

reduce the guided sport harvest by an amount comparable to the reduction that would have been achieved by the IPHC bag limit recommendation. Alternative 2 would have kept the two-fish bag limit, but impose a season-long 45-inch (114 cm) or larger minimum size restriction on the second fish. The 45-inch (114 cm) limit associated with this alternative would have generated guided harvest reductions comparable to those of the IPHC recommendation and thus the expected harvest reduction would have been close to the preferred alternative. However, Alternative 2 would have required guides to measure larger, heavier fish than the preferred alternative, which would have increased the difficulty of compliance for the guides. Moreover, in areas with halibut of a smaller size, larger fish might be more difficult to find than smaller fish. If fish larger than 45 inches (114 cm) were scarce in some areas, the minimum size limit could have a similar impact to a one fish bag limit. Such an impact would be more burdensome to charter vessel operators in those areas than operators in areas where larger fish were more common. Alternative 3 would impose a minimum size limit of 32 inches (81.3 cm) on both fish for the fishing season (currently February 1 to December 31). NMFS does not prefer this alternative because of uncertainties about its effect on reducing harvest. In particular, this alternative may actually increase the pounds of fish harvested in the charter fishery because anglers would be required to harvest larger halibut than they may otherwise harvest under the current bag limit. Alternative 4 would allow anglers to harvest one halibut of any size and one halibut with a total length at least 30 inches (76.2), 32 inches (81.3 cm), or 35 inches (88.9 cm). Of these options, NMFS preferred a size limit of 32 inches (81.3 cm) because its estimated harvest reduction is the most comparable to the IPHC-recommended action. The estimated harvest reduction for the preferred alternative is approximately 425,000 lb (192.8 mt). The enforcement of a size limit requires charter vessel operators to retain the halibut carcass until the fillets are offloaded from the vessel. To an unknown extent, proper disposal of the carcasses may increase costs to charter vessel operators.

This action does not modify recordkeeping or reporting requirements, or duplicate, overlap, or conflict with any Federal rules. This proposed rule has been determined to be not significant for the purposes of Executive Order (E.O.) 12866. This proposed rule complies with the Halibut

Act and the Secretary's authority to implement allocation measures for the management of the halibut fishery. No duplicative or overlapping rules exist that are associated with this proposed rule.

This proposed action is consistent with E.O. 12962 which directs Federal agencies to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities "to the extent permitted by law and where practicable." This E.O. does not diminish NMFS' responsibility to address allocation issues, nor does it require NMFS or the Council to limit their ability to manage recreational fisheries. E.O. 12962 provides guidance to NMFS to improve the potential productivity of aquatic resources for recreational fisheries. This proposed rule does not diminish that productivity or countermand the intent of E.O. 12962.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 300

Fisheries, Fishing, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Treaties.

Dated: April 2, 2007.

John Oliver

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, NMFS proposes to amend 50 CFR part 300 as follows:

PART 300—INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES REGULATIONS

Subpart E—Pacific Halibut Fisheries

1. The authority citation for 50 CFR part 300, subpart E, continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773–773k.

2. In § 300.61, definitions for "Area 2C" and "Head-on length" are added, in alphabetical order, to read as follows:

§ 300.61 Definitions.

* * * * *

Area 2C includes all waters off Alaska that are east of a line running 340° true from Cape Spencer Light (58°11'54" N. lat., 136°38'24" W. long.) and south and east of a line running 205° true from said light.

* * * * *

Head-on length means a straight line measurement passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with the mouth closed to the extreme end of the middle of the tail.

* * * * *

3. In § 300.65, paragraphs (d) through (k) are redesignated as (e) through (l),

respectively, and new paragraph (d) is added to read as follows:

§ 300.65 Catch sharing plan and domestic management measures in waters in and off Alaska.

* * * * *

(d) In Commission Regulatory Area 2C, halibut harvest on a charter vessel is limited to no more than two halibut per person per calendar day provided that at least one of the harvested halibut has a head-on length of no more than 32 inches (81.3 cm). If a person sport fishing on a charter vessel in Area 2C retains only one halibut in a calendar day, that halibut may be of any length.

* * * * *

4. In § 300.66, paragraph (m) is added to read as follows:

§ 300.66 Prohibitions.

* * * * *

(m) Possess halibut on board a charter vessel in Area 2C that has been mutilated or otherwise disfigured in a manner that prevents the determination of size or number of fish, notwithstanding the requirements of the Annual Management Measure 25(2) and (7) (as promulgated in accordance with § 300.62 and relating to Sport Fishing for Halibut). Filleted halibut may be possessed on board the charter vessel provided that the entire carcass, with the head and tail connected as single piece, is retained on board until all fillets are offloaded.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 070322065–7065–01; I.D. 030607C]

RIN 0648–AV39

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery; Amendment 13

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes regulations to implement measures in Amendment 13 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (Scallop FMP). Amendment 13 was developed by the New England Fishery Management

Council (Council) to permanently re-activate the industry-funded observer program in the Scallop FMP through a scallop total allowable catch (TAC) and days-at-sea (DAS) set-aside program that helps vessel owners defray the cost of carrying observers. Proposed measures for the observer service provider program in Amendment 13 include: Requirements for becoming an approved observer service provider; observer certification and decertification criteria; and notification requirements for vessel owners and/or operators. This proposed rule would require scallop vessel owners, operators, or vessel managers to procure certified fishery observers for specified scallop fishing trips from an approved observer service provider. Additionally, this proposed rule would allow adjustments to the observer program to be done through framework action. The measures in this proposed rule would enable NMFS to utilize the Scallop FMP's set-aside program that has been in place in the Scallop FMP since 1999. The set-aside program requires scallop vessel owners to pay for observers, whether or not scallop TAC or DAS set-aside is available, and compensates vessel owners with additional scallop catch or reduced DAS accrual rate if scallop TAC or DAS set-aside is available. Observer coverage in the scallop fishery is necessary to monitor the bycatch of finfish and interactions with threatened and endangered species.

DATES: Public comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern standard time, on May 7, 2007.

