



# Council Report

February 2013

The Council Report summarizes major actions approved at NEFMC meetings or highlights items of interest to stakeholders.

At its January 29-31, 2013 meeting the Council:

- ◆ Took final action on herring specifications for 2013-2015 and several other measures that would help fishermen maximize their catches; and
- ◆ Voted on the Gulf of Maine cod and Georges Bank cod acceptable biological catches.
- ◆ Planned next steps for the EFH Amendment.

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## Herring Fishery Gets Additional 16,600 mt in 2013

In approving Framework 2 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in January, the Council refined two management measures that will provide greater flexibility to fishermen. The first would allow the sub-annual catch limits (sub-ACLs) assigned to each of the four herring management areas to be set monthly instead of annually. The actual amounts or percentages by month would be determined during “specs package” development. Herring fishery specifications are set every three years.

Framework 2 would authorize a carry-over of unused quota in each herring management area into the next fishing year --- to be applied to the sub-ACL in the same area with a limit of 10 percent of the sub-ACL.

The Council also took final action on the 2013-2015 herring fishery specifications. Based on the best available science, the Council allocated an additional 16,600 metric tons of herring to the fishery for the 2013-2015 fishing years.

### Seasonal Splits for 2014 and 2015

**Area 1A: 0% Jan - May;  
100% June - Dec  
Area 1B: 0% Jan - Apr;  
100% May - Dec**

The new specifications include changes to the herring fishery accountability measures (AMs). They would require that the directed herring fishery in a management area close when the catch is projected to reach 92 percent of its sub-ACL, not including any research set-aside fish.

If the directed fishery does close, all vessels with herring permits would be limited to a 2,000 pound trip limit. The specs also would establish a trigger of 95 percent for the total stock-wide herring quota or annual catch limit, which if reached would close the directed fishery in all four management areas.

The specifications will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries as quickly as possible and if approved will be implemented sometime during the 2013 fishing year; this is January through December in the Herring Plan. The seasonal splits and carry-over provisions in Framework 2 will be implemented at the start of the 2014 fishing year.

At this meeting, the Council also initiated a new framework adjustment to the Herring FMP to establish catch caps or ceilings on river herring bycatch in the herring fishery. Work is expected to begin on this action as soon as the specifications package is completed.

SPECIFICATION	2013-2015 ALLOCATION (MT)
Overfishing Limit (OFL)	169,000 - 2013 136,000 - 2014 114,000 - 2015
Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)	114,000
U.S. Optimum Yield (OY)/Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	107,800
Domestic Annual Harvesting (DAH)	107,800
Domestic Annual Processing (DAP)	103,800
U.S. At-Sea Processing (USAP)	N/A
Border Transfer (BT)	4,000
sub-ACL Area 1A	31,200
sub-ACL Area 1B	4,600
sub-ACL 2	30,000
sub-ACL 3	42,000
Research Set-Aside (RSA)	3% of each sub-ACL
Fixed Gear Set-Aside (1A)	295



Terry Stockwell,  
Groundfish  
Committee Chair

**The next  
Groundfish  
Committee  
meeting will be  
held jointly with  
its Advisory  
Panel  
—  
Wednesday  
March 6, 2013  
Sheraton  
Colonial Hotel  
in Wakefield,  
MA**

## Cod Stocks Take a Big Hit

Approving final 2013 - 2015 groundfish specifications at its late January meeting was no easy chore for members of the New England Fishery Management Council this year. While many of the catch limits for this period will represent declines from recent years, the sobering news about the cod stocks was the main event for Council members as well as stakeholders on January 30.

The Council voted on limits for Gulf of Maine cod and Georges Bank cod following the release of the *55th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (55th SAW) Summary Report*, which outlined the outcomes of both cod assessments, and a January meeting of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).

In keeping with its SSC's advice, the Council approved a 77 percent reduction in the Gulf of Maine cod limit and a 55 percent decrease in the U.S. share of Georges Bank cod. Other stocks that will experience decreases in

catch limits include Gulf of Maine haddock, Cape Cod/Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, witch flounder and plaice. Increases in redfish and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder — 168 percent over 2012 for redfish — are also expected.

The approval of a revised rebuilding strategy accounts for the increase in SNE/MA winter flounder, allowing some landings from this stock by both commercial and recreational fishermen. All of the Council's actions are contingent on a positive review by NOAA Fisheries on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce.

After a briefing on the overall condition of the two cod stocks at the meeting (both are at low levels of abundance and fishing mortality is high) questions were asked by meeting attendees and several Council members about the biological reference points for Gulf of Maine cod.

Biological reference points

generally represent the condition of a stock in terms of specific values for catch and biomass, depending on the characteristics of the stock and the level at which it is fished.

The result was the approval of two motions. The first asked the NEFSC to provide advice about appropriate reference points for Gulf of Maine cod when natural mortality for that stock is assumed to be 0.4, as was the case in one of the recent assessment models.

And in the second, the Council asked its SSC and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to evaluate whether reference points should be revised for Georges Bank cod, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, Gulf of Maine haddock and SNE/MA winter flounder, given current predator/prey relationships and changes in environmental conditions.



