

(i) The Council may submit an explanation to NMFS, in writing, as to why the availability of financing for harvesting rights in a fishery would harm the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan applicable to the fishery. If NMFS accepts the Council's reasoning, harvesting rights loans will not be provided, or will cease to be provided, in that fishery.

(ii) If NMFS determines that harvesting rights loans will not be provided in a fishery, NMFS will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** notifying the public that new loans will not be made in that fishery.

(iii) In such a scenario, pending applications will be returned and loan fees returned as exceptional circumstances justify the action.

(3) The harvesting rights to be financed must be issued in a manner in which they can be individually identified such that a valid and specific security interest can be recorded. This determination shall be solely made by the Program.

(c) *Refinancing.* (1) The Program may refinance any existing debts associated with harvesting rights a borrower currently holds, provided that:

(i) The harvesting rights being refinanced would have been eligible for Program financing at the time the borrower purchased them, if Program financing had been available,

(ii) The borrower meets all other applicable lending requirements, and

(iii) The refinancing is in an amount up to 80 percent of the harvesting rights' current market value, as determined at the sole discretion of the Program, and subject to the limitation that the Program will not disburse any amount that exceeds the outstanding principal balance, plus accrued interest (if any), of the existing harvesting rights' debt being refinanced or its fair market value, whichever is less.

(2) In the event that the current market value of harvesting rights and principal loan balance do not meet the 80 percent requirement in paragraph (1)(iii) of this section, borrowers seeking refinancing may be required to provide additional down payment.

(d) *Maturity.* Loan maturity may not exceed 25 years, but may be shorter depending on credit and other considerations.

(e) *Repayment.* Repayment will be by equal quarterly installments of principal and interest.

(f) *Security.* Although harvesting right(s) will be the primary collateral for a loan, the Program may require additional security pledges to maintain the priority of the Program's security

interest. The Program, at its option, may also require all parties with significant ownership interests to personally guarantee loan repayment for any borrower that is a corporation, partnership, or other entity, including collateral to secure the guarantees. Some projects may require additional security, collateral, or credit enhancement as determined, in the sole discretion, by the Program.

(g) *Program credit standards.* Harvesting rights loans, regardless of purpose, are subject to all Program general credit standards and requirements. Collateral, guarantee and other requirements may be adjusted to individual credit risks.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 170817773-7905-1]

RIN 0648-BG81

Fisheries Off West Coast States; Highly Migratory Fisheries; California Drift Gillnet Fishery; Implementation of a Federal Limited Entry Drift Gillnet Permit

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS is proposing regulations under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) to implement a March 2017 recommendation by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to amend the Fishery Management Plan for U.S. West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species (HMS FMP). The proposed rule would bring the State of California's limited entry (LE) drift gillnet (DGN) permit program under MSA authority. All current California DGN permit holders would be eligible to apply for, and receive, a Federal DGN permit, and no additional DGN permits would be created. The proposed rule is administrative in nature and is not anticipated to result in increased activity, effort, or capacity in the fishery.

DATES: Comments on the proposed rule and supporting documents must be

submitted in writing on or before December 15, 2017.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2017-0052, by any of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0052>, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Lyle Enriquez, NMFS West Coast Region, 501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802. Include the identifier "NOAA-NMFS-2017-0052" in the comments.

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure they are received, documented, and considered by NMFS. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

Written comments regarding the burden-hour estimates or other aspects of the collection-of-information requirements contained in this proposed rule may be submitted to the West Coast Regional Office and by email to OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov or fax to (202) 395-5806.

Copies of the draft Regulatory Impact Review and other supporting documents are available via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>, docket NOAA-NMFS-2017-0052 or by contacting the Regional Administrator, Barry Thom, NMFS West Coast Region, 1201 NE Lloyd Blvd., Portland, OR 97232-2182, or *RegionalAdministrator.WCRHMS@noaa.gov*.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lyle Enriquez, NMFS, West Coast Region, 562-980-4025, or Lyle.Enriquez@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The HMS FMP was prepared by the Council and is implemented under the authority of

the MSA by regulations at 50 CFR part 660. Although it adopted all conservation and management measures in place under various Federal statutes (e.g., the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act) and state regulations, the HMS FMP did not incorporate the LE DGN permit programs of California and Oregon. Currently, the large-mesh DGN fishery (14" minimum mesh size) is Federally managed under the HMS FMP and via regulations of the states of California and Oregon to conserve target and non-target stocks, including protected species that are incidentally captured. (California has an active LE DGN program, Oregon no longer issues DGN permits, and DGN fishing is prohibited in Washington.)

