NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES (HMS) ACTIVITIES

Deep-Set Buoy Gear (DSBG) updates

On February 1, 2026, NMFS opened the permit application period for limited entry DSBG permits under qualification tier 9. Applications are open through March 31, 2026. The permit applications are available through the National Permits System.

To apply for a limited entry DSBG permit under tier 9 in 2026, a person must submit a complete application through the National Permits System website no later than 11:59 pm Pacific daylight time on March 31, 2026. A complete application consists of all required information, as detailed in 50 CFR 660.707(g)(12)(i). NMFS may decline an incomplete application. Late applications will not be accepted.

NMFS will issue limited entry DSBG permits to approved applicants on a first come, first serve basis, according to the date and time that their application was submitted. If NMFS approves more than 25 applications this year, the approved applicants above 25 (who were not issued a permit) will receive priority for permit issuance next year. NMFS will continue to accept applications for tier 9 permits on an annual basis, and issue up to 25 permits per year, until a total of 300 limited entry DSBG permits are issued. To date, 100 limited entry permits have been issued, with up to 25 more coming from this application period. Should the Council and/or NMFS determine that the maximum number of permits should be fewer than 300, a rulemaking would be required to change the maximum.

For more information, visit the Deep-Set Buoy Gear website, or contact the West Coast Region Permits Branch at 562-980-4238 or *wcr-permits@noaa.gov*.

Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications

On February 2, 2026, NMFS published a Federal Register Notice for public comment on two EFP applications endorsed by the Council at the November meeting. These applications propose to test the effects and efficacy of using alternative fishing practices to harvest swordfish and other HMS off of the U.S. West Coast. One application includes a request to fish standard and/or linked DSBG during the night (i.e., night-set buoy gear). The other requests to fish with extended linked buoy gear by modifying the configuration to better account for recent ocean conditions, and to target HMS at shallower depths than has been allowed under existing terms and conditions. The public comment period is open through March 4, 2026.