

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 648**

[Docket No. 230316–0077]

RTID 0648–XE470

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Atlantic Herring Fishery; 2024 Management Area 1A Possession Limit Adjustment

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; possession limit adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS is implementing a 2,000-lb (907.2-kg) possession limit for Atlantic herring for Management Area 1A. This is required because NMFS projects that herring catch from Area 1A will reach 92 percent of the Area's sub-annual catch limit before the end of the fishing year. This action is intended to prevent overharvest of herring in Area 1A, which would result in additional catch limit reductions in a subsequent year.

DATES: Effective 0001 hours (hr) local time, November 14, 2024, through December 31, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Colette Tweeddale, Fishery Management Specialist, 978–281–9335.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Regional Administrator of the Greater Atlantic Regional Office monitors Atlantic herring fishery catch in each Management Area based on vessel and dealer reports, state data, and other available information. Regulations at 50 CFR 648.201(a)(1)(i)(A) require implementation of a 2,000-lb (907.2-kg) possession limit for herring for Area 1A beginning on the date that catch is projected to reach 92 percent of the sub-annual catch limit (ACL) for that area. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act provides authority to implement the possession limit only to the Secretary of Commerce, which has been delegated to the Regional Administrator.

Based on vessel reports, dealer reports, and other available information the Regional Administrator projects that the herring fleet will have caught 92 percent of the Area 1A sub-ACL by November 13, 2024. Therefore, effective 0001 hr local time November 14, 2024, through December 31, 2024, a person may not attempt or do any of the following: Fish for; possess; transfer; purchase; receive; land; or sell more than 2,000 lb of herring per trip or more than once per calendar day in or from Area 1A.

Vessels that enter port before 0001 hr local time on November 14, 2024, may land and sell more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring from Area 1A from that trip, provided that catch is landed in accordance with state management measures. Vessels may transit or land in Area 1A with more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring on board, provided that: The herring were caught in an area not subject to a 2,000-lb (907.2-kg) limit; all fishing gear is stowed and not available for immediate use; and the vessel is issued a permit appropriate to the amount of herring on board and the area where the herring was harvested.

Also effective 0001 hr local time, November 14, 2024, through 2400 hr local time, December 31, federally permitted dealers may not attempt or do any of the following: Purchase; receive; possess; have custody or control of; sell; barter; trade; or transfer more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring per trip or calendar day from Area 1A, unless it is from a vessel that enters port before 0001 hr local time on November 14, 2024, and catch is landed in accordance with state management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

NMFS finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment because it is unnecessary, contrary to the public interest, and impracticable. Ample prior notice and opportunity for public comment has been provided for the required implementation of this action. The requirement to implement this possession limit was developed by

the New England Fishery Management Council using public meetings that invited public comment on the measures when they were developed and considered along with alternatives. Further, the regulations requiring implementation of this possession limit also were subject to public notice and opportunity to comment, when they were first adopted in 2014. Herring fishing industry participants monitor catch closely and anticipate potential possession limit adjustments as catch totals approach Area sub-ACLs. The regulation is not discretionary and is designed for implementation as quickly as possible to prevent catch from exceeding limits designed to prevent overfishing while allowing the fishery to achieve optimum yield.

The 2024 herring fishing year began on January 1, 2024, and Management Area 1A opened to fishing on June 1, 2024. Data indicating that the herring fleet will have landed at least 92 percent of the 2024 sub-ACL allocated to Area 1A only recently became available. High-volume catch and landings in this fishery can increase total catch relative to the sub-ACL quickly, especially in this fishing year where annual catch limits are unusually low. If implementation of this possession limit adjustment is delayed to solicit prior public comment, the 2024 sub-ACL for Area 1A will likely be exceeded; thereby undermining the conservation objectives of the Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP). If sub-ACLs are exceeded, the excess must be deducted from a future sub-ACL and would reduce future fishing opportunities. The public expects these actions to occur in a timely way consistent with the FMP's objectives. For the reasons stated above, NMFS also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

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

Dated: November 13, 2024.

Karen H. Abrams,

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

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