Since 2014, the Council has considered transitioning California's LE DGN permit program from state to MSA authority. On March 12, 2017, the Council adopted a final preferred alternative that would amend the HMS FMP and transition the State of California LE DGN permit program from state management to Federal management under MSA authority and entitle all fishermen authorized to fish with large-mesh DGN gear under state law to be eligible to receive a Federal LE DGN permit. As of August 31, 2017, 70 California LE DGN permits were issued for the 2016–2017 fishing season, and 67 have been renewed for the 2017–2018 fishing season. The average number of active DGN vessels per year from 2010 through 2016 is 20 vessels. The action would neither increase capacity within the DGN fishery, nor would it incentivize or stimulate fishing effort or activity of current latent permits. After the initial issuance of Federal DGN permits, no additional permits would be issued, and permits that are not renewed in future years would permanently expire. NMFS would not reissue the expired permits.

In order to participate in the DGN fishery, current participants must possess a State of California LE DGN permit, a California commercial fishing license, a California general gill/trammel net permit, and a California swordfish permit. Additionally, the vessel that the participant fishes from must have a Federal Pacific Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit with a DGN gear endorsement. After the LE DGN permit transitions from the State of California to Federal management, each participant will need to hold all the same permits and licenses, except that the Federal LE DGN permit will take the place of the State of California LE DGN permit. Although these permits and licenses would be required to fish,

possession of a current and up-to-date State of California LE DGN permit is the only permit required to initially obtain a Federal LE DGN permit.

This proposed rule would adopt many of the current State of California management measures associated with the fishery. For example, NMFS would adopt current California requirements regarding the assignment of a permit (i.e., permits would be issued to an individual and assigned to a specific vessel), the transfer of permits between permit holders (i.e., a permit must be held for three years before it is eligible to be transferred), and an annual renewal cycle.

Upon the date of publication of the final rule, all 70 state-eligible permit holders would be eligible to receive a Federal DGN permit if they have renewed their state DGN permit by March 31, 2018. Permit holders who fail to renew their state DGN permit by March 31, 2018, will not be eligible for a Federal DGN permit. As of August 31, 2017, 67 permit holders have renewed their state LE DGN permit. If a state LE DGN permit is transferred after publication of the proposed rule, the transferee, but not the transferor, would be eligible to receive a Federal LE DGN permit upon publication of the final rule.

Federal LE DGN permits would be issued annually for the fishing year starting April 1 and ending March 31 of the following year. Permits would expire on March 31 of each year and, after initial issuance (expected in 2018), the permit renewal deadline would be April 30 of each fishing year. A completed DGN permit renewal form must be received by NMFS no later than close-of-business April 30. Any renewal form received after that date would result in the permanent expiration of the Federal DGN permit. A permit owner who fails to submit a renewal form by the deadline may submit a renewal form to NMFS with a written statement that the failure to renew the permit by the deadline was proximately caused by the permit owner's illness or injury. When a permit owner has died, the owner's estate or other personal representative may submit a statement explaining that the permit owner's death has prevented a timely renewal. The permit holder, or in the case of a deceased permit owner, the estate or other personal representative, will need to provide written proof of illness, injury or death. NMFS will not consider any such renewal request made after July 31. A permit holder would need to hold a Federal LE DGN permit for a vesting period of at least three years before it would be eligible to be transferred. This

vesting period would extend across both state and Federal permit programs (i.e., if a permit holder held a state LE DGN permit for two years and a Federal LE DGN permit for one year, the permit may be transferred).