ADDRESSES: Copies of Amendment 13, the public hearing document, and the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA), are available on request from Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council (Council), 50 Water Street, Newburyport, MA 01950. These documents are also available online at <http://www.nefmc.org>. Amendment 13 is categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

Written comments should be submitted by any of the following methods:

- Mail: Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope, "Comments on Scallop Amendment 13 Proposed Rule."
- E-mail to the following address: ScallopAmendment13@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line of the e-mail comment the following document

identifier: "Comments on Scallop Amendment 13 Proposed Rule";

- Fax: 978-281-9135
- Electronically through the Federal e-Rulemaking portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Written comments regarding the burden-hour estimate or other aspects of the collection-of-information requirement contained in this proposed rule should be submitted to the Regional Administrator at the address above and by e-mail to David_Rostker@omb.eop.gov, or fax to 202-395-7285.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Carrie Nordeen, Fishery Policy Analyst, phone 978-281-9272, fax 978-281-9135.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Since 1999, NMFS has required scallop vessels operating in Scallop Access Areas to pay for observer coverage. This provision operated effectively through a contractual arrangement with an observer provider until June 2004, when the Department of Commerce informed NMFS that it could not renew the contract without resolving possible conflicts with the Miscellaneous Receipts Act and policies regarding augmentation of appropriations. The contract arrangement had enabled vessel owners to pay the observer provider directly for observer deployments, with details of the observer deployment requirements specified through the contract. The expiration of the contract arrangement eliminated the mechanism allowing vessel owners to pay for observer coverage.

Even though the mechanism allowing vessel owners to pay for observer coverage was inoperable, the Council continued to establish specifications for the scallop fishery that included set-asides (TAC and DAS, depending on fishing area) that could be harvested on observed trips to offset the cost to the industry of observers. Existing scallop regulations specify set-asides through February 29, 2008, and require that industry must pay for observer coverage, even if set-asides have been exhausted. For vessels fishing in the Scallop Access Areas, the Council has allocated a portion of the total projected scallop catch to defray the observer costs for vessel owners. Scallop vessels selected to carry observers on access area trips are authorized to land additional scallops on these observed trips to help offset the cost of the observer. An additional set-aside of a reduced DAS accrual rate is allocated to pay for the

cost of observers on observed trips in open areas.

Observer coverage in the scallop fishery is necessary to monitor groundfish bycatch, particularly yellowtail flounder bycatch in the Scallop Access Areas within the groundfish closed areas. It is also needed to monitor interactions between the scallop fishery and sea turtles. Through fiscal year (FY) 2005, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) funded the necessary levels of observer coverage in the scallop fishery to evaluate bycatch of groundfish and sea turtles by utilizing carryover funding from FY 2004. However, in FY 2006, the NEFSC's level of funding for the observer program provided for only minimal observer coverage in the scallop fishery. This meant that observer coverage was constrained to levels less than what would be necessary for sufficient monitoring of the yellowtail flounder bycatch total allowable catch (TAC) in Scallop Access Areas and interactions between the scallop fishery and sea turtles in the Mid-Atlantic during June through October.

To provide for sufficient observer coverage to monitor the scallop fishery, NMFS re-activated the industry-funded observer program, wherein scallop vessels would be required to procure observer coverage from a NMFS-approved observer provider, on June 16, 2006 (71 FR 34842), via emergency rule. The emergency rule established a program that allowed observer service providers meeting specified criteria to be approved by NMFS. NMFS-approved observer service providers were then able to deploy observers on scallop vessels. The emergency rule also established the requirement that vessel owners are required to procure observers from a NMFS-approved observer service provider, and must pay for the observer. The emergency rule was extended through June 11, 2007 (71 FR 69073, November 29, 2006). Extending the emergency rule provided for observer coverage to continue to gather complete fishing year data on the scallop fishery and monitor fishery interactions with sea turtles in early spring.

The Council developed Amendment 13 to permanently re-activate the industry-funded scallop observer program implemented in 2006. At its February 6-8, 2007, meeting, the Council voted to adopt Amendment 13 for submission to NMFS, and submitted the document and associated analyses on February 16, 2007. The Council held one public hearing on Amendment 13 on February 7, 2007, in Portsmouth, NH,

in conjunction with the Council's February meeting.

Proposed Measures

To provide for observer coverage in the scallop fishery when the Scallop Access Areas re-open on June 15, 2007, and into the future, this action would permanently re-activate the industry-funded scallop observer program that was implemented in 2006 via emergency rule. Like the emergency rule, this action would require scallop vessels to procure observer coverage from a NMFS-approved observer service provider. This action proposes criteria to be met in order for an entity to be approved by NMFS as an observer service provider, proposes the requirements for certification and decertification of observers for the scallop fishery, and proposes vessel notification requirements. Lastly, this action proposes to provide a framework mechanism to implement future adjustments to the scallop observer program.

Observer program requirements proposed in this action were developed to provide for the accurate and timely collection of unbiased data and to minimize conflict of interest issues. The proposed requirements were also designed to be consistent with national NMFS observer standards and were based upon NMFS observer program requirements in Alaskan fisheries, but modified to meet the needs and objectives of the Northeast Regional Office (NERO) and NEFSC. Since implementation via emergency rule in June 2006, the proposed industry-funded observer program has been successful, as it provided sufficient observer coverage for the scallop fishery and allowed NMFS to maintain sufficient operational standards and data quality control.

Observer Service Provider Requirements

This proposed action would allow any entity to become an observer service provider if it meets the proposed approval and responsibilities criteria. Potential observer service providers would be required to submit an application containing detailed information such as contact information, description of past experience with placing individuals in remote field and/or marine environments, evidence of adequate insurance to cover injury, liability and accidental death for observers during employment, and proof of compensation for observers while employed that meet or exceed Department of Labor guidelines. Entities interested in being included on the list of NMFS-approved

observer service providers would be required to submit an application with the information proposed in the regulatory text of this action. Upon receipt of an application, NMFS would provide all potential observer service providers with an estimated number of observer sea days for this fishing year under the proposed program. Additionally, a planned schedule of observer deployments would be posted on this NOAA website: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>. NMFS would notify candidate observer service providers of their approval or disapproval within 15 days of its receipt of their applications. If approved, the observer service provider's name would be added to the list of NMFS-approved observer service providers.

Observer service providers would be required to comply with all observer support, deployment logistics and limitations, communication, training, reporting, and conflict of interest requirements proposed in the regulatory text of this action. Observer service providers would also be responsible for setting the daily cost of observer coverage on a vessel. NMFS would continue to be responsible for determining the reduced DAS accrual rate and TAC for the set-aside program to defray the cost of observer coverage through biennial specifications. This proposed NMFS-approval process would maintain quality control of the data collected, but would not have potential conflicts with augmentation of appropriations law and policy.

