



Highlights from AEB Fishermen's Winter Fisheries Enforcement Teleconference

The AEB Fishermen's Winter Fisheries Enforcement Teleconference held yesterday (Dec. 29, 2015) covered a variety of topics ranging from a new fine that begins in 2016 for failing to log or call in a trip for the observer program to clarification on what defines a trip when delivering to a tender.

Longliners Not Allowed to Set Gear for Cod Before Midnight on Dec. 31, 2015:

NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Special Agent Brent Pristas began the teleconference by pointing out that in the past, NOAA Fisheries regulations allowed for gear to be set early.

“Normally, it's the pot fishermen who go out a couple of days before the opener and set their gear,” he said, “and that is legal under the federal rules. However, this year, since longlining was closed due to halibut mortality, there is a regulation that says when all groundfish fishing is closed to a particular gear type, you cannot set that gear. I don't know if there are any longliners who set gear before midnight on the 31st for cod, but this year, it is not allowed.”

Pristas recommended calling his office if anyone has questions.

Clarification On When Fishing Trips End under the Observer Program:

Pristas also explained that under the observer coverage program, if a commercial fisherman delivers to a tender, that does not end a fishing trip. He said when a boat returns to a port, that is when the trip ends.

Bycatch on Skate Decreasing to 5 Percent in 2016:

Pristas advised fishermen that beginning on January 27, 2016, the bycatch amount on skate has been set at 5 percent.

Verify VMS Units Are Working Properly:

Pristas reminded fishermen to check to see that their Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) units are working properly before they go fishing.

“I recommend turning your VMS unit on, giving it a couple hours for the signals to make their way through the system and give our office a call just to make sure it’s working,” Pristas said. “That will save any potential trouble that could occur in the middle of the season.”

New Observer Coverage Program Fine for Failing to Call/Log Fishing Trip:

Pristas said in 2016, a new fine under the observer coverage program will be issued to captains who fail to log or call in a fishing trip.

“In the past, captains that have missed doing so would normally be given a warning,” he said. “This year, it will be a \$1,000 fine. However, if there are mitigating circumstances, we do take that into account.”

Requirements for fishing in the Parallel Pacific Cod Fishery:

Because of confusion surrounding requirements for participating in the parallel Pacific cod fishery, Pristas and Mark Stichert of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) addressed questions about the issue. Stichert said a vessel can participate in the parallel fishery if they do not have a Federal Fisheries Permit (FFP) or License Limitation Permit (LLP). However, vessels that have an FFP must also have the properly endorsed LLP for their particular gear/fishery. Pristas pointed out that a number of circumstances can be unique to each fisherman. He recommended calling his office to clear up any confusion, and said he would be happy to look up a particular fisherman’s vessel and permits to explain what the options are. Stichert said he would also be happy to answer any questions.

Brent Pristas – NOAA Fisheries: (907) 486-3298

Mark Stichert – ADF&G: (907) 486-1845

State Waters Cod Fishery and GHL:

Stichert said there are no changes for the state waters cod fishery this year. He reviewed the guideline harvest levels (GHL) for fishermen listening to the teleconference. Stichert said the GHL will increase this year – to 26.8 million pounds divided into sectors.

- The pot fleet will receive 22.8 million pounds.
- Jig boats will get about 4 million pounds.

Stichert said the pot fishery will open on March 7th or one week after the federal pot “A” season closes, whichever is later. The jig season will open after the federal jig season closes or on March 15th, whichever occurs first.

Pollock TAC in the Western Gulf:

Mary Furuness of the NMFS Alaska Region discussed details of the pollock total allowable catch (TAC) in the Western Gulf. She said it has increased from 31,000 in 2015 to 56,494 metric tons for 2016. The “A” season allocation is 3,827 metric tons. Starting January 20, 2016, there will be slight increases for Pacific cod in the Western Gulf: approximately 1,000 tons. Furuness also pointed out that the jig sector allocation can increase or decrease depending on how much they catch every year.

“This year, they didn’t catch 90 percent of their allocation for the second year,” said Furuness. “So their allocation remains at 3.5 percent, and the “A” season allocation will be 595 tons.”

Other gear group allocations for the “A” season include:

- Hook and line catcher vessels: 192 metric tons.
- Trawl catcher vessels: 7,579 metric tons
- Pot vessels: 5,417 metric tons

Furuness said the Chinook salmon limit will remain at 2,700 for the trawl non-pollock non rockfish program.

Observer Program and Selection Rate:

Glenn Campbell of the Observer Program emphasized a couple of things that are new with regard to logging trips in 2016.

“In the past, our selection rate was based on vessel length,” said Campbell. “We used to have a rate for vessels 40’ to 57.4’ and then a different rate for vessels 57.5’ and above. Starting in 2016, the rate will be based on gear type.”

Campbell also mentioned that the Observer Program has added a couple of new fields that fishermen will see when logging their trips online. The first field is for gear types. Another field is to log whether boats will be delivering to a tender.

For fishermen who want to call in their trips, the numbers to call are:

(855) 747-6377

Or **(206) 673-3338**.

U.S.C.G. Moving from 2-year Certification & Decal to 5-year:

Chris Rilling, Director of the Groundfish Observer Program for Alaska, reminded fishermen that the U.S. Coast Guard will be moving from a two-year to a 5-year inspection requirement. Russ Hazlett of the USCG Sector in Anchorage said currently, the decal is only valid for two years. That means for now, the Coast Guard will not enforce non-compliance for three years after the expiration, other than explaining that it’s time to get a new exam/decal. Hazlett said the reason for the five year time line is eventually, the vessels will receive a Certificate of Compliance which will be issued every five years with two year re-exams.

Anyone interested in listening to the archived teleconference of the AEB Fishermen’s Winter Fisheries Enforcement Teleconference can do so by going to this [KSDP link](#).

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