This proposed rule also includes technical edits to existing regulatory text. These edits add the word "general" before instances of "HMS permit" to distinguish the existing HMS permit from the new LE DGN permit; update a web address from which permit applications may be obtained; update the reference to the NMFS "Southwest Region" to refer to the West Coast Region, into which it was incorporated; and update the description of the NMFS regional "Sustainable Fisheries Division" to describe it as part of the West Coast Region.

Classification

Pursuant to section 304 (b)(1)(A) of the MSA, the NMFS West Coast Regional Administrator has determined that this proposed rule is consistent with the HMS FMP, other provisions of the MSA, and other applicable law, subject to further consideration after public comment.

This proposed rule has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866. This proposed rule is not an Executive Order 13771 regulatory action because this proposed rule is not significant under Executive Order 12866.

This proposed rule contains a collection-of-information requirement subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and which has been approved by OMB under control number 0648–0204. Public reporting burden for the additional collection of information is estimated to average thirty minutes per form, including time for reviewing instructions, gathering the information needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate, or any other aspect of this data collection, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to NMFS (see ADDRESSES) and by email to OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov, or fax to (202) 395–5806.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the PRA, unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB Control Number. All currently approved NOAA collections of information may be viewed at: http://www.cio.noaa.gov/services_programs/prasubs.html.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that this proposed rule, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The proposed rule is administrative in nature and adopts current State of California permit requirements as they relate to the DGN fishery. This action is not expected to increase capacity, incentivize or stimulate fishing effort or activity of current latent permits, or change current fishing practices.

For Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (50 CFR 200.2). A business primarily involved in commercial fishing (NAICS 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and its combined annual receipts are not in excess of \$11 million for all of its affiliated operations worldwide. NMFS has determined that all current participants in the DGN fishery are small entities under the NMFS standard. The average ex-vessel revenue for the U.S. West Coast DGN fishery from 2011 to 2015 is \$745,600, with an average of 20 vessels participating per year. Therefore, the average ex-vessel revenue per active participant is \$37,280. The increase in administrative costs, if any, resulting from this action would be less than 1% of ex-vessel revenues per active participant. In addition, because each affected entity is a small business, there would be no disproportionate economic impacts between large and small entities.

Currently, participants must possess a Federal Pacific Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit (\$30), as well as a State of California commercial fishing license (\$136.99), a California general gill/trammel net permit (\$469.25), and a California LE DGN permit (\$469.25) that includes a swordfish permit for fishing with hook-and-line or harpoon. If a fisherman does not participate in the DGN fishery, but participates in the harpoon or hook-and-line fishery, they must purchase a swordfish permit for \$469.25. If this action is implemented, fishermen would receive a Federal LE DGN permit. The fee for a Federal LE DGN permit would be determined by only the administrative cost of issuing the permit, and it is expected that the Federal LE DGN permit would cost less than \$100, which is far less than the California LE DGN permit cost of

\$469.25. There are three likely scenarios associated with implementing a Federal LE DGN permit, discussed below; in each scenario, the economic effects are not significant, as they would lead to either a reduction in costs or an insignificant increase in costs.

In the first scenario, fishermen would acquire a Federal LE DGN permit. If the State of California does not amend its regulations and continues to require that fishermen purchase a State of California LE DGN permit (with the swordfish permit included), the cost increase would be only the additional cost of the Federal LE DGN permit. In the second scenario, if fishermen purchase a Federal LE DGN permit and state regulations are amended to no longer require the State of California LE DGN permit, but either a swordfish permit is still required or fishermen continue participating in the harpoon or hook-and-line fishery, there would be a cost increase equal to the cost of the Federal LE DGN permit, while the savings from not purchasing the state LE DGN permit would be offset by the cost of purchasing the swordfish permit. In the third scenario, if fishermen purchase a Federal LE DGN permit, a state LE DGN permit is no longer required, and either a swordfish permit is not required or fishermen do not participate in the harpoon or hook-and-line fishery, the fishermen would realize a cost savings, and the amount of cost savings would equal the difference between the cost of the state LE DGN permit (\$469.25) and the cost of the Federal LE DGN permit (expected to be less than \$100).

