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PUBLIC NOTICE

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NMFS-SEA-17-18
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 30, 2017

Notice of Availability for Amendment 21-3 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan/ Proposed Rule to Change Pacific Whiting At-Sea Sector Darkblotched Rockfish and Pacific Ocean Perch (POP) Allocations to Set-Asides

NMFS has published a Notice of Availability (82 FR 44984 on September 27, 2017) for Amendment 21-3 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This FMP amendment would change allocations (i.e. “hard caps”) to sector-specific set-asides (i.e. “soft-caps”), within the at-sea sectors of the Pacific whiting fishery, for darkblotched rockfish and POP.

NMFS is publishing a proposed rule to revise related regulations. The Notice of Availability and Proposed Rule are available for review at the following link. Comments on Amendment 21-3 or the proposed rule must be received on or before Sunday, November 27, 2017 and may also be submitted at:

<https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0102>

FMP Amendment 21-3, background information and documents are available at the Council's Web site at <http://www.pcouncil.org/groundfish/fishery-management-plan/groundfish-amendments-in-development/>.

Background

NMFS manages the groundfish fisheries in the exclusive economic zone off Washington, Oregon, and California under the FMP. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared and NMFS implemented the PCGFMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq. and by regulations at 50 CFR parts 600 and 660.

Amendment 21-3 consists of two components: (1) Changes in the way two species, darkblotched rockfish and POP are managed in the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors, and (2) a provision that allows automatic closure by NMFS of one or both of the at-sea sectors in the event that the set-aside plus the available reserve for unforeseen catch events (known as the “buffer”) of either species is projected to be reached.

The Council has been exploring alternative management measures with the purpose of substantially reducing the risk of the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors (mothership [MS] and catcher/processor [CP]) not attaining their respective whiting allocations based on the incidental catch of darkblotched rockfish or POP, which are currently subject to rebuilding plans. Timeliness and administrative feasibility were important considerations of the Council in exploring these measures. The proposed FMP amendment is intended to be an interim solution to address the immediate needs of the at-sea sectors with regards to incidental catch of darkblotched rockfish or POP.