This action proposes a few minor changes from the observer service provider requirements implemented by emergency rule. The cost of training/certifying scallop observers is borne by NMFS. To facilitate cost-effective training/certification, this action proposes that a minimum class size of eight observers, which may be split among multiple observer service providers, be required for the scallop observer training class operated by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP). Training classes with fewer than eight participants would be delayed until at least eight participants were enrolled. This action also proposes that an approved observer service provider would be required to maintain in its employ at least eight observers that had been certified through the scallop observer training class operated by NEFOP. The emergency rule implemented an observer service provider requirement that an observer's first deployment shall be on a Scallop Access Area trip and that the resulting data be edited and approved by NMFS prior to any further deployments.

Specifying details of new observer's first deployment was designed to provide the necessary oversight to ensure the collection of timely and accurate data. However, NEFOP has learned that requiring an observer's first deployment and the resulting data be edited and approved by NMFS, prior to any further deployments, is sufficient for quality control, and that requiring an observer's first deployment be on a Scallop Access Area trip may limit the availability of observers to provide coverage on scallop trips to open areas. Therefore, the requirement that an observer's first deployment and the resulting data be edited and approved by NMFS, prior to any further deployments is proposed in this action, but the requirement that an observer's first deployment shall be on a Scallop Access Area trip is not proposed in this action.

Observer Certification Requirements

This action proposes that employees of observer service providers must meet the NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards available at <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop/> and must pass the NEFOP training course and be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the responsibilities of an observer. NMFS has the authority to review observer certification and issue observer certification probation and/or decertification if warranted. One minor addition to the observer certification requirements implemented by emergency rule is that this action proposes that all observers would be required hold a current Red Cross (or equivalent) cardiopulmonary resuscitation certificate.

Removal/Decertification Requirements

This proposed action would specify criteria and protocols for removal of an observer service provider from the list of NMFS-approved observer service providers and the probation and decertification of an observer.

Vessel Requirements

Proposed in this action are general requirements for scallop vessels, notification procedures, and requirements of the vessel if it is selected to carry an observer. Vessels are responsible for paying the cost of a observer, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside TAC or reduced DAS accrual rate.

The emergency rule required that vessels contact NMFS prior to the 25th day of the month preceding the month in which it intends to fish. This requirement was designed by NMFS to

provide NEFOP with an estimate of fishing effort to expect in the following month, so that observer coverage needs could be met. However, NEFOP has found that it does not need this provision to meet coverage needs; therefore, NMFS is not proposing that notification requirement in this action.

Future Adjustments to the Observer Program

Lastly, this action proposes a framework mechanism to implement future adjustments to the scallop observer program. Under the Scallop FMP, and in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, the framework process allows for abbreviated rulemaking if the Secretary of Commerce finds good cause to waive the requirement for a proposed rule and opportunity for public comment. Currently, adjustments to the observer program must be made through an amendment to the Scallop FMP. Providing for a framework mechanism in the Scallop FMP to make adjustments to measures implemented for the observer program would allow the Council more flexibility to develop improvements to the observer program.

Public comments are being solicited on Amendment 13 and its incorporated documents through the end of the comment period, May 18, 2007, stated in the notice of availability (NOA) for Amendment 13 (72 FR 12749, March 19, 2007). Public comments on the proposed rule must be received by May 18, 2007, the end of the comment period specified in the NOA for Amendment 13, to be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. All comments received by May 18, 2007, whether specifically directed to Amendment 13 or the proposed rule, will be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on Amendment 13. Comments received after that date will not be considered in the decision to approve or disapprove Amendment 13. To be considered, comments must be received by close of business on the last day of the comment period.

Current scallop observer program regulations, implemented via emergency rule, will expire on June 11, 2007. This action proposes to make minor modifications to those regulations and make them permanent.

Classification

At this time, NMFS has not determined that the amendment this proposed rule would implement is consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and

other applicable laws. NMFS, in making that determination, will take into account the data, views, and comments received during the comment period.

This proposed rule has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

This proposed rule maintains collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), previously approved under control number 0648-0546 in conjunction with the emergency action and currently under review for renewal. If approved by OMB, the requirements under 0648-0546 would remain in place even after the expiration of the emergency rule for use under the authority of Amendment 13, provided Amendment 13 is approved and implemented. These requirements apply to entities interested in becoming NMFS-approved observer service providers and to those observer service providers approved by NMFS and providing observer services to the scallop fishery. Public reporting burden for these collections of information are estimated to average as follows:

1. Application for approval of observer service provider - 10 hr per response;
2. Applicant response to denial of application for approval of observer service provider - 10 hr per response;
3. Observer service provider request for observer training - 30 min per response;
4. Observer deployment report - 10 min per response;
5. Observer availability report - 10 min per response;
6. Safety refusal report - 30 min per response;
7. Submission of raw observer data - 5 min per response;
8. Observer debriefing - 2 hr per response;
9. Biological samples - 5 min per response;
10. Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer service providers - 8 hr per response;
11. Vessel request to observer service provider for procurement of a certified observer - 25 min per response; and
12. Vessel request for waiver of observer coverage requirement - 5 min per response.

These estimates include the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection 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 e-mail to

David_Rostker@omb.eop.gov, or fax to (202) 395-7285.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, no person is required to respond to, and no person shall be subject to 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.

An IRFA was prepared, as required by section 603 of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA). The IRFA describes the economic impact this proposed rule, if adopted, would have on small entities. A description of the action, why it is being considered, and the legal basis for this action are contained at the beginning of this section in the preamble and in the **SUMMARY** section. A copy of this analysis is available from the Council (see **ADDRESSES**) or NMFS at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>. A summary of the analysis follows:

Statement of Objective and Need

The objective of this action is to re-activate the industry-funded observer program for the scallop fishery. Observer coverage is necessary in the scallop fishery to monitor bycatch of finfish and interactions with endangered and threatened species. The need for this action is to provide a mechanism to approve observer service providers so that the set-aside program can be utilized to help defray costs of carrying the necessary level of observers in the scallop fishery. A complete description of the reasons why this action is being considered, and the objectives of and legal basis for this action, is contained in the preamble to this proposed rule and is not repeated here.