As noted above, all entities subject to this action are considered small entities for RFA purposes. Based on the analysis provided above, the proposed action, if adopted, would not have a significant adverse economic impact on these small business entities. As a result, an initial regulatory flexibility analysis is not required and none has been prepared.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 660

Fisheries, Fishing, Reporting, and recordkeeping requirements.

Dated: October 25, 2017.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 660 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 660—FISHERIES OFF WEST COAST STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 660 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*, 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, and 16 U.S.C. 7001 *et seq.*

■ 2. In § 660.702, revise the definition of “Sustainable Fisheries Division” to read as follows:

* * * * *

Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) means the Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, West Coast Region, NMFS, or his or her designee.

* * * * *

■ 3. In § 660.707, revise paragraphs (a)(1), (a)(4), (b)(1), (b)(3), (b)(4), and (e), and add paragraph (f) to read as follows:

§ 660.707 Permits.

(a) * * *

(1) A commercial fishing vessel of the United States must be registered for use under a general HMS permit that authorizes the use of specific gear, and a recreational charter vessel must be registered for use under a HMS permit if that vessel is used:

(i) To fish for HMS in the U.S. EEZ off the States of California, Oregon, and Washington; or

(ii) To land or transship HMS shoreward of the outer boundary of the U.S. EEZ off the States of California, Oregon, and Washington.

* * * * *

(4) Only a person eligible to own a documented vessel under the terms of 46 U.S.C. 12102(a) may be issued or may hold (by ownership or otherwise) a general HMS permit.

(b) * * *

(1) Following publication of the final rule implementing the FMP, NMFS will issue general HMS permits to the owners of those vessels on a list of vessels obtained from owners previously applying for a permit under the authority of the High Seas Fishing Compliance Act, the Tuna Conventions Act of 1950, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Fishery Management Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region, or whose vessels are listed on the vessel register of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission.

* * * * *

(3) An owner of a vessel subject to these requirements who has not received a permit under this section from NMFS and who wants to engage in the fisheries must apply to the SFD for the required permit in accordance with the following:

(i) A West Coast Region Federal Fisheries application form may be obtained from the SFD or downloaded from the West Coast Region home page (<http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/>

[permits/commercial_fishing_research_permits.html](#)) to apply for a permit under this section. A completed application is one that contains all the necessary information and signatures required.

(ii) A minimum of 15 days should be allowed for processing a permit application. If an incomplete or improperly completed application is filed, the applicant will be sent a notice of deficiency. If the applicant fails to correct the deficiency within 30 days following the date of notification, the application will be considered abandoned.

(iii) A permit will be issued by the SFD. If an application is denied, the SFD will indicate the reasons for denial.

(iv) *Appeals.* (A) Any applicant for an initial permit may appeal the initial issuance decision to the Regional Administrator. To be considered by the Regional Administrator, such appeal must be in writing and state the reasons for the appeal, and must be submitted within 30 days of the action by the Regional Administrator. The appellant may request an informal hearing on the appeal.

(B) Upon receipt of an appeal authorized by this section, the Regional Administrator will notify the permit applicant, or permit holder as appropriate, and will request such additional information and in such form as will allow action upon the appeal.

(C) Upon receipt of sufficient information, the Regional Administrator will decide the appeal in accordance with the permit provisions set forth in this section at the time of the application, based upon information relative to the application on file at NMFS and the Council and any additional information submitted to or obtained by the Regional Administrator, the summary record kept of any hearing and the hearing officer's recommended decision, if any, and such other considerations as the Regional Administrator deems appropriate. The Regional Administrator will notify all interested persons of the decision, and the reasons for the decision, in writing, normally within 30 days of the receipt of sufficient information, unless additional time is needed for a hearing.

(D) If a hearing is requested, or if the Regional Administrator determines that one is appropriate, the Regional Administrator may grant an informal hearing before a hearing officer designated for that purpose after first giving notice of the time, place, and subject matter of the hearing to the applicant. The appellant, and, at the discretion of the hearing officer, other interested persons, may appear

personally or be represented by counsel at the hearing and submit information and present arguments as determined appropriate by the hearing officer. Within 30 days of the last day of the hearing, the hearing officer shall recommend in writing a decision to the Regional Administrator.

