



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930-2276

Area 1 Lobster Trap Fishery Limited Entry Program
Proposed Rule
November 18, 2011

What is the purpose of this letter?

We are seeking your comments on a proposed rule recently published in the Federal Register. The proposed rule describes a way to control trap fishing effort in Area 1 (Federal inshore waters—Gulf of Maine) by capping the number of Federal Area 1 lobster trap permits at recent levels. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) urged us to develop a program to limit trap fishing effort in Area 1 because they, along with scientists and the fishing industry, are concerned that unchecked trap fishing effort in Area 1 may harm the Gulf of Maine lobster stock and fishery.

What new regulations are under review?

The proposed rule seeks to cap the number of Area 1 lobster trap permits by applying these eligibility criteria to Federal lobster permits:

- (1) Possession of a Federal limited access lobster permit;
- (2) Proof that the Federal lobster permit had an Area 1 trap gear designation during the 2008 Federal fishing year, which occurred between May 1, 2008, and April 30, 2009; and
- (3) Proof of purchase of an Area 1 lobster trap tag during any fishing year from 2004-2008.

The proposed program would require Federal lobster permit holders (you), who want to fish with traps in Area 1 in the future, to submit an application and show that your permit meets the eligibility criteria. If your permit qualifies under the program, you may continue to fish with up to 800 lobster traps in the Federal waters of Area 1. We have data available to pre-qualify many permit holders, which may simplify the application process for them. However, others may need to submit documentation to show they meet the eligibility criteria.

How can I submit a comment and get more information?

- Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking portal <http://www.regulations.gov>. Click the “submit a comment” icon, then enter NOAA-NMFS-2011-0234 in the keyword search. Locate the document you wish to comment on from the resulting list and click on the “submit a comment” icon to the right of that line;
- Fax: (978) 281-9135, Attn: Robert Ross;
- Mail: Robert Ross, NMFS, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

Mark the outside of the envelope: “Comments on Lobster Area 1 Proposed Rule.”

Comments must be received by 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time on January 3, 2012.

You can get a copy of the proposed rule and draft environmental assessment prepared for this action by writing to the mailing address specified above or by calling (978) 675-2162. The documents are also available online at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>.

