

COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION

17 CFR Part 30

Foreign Futures and Options Transactions

AGENCY: Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

ACTION: Order.

SUMMARY: The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (Commission or CFTC) is granting an exemption to certain firms designated by the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission (HKSF) from the application of certain of the Commission's foreign futures and option regulations based upon substituted compliance with certain comparable regulatory and self-regulatory requirements of a foreign regulatory authority consistent with conditions specified by the Commission, as set forth herein. This Order is issued pursuant to Commission Regulation 30.10, which permits persons to file a petition with the Commission for exemption from the application of certain of the Regulations set forth in Part 30 and authorizes the Commission to grant such an exemption if such action would not be otherwise contrary to the public interest or to the purposes of the provision from which exemption is sought. The Commission notes that the relief granted by this Order is not applicable to any licensed corporation subject to joint oversight by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the HKSF, or to any registered institution subject to oversight solely by the HKMA. Further, this Order does not pertain to any transaction in swaps, as defined in Section 1a(47) of the Commodity Exchange Act.

DATES: Effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Commission has issued the following Order:

Order Under CFTC Regulation 30.10 Exempting Certain Firms Designated by Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission From the Application of Certain of the Foreign Futures and Option Regulations as of the Later of the Date of Publication of the Order Herein in the Federal Register or After Filing of Consents by Such Firms and HKSFC, as Appropriate, to the Terms and Conditions of the Order Herein.

Commission Regulations governing the offer and sale of commodity futures and option contracts traded on or subject to the regulations of a foreign board of trade to customers located in the U.S. are contained in Part 30 of the Commission's regulations.¹ These regulations include requirements for intermediaries with respect to registration, disclosure, capital adequacy, protection of customer funds, recordkeeping and reporting, and sales practice and compliance procedures that are generally comparable to those applicable to transactions on U.S. markets.

¹ Commission regulations referred to herein are found at 17 CFR Ch. I (2014).

In formulating a regulatory program to govern the offer and sale of foreign futures and option products to customers located in the U.S., the Commission, among other things, considered the desirability of ameliorating the potential impact of such a program. Based upon these considerations, the Commission determined to permit persons located outside the U.S. and subject to a comparable regulatory structure in the jurisdiction in which they were located to seek an exemption from certain of the requirements under Part 30 of the Commission's regulations based upon substituted compliance with the regulatory requirements of the foreign jurisdiction.²

Appendix A to Part 30, "Interpretative Statement With Respect to the Commission's Exemptive Authority Under §30.10 of Its Rules" (Appendix A), generally sets forth the elements the Commission will evaluate in determining whether a particular regulatory program may be found to be comparable for purposes of exemptive relief pursuant to Regulation 30.10.³ These elements include: (1) registration, authorization or other form of licensing, fitness review or qualification of persons that solicit and accept customer orders; (2) minimum financial requirements for those persons who accept customer funds; (3) protection of customer funds from misapplication; (4) recordkeeping and reporting requirements; (5) sales practice standards; (6) procedures to audit for compliance with, and to take action against those persons who violate, the requirements of the program; and (7) information sharing arrangements between the Commission and the appropriate governmental and/or self-regulatory organization (SRO) to ensure Commission access on an "as needed" basis to information essential to maintaining standards of customer and market protection within the U.S.

² "Foreign Futures and Foreign Options Transactions," 52 FR 28290 (Aug. 5, 1987).

³ 52 FR 28990, 29001.

Moreover, the Commission specifically stated in adopting Regulation 30.10 that no exemption of a general nature would be granted unless the persons to whom the exemption is to be applied: (1) submit to jurisdiction in the U.S. by designating an agent for service of process in the U.S. with respect to transactions subject to Part 30 and filing a copy of the agency agreement with the National Futures Association (NFA); (2) agree to provide access to their books and records in the U.S. to the Commission and Department of Justice representatives; and (3) notify NFA of the commencement of business in the U.S.⁴

On September 8, 2012, the HKSFC petitioned the Commission on behalf of its member firms, known as “licensed corporations”, for which it is the sole regulatory body, located and doing business in Hong Kong, for an exemption from the application of the Commission’s Part 30 Regulations to those firms. In support of its petition, the HKSFC stated that granting such an exemption with respect to such firms that it has authorized to conduct foreign futures and option transactions on behalf of customers located in the U.S. would not be contrary to the public interest or to the purposes of the provisions from which the exemption is sought because such firms are subject to a regulatory framework comparable to that imposed by the Commodity Exchange Act (Act) and the regulations thereunder.

Based upon a review of the petition, including supplementary materials filed by the HKSFC, the Commission has concluded that the standards for relief set forth in Regulation 30.10 and, in particular, Appendix A thereof, have been met and that compliance with applicable Hong Kong law and regulations may be substituted for

⁴ 52 FR 28980, 28981, and 29002.

compliance with those sections of the Act and regulations thereunder more particularly set forth herein.