Description and Estimate of Number of Small Entities to Which the Rule Would Apply

The vessels in the scallop fishery could be considered small business entities because all of them grossed less than \$4 million, according to the dealer's data, for 2004 to 2006. The proposed action would affect vessels with limited access and general category scallop permits. According to the recent permit data, there were 318 vessels that obtained full-time limited access permits in 2006, including 55 small-dredge and 14 scallop trawl permits. In the same year, there were also 32 part-time and 1 occasional limited access permit in the scallop fishery. In addition, 2,501 permits were issued to vessels in the open access general category and over 500 of these vessels landed scallops during the last 2 years. These numbers could change as the

fishing year progresses. Based on this information, the proposed action is expected to have impacts on a substantial number of small entities. There are no large entities participating in this fishery, as defined in section 601 of the RFA. Therefore, there are no disproportionate economic impacts on small entities.

Description of Projected Reporting, Recordkeeping, and Other Compliance Requirements

This action does not contain any new collection-of-information, reporting, recordkeeping, or other compliance requirements. It does not duplicate, overlap, or conflict with any other Federal rules. It maintains requirements approved in conjunction with the emergency action.

Economic Impacts of the Proposed Action Compared to Significant Non-Selected Alternatives

Proposed Action

Previous scallop regulatory actions established provisions that impose some cost on vessels that participate in the scallop fishery by requiring vessels to carry and pay for observers on some trips. Compliance costs associated with the observer coverage can be minimized through the set-aside (i.e., TAC and DAS, depending on fishing area) that will provide compensation to vessel owners that have paid for observers. This action re-activates the mechanism that allow vessels to offset the costs of observer coverage and harvesting additional scallops from the set-aside. The net impacts of the observer program on vessels that participate in the scallop fishery will depend on scallop prices, trip costs, observer costs, and the TAC or reduced DAS accrual rate provided by NMFS. The analyses presented in Amendment 13 showed that, in some circumstances, observer coverage could reduce crew and vessel income by extending the trip and increasing the trip costs, especially for vessels with a lower catch rate per DAS. But in most cases, overall costs due to the observer coverage will be minimized, and may even yield positive economic benefits, due to the compensation that would be provided by NMFS.

The average total revenue for a general category vessel was \$139,755 for the first 11 months of the 2006 fishing year, \$249,167 for fishing year 2005, and \$260,942 for fishing year 2004. Assuming that the cost of an observer would be \$800 per day-at-sea (or \$33.30 per hour, slightly higher than the \$775 paid by vessels during the 2006 fishing year), average observer costs per general

category vessel were estimated to be about \$1,440 per trip in 2006. A cost of \$1,400 per vessel for the year, assuming that each vessel carries an observer on only one trip, would amount to about 1 percent of total revenue. Similarly, the average total revenue of a limited access vessel was \$803,873 for the first 11 months of the 2006 fishing year, \$1,072,991 for fishing year 2005, and \$988,401 for fishing year 2004. Average observer costs per limited access vessel were \$6,560 per trip in 2006. Again, assuming that each vessel carries an observer on only one trip, observer cost would amount to less than 1 percent of the total revenue. (These are the amounts paid to the observer provider and do not include compensation through TAC or DAS set-asides.) Because of the set-aside, compliance costs to scallop vessels are expected to be considerably less than these amounts, under most circumstances. However, as described previously, if there is no set-aside, or no remaining set-aside, to help pay for the observer coverage, the vessels would be responsible for paying the observer, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells scallops on that trip. This has been the process since the set-aside program was implemented in 1999, but NMFS usually distributes the set-aside such that the majority, if not all trips with an observer aboard, are at least partially compensated.

Economic impacts on scallop vessels, under several scenarios for both limited access and general category vessels, were analyzed in the IRFA for Amendment 13. Scenarios are based on set variables (i.e., trip costs, cost of observer, and the compensation (either TAC or DAS) provided by NMFS for carrying an observer) and fluctuating variables (i.e., landings per unit effort, price of scallops). While TAC compensation is provided by NMFS, vessels must incur additional costs to harvest the compensation TAC. Economic impacts on vessels in the scallop fleet are analyzed in the IRFA by considering set variables, fluctuating variables, and whether or not a vessel carries an observer for a trip. Although the IRFA in Amendment 13 analyzes several scenarios, the results are summarized as follows:

For limited access vessels, fluctuating variables in the assumptions include: Landings per unit effort (LPUE) ranging from 1,800 lb (816.5 kg) per DAS to 800 lb (362.9 kg) per DAS and scallop price ranging from \$7.60 per lb to \$6.00 per lb. Given the highest LPUE and highest price, a vessel's income could be expected to increase by about \$9,280 with an observer onboard (from \$61,560

without an observer, to \$70,840 with an observer). A vessel's crew income could be expected to increase by about \$10,722 with an observer (from \$63,540 without an observer, to \$72,282 with an observer). The increase in income when carrying an observer is due to the compensation for carrying an observer, either additional pounds (400 lb (181.4 kg) per day) or DAS (0.15 reduced accrual rate in open areas). With an LPUE of 800 lb (362.9 kg) per DAS and a price of \$7.60 per lb, a vessel's income could be expected to decline by about \$32 with an observer onboard (from \$24,624 without an observer to \$24,592 with an observer). A vessel's crew income could be expected to decline by about \$1,619 with an observer (from \$19,566 without an observer, to \$17,947 with an observer). These decreases in income result from extended trip lengths to catch the additional pounds to pay for an observer.

General category vessels are subject to the industry-funded observer provisions only when fishing in Scallop Access Areas and are compensated with additional pounds per trip. With a compensation of 400 lb (181.4 kg) per day, a vessel would cover observer costs of \$1,600 by fishing 2 days and landing 1,200 lb (544.3 kg) of scallops (400 lb (181.4 kg) for the trip and 800 lb (362.9 kg) as compensation). At a price of \$6.00 per lb, the vessel would generate \$7,200 revenue from scallops, and would increase total crew income by \$1,410 and vessel income by \$1,440. At a scallop price of \$7.60 per lb, vessels and crews could be expected to increase revenues even at a lower compensation rate. By fishing more days, a vessel could experience even more gains in revenue. For example, by fishing 3.5 days and receiving 1,600 lb (725.7 kg) in compensation, total scallop revenue could increase to \$15,200 at a price of \$7.60 per lb, increasing both crew and vessel income by over \$4,000. These positive impacts on vessels are due to the fact that general category vessels are not allowed to land more than 400 lb (181.4 kg) on regular trips and, even at a price of \$6.00 per lb, a compensation amount of 400 lb (181.4 kg) could bring \$2,400 in revenue, exceeding the cost of the observer and trip costs. However, if compensation pounds were set too low, or if prices decline below \$6.00 per lb, the economic gains from compensation for carrying an observer could decline.

