

(e) Any person may make voluntary payments or in-kind contributions to a Council for purposes of assisting the Council in carrying out its functions.

§ 270.19 Notice of assessment.

(a) The Council must serve each person subject to assessment with notice that the assessment is due. The notice of assessment must contain:

(1) A specific reference to the provisions of the Act, regulations, charter and referendum that authorize the assessment;

(2) The amount of the assessment;

(3) The period of time covered by the assessment;

(4) The date the assessment is due and payable, which will not be earlier than 30 days from the date of the notice;

(5) The form(s) of payment; and

(6) To whom and where the payment must be made.

(b) The notice must advise such person of his or her right to seek review of the assessment by filing a written petition of objection with NMFS at any time during the time period to which the assessment applies, including the right to request a hearing on the petition. The notice must state that the petition of objection must be filed in accordance with the procedures in § 270.21.

(c) The notice must also advise such persons of his or her right to a refund of the assessment as provided in § 270.22. The notice must state that a refund may be requested for not less than 90 days from such collection, and provide that the Council will make the refund within 60 days after the request for the refund is requested.

§ 270.20 Payment of assessments.

Persons subject to an assessment would be required to pay the assessment on or before the date due, unless they have demanded a refund or filed a petition of objection with NMFS under § 270.21. However, persons who have demanded a refund under § 270.22 or filed a petition of objection under § 270.21 may submit proof of these actions in lieu of payment. In the case of a petition of objection, NMFS will inform the Council and the petitioner of its find-

ing at which time petitioner must pay the revised assessment if applicable.

§ 270.21 Petition of objection.

(a) *Filing a petition.* Any person issued a notice of assessment under § 270.19 may request that NMFS modify or take other appropriate action regarding the assessment or promotion plan by filing a written petition of objection with NMFS. Petitions of objection may be filed:

(1) Only if the petitioner determines one or more of the following criteria is not in accordance with the law:

(i) The assessment;

(ii) The plan upon which the assessment is based; or

(iii) Any obligation imposed on the petitioner under the plan.

(2) Only during the time period to which the assessment applies.

(b) *Contents of the petition of objection.* A petition must be addressed to Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, and must contain the following:

(1) The petitioner's correct name, address, and principal place of business. If the petitioner is a corporation, this must be stated, together with the date and state of incorporation, and the names, addresses, and respective positions of its officers; if a partnership, the date and place of formation and the name and address of each partner;

(2) The grounds upon which the petition of objection is based, including the specific terms or provisions of the assessment, the marketing and promotion plan, or obligation imposed by the plan, to which the petitioner objects;

(3) A full statement of the facts upon which the petition is based, set forth clearly and concisely, accompanied by any supporting documentation;

(4) The specific relief requested; and

(5) A statement as to whether or not the petitioner requests a hearing.

(c) *Notice to Council.* NMFS will promptly furnish the appropriate Council with a copy of the petition of objection.

§ 270.22

(d) *Opportunity for informal hearing.* (1) Any person filing a petition of objection may request an informal hearing on the petition. The hearing request must be submitted with the petition of objection.

(2) If a request for hearing is timely filed, or if NMFS determines that a hearing is advisable, NMFS will so notify the petitioner and the Council. NMFS will establish the applicable procedures, and designate who will be responsible for conducting a hearing. The petitioner, the Council, and any other interested party, may appear at the hearing in person or through a representative, and may submit any relevant materials, data, comments, arguments, or exhibits. NMFS may consolidate two or more hearing requests into a single proceeding.

(3) *Final decision.* Following the hearing, or if no hearing is held, as soon as practicable, NMFS will decide the matter and serve written notice of the decision on the petitioner and the Council. NMFS's decision will be based on a consideration of all relevant documentation and other evidence submitted, and will constitute the final administrative decision and order of the agency. NMFS will have the discretion to waive collection of a contested assessment or revise, modify, or alter the assessment amount based on a Council method of assessment.

§ 270.22 Refunds.

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of the Act, any person who pays an assessment under the Act may demand and must promptly receive from the Council a refund of such assessment. A demand for refund must be made in accordance with procedures in the approved charter and within such time as will be prescribed by the Council and approved by NMFS. Procedures to provide such a refund must be established before any such assessment may be collected. Such procedures must allow any person to request a refund 90 days or more from such collection, and provide that such refund must be made within 60 days after demand for such refund is made.

(b) Once a refund has been requested by a sector participant and paid by the Council, that sector participant may

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no longer participate in a referendum or other business of the Council during the remainder of the assessment rate period. Future assessments will only be sent to such a sector participant at the request of the sector participant. If assessments are paid during a future assessment rate period and no refund is requested, that sector participant may again participate in a referendum or other business of the Council.

§ 270.23 Dissolution of Councils.

(a) *Petition for termination.* (1) A petition to terminate a Council may be filed with NMFS by no less than three sector participants in any one sector. Any petition filed under this subsection must be accompanied by a written document explaining the reasons for such petition.

(2) If NMFS determines that a petition filed under paragraph (a)(1) of this section is accompanied by the signatures, or corporate certifications, of no less than three sector participants in the sector referred to in paragraph (a)(1) of this section who collectively accounted for, in the 12-month period immediately preceding the month in which the petition was filed, not less than 20 percent of the value of the fish or fish products described in §270.3(c)(2)(iii) that were handled by that sector during the period, NMFS within 90 days after the determination, will conduct a referendum for termination of the Council among all sector participants in that sector.

(3) Not less than 30 days prior to holding a referendum, NMFS will publish an announcement in the FEDERAL REGISTER of the referendum, including an explanation of the reasons for the petition for termination filed under paragraph (a)(1) of this section and any other relevant information NMFS considers appropriate.

(4) If the referendum votes which are cast in favor of terminating the Council constitute a majority of the sector participants voting and the majority, in the period in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, collectively accounted for not less than 66 percent of the value of such fish and fish products that were handled during such period by the sector in paragraph (a)(1) of this section,