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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF442

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit application contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The Exempted Fishing Permit would allow commercial fishing vessels to fish outside of scallop regulations in support of research conducted by the Coonamessett Farm Foundation. These exemptions would support research conducted on trips to test gear modifications for bycatch reduction in the scallop dredge fishery.

Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 23, 2017.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line “CFF Compensation Fishing Gear Research EFP.”
- *Mail:* John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope “Comments on CFF Compensation Fishing Gear Research EFP.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Alyson Pitts, Fisheries Management Specialist, (978) 281-9352.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) submitted a complete application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) on May 4, 2017, that would allow gear research to be conducted by vessels on compensation fishing trips associated with projects funded by the 2017 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) program. The exemptions would allow 19 commercial fishing vessels to exceed the crew size regulations at 50 CFR 648.51(c) in order to place a researcher on the vessel, and temporarily exempt the participating vessels from possession limits and minimum size requirements specified in 50 CFR part 648, subparts B and D through O, for sampling purposes only. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited, including landing fish in excess of a possession limit or below the minimum size.

Experimental fishing activity would test gear modifications in an attempt to reduce finfish bycatch in the scallop dredge fishery. The gear modifications that would be tested adhere to current scallop gear regulations and include:

- A “daylight skirt”: 1 to 2 rows of 12-in by 12-in windows are cut into the twine top/skirt of the top of the scallop dredge bag;
- An extended link apron: Two links are used to connect the rings of the dredge apron to increase the inner ring spacing from ~3.5” to ~4.5”;
- A “fish sweep”: A cookie sweep affixed to the front of the headbale;
- A low profile dredge: The frame is 4” shorter in height than a traditional scallop dredge.

All trips would take place in scallop fishing areas open to the entire Atlantic sea scallop fishery. Exemption from crew size limits is needed because a research technician would accompany vessels on the compensation fishing trips to collect catch data associated with different dredge modifications. The crew size exemption would be for approximately 120 days-at-sea and would be used in conjunction with a valid compensation fishing letter of authorization. The technician would only engage in data collection activities, and would not process catch to be landed for sale. Exemption from possession limit and minimum sizes would support catch sampling activities, and ensure the vessel is not in conflict with possession regulations while collecting catch data. All catch above a possession limit or below a minimum size would be discarded as soon as possible following data collection. All bycatch would be returned to the sea as soon as practicable following data collection; estimated catch totals are listed below on Table 1. All research trips would otherwise be consistent with normal commercial fishing activity and catch would be retained for sale.

TABLE 1—ESTIMATED BYCATCH FOR CFF EFP COMPENSATION TRIPS

Species	Scientific name	Number	Weight (lb)	Weight (kg)
NE Skate Complex	<i>Rajidae Species</i>	96,500	120,000	54,431
Barndoor Skate	<i>Dipturus laevis</i>	400	750	340
Summer Flounder	<i>Paralichthys dentatus</i>	120	200	90
Winter Flounder	<i>Pseudopleuronectes americanus</i>	250	550	249
Yellowtail Flounder	<i>Limanda ferruginea</i>	1,750	1,500	680
Windowpane Flounder	<i>Scophthalmus aquosus</i>	1,750	1,500	680
Monkfish	<i>Lophius americanus</i>	2000	4,500	2,041

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the

year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate

completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the

initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 2, 2017.

Margo B. Schulze-Haugen,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF417

Schedules for Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops and Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshops

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public workshops.

SUMMARY: Free Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops and Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshops will be held in July, August, and September of 2017. Certain fishermen and shark dealers are required to attend a workshop to meet regulatory requirements and to maintain valid permits. Specifically, the Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop is mandatory for all federally permitted Atlantic shark dealers. The Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshop is mandatory for vessel owners and operators who use bottom longline, pelagic longline, or gillnet gear, and who have also been issued shark or swordfish limited access permits. Additional free workshops will be conducted during 2017 and will be announced in a future notice.

