

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT/AMENDMENT NO. 1

FOR THE

SURF CLAM AND OCEAN QUAHOG INDUSTRIES

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

March, 1979

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

in cooperation with

New England Fishery Management Council

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

National Marine Fisheries Service

II. SUMMARY

() Draft (X) Final Environmental Assessment/Amendment No. 1 for the Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Industries Fishery Management Plan

II-1. Responsible Federal Agency

US Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service

II-2. Name of Action

(X) Administrative () Legislative

II-3. Description of the Action

The Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (FCMA), enacted and signed into law on April 13, 1976, established a Fishery Conservation Zone (FCZ) and provided exclusive US regulation over all fishery resources except highly migratory species (i. e., tuna). Pursuant to the FCMA, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council in consultation with the New England and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils prepared a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Industries (the Plan). The Councils, in the same manner, have prepared this amendment to the Plan. This amendment extends the present Plan, which terminates on September 30, 1979, until December 31, 1979. This extension is effected by establishing a quarterly quota of surf clam for the fourth quarter of 1979 (October 1, 1979 to December 31, 1979). This quota is exactly the same as the quota for the fourth quarter of 1978. The primary objective of amending the Plan in this fashion is to provide the Mid-Atlantic Council the time frame necessary to prepare a substantial amendment to the Plan in compliance with the review, comment, and implementation requirements of the FCMA.

The amendment also provides for the processor reporting requirements established by the amendments to the FCMA. The amendment would also remove the requirement that each quarter begin with a four day fishing week for surf clam and replace that provision with a requirement that the number of fishing days for the beginning of each quarter would be set by the Regional Director in consultation with the Surf Clam Committee of the Mid-Atlantic Council.

Implementation of these amendments by the Secretary of Commerce does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the environment.

II-4. Summary of Impact

These amendments will assure the continuation of the current plan until the completion and adoption of a revised fishery management plan for the surf clam and ocean quahog fisheries. The amendment will maintain the status quo in the fishery, prevent economic dislocations, protect the stocks, and allow for more informed decision making in the major plan revision as the result of being able to include in the major plan revision data which would be impossible to include without this amendment.

II-5. Alternatives

The alternative to the proposed amendment is to not extend the current plan. Adoption of this alternative would require two alternative actions:

1. Revise the current plan so that the revision could be adopted prior