

transfer to the crab license to whose issuance that fishing history gave rise, then:

(1) The issued crab license acquires the vessel's pre-license crab fishing history,

(2) The vessel loses its pre-license crab fishing history,

(3) The vessel thereafter transfers without its pre-license crab fishing history, and

(4) The vessel's subsequent fishing history is its post-license fishing history.

The January 1, 1990, beginning of the crab fishing history period for program bid scoring and reduction loan allocation purposes is not earlier than the January 1, 1988, beginning of the VMP. However, the December 31, 1999, ending of the bid scoring and reduction loan allocation period is later than the ending of the RPP.

If the reduction vessel in each program bid were to be the vessel designated, at the time of bidding, on the bid's crab reduction permit, there would be two possibilities:

(1) The bid's reduction vessel could be the same as the vessel whose pre-license crab fishing history transferred to the bid's crab reduction permit. In this possibility, both the pre-license and the post-license history required for bid scoring and loan allocation purposes would be that of the bid's reduction vessel, and

(2) The bid's reduction vessel could be a vessel other than the vessel whose pre-license crab fishing history transferred to the bid's crab reduction permit. In this possibility, the pre-license history required for bid scoring and loan allocation purposes would have been earned by a vessel other than the bid's reduction vessel. Presumably, however, the post-license history required for this purpose would be the reduction vessel's remaining fishing history, which had not previously transferred to some other crab license (even though that vessel may not have been designated on the crab license corresponding to the bid's crab reduction permit until more than a year after NMFS issued that crab license).

Accordingly, to assist NMFS in considering the pertinent public comments, NMFS solicits the public's response to the following questions:

(1) Does the crab fishing history of a particular vessel always functionally transfer from the vessel at the time the history gives rise to issuance of a crab license?

(2) Does the crab fishing history, thereafter, become the history of the crab license to which the history gave rise rather than the history of the vessel which earned the history?

(3) Should the pre-license portion of the crab fishing history for reduction purposes always be the pre-license history of the vessel whose history gave rise to issuance of the crab license corresponding to the bid's crab reduction permit?

(4) What should be the ending point of this pre-license crab fishing history? The end of the RPP? The date on which a post-RPP crab license was issued? Some other date specified in the crab fishery management plan regulations? Some other date corresponding to some other point?

(5) What should be the beginning point of this pre-license crab fishing history? The point at which the vessel which earned this history first existed? Some other date corresponding to some other point?

(6) Should the post-license portion of crab fishing history for reduction purposes always be the post-license history of the bid's reduction vessel (e.g., the vessel designated, at the time of bidding, on the bid's crab reduction permit)? If not, what else should it be and why?

(7) What are the specific instances in which persons would have combined the pre-license crab fishing history of different vessels to give rise to issuance of the crab license corresponding to a bid's crab reduction permit? In each such specific instance, what should be the specific beginning and ending points which determine how much of each different vessel's pre-license crab fishing history gave rise to issuance of the crab license and, consequently, transferred from each of these vessels to the crab license?

(8) If program regulations adopted, for reduction purposes, the pertinent public comments' approach to reduction vessels and crab fishing histories, would this create any corollary problems? If so, what would they be and how should they best be resolved?

(9) If program regulations adopted the pertinent public comments' approach, are the required data for implementing the program still determinable and readily available under that approach?

(10) Overall, which approach in this regard would accomplish the most good for the most potential program bidders--the approach which the rule proposed or the approach which pertinent public comments have suggested? Why?

(11) Would it be appropriate to use both these approaches-- the first approach for some vessels and the second approach for other vessels or should only one of the two approaches be used? Why?

Moreover, what specific circumstances involving lost or

destroyed vessels would be appropriate, in each conceivable instance, for not requiring a reduction vessel to be extant at the time of program bidding?

Fishing History Years for Bid Scoring and Reduction Loan Allocation Purposes

Overall, which of the approaches would accomplish the most good for the most potential program bidders? Why?

NMFS believes additional public comment about these matters will facilitate a rule which best fulfills the program's statutory objective.

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

Dated: April 9, 2003.

Rebecca Lent,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[I. D. 031903E]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Application for an Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Notice of receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit.

SUMMARY: This notice announces receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) from Mr. John Gauvin and Mr. Brent Paine. If granted, this permit would be used to test salmon excluder devices in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery. It is intended to promote the objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP) by testing methods of reducing salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP application are available by writing to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Alaska Region, NMFS, P. O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, Attn: Lori Durall.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Melanie Brown, 907-586-7228 or melanie.brown@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the domestic groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI) under the FMP. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMP under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing the groundfish fisheries of the BSAI appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679. The FMP and the implementing regulations at §§ 679.6 and 600.745(b) authorize issuance of EFPs to allow fishing that would otherwise be prohibited. Procedures for issuing EFPs are contained in the implementing regulations. The information gathered through this EFP may lead to future rulemakings.

NMFS received an application for an EFP from Mr. John Gauvin and Mr. Brent Paine. The purpose of the EFP is to test the effectiveness of salmon excluder devices for pollock trawls. The goal is to develop a device for pollock trawls that reduces salmon bycatch without significantly lowering catch rates of pollock.

The EFP is necessary to allow the applicants to demonstrate whether such a device could be developed to reduce salmon bycatch. The taking of salmon during the experiment is crucial for determining the effectiveness of the device. Salmon taken during the experiment will not be counted toward the Chinook and Chum bycatch limits under § 679.21(e)(1)(vii) and (viii). The potential exists that the amount of pollock trawl salmon bycatch by the

industry during the EFP period would approach or exceed the salmon bycatch limits. The additional salmon taken during the experiment would create an additional burden on the pollock trawl industry and may lead to closures of the salmon savings areas, if the EFP salmon is counted toward the salmon bycatch limits. Approximately 200 Chum salmon and 30 Chinook salmon are required to support the experiment, well below the BSAI annual limits of 33,000 chinook salmon and 42,000 chum salmon.

The applicants have also requested an exemption from closures of the Chinook Salmon Savings Area and the Chum Salmon Savings Area (§ 679.21(e)(7)(vii) and (viii)). The experiment must be conducted in areas of salmon concentration to ensure a sufficient sample size. The salmon savings areas are areas of known concentration of salmon and provide an ideal location for conducting the experiment and ensuring that the vessel encounters concentrations of salmon.

Groundfish taken under the EFP also would not be applied to the total allowable catch (TAC) limit specified in the annual harvest specifications (§ 679.20), but the amount taken is expected to result in total groundfish harvests well below the acceptable biological catch (ABC) amounts for the BSAI. A total of approximately 2,270 metric tons (mt) of Bering Sea pollock would be taken in the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004 and would not be included in the harvest applied against the Bering Sea pollock TAC of

approximately 1.5 mt. The Bering Sea pollock ABC is 2.33 million mt, well above the combined TAC and the additional harvest anticipated from the experiment.

These levels of harvest and manner of harvest are not expected to have a significant impact on the marine environment, but the potential effects on the marine environment will be further analyzed during review of the application.

In accordance with § 679.6, NMFS has determined that the proposal warrants further consideration and has initiated consultation with the Council by forwarding the application to the Council. The Council will consider the EFP application during its April 3–8, 2003, meeting which will be held at the Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska. The applicants have been invited to appear in support of the application, if the applicants desire. Interested persons may comment on the application at the Council meeting during public testimony.

A copy of the application is available for review from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**).

Based on the results of this EFP, this action may lead to future rulemaking.

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

Dated: April 9, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,

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