Observer coverage would improve information that could be used to reduce the amount of finfish bycatch and the level of sea turtle takes in the scallop fishery. This could eliminate the need for more conservative management measures in the future that may

potentially have adverse impacts on the scallop industry. For these reasons and the reasons described above, the benefits of the observer program are expected to exceed costs of this program and have positive economic impacts on vessels participating in the scallop fishery.

The proposed adjustment mechanism to the observer program through framework action could be used to reduce the differential impacts of this program on some vessels, such as by implementing different TAC amounts and DAS accrual rates for smaller vessels. The adjustments through framework could also provide more flexibility to the program in determining the amount of set-aside or the way the observer costs are shared among the vessels in the scallop fleet.

Participation by potential observer service providers is voluntary and, since no Federal action is requiring participation, further assessment of the potential impacts on these entities is not required. No significant quantifiable impacts on scallop prices and change in benefits to the consumers are expected from this action, since the observer program is not expected to impact scallop landings in a significant way.

Non-selected Alternatives

The proposed action would permanently re-activate the industry-funded observer program in the Scallop FMP through a set-aside program that would help vessel owners defray the cost of carrying observers. The alternatives to the proposed action do not provide for an industry-funded observer program. Under the no action alternative, the emergency rule would expire and no regulations would be implemented allowing for funding in addition to that provided by NMFS under its existing observer program. However, as discussed previously, NMFS's current and anticipated funding would only provide for minimal observer coverage in the scallop fishery. Therefore, under the no action alternative, observer coverage levels would likely be less than sufficient for monitoring the yellowtail flounder bycatch TAC in Scallop Access Areas and interactions between the scallop fishery and sea turtles in the Mid-Atlantic during June through October. Due to implications of having minimal observer coverage (e.g., earlier closures based on less reliable bycatch estimates, closures to prevent interactions with sea turtles), no action would likely result in negative economic impacts (e.g., reduced fishing opportunity, reduced harvest) for the scallop industry in both the short and long-term. Without an

industry-funded observer program, adequate observer coverage for the scallop fishery could only occur if provided wholly by NMFS. However, because of resource constraints, it is not realistically possible for NMFS to wholly fund an adequate level of observer coverage for the scallop fishery.

The set-aside program is already an established provision in the scallop regulations and the measures in this proposed rule would only establish a mechanism to enable the set-asides to be utilized by the industry as compensation for having paid for observer coverage. Measures to modify and improve the set-aside program are outside the scope of Amendment 13. During the Council's public hearing on Amendment 13, the scallop industry expressed concern that the proposed action would not provide a complete solution to the economic impacts associated with having to pay for observers under the existing set-aside program. The scallop industry also acknowledged that there were no other alternatives, besides the proposed and no action alternatives, that could be considered in Amendment 13. Based on this public input, this action also proposes a mechanism to allow future modifications to the observer program to be implemented by framework action. Providing for a framework mechanism in the Scallop FMP to make adjustments to the observer program would allow more flexibility to address industry's concerns with the program.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 648

Fisheries, Fishing, Recordkeeping and reporting requirements.

Dated: April 2, 2007.

John Oliver,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 648 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 648—FISHERIES OF THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

1. The authority citation for part 648 continues to read as follows:

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

2. In § 648.10, paragraph (b)(4) is revised to read as follows:

§ 648.10 DAS and VMS notification requirements.

* * * * *

(b) * * *

(4) *Atlantic sea scallop vessel VMS notification requirements.* Less than 1 hr prior to leaving port, the owner or

authorized representative of a scallop vessel that is required to use VMS as specified in paragraph (b)(1) of this section must notify the Regional Administrator by entering the appropriate VMS code that the vessel will be participating in the scallop DAS program, Area Access Program, or general category scallop fishery. VMS codes and instructions are available from the Regional Administrator upon request.

* * * * *

3. In § 648.11, paragraphs (a) introductory text and (a)(1) are revised, and paragraphs (g), (h), and (i) are revised to read as follows:

§ 648.11 At-sea sampler/observer coverage.

(a) The Regional Administrator may request any vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops, NE multispecies, monkfish, skates, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfly, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, tilefish, or Atlantic deep-sea red crab; or a moratorium permit for summer flounder; to carry a NMFS certified fisheries observer. A vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops is subject to the additional requirements specified in paragraph (g) of this section.

(1) For the purpose of deploying at-sea observers, sea scallop vessel owners are required to notify NMFS of scallop trips as specified in paragraph (g) of this section. Unless otherwise notified by the Regional Administrator, owners of scallop vessels shall be responsible for paying the cost of the observer for all scallop fishing trips on which an observer is carried onboard the vessel, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells sea scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside for an increased possession limit, or reduced accrual rate of DAS.

* * * * *

(g) *Atlantic sea scallop observer program*—(1) *General.* Unless otherwise specified, owners, operators, and/or managers of vessels issued a Federal scallop permit under § 648.4(a)(2), and specified in paragraph (b) of this section, must comply with this section and are jointly and severally responsible for their vessel's compliance with this section. To facilitate the deployment of at-sea observers, all sea scallop vessels issued limited access permits fishing in open areas or Sea Scallop Access Areas, and general category vessels fishing under the Sea Scallop Access Area program specified in § 648.60, are required to comply with the additional notification requirements specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. All sea

scallop vessels issued a VMS general category or Non-VMS general scallop permit that are participating in the Area Access Program specified in § 648.60 are required to comply with the additional VMS notification requirements specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. When NMFS notifies the vessel owner, operator, and/or manager of any requirement to carry an observer on a specified trip in either an Access Area or Open Area as specified in paragraph (g)(3) of this section, the vessel may not fish for, take, retain, possess, or land any scallops without carrying an observer. Vessels may only embark on a scallop trip in open areas or Access Areas without an observer if the vessel owner, operator, and/or manager has been notified that the vessel has received a waiver of the observer requirement for that trip pursuant to paragraphs (g)(3) and (g)(4)(ii) of this section.