## Industry to Pay Observers Costs in 2013

NOAA Fisheries officially put the fishing industry on notice that it would be able to pay only 50 percent of the sector monitoring costs in fishing year 2013.

The industry would be responsible for the rest of the costs, according to NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator John Bullard. He said further details were contingent on the budget negotiations still taking place in Washington, DC and that he would provide more information as soon as possible.



## Development of Area Management Alternatives Underway

During the late January meeting, the Council reviewed work accomplished to date on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment 2. In the process, its members received updates from the Habitat and Groundfish Committees about the area management measures now in development. The items below summarize the discussions.

- ◆ The Habitat Committee presented a range of options for the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Southern New England areas. These will be refined in the coming months and incorporate options developed to address groundfish considerations. The committee also described the proposed research and monitoring recommendations developed to date. These included three dedicated habitat research areas in addition to a data collection program intended for

use in developing gear modification measures to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on EFH.

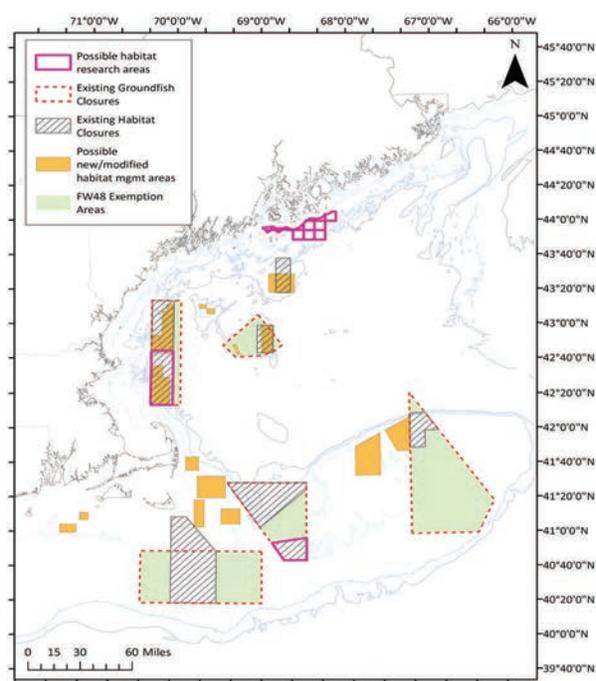
- ◆ On behalf of the Council's Groundfish Committee, the Closed Area Technical Team (CATT) described its progress to develop spatial management options that would address groundfish management issues exclusively --- those that either open, close or otherwise restrict specified areas. Using survey, fishery, and tagging data, plus published information, this group is working on analyses that will help define areas consistent with goals and objectives approved by the Council.
- ◆ Added to that guidance, the Groundfish Committee further recommended that design criteria for the management areas in-

clude elements that allow flexibility and are limited in time and space to address a specific problem. An example could be limiting fishing on spawning aggregations of overfished stocks.

- ◆ The full Council discussed whether the scope of work for the EFH Amendment should be prioritized. Instead, members agreed to allow the technical groups and committees working on the action leeway in the coming months as they work to complete alternatives for the Council. To further this outcome, the Council also agreed no new topics would be added to the EFH Amendment.
- ◆ The Groundfish Committee plans to bring its area management recommendations to the full Council for review at the April 23-25 meeting in Mystic, CT. The next step would involve both Groundfish and Habitat Committees in the development of alternatives that meet both EFH and groundfish objectives.



*Learn more about the EFH Amendment at the ME Fishermen's Forum, February 28-March 2 Samoset Resort, Rockland ME*



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**The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, initially enacted in 1976.**

- ◆ **The Council develops rules for both large and small-scale commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the region's coastline.**
- ◆ **Major ports include Portland, ME, Gloucester and New Bedford, MA and Point Judith, RI.**
- ◆ **Its management authority extends to fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and southern New England and overlaps with the Mid-Atlantic Council for some species.**

**Next Council Meeting, April 23-25, 2013  
Hilton Hotel  
Mystic, CT**

**Tom Nies Named NEFMC Executive Director**

Mr. Thomas A. Nies, a highly regarded fishery analyst and chairman of a key group of fisheries experts that provides technical advice to managers about the New England's groundfish fisheries has been named Executive Director of the New England Fishery Management Council.

Mr. Nies replaces Captain Paul J. Howard who is retiring on March 1 after 16 years in the position.

Mr. Nies was born in Highland Indiana. He graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1976, with a BS in Mathematics and holds an MBA in Leadership from Franklin Pierce University.

During his 21-year Coast Guard career he focused on at-



sea law enforcement. Mr. Nies logged over ten years of at-sea duty, an accomplishment which culminated when he was appointed Commanding Officer of the *U.S.C.G.C. Spencer* based in Boston, MA.

Mr. Nies's land-based assignments with the Coast Guard included a stint at the fisheries

law enforcement branch at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. He later served as the Admiral's representative for the First District Law Enforcement Division at New England Council meetings.

He retired from the Coast Guard and joined the Council staff in 1997. He initially worked on the Herring Fishery Management Plan and made major contributions to the development of a standard bycatch methodology for Northeast fisheries. Mr. Nies has worked on the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan since 2000.