



Council Report

An update published by the New England Fishery Management Council – June 2010

The Council Report summarizes major issues voted on or discussed at each regularly scheduled NEFMC meeting. The Council met most recently on June 22-24, in Portland, ME.

At its June meeting, the Council addressed issues related to monkfish, groundfish, sea scallops essential fish habitat and management priorities.

Monkfish

Amendment 5 measures approved

At its meeting in Portland, ME last week, the New England Fishery Management Council cast its final vote to approve Amendment 5 of the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan and forward the package of management measures to the Secretary of Commerce for review. The Council approved a suite of new monkfish rules at its April meeting, but a decision on the annual monkfish catch target for 2011-2013 for the Northern Management Area (NMA), which includes New England waters, was conditional, pending the outcome of analyses associated with an alternative target.

Results presented at the meeting, indicated the alternative target would have set the monkfish total catch at 13,988 metric tons, or 31 million pounds, but the Council chose to retain its initial target of 10,750 metric tons or 24 million pounds. The more conservative target level was adopted because it is more likely ensure greater stability of the monkfish resource and better opportunities for those who participate in the fishery, especially given the high degree of scientific uncertainty associated with the current stock status.

The Council has also approved a 2011-2013 annual catch target for the Southern Management Area (SMA) of 11,469 metric tons, or 25 million pounds. The new SMA and NMA catch targets represent increases of 75% and 100%, respectively, over the catch targets in place since 2007. These increases are justified based on peer reviewed stock assessments that have concluded both monkfish stocks are above their management biomass targets. But the assessments contain statements about the uncertainty associated with the scientific understanding of monkfish biology, a situation that warrants a precautionary management approach.

The Monkfish Plan and its amendments are prepared jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Council. Both Councils have now approved the new management measures which are expected to be in place at the start of the fishing year in May 2011, if approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce.

Groundfish

Framework 45 initiated: yellowtail flounder, Gulf of Maine winter flounder and pollock to be revisited; party/charter control rule reaffirmed

New measures discussed at last week's Council could mitigate some of the negative impacts being experienced by several "sectors" and the "common pool" fishery organized under the rules of the newly implemented catch share program, Amendment 16 to the Groundfish Plan.

Issues identified for further development and inclusion in Framework Adjustment 45 included the following, beginning with a request to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee to review any new data collected and determine whether these would affect the current allowable biological catch (ABC) recommendation for Gulf of Maine winter flounder:

- Adopting new status determination criteria for pollock, and setting a new allowable biological catch and annual catch limit for 2011-2012 -- a change that could result in an increase in pollock catches.
- Modifying the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder rebuilding strategy - possibly resulting in a longer rebuilding period with less negative consequences for fishermen.
- Adopting new sectors based on requests received by May 1, 2010.
- Exempting Handgear A and B permits from dockside monitoring requirements (currently scheduled to be effective in fishing year 2012 for common pool vessels).
- Protecting spawning cod aggregations; during this very preliminary discussion, the action was intended to apply to specifically identified aggregations targeted by recreational fishermen in the Ipswich Bay/Whaleback areas of Mass Bay and sector vessels fishing in blocks 132 and 133; it also could include a May and June prohibition of cod possession by recreational fishermen in defined areas of blocks 132 and 133, or a closure of these areas to recreational fishermen, and removal of the sector exemption from the June rolling closure in blocks 132 and 133.
- Allowing General Category scallop dredge vessels to fish in the Great South Channel area year round (remove the current seasonal prohibition during yellowtail flounder spawning).

The Council also voted to reaffirm the existing control date for Northeast Multispecies party/charter permits (March 30, 2006). While there was recognition that it needed to address the management concerns of the party/charter industry, the development of additional party/charter measures will be determined through the Council's priority setting process.

The groundfish framework adjustment is scheduled for implementation in fishing year 2011.

Sea Scallops

Framework 22 Moves Forward

On the heels of final steps to complete Amendment 15 to the Scallop Plan, the Council unanimously approved a motion to initiate Framework Adjustment 22 last week. The action will contain fishery specifications for 2011-2012, including the area rotation schedule for the next two years and measures to minimize the impacts of incidental take of sea turtles in the fishery. Additional issues under consideration at this early stage of development include modifications to the vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and other measures based on Scallop Advisory Panel input, such as delaying the opening date of Mid-Atlantic access areas for general category vessels and revisiting a provision to allow limited access general category IFQ vessels to possess up to 100 bushels of in-shell scallops seaward of the VMS demarcation line.

There also may be consideration of a new, shorter and/or smaller rotational area in the Great South Channel, modifications to the overfishing definition and scallop reference points, and gear restrictions for small dredge permit vessels operating in the rotational access areas. The Council also reviewed the research priorities approved by the Scallop Committee for the 2011 and 2012 Research Set-Aside program. Final approval of Framework 22 is scheduled to occur at the Council's November 16-18 meeting in Brewster, MA.

Habitat

Update on the EFH Omnibus Amendment

The overall goal of the second phase of Essential Fish Habitat Omnibus (EFH) Amendment 2 is to develop a series of alternatives that will minimize the impacts of fishing on EFH across Council FMPs. Council staff and Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT) members reviewed ongoing Swept Area Seabed Impact model analyses, and the Habitat Committee Chair presented a series of preliminary tasking to the PDT based in part on those analyses.

The Committee's recommendations included new habitat management areas, removal of some existing habitat management areas, and development of research areas. For all measures, they recommended upfront consideration of the tradeoffs between costs to habitat and costs to the industry.

These motions and the underlying analyses were discussed by the Council, and the tasking was approved for further development by the Habitat PDT, Committee, and Advisory Panel. Additional meetings will be scheduled to refine these concepts into formal alternatives for Council consideration.

Management Priorities

Items revised in response to pressing issues

In further discussions intended to sort out the number of management actions the Council will work on in 2010 and 2011, members continued to support work on a joint scallop/groundfish action that would allow the transfer of yellowtail flounder between the two fisheries. It placed the same level of importance on Framework Adjustment 45 to the Groundfish Plan (described above).

Meanwhile, the Groundfish Plan Development Team was directed to use the following goals to shape its recommendations to the Council on measures relating to accumulation limits: 1) maintain inshore and offshore fleets; 2) to the extent possible, maintain a diverse groundfish fishery, including different gear types, vessel sizes, geographic locations, and levels of participation; 3) maintain a balance in the geographic distribution of permits to protect fishing communities and the infrastructure they provide and 4) prohibit any person or government entity from acquiring or controlling excessive access to the resource, through in order to prevent extraction of disproportionate economic rents from other permit holders. A revised priorities list is posted on the Council's website under [What's New](#).

Materials on the Web

Meeting materials related to the above issues and PowerPoint presentations that accompanied the briefings provided to the Council in April are located on the Council's website www.nefmc.org. Audio files of the full meeting discussions are posted at <http://www.nefmc.org/actions/index.html>.

Next Council Meeting – September 28-30, 2010, Newport, RI