

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2019-2020 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

This report presents the results of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping and a schedule for regulation deeming and FMP transmittal.

NMFS would like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work done by the GMT and Council staff in drafting the integrated alternatives and the preliminary new management measures analysis since the November Council meeting. Progress on the integrated alternatives analysis to date gives NMFS confidence that a January 1, 2019 start date is achievable.

Results of NEPA Scoping

NMFS conducted NEPA scoping on the 2019-2020 harvest specifications and management measures and has preliminarily determined that an Environmental Assessment is the proper level of NEPA for the 2019-2020 harvest specifications and management measures.

The 2019-2020 biennium is the second cycle with access to the long-term analysis completed in the 2015-2016 EIS. To evaluate the level of NEPA needed for the 2019-2020 harvest specifications and management measures, NMFS used the long term analysis in the 2015-2016 EIS to assess whether or not the 2019-2020 harvest specifications and routine management measure adjustments are within the range analyzed in the 2015-2016 EIS or 2017-2020 EA. If the item is within the previously analyzed range, the item was determined not to need further NEPA analysis for 2019-2020. If the item was determined to not be within the range, we evaluated what level of further NEPA analysis was necessary. All of the routine management measure adjustments in the 2019- 2020 integrated alternatives analysis were within the range previously analyzed. New management measures were incorporated into the action alternatives to facilitate analysis.

Deeming/FMP transmittal schedule

As in past harvest specification and management measure cycles, NMFS will work closely with Council staff to review regulations before publication in the proposed rule. To allow this collaboration, the schedule below includes delivery dates for draft regulations followed by several weeks of review and editing between NMFS and Council staff.

Preliminary schedule:

- 7/23/2018 – NMFS sends Council staff draft regulations for preliminary deeming review
- 8/6/2018 – NMFS sends final proposed regulations to Council staff
- 8/31/2018 – Council sends NMFS final proposed regulations, deeming letter, and transmits FMP Amendment
- Fall/Winter 2018 – FMP Notice of Availability, Proposed rule public comment period, final rule drafting and publication by NMFS