

National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region
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www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/index.html

PUBLIC NOTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 24, 2017

Final Rule for Widow Rockfish Quota Share (QS) Reallocation

NMFS published a final rule revising regulations to reallocate widow rockfish quota shares (QS) in the Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program. Regulations contained in this rule are effective December 26, 2017.

The Federal Register notice of the final rule can be found at:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/11/24/2017-25349/magnuson-stevens-act-provisions-fisheries-off-west-coast-states-pacific-coast-groundfish-fishery>

NMFS will mail prefilled applications for widow rockfish reallocation with workbooks showing NMFS's calculation of reallocated QS to eligible QS permit owners. A complete, certified application must be either postmarked or hand-delivered within normal business hours to NMFS, West Coast Region, Permits Office, Bldg. 1, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE., Seattle, WA 98115, **no later than December 26, 2017**. NMFS will not accept or review any applications received or postmarked after the application deadline. There are no hardship exemptions for this deadline. NMFS will not accept emailed applications.

After the application deadline, NMFS will review all applications and mail initial administrative determinations (IAD) to applicants, indicating whether each application was approved. Applicants will have 60 calendar days from the date of the IAD to appeal the decision. If any appeals are received, NMFS will reallocate widow rockfish QS amounts in 2018 consistent with all of the IADs and await any action resulting from an appeal until 2019.

If NMFS does not receive any appeals on the reallocation, widow rockfish QS will become transferrable about two weeks after the appeal deadline. Once widow rockfish QS is transferable, any QS permit owner who exceeds either the widow rockfish control limit or the non-whiting aggregate limit as the result of the reallocation will have until November 30, 2018, to divest of their excess holdings. If NMFS does receive one or more appeals, widow QS will become transferrable on or about January 1, 2019, and any QS permit owner who exceeds either limit as the result of the reallocation will have until November 30, 2019, to divest of their excess holdings.

Background information and documents for the widow rockfish reallocation, including a small entity compliance guide, are available at the NMFS West Coast Region Web site at:

http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/groundfish_catch_shares/rules_regulations/widow_rockfish_reallocation.html.

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Background

NMFS manages the groundfish fisheries in the exclusive economic zone off Washington, Oregon, and California under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared and NMFS implemented the FMP 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.

In January 2011, NMFS implemented the trawl rationalization program, which includes an IFQ Program for limited entry (LE) trawl participants. At the time of implementation, the widow rockfish stock was overfished and QS were allocated to QS permit holders in the Shorebased IFQ Program only to cover widow rockfish bycatch that may be associated with harvest of target species. Widow rockfish has been rebuilt since 2012, this final rule reallocates QS to initial recipients in order to allow them to reestablish a fishery targeting widow rockfish. The reallocation is based on a target species formula that represents the fishing history of permit holders when widow rockfish was a targeted species. This final rule also removes the daily vessel limit for widow rockfish, allows trading of widow rockfish QS, and sets a deadline for divestiture of excess QS should the reallocation of widow rockfish cause any QS permit holder to exceed the widow rockfish control limit or the non-whiting aggregate limit.