(2) *Vessel notification procedures.* For the purpose of determining if an observer will be deployed on a vessel for a specific trip, the owner, operator, or manager of a vessel issued a limited access permit fishing in open areas or in the Sea Scallop Area Access program specified in § 648.60, or the owner, operator, or manager of a vessel issued a general category scallop permit and fishing in the Sea Scallop Area Access program specified in § 648.60, is required to comply with the following notification requirement. For each scallop trip, the vessel owner, operator, and/or manager shall notify NMFS by telephone, using the phone number provided by the Regional Administrator in the Small Entity Compliance Guide, and provide the following information: Vessel name and permit number; contact name and number; date and time of departure; port of departure; area to be fished (either open areas or the specific Sea Scallop Access Area); and whether fishing as a scallop dredge, scallop trawl, or general category vessel.

(3) *Selection of scallop fishing trips for observer coverage.* Based on predetermined coverage levels for various sectors of the scallop fishery that are provided by NMFS in writing to all observer service provider approved pursuant to paragraph (h) of this section, NMFS shall notify the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager whether the vessel must carry an observer, or if a waiver has been granted, for the specified trip within 24 hr of the vessel owner's, operator's, or vessel manager's notification of the prospective trip, as specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. Any request to carry an observer may be waived by NMFS. All waivers for

observer coverage shall be issued to the vessel by VMS so as to have on-board verification of the waiver.

(4) *Procurement of observer services by scallop vessels.* (i) An owner of a scallop vessel required to carry an observer under paragraph (g)(3) of this section must arrange for carrying an observer certified through the observer training class operated by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (herein after NMFS/NEFOP certified) from an observer service provider approved by NMFS under paragraph (h) of this section. A list of approved observer service providers shall be posted on the NOAA/NEFOP website at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fjsb/>. The owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel selected to carry an observer must contact the observer service provider and must provide at least 72-hr notice in advance of the fishing trip for the provider to arrange for observer deployment for the specified trip.

(ii) An owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel that cannot procure a certified observer within 72 hr of the advance notification to the provider due to the unavailability of an observer, may request a waiver from NMFS from the requirement for observer coverage for that trip, but only if the owner, operator, or vessel manager has contacted all of the available observer service providers to secure observer coverage and no observer is available. NMFS shall issue such a waiver within 24 hr, if the conditions of this paragraph (g)(4)(ii) are met.

(5) Owners of scallop vessels shall be responsible for paying the cost of the observer for all scallop fishing trips on which an observer is carried onboard the vessel, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells sea scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside for an increased possession limit or reduced DAS accrual rate. The owners, operators, and/or managers of vessels that carry an observer may be compensated with a reduced DAS accrual rate for open area trips or additional scallop catch per day in Access Areas in order to help defray the cost of the observer, under the program specified in §§ 648.53 and 648.60. Observer service providers are responsible for setting the daily rate for observer coverage on a vessel. NMFS shall determine any reduced DAS accrual rate and the amount of additional pounds of scallops per day fished in an access area for the applicable fishing year based on the economic conditions of the scallop fishery, as determined by best available information. Vessel owners and observer service providers shall be

notified by Small Entity Compliance Guide of any DAS accrual rate and additional pounds of scallops determined by the Regional Administrator. The Regional Administrator may adjust the DAS accrual rate and additional pounds of scallops, if necessary, based on economic conditions of the scallop fishery. Vessel owners and observer providers shall be notified of any such adjustments through a letter.

(6) When the available DAS or TAC set-aside for observer coverage is exhausted, vessels shall still be required to carry an observer as specified in this section, and shall be responsible for paying for the cost of the observer, but shall not be authorized to harvest additional pounds or fish at a reduced DAS accrual rate.

(h) *Observer service provider approval and responsibilities—(1) General.* An entity seeking to provide observer services to the Atlantic sea scallop fishery must apply for and obtain approval from NMFS following submission of a complete application to The Observer Program Branch Chief, 25 Bernard St Jean Drive, East Falmouth, MA 02536. A list of approved observer service providers shall be distributed to scallop vessel owners and shall be posted on NMFS's web page, as specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section.

(2) [Reserved]

(3) *Contents of application.* An application to become an approved observer service provider shall contain the following:

(i) Identification of the management, organizational structure, and ownership structure of the applicant's business, including identification by name and general function of all controlling management interests in the company, including but not limited to owners, board members, officers, authorized agents, and staff. If the applicant is a corporation, the articles of incorporation must be provided. If the applicant is a partnership, the partnership agreement must be provided.

(ii) The permanent mailing address, phone and fax numbers where the owner(s) can be contacted for official correspondence, and the current physical location, business mailing address, business telephone and fax numbers, and business e-mail address for each office.

(iii) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, that they are free from a conflict of interest as described under paragraph (h)(6) of this section.

(iv) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, describing any criminal convictions, Federal contracts they have had, and the performance rating they received on the contract, and previous decertification action while working as an observer or observer service provider.

(v) A description of any prior experience the applicant may have in placing individuals in remote field and/or marine work environments. This includes, but is not limited to, recruiting, hiring, deployment, and personnel administration.

(vi) A description of the applicant's ability to carry out the responsibilities and duties of a scallop fishery observer services provider as set out under paragraph (h)(5) of this section, and the arrangements to be used.

(vii) Evidence of holding adequate insurance to cover injury, liability, and accidental death for observers during their period of employment (including during training). Workers' Compensation and Maritime Employer's Liability insurance must be provided to cover the observer, vessel owner, and observer provider. The minimum coverage required is \$5 million. Observer service providers shall provide copies of the insurance policies to observers to display to the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager, when requested.

(viii) Proof that its observers, either contracted or employed by the service provider, are compensated with salaries that meet or exceed the Department of Labor (DOL) guidelines for observers. Observers shall be compensated as Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) non-exempt employees. Observer providers shall provide any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract or employment status.

(ix) The names of its fully equipped, NMFS/NEFOP certified observers (with resumes) on staff or a list of its training candidates (with resumes) and a request for a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class. The NEFOP training has a minimum class size of eight individuals; which may be split among multiple vendors requesting training. Requests for training classes with fewer than eight individuals will not be processed until further requests make up the full training class size.

