

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPLICATIONS

At the June 2016 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) accepted exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications for deep-set buoy gear (DSBG) and received one, from Mr. David Stephens. The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) reviewed this application and decided that more development and information was needed. Subsequently it recommended the application be resubmitted for further consideration at the September 2016 Council meeting. The HMSMT reviewed Mr. Stephens' revised application during its meeting in Portland, OR, August 8-11, 2016, and considers the application to have improved substantially and recommends that the Council approve it.

The HMSMT feels that this EFP application will help to better inform the development of a DSBG fishery in several ways. First, Mr. Stephens has experience working on the PIER EFP vessels with DSBG. Information gathered from his proposed EFP will help evaluate the effectiveness of fishermen transitioning from collaborative experience or training into independent fishing activity and can be useful for understanding the process of introducing inexperienced participants into a new fishery. Mr. Stephens and his co-applicants intend to continue cooperating with PIER to maximize their chances of success in this EFP. The applicant's intent to use smaller vessels than currently used in the other DSBG EFPs may also provide useful information on the possible effect of vessel size on fishing success. Because the applicants also propose setting and actively tending DSBG gear and conducting traditional harpoon fishing on the same trip depending on fishing and oceanic conditions, information can be collected on the feasibility of using DSBG gear as a means of supplementing and increasing opportunity for other gear types.

The applicant has requested no more than 50 percent observer coverage. The Council recommended 100 percent observer coverage for the three DSBG EFPs it approved in 2015 (PIER, Ferguson, and Mintz). However, NMFS issued a permit to PIER with 30 percent observer coverage based on the applicant being a research institution which developed the gear and had several fishing seasons of previous experience. Given Mr. Stephens' previous experience with the gear from cooperating onboard with PIER vessels and his plans to continue doing so under his own EFP, the HMSMT recommends the Council consider allowing less than 100 percent coverage. The Council's coverage recommendation to NMFS could weigh the need for adequate observer coverage against the desirability of increased fishing effort that would be allowed by lower observer coverage requirements.

Council Operating Procedure (COP) 20, the protocol for consideration of EFPs for HMS fisheries, contains a provision allowing the HMSMT to forward to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) any data analysis methods that could benefit from a rigorous scientific review (Protocol E.2). At this stage the application does not have a scientific component that necessitates SSC review.