



To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

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

TITLE: Small-mesh Multispecies Specifications for Fishing Years 2015-2017,
Environmental Assessment (RIN 0648- BE87)

LOCATION: Exclusive economic zone off the East Coast of the United States

SUMMARY: The purpose of this action is to set the specifications for the 2015-2017 fishing years, based on the New England Fishery Management Council's recommendation. In 2012 and 2013, northern red hake catch rates exceeded the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Northern red hake was also determined to be experiencing overfishing. To reduce the risk of continued overfishing of northern red hake and constrain catch within the proposed catch limits, this action also proposes the Council's recommended measures to adjust the northern red hake possession limits and possession limit reduction triggers.

When the specifications were being developed, the Whiting Plan Development Team identified an error in the previous set of specifications (i.e., fishing years 2012-2014.) The northern red hake post-season accountability measure was triggered for fishing year 2014 using the incorrect catch and landings limits. This action would correct the accountability measure based on this information.

In addition, when developing the rulemaking for this action, we determined that the regulations establishing the specifications process in Amendment 19 do not fully comply with the Council's intent. We intend to correct this oversight by including possession limits and modifications to the in-season accountability measure trigger as measures that can be modified in a specifications package.

RESPONSIBLE

OFFICIAL: John K. Bullard
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact, including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.



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,

for Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure