



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region
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PUBLIC NOTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NMFS Seeks Pacific Coast Groundfish Vessels for Trawl Gear Exempted Fishing Permit Project

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) seeks federally licensed limited entry bottom trawl vessels to participate in the *Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch when Targeting Rockfish in the Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Fishery Study*. This study would test a new fishery for chilipepper, widow, and yellowtail rockfishes while exempting participating vessels from two separate gear requirements:

- (1) Selective Flatfish Trawl – Currently, regulations at 50 CFR 660.130(b)(3)(ii)(A) require federally licensed limited entry bottom trawl vessels to use a selective flatfish trawl when fishing shoreward of the Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) north of 40°10'N latitude in the waters off the west coast. The selective flatfish trawl gear was originally designed and implemented to reduce the bycatch of round fish, such as canary rockfish and salmon, while increasing the catch of flatfish species. Vessels would still be required to use a small footrope trawl as is required at 40 CFR 660.130(b)(3)(ii).
- (2) Minimum Mesh Size – Currently, regulations at 50 CFR 660.130(b)(2) require federally licensed limited entry bottom trawl vessels to use a 4.5 inch (11.7 cm) mesh throughout the length of the trawl net when fishing anywhere along the west coast. The minimum mesh size requirement was intended to (1) reduce the harvest of small and unmarketable fish, (2) reduce the incidental harvest of unwanted species, and (3) establish a standard, coastwide mesh requirement.

This EFP is intended to provide additional flexibility in the configuration and use of bottom trawl gear for participating vessels, as well as provide additional information on potential impacts to protected resources, particularly Chinook salmon bycatch, resulting from this added flexibility. The additional information would be used to enhance the management of the groundfish fishery and promote the objectives of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). NMFS is seeking vessels to participate in the EFP project for the 2017 fishing year.

National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region

What You Need to Know

The EFP may include a number of measures to minimize potential bycatch of protected species, particularly Chinook salmon, which may result from this EFP. Some possible measures include:

- Limits on areas and times during which EFP fishing can take place.
- Additional reporting and monitoring requirements, including filing a declaration before each trip with the Office of Law Enforcement, filling out a logbook, and 100-percent at-sea monitoring using observers or electronic monitoring (EM).
- Additional requirements for sorting and handling of catch, such as sorting and reporting of any salmon catch at the haul level.
- Mandatory participation in a collective bycatch avoidance agreement with other participating vessels.
 - Vessels participating in this EFP may be required to work with Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) to provide real-time, or near-real time, information on salmon bycatch and to respond to the information compiled by PSMFC to avoid high bycatch areas.
- Limits on salmon bycatch that may be set at the haul or trip level or other time period.

In addition, to be eligible to participate in the EFP interested applicants must meet the following criteria on an ongoing basis. All vessels, owners, and captains, will be subject to a review of sanction history through the Office of Law Enforcement to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria. Specific eligibility criteria may be waived on a case-by-case basis.

- The participant owns the vessel proposed to be used or has written permission of the owner;
- The participant's vessel is registered to a valid trawl Pacific Coast Groundfish limited entry permit and a valid vessel account set up to receive quota pounds under the IFQ program;
- The participant has prior experience fishing in the IFQ program;
- The vessel has a current and valid U.S. Coast Guard Vessel Safety Check decal;
- The participant has not had a violation of fishing regulations in the last 3 years in which the participant was fined more than \$1,000 for a criminal penalty or \$5,000 for a civil penalty;
- The participant has never had a violation for falsification of observer, logbook, or fish ticket data;
- The vessel has had no unobserved fishing trips or fishing days since the inception of the IFQ program;
- The participant is willing and able to follow the terms and conditions of the EFP, including the associated individual vessel monitoring plan; and,

Submit your comments regarding the EFP application online via the Federal electronic rulemaking portal: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2016-31704>

To learn more or to apply to participate in the project, contact the Groundfish Permits Branch at (206)526-4353 or the Oregon Trawl Commission (541)469-7830.

For more information contact: NMFS West Coast Region at 206-526-6140 or visit our website at <http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov>, click on "Fisheries" then "Groundfish"

Any discrepancies between this public notice and the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.