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## PUBLIC NOTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **PACIFIC COAST GROUND FISH FISHERY**

Trawl Rationalization Program – Individual Fishing Quota Fishery

*Widow Rockfish Reallocation Proposed Rule Published – Request for Comments*

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a proposed rule in the Federal Register (June 29, 2016) that would reallocate widow rockfish quota shares in the shorebased trawl individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery. NMFS requests comments on the rule, which is currently available for public review. **Comments must be received on or before July 29, 2016.**

In January 2011, NMFS implemented the trawl rationalization program, a type of catch share program, for the Pacific coast groundfish fishery's limited entry trawl fleet, which includes an IFQ program for limited entry trawl participants. At the time of implementation, the widow rockfish stock was overfished and quota shares (QS) were allocated to QS permit owners in the IFQ program using an overfished species formula. Now that the widow rockfish stock has been rebuilt, NMFS proposes to reallocate QS to initial recipients based on a target species formula that will more closely represent the fishing history of permit owners when widow rockfish was a targeted species. Through this rule, NMFS also proposes to allow the trading of widow rockfish QS, set a deadline for divestiture in case the reallocation of widow rockfish puts any QS permit owner over an accumulation limit, and remove the daily vessel limit for widow rockfish since it is no longer an overfished species.

For purposes of the widow rockfish reallocation calculation, NMFS intends to use landings data from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission's PacFIN database. Although QS permit owners had the opportunity to review and revise their data in 2009, they may not have reviewed their widow rockfish history closely at that time, since widow rockfish was overfished and the QS allocation used a Group 2 formula that was not based on widow landings. NMFS wants to provide an opportunity for this review before we "freeze" the database for purposes of reallocation. Freezing the database means that **NMFS intends to extract a dataset of the PacFIN database as of July 27, 2016**, and will use that dataset for the reallocation of widow rockfish.

If QS permit owners in the shorebased trawl IFQ program have concerns over the accuracy of their widow rockfish data in the PacFIN database, they should contact the state in which they landed those fish to correct any errors. Any revisions to an entity's fish tickets would have to be approved by the state in order to be accepted, and must be completed as of the date we freeze the database in order for the updated information to be used for the widow rockfish reallocation formula. State contacts are as follows:

- **Washington:** Marjorie Morningstar - 360-902-2854, marjorie.morningstar@dfw.wa.gov
- **Oregon:** Nadine Hurtado - 503-947-6247, nadine.hurtado@state.or.us
- **California:** Marine Fisheries Statistical Unit - 562-342-7130

Assuming the final rule publishes, NMFS proposes to mail prefilled applications for widow rockfish reallocation with workbooks showing NMFS' calculation after the final rule publishes, likely in the early fall. After the application deadline, NMFS would review all applications and issue initial administrative determinations (IAD), indicating whether each application was approved. Applicants would have 60 calendar days from the date of the IAD to appeal the decision. If any appeals were received, NMFS would reallocate widow QS amounts in 2017 consistent with all of the IADs and await any action resulting from an appeal until 2018.

Assuming the final rule publishes, NMFS intends to reallocate widow rockfish quota shares to quota share permit owners for January 1, 2017. If NMFS does not receive any appeals on the reallocation, widow QS would become transferrable on or about January 1, 2017, and any QS permit owner who exceeded the control limit as the result of the reallocation would have until November 30, 2017, to divest of their excess holdings. If NMFS does receive one or more appeals, widow QS would become transferrable on or about January 1, 2018, and any QS permit owner who exceeded the control limit as the result of the reallocation would have until November 30, 2018, to divest of their excess holdings.

Please find additional information in the proposed rule, and contact Sarah Towne at the number above with any questions.

You can view or download the proposed rule on the Federal Register website at:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/06/29/2016-15217/magnuson-stevens-act-provisions-fisheries-off-west-coast-states-pacific-coast-groundfish-fishery>, or on the NMFS West Coast Region website (along with the draft environmental assessment) at:

[http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/groundfish\\_catch\\_shares/rules\\_regulations/widow\\_rockfish\\_reallocation.html](http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/groundfish_catch_shares/rules_regulations/widow_rockfish_reallocation.html).

You can submit comments via mail by following the instructions in the proposed rule, or submit comments online through the regulations.gov portal: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0037>.