By this Order, the Commission hereby exempts, subject to specified conditions, those firms identified to the Commission by the HKSFCA as eligible for the relief granted herein from:

- Registration with the Commission for firms and for firm representatives;
- The requirement in Commission Regulation 30.6(a) and (d), 17 CFR 30.6(a) and (d), that firms provide customers located in the U.S. with the risk disclosure statements in Commission Regulation 1.55(b), 17 CFR 1.55(b), and Commission Regulation 33.7, 17 CFR 33.7, or as otherwise approved under Commission Regulation 1.55(c), 17 CFR 1.55(c);
- The separate account requirement contained in Commission Regulation 30.7, 17 CFR 30.7;
- Those sections of Part 1 of the Commission's financial regulations that apply to foreign futures and options sold in the U.S. as set forth in Part 30; and
- Those sections of Part 1 of the Commission's regulations relating to books and records which apply to transactions subject to Part 30, based upon substituted compliance by such persons with the applicable statutes and regulations in effect in Hong Kong.

This determination to permit substituted compliance is based on, among other things, the Commission's finding that the regulatory framework governing persons in Hong Kong who would be exempted hereunder provides:

(1) A system of qualification or authorization of firms who deal in transactions subject to regulation under Part 30 that includes, for example, criteria and procedures for granting, monitoring, suspending and revoking licenses, and provisions for requiring and obtaining access to information about authorized firms and persons who act on behalf of such firms;

(2) Financial requirements for firms including, without limitation, a requirement for a minimum level of working capital and daily mark-to-market settlement and/or accounting procedures;

(3) A system for the protection of customer assets that is designed to preclude the use of customer assets to satisfy house obligations and requires separate accounting for such assets;

(4) Recordkeeping and reporting requirements pertaining to financial and trade information;

(5) Sales practice standards for authorized firms and persons acting on their behalf that include, for example, required disclosures to prospective customers and prohibitions on improper trading advice;

(6) Procedures to audit for compliance with, and to redress violations of, the customer protection and sales practice requirements referred to above, including, without limitation, an affirmative surveillance program designed to detect trading activities that take advantage of customers, and the existence of broad powers of investigation relating to sales practice abuses; and

(7) Mechanisms for sharing of information between the Commission, and the HKSFCA on an “as needed” basis including, without limitation, confirmation

data, data necessary to trace funds related to trading futures products subject to regulation in Hong Kong, position data, and data on firms' standing to do business and financial condition.

Commission staff has concluded, upon review of the petition of the HKSFC and accompanying exhibits, that the HKSFC's regulation of financial futures and options intermediaries is comparable to that of the U.S. in the areas specified in Appendix A of Part 30, as described above.

This Order does not provide an exemption from any provision of the Act or regulations thereunder not specified herein, such as the antifraud provision in Regulation 30.9. Moreover, the relief granted is limited to brokerage activities undertaken by certain licensed corporations on behalf of customers located in the U.S. with respect to transactions on a foreign futures and options exchange located in Hong Kong subject to exclusive regulatory oversight by the HKSFC for products that customers located in the U.S. may trade.⁵ The relief does not extend to regulations relating to trading, directly or indirectly, on U.S. exchanges, and does not pertain to any transaction in swaps, as defined in Section 1a(47) of the Act. For example, a licensed corporation trading in U.S. markets for its own account would be subject to the Commission's large trader reporting requirements.⁶ Similarly, if such a licensed corporation were carrying positions on a U.S. exchange on behalf of foreign clients and submitted such transactions for clearing on an omnibus basis through a firm registered as a futures commission merchant under the Act, it would be subject to the reporting requirements applicable to foreign brokers.⁷ The relief herein is not applicable where the licensed corporation solicits or accepts orders

⁵ See, e.g., Sections 2(a)(1)(C) and (D) of the Act.

⁶ See, e.g., 17 CFR Part 18 (2014).

⁷ See, e.g., 17 CFR Parts 17 and 21 (2014).

from customers located in the U.S. for transactions on U.S. exchanges. In that case, the firm must comply with all applicable U.S. laws and regulations, including the requirement to register in the appropriate capacity. The Commission further notes that the relief granted by this Order is not applicable to any licensed corporation subject to joint oversight by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the HKSFC.⁸

The eligibility of any firm to seek relief under this exemptive Order is subject to the following conditions:

(1) The regulator or SRO responsible for monitoring the compliance of such firms with the regulatory requirements described in the Regulation 30.10 petition must represent in writing to the Commission that:

(a) Each firm for which relief is sought is registered, licensed or authorized, as appropriate, and is otherwise in good standing under the standards in place in Hong Kong; such firm is engaged in business with customers located in Hong Kong as well as in the U.S.; and such firm and its principals and employees who engage in activities subject to Part 30 would not be statutorily disqualified from registration under Section 8a(2) of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 12a(2);

(b) It will monitor firms to which relief is granted for compliance with the regulatory requirements for which substituted compliance is accepted and will promptly notify the Commission or NFA of any change in status of a firm that would affect its continued eligibility for the

⁸ The HKMA administers the Hong Kong Banking Ordinance and is the government authority in Hong Kong responsible for maintaining monetary and banking stability. Certain financial institutions may be required to become a licensed corporation by virtue of undertaking certain regulated activities subject to HKSFC oversight. Elements of the HKMA's regulatory program did not form the basis, in whole or in part, for this exemptive relief.

