



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 19, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM:

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D. *Robert Mearns*
for Administrator, Alaska Region

SUBJECT:

Categorical Exclusion for a Regulatory Amendment to Modify the Hired Master Regulations for Management of the Individual Fishing Quota Program for the Fixed-Gear Commercial Fisheries for Pacific Halibut and Sablefish in Waters off Alaska (RIN 0648-BC62)

NAO 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures, requires all proposed actions to be reviewed with respect to environmental consequences on the human environment. This memorandum summarizes the determination that the regulatory amendment to modify the hired master regulations for management of the Individual Fishing Quota Program for the Fixed-Gear Commercial Fisheries for Pacific Halibut and Sablefish in Waters off Alaska (IFQ Program) qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.

Description of the Action

This action amends the IFQ Program regulations to remove the hired master exemption from IFQ derived from halibut and sablefish catcher vessel quota share that an initial recipient received by transfer after the control date of February 12, 2010. This action includes two provisions. One provision would allow an initial recipient of quota share to consolidate quota share into a block between the control date and effective date of this action and the consolidated block of quota share would retain the hired master exemption. The second provision would allow an initial recipient of quota share to consolidate quota share into a block after the effective date of this action, but the consolidated block of quota share would not retain the hired master exemption. As a result of this action, individuals who purchase quota share after the control date would have to be on the vessel while fishing the associated IFQ. Catcher/processor quota shares, Community Development Quota quota shares, and Community Quota Entity quota shares are exempt



from this action. The change in use of a hired master will increase the number of owners operating their vessels and decrease quota share consolidation while honoring past investments people have made in the IFQ Program. As a result, opportunities should increase for entry level fishermen to buy into the IFQ Program.

Effects of the Action

This action does not have the potential to pose significant effects, individually or cumulatively. This action modifies existing regulations in the IFQ Program to restrict use of the hired master privilege assigned to initial recipients of quota share. The decision affects who may fish quota share that is transferred after the control date. There is no change in the number of quota shares available to the fishery or the harvest level of the associated IFQ. The action will have no effect on the natural or physical environment because it will not change current fishing practices (e.g., season and gear types), overall harvest limits of halibut and sablefish, harvest of non-target species, or regulations protecting habitat and important breeding areas.

Categorical Exclusion

This action will not result in any changes to the human environment. As defined in sections 5.05 and 6.03c.3(i) of NAO 216-6, this action implements regulations of an administrative and technical nature and does not have the potential to pose significant effects to the quality of the human environment. As such, this action is categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment.

cc: AKR NEPA Coordinator

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