

Dated: December 21, 2007.

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*Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Regulatory Programs, National Marine
Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No.050613158-5262-03]

RIN 0648-AT48

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Provisions; Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Extension of Emergency Fishery Closure Due to the Presence of the Toxin that Causes Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries
Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration (NOAA),
Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; emergency
action; extension of effective period;
request for comments.

SUMMARY: This action extends a temporary final rule initially published on October 18, 2005. The regulations contained in the temporary rule, emergency action, published on October 18, 2005, and subsequently extended several times at the request of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), will expire on January 1, 2008. This temporary rule extends a closure of Federal waters through December 31, 2008. The FDA has determined that current oceanographic conditions and alga sampling data suggest that the northern section of the Temporary Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) Closure Area remain closed to the harvest of bivalve molluscan shellfish and that the southern area remain closed to the harvest of whole or roe-on scallops. NMFS is publishing the regulatory text associated with this closure in this temporary emergency rule in order to ensure that current regulations accurately reflect the codified text that has been modified and extended numerous times, so that the public is aware of the regulations being extended through December 31, 2008.

DATES: The amendments to § 648.14 are effective from January 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008. The expiration date of the temporary emergency action published on July 27, 2007 (72 FR

35200), is extended through December 31, 2008. Comments must be received by January 30, 2008.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the Small Entity Compliance Guide, the emergency rule, the Environmental Assessment, and the Regulatory Impact Review prepared for the October 18, 2005, reinstatement of the September 9, 2005, emergency action and subsequent extensions of the emergency action, are available from Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. These documents are also available via the internet at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/redtide/index.html>.

You may submit comments, identified by RIN 0648-AT48, by any one of the following methods:

- Mail: Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2298. Mark on the outside of the envelope, "Comments on PSP Closure."

- Fax: (978) 281-9135.

- Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal Rulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Instructions: All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All Personal Identifying Information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brian Hooker, Fishery Policy Analyst, phone: (978) 281-9220, fax: (978) 281-9135.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

This emergency closure is being implemented at the request of the FDA after samples of shellfish from the inshore and offshore waters off of the coasts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts tested positive for the toxins (saxotoxins) that cause PSP. These toxins are produced by the alga *Alexandrium fundyense*, which can form blooms commonly referred to as red tides. Current oceanographic conditions and alga sampling data suggest that the northern section of the

Temporary PSP Closure Area remain closed to the harvest of bivalve molluscan shellfish and that the southern area remain closed to the harvest of whole or roe-on scallops. Red tide blooms, also known as harmful algal blooms (HABs), can produce toxins that accumulate in filter-feeding shellfish. Shellfish contaminated with the toxin, if eaten in large enough quantity, can cause illness or death from PSP.

On June 10, 2005, the FDA requested that NMFS close an area of Federal waters off the coasts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts to fishing for bivalve shellfish intended for human consumption. On June 16, 2005, NMFS published an emergency rule (70 FR 35047) closing the area recommended by the FDA, i.e., the Temporary PSP Closure Area, through September 30, 2005. On July 7, 2005 (70 FR 39192), the emergency rule was modified to facilitate the testing of shellfish for the toxin that causes PSP by the FDA and/or FDA-approved laboratories through the issuance of a Letter of Authorization (LOA) from the NMFS Regional Administrator. On September 9, 2005 (70 FR 53580), the emergency regulation was once again modified by the division of the Temporary PSP Closure Area into northern and southern components. The northern area remained closed to the harvest of all bivalve molluscan shellfish, while the southern component was reopened to the harvest of Atlantic surfclams and ocean quahogs, but remained closed to the harvest of whole or roe-on scallops. The rule was extended as published on September 9, 2005, on October 3, 2005 (70 FR 57517); reinstated on October 18, 2005, (70 FR 60450) to correct a technical error; extended on December 28, 2005 (70 FR 76713); and subsequently on June 30, 2006 (71 FR 37505); January 4, 2007 (72 FR 291); and again on June 27, 2007 (72 FR 35200), through December 31, 2007. On May 18, 2007, the FDA indicated that it could not support the re-opening of the Temporary PSP Closure Area due to insufficient analytical data from the area, and recommended the area remain closed indefinitely. The boundaries of the northern component of the Temporary PSP Closure Area comprise Federal waters bound by the following coordinates in the order stated: (1) 43°00' N. lat., 71°00' W. long.; (2) 43° 00' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.; (3) 41°39' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.; (4) 41° 39' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long., and then ending at the first point. Under this emergency rule, this area remains closed to the harvest of Atlantic surfclams, ocean quahogs, and whole or roe-on scallops. The

boundaries of the southern component of the Temporary PSP Closure Area comprise Federal waters bound by the following coordinates in the order stated: (1) 41° 39' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long.; (2) 41° 39' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.; (3) 40° 00' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.; (4) 40° 00' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long., and then ending at the first point. Under this emergency rule, this southern component of the area remains closed only to the harvest of whole or roe-on scallops.