exemption granted hereunder, including the termination of its activities in the U.S.;

(c) All transactions with respect to customers located in the U.S. will be made subject to the regulations of the HKSFC and the Commission will receive prompt notice of all material changes to the relevant laws in Hong Kong, any rules promulgated thereunder and HKSFC rules;

(d) Customers located in the U.S. will be provided no less stringent regulatory protection than Hong Kong customers under all relevant provisions of Hong Kong law; and

(e) It will cooperate with the Commission with respect to any inquiries concerning any activity subject to regulation under the Part 30 Regulations, including sharing the information specified in Appendix A on an “as needed” basis and will use its best efforts to notify the Commission if it becomes aware of any information that in its judgment affects the financial or operational viability of a member firm doing business in the U.S. under the exemption granted by this Order.

(2) Each firm seeking relief hereunder must represent in writing that it:

(a) Is located outside the U.S., its territories and possessions and, where applicable, has subsidiaries or affiliates domiciled in the U.S. with a related business (e.g., banks and broker/dealer affiliates) along with a brief description of each subsidiary's or affiliate's identity and principal business in the U.S.;

(b) Consents to jurisdiction in the U.S. under the Act by filing a valid and binding appointment of an agent in the U.S. for service of process in accordance with the requirements set forth in Regulation 30.5;

(c) Agrees to provide access to its books and records related to transactions under Part 30 required to be maintained under the applicable statutes and regulations in effect in Hong Kong upon the request of any representative of the Commission or U.S. Department of Justice at the place in the U.S. designated by such representative, within 72 hours, or such lesser period of time as specified by that representative as may be reasonable under the circumstances after notice of the request;

(d) Has no principal or employee who solicits or accepts orders from customers located in the U.S. who would be disqualified under Section 8a(2) of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 12a(2), from doing business in the U.S.;

(e) Consents to participate in any NFA arbitration program that offers a procedure for resolving customer disputes on the papers where such disputes involve representations or activities with respect to transactions under Part 30, and consents to notify customers located in the U.S. of the availability of such a program; provided, however, that the firm may require its customers located in the U.S. to execute a consent concerning the exhaustion of certain mediation or conciliation procedures made available by the HKSFCA prior to bringing an NFA arbitration proceeding;

(f) Undertakes to comply with the applicable provisions of Hong Kong laws and HKSFCA rules that form the basis upon which this exemption from certain provisions of the Act and regulations thereunder is granted; and

(g) Consents to refuse those customers located in the U.S. the option of not segregating funds notwithstanding relevant provisions of Hong Kong law or regulations promulgated by the HKSFCA.

As set forth in the Commission's September 11, 1997 Order delegating to NFA certain responsibilities, the written representations set forth in paragraph (2) shall be filed with NFA.⁹ Each firm seeking relief hereunder has an ongoing obligation to notify NFA should there be a material change to any of the representations required in the firm's application for relief.

This Order will become effective as to any designated HKSFCA firm on the later of the date of publication of the Order in the Federal Register or the filing of the consents set forth in paragraphs (2)(a)-(f). Upon filing of the notice required under paragraph (1)(b) as to any such firm, the relief granted by this Order may be suspended immediately as to that firm. That suspension will remain in effect pending further notice by the Commission, or the Commission's designee, to the firm and the HKSFCA.

This Order is issued pursuant to Regulation 30.10 based on the representations made and supporting material provided to the Commission and the recommendation of the staff, and is made effective as to any firm granted relief hereunder based upon the

⁹ 62 FR 47792, 47793 (Sept. 11, 1997). Among other duties, the Commission authorized NFA to receive requests for confirmation of Regulation 30.10 relief on behalf of particular firms, to verify such firms' fitness and compliance with the conditions of the appropriate Regulation 30.10 Order and to grant exemptive relief from registration to qualifying firms.

filings and representations of such firms required hereunder. Any material changes or omissions in the facts and circumstances pursuant to which this Order is granted might require the Commission to reconsider its finding that the standards for relief set forth in Regulation 30.10 and, in particular, Appendix A, have been met. Further, if experience demonstrates that the continued effectiveness of this Order in general, or with respect to a particular firm, would be contrary to public policy or the public interest, or that the systems in place for the exchange of information or other circumstances do not warrant continuation of the exemptive relief granted herein, the Commission may condition, modify, suspend, terminate, withhold as to a specific firm, or otherwise restrict the exemptive relief granted in this Order, as appropriate, on its own motion.

The Commission will continue to monitor the implementation of its program to exempt firms located in jurisdictions generally deemed to have a comparable regulatory program from the application of certain of the foreign futures and option regulations and will make necessary adjustments if appropriate.

Issued in Washington, DC, on March 19, 2015, by the Commission.

Christopher J. Kirkpatrick,
Secretary of the Commission.

**Appendix to Foreign Futures and Options Transactions – Commission Voting
Summary**

On this matter, Chairman Massad and Commissioners Wetjen, Bowen, and Giancarlo voted in the affirmative. No Commissioner voted in the negative.

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