(x) An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) describing its response to an "at sea" emergency with an observer, including, but not limited to, personal injury, death, harassment, or intimidation.

(4) *Application evaluation.* (i) NMFS shall review and evaluate each

application submitted under paragraphs (h)(2) and (h)(3) of this section. Issuance of approval as an observer provider shall be based on completeness of the application, and a determination by NMFS of the applicant's ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of a sea scallop fishery observer service provider as demonstrated in the application information. A decision to approve or deny an application shall be made by NMFS within 15 days of receipt of the application by NMFS.

(ii) If NMFS approves the application, the observer service provider's name will be added to the list of approved observer service providers found on NMFS's website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section and in any outreach information to the industry. Approved observer service providers shall be notified in writing and provided with any information pertinent to its participation in the sea scallop fishery observer program.

(iii) An application shall be denied if NMFS determines that the information provided in the application is not complete or NMFS concludes that the applicant does not have the ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of a sea scallop fishery observer service provider. NMFS shall notify the applicant in writing of any deficiencies in the application or information submitted in support of the application. An applicant who receives a denial of his or her application may present additional information, in writing, to rectify the deficiencies specified in the written denial, provided such information is submitted to NMFS within 30 days of the applicant's receipt of the denial notification from NMFS. In the absence of additional information, and after 30 days from an applicant's receipt of a denial, an observer provider is required to resubmit an application containing all of the information required under the application process specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section to be re-considered for being added to the list as an approved observer service provider.

(5) *Responsibilities of observer service providers.* (i) An observer service provider must provide observers certified by NMFS/NEFOP pursuant to paragraph (i) of this section for deployment in the sea scallop fishery when contacted and contracted by the owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel fishing in the scallop fishery, unless the observer service provider does not have an available observer within 72 hr of receiving a request for an observer from a vessel owner, operator, and/or manager, or refuses to deploy an observer on a requesting

vessel for any of the reasons specified at paragraph (h)(5)(viii) of this section. An approved observer service provider must maintain in its employ a minimum of eight NMFS/NEFOP certified observers in order to remain approved. Should a service provider's employed NMFS/NEFOP certified observers drop below eight, the provider must supply the appropriate number of candidates to the next available training class. Failure to do so shall be cause for suspension of the provider's approved status, until rectified.

(ii) An observer service provider must provide to each of its observers:

(A) All necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics, of observers to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments, and to any debriefing locations, if necessary;

(B) Lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary for observers assigned to a scallop vessel or to attend a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class;

(C) The required observer equipment, in accordance with equipment requirements listed on NMFS's website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section under the Sea Scallop Program, prior to any deployment and/or prior to NMFS observer certification training; and

(D) Individually assigned communication equipment, in working order, such as a cell phone or pager, for all necessary communication. An observer service provider may alternatively compensate observers for the use of the observer's personal cell phone or pager for communications made in support of, or necessary for, the observer's duties.

(iii) *Observer deployment logistics.* Each approved observer service provider must assign an available certified observer to a vessel upon request. Each approved observer service provider must provide for access by industry 24 hr per day, 7 days per week, to enable an owner, operator, or manager of a vessel to secure observer coverage when requested. The telephone system must be monitored a minimum of four times daily to ensure rapid response to industry requests. Observer service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section are required to report observer deployments to NMFS daily for the purpose of determining whether the predetermined coverage levels are being achieved in the scallop fishery.

(iv) *Observer deployment limitations.* Unless alternative arrangements are approved by NMFS, an observer provider must not deploy any observer

on the same vessel for two or more consecutive deployments, and not more than twice in any given month. A certified observer's first deployment and the resulting data shall be immediately edited, and approved, by NMFS prior to any further deployments of that observer.

(v) *Communications with observers.* An observer service provider must have an employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hr a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, stationed shoreside, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel assignment.

(vi) *Observer training requirements.* The following information must be submitted to NMFS to request a certified observer training class at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the proposed training class: Date of requested training; a list of observer candidates, with a minimum of eight individuals; observer candidate resumes; and a statement signed by the candidate, under penalty of perjury, that discloses the candidate's criminal convictions, if any. All observer trainees must complete a basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid course prior to the beginning of a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class. NMFS may reject a candidate for training if the candidate does not meet the minimum qualification requirements as outlined by NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers as described in paragraph (i)(1) of this section.

(vii) *Reports—(A) Observer deployment reports.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS/NEFOP when, where, to whom, and to what fishery (open or closed area) an observer has been deployed, within 24 hr of the observer's departure. The observer service provider must ensure that the observer reports back to NMFS its Observer Contract (OBSCON) data, as described in the certified observer training, within 12 hr of landing. OBSCON data are to be submitted electronically or by other means as specified by NMFS. The observer service provider shall provide the raw (unedited) data collected by the observer to NMFS within 72 hr of the trip landing.

(B) *Safety refusals.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any trip for which the deployment of an observer has been refused due to safety issues, e.g., failure to hold a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal, or failure to meet the safety requirements of the observer's pre-trip vessel safety checklist, within 24 hr of the refusal.

(C) *Biological samples.* The observer service provider must ensure that biological samples, including whole marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds, are stored/handled properly and transported to NMFS within 7 days of landing.

(D) *Observer debriefing.* The observer service provider must ensure that the observer remains available to NMFS, either in-person or via phone, at NMFS's discretion, including NMFS Office for Law Enforcement, for debriefing for at least 2 weeks following any observed trip. An observer that is at sea during the 2-week period must contact NMFS upon his or her return, if requested to do so by NMFS.

(E) *Observer availability report.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any occurrence of inability to respond to an industry request for observer coverage due to the lack of available observers on staff by 5 pm, Eastern Standard Time, of any day on which the provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage.

(F) *Other reports.* The observer provider must report possible observer harassment, discrimination, concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty, or observer illness or injury; and any information, allegations, or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior, to NMFS/NEFOP within 24 hr of the event or within 24 hr of learning of the event.

(viii) *Refusal to deploy an observer.—*
(A) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting scallop vessel if the observer service provider does not have an available observer within 72 hr of receiving a request for an observer from a vessel.

(B) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting scallop vessel if the observer service provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to the reasons described at § 600.746.

