

Council Report

An update published by the New England Fishery Management Council – June 2002

The Council Report summarizes major issues voted upon or discussed at each regularly scheduled meeting of the NEFMC. The Council met most recently on May 16, 2002 at the Sheraton Ferncroft Hotel in Danvers, MA.

This one-day meeting was held to address groundfish management issues related to the development of Amendment 13 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan.

The Council met in mid-May to identify the range of potential management alternatives it will consider in Amendment 13 to the Groundfish FMP. This meeting followed a series of Groundfish Committee meetings held throughout the region to solicit fishermen's views on the concept of area management --- dividing up the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and Southern New England into five geographic areas with biological objectives assigned by area.

While diverse views were presented at the committee meetings, a number of suggestions were incorporated into the Council's first cut at the Amendment 13 alternatives. They will be further discussed and refined at the June Council meeting on June 24-26 in Rockport, ME. A final vote on the range of options is scheduled to take place at the July 23-25 meeting in Portland, ME. Public hearings will likely be scheduled during December and January.

Summary of Council Decisions to Date

The management strategies agreed to in May are as follows:

1. Settlement Agreement - An alternative based on the measures contained in U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler's most recent decision, consisting of the settlement agreement signed on to by many parties involved in the Framework 33 lawsuit.

2. Judge Kessler's Initial Order - The Council has not met since the judge rescinded her initial order in favor of the settlement agreement. It could, therefore, decide to omit this alternative from consideration at the June meeting.

3. Area Management - Five major areas will be considered: Georges Bank, divided into two sections, Southern New England and the Gulf of Maine, and the inshore Gulf of Maine, also divided into inshore and offshore sections. The inshore Gulf of Maine will also be divided into an eastern and western section. A variation approved for analysis calls for using NAFO Area 5ZJM, located in the vicinity of Closed Area II, as the eastern Georges Bank boundary and that the delineation between Southern New England/Georges Bank line be drawn at 70° W Longitude.

The process to be used to develop the area Total Allowable Catches (TACs) would consist of a combination of landings from the Vessel Trip Reports (1996-1998 and 1996-2000) and trawl survey observations (fall and spring) to estimate the relative distribution of stocks. This calculation will be used to develop species-specific TACs to determine a TAC for each area and species. Additional options for area management may also be considered.

4. Hard TAC Program - Specific guidance was not provided at the meeting, although the concept may involve a prohibition on landing a species once a TAC is reached.

5. A Sector Allocation Alternative – This alternative could consider self-selected sectors formed by groups who share common fishing practices, come from the same communities, belong to the same organizations, who have established similar marketing arrangements or directed sectors with fishermen assigned to sectors based on some criteria (such as gear, permit category or size).

6. DAS Reduction Alternative - This option would be based on the days-at-sea (DAS) reduction necessary to achieve the biological goals for stocks that need the least mortality reduction in the first year of the amendment. Additional measures would be added to meet the goals for the other stocks.

7. Recreational Fishery Measures – This alternative would allocate a 20% share of the target TAC for Gulf of Maine cod to the recreational sector and improve monitoring of the recreational catch by implementing a permit requirement for recreational vessels (similar to the current party/charter boat requirement).

In addition, the Council directed the Groundfish Plan Development Team to consider:

- All industry proposals
- A vessel performance program (possibly a system of monitoring individual vessels --- landings and DAS use --- to determine whether the fleet is approaching the target TAC; overages beyond a set performance standard would trigger DAS penalties; there could also be incentives for compliance
- Bycatch reduction measures such as the 8-inch square mesh escape panel
- An access program for Closed Area II to catch Georges Bank yellowtail flounder
- Elimination of the current day boat gillnet requirement to take a 21-day block out of the fishery during the months of June, July, August or September
- Tuna purse seine vessel access to the year-round groundfish closed areas

Other Business

Apart from Amendment 13, but in response to the latest restrictions facing the groundfish industry, the Council also agreed to request that NMFS implement a days-at-sea leasing program “through the most expedient mechanism”. That request has been forwarded to the agency.

Change in Council Membership

Council member Dr. William Brennan who has held an at-large seat from the state of Maine since 2000 has been named Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Affairs. A former Commissioner of the Maine Department of Marine Resources and Council member from 1987 through 1995, he was the principal in a marine and environmental policy consulting firm in Portland, and also served as adjunct professor at the Maine Maritime Academy. The Council congratulates Bill on receiving his doctorate and wishes him well in the international arena and in all his future endeavors.

Scheduled Meetings

Recreational Advisory Panel Meeting

Tuesday, June 18, 2002 at 9:30 a.m.
Holiday Inn, One Newbury Street, Peabody, MA 01960

Habitat Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 19, 2002 at 9:30 a.m.
Thursday, June 20, 2002 at 9:00 a.m.
Holiday Inn, 31 Hampshire Street, Mansfield, MA 02048