(E) The Regional Administrator may adopt the hearing officer's recommended decision, in whole or in part, or may reject or modify it. In any event, the Regional Administrator will notify interested persons of the decision, and the reason(s) therefore, in writing, within 30 days of receipt of the hearing officer's recommended decision. The Regional Administrator's decision will constitute the final administrative action by NMFS on the matter.

(F) Any time limit prescribed in this section may be extended for a period not to exceed 30 days by the Regional Administrator for good cause, either upon his or her own motion or upon written request from the appellant stating the reason(s) therefore.

(4) General HMS permits issued under this subpart will remain valid until the first date of renewal, and permits may be subsequently renewed for 2-year terms. The first date of renewal will be the last day of the vessel owner's birth month in the second calendar year after the permit is issued (e.g., if the birth month is March and the permit is issued on October 3, 2007, the permit will remain valid through March 31, 2009).

* * * * *

(e) *Fees.* An application for a permit, or renewal of an existing permit under this section will include a fee for each vessel. The fee amount required will be calculated in accordance with the NOAA Finance Handbook and specified on the application form.

(f) *Federal Limited Entry Drift Gillnet Permit.*

(1) *General.* This section applies to individuals fishing with large-mesh (14 inch or greater stretched mesh) drift gillnet (DGN) gear. Individuals who target, retain, transship, or land fish captured with a large-mesh DGN must possess a valid Federal limited entry DGN permit. Federal limited entry DGN permits are issued to an individual, and a vessel must be specified on the permit.

(2) *Initial Qualification.* Upon publication of NMFS' final rule to establish the Federal limited entry DGN permit, all State of California limited entry DGN permit holders are eligible to obtain a Federal limited entry DGN permit. If a 2017–2018 California state DGN permit renewal application is not received by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or postmarked by

March 31, 2018, the permit holder is not eligible to receive a 2018–2019 Federal limited entry DGN permit.

(3) *Documentation and burden of proof.* An individual applying for issuance, renewal, transfer, or assignment of a Federal limited entry DGN permit must prove that they meet the qualification requirements by submitting the following documentation, as applicable: A certified copy of the assigned vessel's documentation as a fishing vessel of the United States (U.S. Coast Guard or state) is the best evidence of vessel identification; a copy of a current State of California limited entry DGN permit is the best evidence of initial qualification for a Federal limited entry DGN permit; a copy of a written contract reserving or conveying limited entry rights is the best evidence of reserved or acquired rights; and other relevant, credible evidence that the applicant may wish to submit or that the SFD may request or require.

(4) *Fees.* Any processing fee will be determined by the service costs needed to process a permit request. If a fee is required, it would cover administrative expenses related to issuing limited entry permits, as well as renewing, transferring, assigning, and replacing permits. The amount of any fee will be calculated in accordance with the procedures of the NOAA Finance Handbook for determining the administrative costs of each special product or service. A fee may not exceed such costs and is specified with each application form. The appropriate fee must accompany each application.

(5) *Initial decisions.* (i) The SFD will make initial decisions regarding issuing, renewing, transferring, and assigning limited entry permits.

(ii) Adverse decisions shall be in writing and shall state the reasons for the adverse decision.

(iii) The SFD may decline to act on an application for issuing, renewing, transferring, or assigning a limited entry permit and will notify the applicant, if the permit sanction provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at 16 U.S.C. 1858(a) and implementing regulations at 15 CFR part 904, subpart D, apply.

(6) *Issuance.* Federal limited entry DGN permits will be issued by the SFD. If an application is denied, the SFD will indicate the reasons for denial. A DGN permit will be issued to an individual and assigned to a specific vessel. A permit holder may assign the permit to another vessel once per permit year (April 1 to March 31).

(7) *Appeals.* Any applicant for an initial permit may appeal the initial issuance decision to the Regional

Administrator. Appeals will be made and processed following procedures as described at paragraph (b)(3)(iv) of this section.