DATES: The Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops will be held on July 13, August 17, and September 7, 2017.

The Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshops will be held on July 14, July 18, August 1, August 16, September 1, and September 13, 2017.

See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for further details.

ADDRESSES: The Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops will be held in Fort Lauderdale, FL; Bohemia, NY; and Panama City, FL.

The Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshops will be held in Kenner, LA;

Ronkonkoma, NY; Key Largo, FL; Charleston, SC; Warwick, RI; and Panama City, FL.

See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for further details on workshop locations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rick Pearson by phone: (727) 824-5399, or by fax: (727) 824-5398.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The workshop schedules, registration information, and a list of frequently asked questions regarding these workshops are posted on the Internet at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/workshops/index.html>.

Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops

Since January 1, 2008, Atlantic shark dealers have been prohibited from receiving, purchasing, trading, or bartering for Atlantic sharks unless a valid Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop certificate is on the premises of each business listed under the shark dealer permit that first receives Atlantic sharks (71 FR 58057; October 2, 2006). Dealers who attend and successfully complete a workshop are issued a certificate for each place of business that is permitted to receive sharks. These certificate(s) are valid for 3 years. Approximately 133 free Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops have been conducted since January 2007.

Currently, permitted dealers may send a proxy to an Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop. However, if a dealer opts to send a proxy, the dealer must designate a proxy for each place of business covered by the dealer's permit which first receives Atlantic sharks. Only one certificate will be issued to each proxy. A proxy must be a person who is currently employed by a place of business covered by the dealer's permit; is a primary participant in the identification, weighing, and/or first receipt of fish as they are offloaded from a vessel; and who fills out dealer reports. Atlantic shark dealers are prohibited from renewing a Federal shark dealer permit unless a valid Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop certificate for each business location that first receives Atlantic sharks has been submitted with the permit renewal application. Additionally, trucks or other conveyances that are extensions of a dealer's place of business must possess a copy of a valid dealer or proxy Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop certificate.

Workshop Dates, Times, and Locations

1. July 13, 2017, 12 p.m.–4 p.m., LaQuinta Inn & Suites, 999 West Cypress Creek Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309.

2. August 17, 2017, 12 p.m.–4 p.m., LaQuinta Inn & Suites, 10 Aero Road, Bohemia, NY 11716.

3. September 7, 2017, 12 p.m.–4 p.m., LaQuinta Inn & Suites, 7115 Coastal Palms Boulevard, Panama City, FL 32408.

Registration

To register for a scheduled Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop, please contact Eric Sander at ericssharkguide@yahoo.com or at (386) 852-8588.

Registration Materials

To ensure that workshop certificates are linked to the correct permits, participants will need to bring the following specific items to the workshop:

- Atlantic shark dealer permit holders must bring proof that the attendee is an owner or agent of the business (such as articles of incorporation), a copy of the applicable permit, and proof of identification.
- Atlantic shark dealer proxies must bring documentation from the permitted dealer acknowledging that the proxy is attending the workshop on behalf of the permitted Atlantic shark dealer for a specific business location, a copy of the appropriate valid permit, and proof of identification.

Workshop Objectives

The Atlantic Shark Identification Workshops are designed to reduce the number of unknown and improperly identified sharks reported in the dealer reporting form and increase the accuracy of species-specific dealer-reported information. Reducing the number of unknown and improperly identified sharks will improve quota monitoring and the data used in stock assessments. These workshops will train shark dealer permit holders or their proxies to properly identify Atlantic shark carcasses.

Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshops

Since January 1, 2007, shark limited-access and swordfish limited-access permit holders who fish with longline or gillnet gear have been required to submit a copy of their Protected Species Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshop certificate in order to renew either permit (71 FR 58057; October 2, 2006). These certificate(s) are valid for 3 years. As such, vessel owners who have not already attended a workshop and received a NMFS certificate, or vessel owners whose certificate(s) will expire prior to the next permit renewal, must attend a workshop to fish with, or