UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Trawl Rationalization Trailing Actions: Chafing Gear

LOCATION: Marine waters off Washington, Oregon, and California

SUMMARY: The action modifies chafing gear regulations that apply to all midwater trawl gear used in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. Chafing gear is webbing or other material attached to the codend to minimize damage from rubbing against the stern ramp and from contact with the ocean floor. The proposed action is neither expected to compromise the sustainability of any target or non-target species, nor is it expected to result in significant social or economic impacts interrelated with significant natural or physical environmental effects.

Increased chafing gear coverage may result in fewer small fish escaping from the codend by reducing the effective mesh size or creating the effect of a double-walled codend. Small fish include juvenile Pacific whiting and non-groundfish species such as coastal pelagic species, eulachon, and small forage fish. Eulachon is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Because vessels targeting Pacific whiting have less market opportunity for small fish, they are expected to take measures to reduce the catch of small unmarketable Pacific whiting. The catch of small non-target species, including eulachon is not expected to increase substantially. Eulachon will continue to be monitored and managed to stay within thresholds identified in the current Endangered Species Act Section 7 biological opinion for the groundfish fishery.

Increased chafing gear coverage may result in midwater trawl gear being used to fish in a manner that results in more contact with ocean floor than is currently occurring. Historical data indicate that the midwater trawl gear used to target Pacific whiting does occasionally make contact with the ocean floor (approximately 8 percent of the hauls). The vulnerability of the net to damage from bottom contact means that increases in chafing gear are not likely to result in substantial increases in bottom contact. The expected impact to EFH and bottom habitat is minor.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

Frank Lockhart
Groundfish & Coastal Pelagic Species Program Director
NMFS West Coast Region
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
7600 Sandpoint Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115
Phone: 206-526-6142

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the supporting environmental assessment (EA), is enclosed for your information.

Printed on Recycled Paper

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the responsible official named above.

Sincerely,

TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012

Digitally signed by TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012
DN: c=US, o=U.S. Government, ou=DoD, ou=PKI, ou=OTHER, cn=TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012
Date: 2014.11.18 13:11:32 -05'00'

For: Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

Printed on Recycled Paper