(8) *Transfers.* Federal limited entry DGN permits may be transferred to another individual only if the current permit holder has held the Federal DGN permit for a minimum of three consecutive years (counted April 1 to March 31 of the following year). At the time of the establishment of the Federal limited entry DGN permit system, the length of time an individual has held a State of California limited entry DGN permit carries over (*e.g.*, if an individual has held a California DGN permit for two years, they are eligible to transfer the Federal DGN permit after holding the Federal DGN permit for one year). Exceptions to this limitation on permit transfer may be made under the following circumstances:

(i) The permit holder suffers from a serious illness or permanent disability that prevents the permit holder from earning a livelihood from commercial fishing.

(ii) If a deceased permit holder's estate or heirs submit a transfer request within six months of the permit holder's death.

(iii) Upon dissolution of marriage if the permit is held as community property.

(9) *Renewals.* (i) The SFD will send notices to renew limited entry permits to the most recent address of the permit holder on file.

(ii) The permit owner is responsible for renewing a limited entry permit.

(iii) The deadline for receipt or postmark of a Federal DGN permit renewal application is April 30 of the permit year (*i.e.*, April 30, 2019 for 2019–2020 fishing season). Federal DGN permits must be renewed yearly.

(iv) A DGN permit that is allowed to expire will not be renewed unless the permit owner requests reissuance by

July 31 (three months after the renewal application deadline) and NMFS determines that failure to renew was proximately caused by illness, injury, or death of the permit owner. If the permit expires, it will be forfeited and NMFS will not reissue the permit to anyone.

(10) *Owner on-board requirement.* (i) Except as provided in paragraphs (ii) through (v), the DGN permit holder must be on-board the vessel and in possession of a valid Federal limited entry DGN permit when engaged in DGN fishing activity.

(ii) A permit holder may designate another individual to fish under their permit for up to 15 days per fishing year (April 1 to March 31 of the following year); the substitute must comply with all other Federal permitting requirements. A permit holder shall notify NMFS of a substitution at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of the trip.

(iii) If the person who owns a Federal DGN permit is prevented from being on-board a fishing vessel because the person died, is ill, or is injured, NMFS may allow an exemption to the owner on-board requirement for more than 15 days. The person requesting the exemption must send a letter to NMFS requesting an exemption from the owner on-board requirements, with appropriate evidence as described at paragraph (f)(10)(iv) or (v) of this section. All exemptions for death, injury, or illness will be evaluated by NMFS and a decision will be made in writing to the permit owner (or, in the case of the death of the permit owner, to the estate or heirs of the permit owner) within 60 calendar days of receipt of the original exemption request.

(iv) Evidence of death of the permit owner shall be provided to NMFS in the form of a copy of a death certificate. In the interim before the estate is settled,

if the deceased permit owner was subject to the owner on-board requirements, the estate of the deceased permit owner may send a letter to NMFS with a copy of the death certificate, requesting an exemption from the owner-on-board requirements. An exemption due to death of the permit owner will be effective only until such time that the estate of the deceased permit owner has registered the deceased permit owner's permit to a beneficiary, transferred the permit to another owner, or three years after the date of death as proven by a death certificate, whichever is earliest. An exemption from the owner-on-board requirement will be conveyed in a letter from NMFS to the estate of the permit owner and is required to be on the vessel during DGN fishing operations.

(v) Evidence of illness or injury that prevents the permit owner from participating in the fishery shall be provided to NMFS in the form of a letter from a certified medical practitioner. This letter must detail the relevant medical conditions of the permit owner and how those conditions prevent the permit owner from being on-board a fishing vessel during DGN fishing. An exemption due to injury or illness will be effective only for the fishing year of the request for exemption. In order to extend a medical exemption for a succeeding year, the permit owner must submit a new request and provide documentation from a certified medical practitioner detailing why the permit owner is still unable to be on-board a fishing vessel. An exemption from the owner-on-board requirement will be conveyed in a letter from NMFS to the permit owner and is required to be on the vessel during DGN fishing operations.

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