Classification

This action is issued pursuant to section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), 16 U.S.C. 1855(c). Pursuant to section 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) of the Administrative Procedure Act, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries finds there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action as notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest due to a public health emergency, and public comment has been solicited concurrently with each of the extensions of this actions, as detailed and responded to below. In addition, under section 553(d)(3) there is good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness due to a public health emergency. Consultation with the FDA concerning the extension of this action beyond the January 1, 2008, expiration date continued through December 2007, making it impossible to first publish this action as a proposed rule and provide for a 30-day delay of effectiveness. The original emergency closure was in response to a public health emergency. Toxic algal blooms are responsible for the marine toxin that causes PSP in persons consuming affected shellfish. People have become seriously ill and some have died from consuming affected shellfish under similar circumstances. Pursuant to section 305(c)(3)(C) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the closure to the harvest of shellfish, as modified on September 9, 2005, and re-instated on October 18, 2005, may remain in effect until the circumstances that created the emergency no longer exist, provided the public has had an opportunity to comment after the regulation was published, and, in the case of a public

health emergency, the Secretary of Health and Human Services concurs with the Commerce Secretary's action. During the initial comment period, June 16, 2005, through August 1, 2005, no comments were received. One comment was received after the re-opening of the southern component of the Temporary PSP Closure Area on September 9, 2005. The commenter expressed reluctance to re-opening a portion of the closure area without seeing the results of the FDA tests. Data used to make determinations regarding closing and opening of areas to certain types of fishing activity are collected from Federal, state, and private laboratories. NOAA maintains a Red Tide Information Center (http://www.cop.noaa.gov/news/fs/ne_hab_200605.html), which can be accessed directly or through the website listed in the ADDRESSES section. Information on test results, modeling of algal bloom movement, and general background on red tide can be accessed through this information center. While NMFS is the agency with the authority to promulgate the emergency regulations, it modified the regulations on September 9, 2005, at the request of the FDA, after the FDA has determined that the results of its tests warranted such action. If necessary, the regulations may be terminated at an earlier date, pursuant to section 305(c)(3)(D) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, by publication in the **Federal Register** of a notice of termination, or extended further to ensure the safety of human health.

This emergency/interim rule is exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act because the rule is issued without opportunity for prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

The rule, as last published on October 18, 2005, was determined to be not significant for the purposes of Executive Order 12866.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 648

Fisheries, Fishing, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Dated: December 20, 2007.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator For Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

■ For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 648 continues to read as follows:

PART 648—FISHERIES OF THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 648 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

■ 2. In § 648.14, paragraphs (a)(170) and (a)(171) are added to read as follows:

§ 648.14 Prohibitions.

(a) * * *

(170) Fish for, harvest, catch, possess or attempt to fish for, harvest, catch, or possess any bivalve shellfish, including Atlantic surfclams, ocean quahogs, and mussels with the exception of sea scallops harvested only for adductor muscles and shucked at sea, or a vessel issued and possessing on board a Letter of Authorization (LOA) from the Regional Administrator authorizing the collection of shellfish for biological sampling and operating under the terms and conditions of said LOA, in the area of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone bound by the following coordinates in the order stated:

(i) 43° 00' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long.;

(ii) 43° 00' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.;

(iii) 41° 39' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.;

(iv) 41° 39' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long.;

and then ending at the first point.

(171) Fish for, harvest, catch, possess, or attempt to fish for, harvest, catch, or possess any sea scallops except for sea scallops harvested only for adductor muscles and shucked at sea, or a vessel issued and possessing on board a Letter of Authorization (LOA) from the Regional Administrator authorizing collection of shellfish for biological sampling and operating under the terms and conditions of said LOA, in the area of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone bound by the following coordinates in the order stated:

(i) 41° 39' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long.;

(ii) 41° 39' N. lat., 69° 00' W. long.;

(iii) 40° 00' N. lat., 6° 00' W. long.;

(iv) 40° 00' N. lat., 71° 00' W. long.;

and then ending at the first point.

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