(C) The observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a scallop vessel that is otherwise eligible to carry an observer for any other reason, including failure to pay for previous observer deployments, provided the observer service provider has received prior written confirmation from NMFS authorizing such refusal.

(6) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* An observer service provider:

(i) Must not have a direct or indirect interest in a fishery managed under Federal regulations, including, but not limited to, a fishing vessel, fish dealer,

fishery advocacy group, and/or fishery research;

(ii) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels, other than when an observer will be deployed; and

(iii) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from anyone who conducts fishing or fishing related activities that are regulated by NMFS, or who has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the official duties of observer providers.

(7) *Removal of observer service provider from the list of approved observer service providers.* An observer provider that fails to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section shall be notified by NMFS, in writing, that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers. Such notification shall specify the reasons for the pending removal. An observer service provider that has received notification that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers may submit written information to rebut the reasons for removal from the list. Such rebuttal must be submitted within 30 days of notification received by the observer service provider that the observer service provider is subject to removal and must be accompanied by written evidence rebutting the basis for removal. NMFS shall review information rebutting the pending removal and shall notify the observer service provider within 15 days of receipt of the rebuttal whether or not the removal is warranted. If no response to a pending removal is received by NMFS within 30 days of the notification of removal, the observer service provider shall be automatically removed from the list of approved observer service providers. The decision to remove the observer service provider from the list, either after reviewing a rebuttal, or automatically if no timely rebuttal is submitted, shall be the final decision of the Department of Commerce. Removal from the list of approved observer service providers may not prevent such observer service provider from obtaining an approval in the future if a new application is submitted that demonstrates that the reasons for removal are remedied. Certified observers under contract with an observer service provider that has been removed from the list of approved service providers must complete their assigned duties for any scallop trips on

which the observers are deployed at the time the observer service provider is removed from the list of approved observer service providers. An observer service provider removed from the list of approved observer service providers is responsible for providing NMFS with the information required in paragraph (h)(5)(vii) of this section following completion of the trip. NMFS may consider, but is not limited to, the following in determining if an observer service provider may remain on the list of approved observer service providers:

- (i) Failure to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities of observer service providers specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section;
- (ii) Evidence of conflict of interest as defined under paragraph (h)(6) of this section;
- (iii) Evidence of criminal convictions related to:
 - (A) Embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property; or
 - (B) The commission of any other crimes of dishonesty, as defined by state law or Federal law, that would seriously and directly affect the fitness of an applicant in providing observer services under this section;
- (iv) Unsatisfactory performance ratings on any Federal contracts held by the applicant; and
- (v) Evidence of any history of decertification as either an observer or observer provider.

(i) *Observer certification.* (1) To be certified, employees or sub-contractors operating as observers for observer service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section must meet NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers. NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards are available at the National Observer Program website: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop/>.

(2) *Observer training.* In order to be deployed on any scallop vessel, a candidate observer must have passed a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Fisheries Observer Training course. If a candidate fails training, the candidate shall be notified in writing on or before the last day of training. The notification will indicate the reasons the candidate failed the training. A candidate that fails training shall not be able to enroll in a subsequent class. Observer training shall include an observer training trip, as part of the observer's training, aboard a scallop vessel with a trainer. A certified observer's first deployment and the resulting data shall be immediately edited, and approved, by NMFS prior to

any further deployments of that observer.

- (3) *Observer requirements.* All observers must:
 - (i) Have a valid NMFS/NEFOP fisheries observer certification pursuant to paragraph (i)(1) of this section;
 - (ii) Be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the responsibilities of an observer on board scallop vessels, pursuant to standards established by NMFS. Such standards are available from NMFS website specified in paragraph (g)(4) of this section and shall be provided to each approved observer service provider;
 - (iii) Have successfully completed all NMFS-required training and briefings for observers before deployment, pursuant to paragraph (i)(2) of this section; and
 - (iv) Hold a current Red Cross (or equivalent) cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid certification.

(4) *Probation and decertification.* NMFS has the authority to review observer certifications and issue observer certification probation and/or decertification as described in NMFS policy found on the website at: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>.

(5) *Issuance of decertification.* Upon determination that decertification is warranted under paragraphs (i)(1) through (3) of this section, NMFS shall issue a written decision to the observer containing the decertification and to the approved observer service provider via certified mail at their most current address provided to NMFS. The decision shall identify whether a certification is revoked and shall identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective immediately as of the date of issuance, unless the decertification official notes a compelling reason for maintaining certification for a specified period and under specified conditions. Decertification is the final decision of the Department of Commerce.

4. In § 648.51, paragraphs (c)(4) and (e)(3)(iii) are revised to read as follows:

§ 648.51 Gear and crew restrictions.

- * * * * *
- (c) * * *
- (4) A certified at-sea observer is on board, as required by § 648.11(g).
- * * * * *
- (e) * * *
- (3) * * *
- (iii) A certified at-sea observer is on board, as required by § 648.11(g).
- * * * * *

5. In § 648.55, paragraph (e)(31) is revised, and paragraph (e)(32) is added to read as follows:

§ 648.55 Framework adjustments to management measures.

- * * * * *
- (e) * * *

(31) Modifications to provisions associated with observer set-asides; observer coverage; observer deployment; observer service provider; and/or the observer certification regulations.

(32) Any other management measures currently included in the FMP.

* * * * *

6. In § 648.60, paragraph (a)(2) is revised to read as follows:

§ 648.60 Sea scallop area access program requirements.

- (a) * * *
- (2) Vessels participating in the Sea Scallop Access Area Program must comply with the trip declaration requirements specified in § 648.10(b)(4) and vessel notification requirements specified in § 648.11(g) for observer deployment.

* * * * *

[FR Doc. E7-6489 Filed 4-5-07; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Parts 648

[Docket No. 070322066-7066-01; I.D. 031307C]

RIN 0648-AU51

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Fisheries; Regulatory Amendment to Reconcile State and Federal Commercial Fishing Vessel Permit Programs

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes regulations to modify the permitting and vessel replacement provisions for Federal limited access permit programs of the Northeastern United States, excluding American lobster. This action is intended to prevent fishing effort beyond what is accounted for in the FMPs for each fishery and to reinforce efforts undertaken by state fishery management agencies at targeting regulations specifically for vessels that participate wholly in state water fisheries. These measures are necessary