

**New England Fishery Management Council**  
**Recreational Advisory Panel**  
**Meeting Summary**  
May 27, 2009

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met in Wakefield, MA to develop recommendations for Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Members present included Mr. Barry Gibson (Chair), Mr. Tom Dipersia, Mr. Don Swanson, Mr. Ed Nowak, Mr. Chuck Casella, Mr. Mike Sosik, Mr. Tom Plaia, Mr. Jonathan Sterritt, and Mr. George Costello. Mr. Rip Cunningham, Groundfish Committee Chair, participated in the meeting. The RAP was supported by Tom Nies of the Council staff.

The Chair advised the RAP that Mr. Bud Brown, Vice-Chair, resigned due to other personal commitments. Mr. Mike Sosik accepted the position as Vice-Chair.

Council staff gave a brief overview of the draft Amendment 16 document before the RAP began its discussions.

**Recreational/Commercial Allocation**

The RAP reviewed the impacts of the two alternatives for a specific allocation of groundfish to the recreational component. During this discussion, Mr. Cunningham briefed the RAP on recent meetings on the MRIP program that suggest that the MRFSS system may have under-estimated recreational catch. As a result, any allocations based on those numbers might lock-in too small a share for the recreational component. The RAP discussed these implications and considered whether it would be better not to have a specific allocation. **The consensus of the RAP was to continue to support a specific allocation and to reiterate an earlier recommendation that allocations for GOM haddock and GOM cod be based on the 2001-2006 time period.** As noted in earlier reports, the rationale for this time period includes:

- The time period better reflects the proportions currently caught by the two components of the fishery.
- Recreational catches of haddock were constrained by a bag limit even after commercial trip limits were raised (or removed). After bag limits were relaxed, the recreational catch increased.
- Recreational measures actually raised the haddock minimum size at a time when commercial measures were being relaxed.
- Recreational effort has shifted to haddock in the Gulf of Maine due to the increased minimum size for cod.
- If recreational discards were included in the catch calculations, the recreational share would increase.
- Commercial buyouts reduced effort for the commercial fishery. Some of the benefits of those buyouts should accrue to the public at large, via the recreational fishery.
- Stock sizes of GOM cod, GOM haddock, and pollock were low in the mid-90s, reducing access to these fish by recreational fishermen. Using 2001 as the starting date for the allocation chooses a period when access improved because rebuilding had begun.

- The more recent time period is more consistent with current conditions in the fishery. They are more reflective of where the fishery is at present, and where it is likely to be going.

While discussing the allocation period, the RAP questioned the need for additional management measures should the longer period be selected by the Council. Recent economic events have reduced the number of trips made by both private boat and party/charter modes. Staff noted that one of the commercial accountability measures (AMs) is structured to relax restrictions should ACLs not be attained. The RAP members agreed that this should be pursued for recreational fishermen as well.

**Motion:** The RAP recommends the Council revise each recreational AM option. Where the current text says “exceeds”, revise to say “exceeds or does not meet 90 percent of the ACL” triggers an adjustment. (Mr. Nowak/Mr. Dipersia)

The motion carried on a show of hands (8-0).

### **Recreational Management Measures**

RAP members next discussed recreational management measures. *Members made it clear that they believed the recreational allocation should be based on 2001-2006, in which case no additional measures appeared necessary. The discussion of measures was held in the context of recommending measures should a different allocation period (1996-2006) be selected.*

The discussion revealed very different opinions on the measures. Some party/charter operators opposed either a bag limit change or a change in season and supported an increase in minimum fish size for GOM cod. Some private boat operators preferred the change in season.

**Motion:** If the years 96-06 are selected for allocating GOM cod, the RAP supports Option 3 (extending GOM cod prohibition to April 15). (Mr. Swanson/Mr. Plaia)

The motion failed on a show of hands (2-5-1).

The Chair asked if it was possible to select different measures for the party/charter and private boat components of the recreational fishery. Staff replied that this was possible; there seemed to be little interest in pursuing this option among RAP members at present and the idea was dropped.

A motion was offered to adopt the 26-inch size limit for GOM cod (Mr. Dipersia) but failed due to lack of a second.

**Motion:** To support Option 2 (six fish bag limit) for GOM cod. (Mr. Sterritt/Mr. Casella)

The maker explained that this motion should be viewed as a compromise between the party/charter and private boat components rather than an ideal solution. **The motion carried on a show of hands (5-2-1).**

**Motion:** If years 96-06 are selected for the GOM haddock allocation, the RAP recommends the Council use GOM haddock Option 1 (21 inch fish). (Mr. Swanson/Mr. Plaia)

Several RAP members supported this motion, noting there are enough large haddock available for this to measure to work. **The motion carried on a show of hands (7-0-1).**

RAP members discussed the motions for filleting fish at sea. Option 2 is effectively an increase in minimum fish size and was opposed. Members noted that several states require landing fillets with skin-on, but felt that the federal regulations need not be bound by these states. One member questioned how fish will be identified by enforcement agents if landed skin-off.

**Motion:** The RAP recommends the Council adopt Option1 for filleting fish at sea (allow landing fillets with skin off, from legal sized fish). (Mr. Dipersia/Mr. Sterritt)

**The motion carried on a show of hands (5-1-2).**

**Motion:** The RAP recommends the Council remove the current two hook per line limitation but maintain one line per angler. (Mr. Casella/Mr. Sosik)

**The motion carried on a show of hands (8-0).**

The RAP discussed the minimum size limit for Atlantic halibut. While some members supported the increase, others felt that the recreational fishery catches so few halibut that the increase was unnecessary.

**Motion:** The RAP supports the increase in the minimum size limit for Atlantic halibut to 41 inches. (Mr. Swanson/Mr. Casella)

**The motion failed on a show if hands (4-4).**

**Motion:** The RAP recommends that for recreational fishermen, the Council should keep the regulation for Atlantic halibut at one fish per day at 36 inches. (Mr. Sterritt/Mr. Nowak)

**The motion carried with a show of hands (6-1-1).**

The RAP considered Atlantic wolffish measures. While some members felt that the recreational fishery did not harvest sufficient wolffish that a prohibition was necessary, the RAP chose not to pass a motion on these measures.

### **Other Business**

RAP members discussed reports of unusually large cod catches south of Rhode Island in recent years. Noting that the interim rule adopted a bag limit for GB cod (which includes fish from this area), RAP members discussed whether the measure should be extended when the interim rule expired. Some members suggested that the rules in the GOM should apply to this area as well. Others noted that the cod fishery in this area was far shorter than in the GOM and the seasonal closure – if applied to SNE – would eliminate the recreational cod fishery in the area.

**Motion:** The RAP recommends that regulations for GB cod should mirror the regulations for GOM cod. (Mr. Dipersia/Mr. Sterritt)

Several members commented that while they supported setting similar bag limits in the GOM and GB, they did not agree on the seasonal closures or minimum fish sizes. Coupled with the concerns raised about the seasons, these comments led to the maker perfecting his motion:

**Motion as perfected:** Regulations for GB cod should mirror the recreational bag limit regulations for GOM cod.

**The motion failed on a show of hands (1-5-2).**

**Motion:** To recommend to the Council to adopt a 10 fish bag limit for GB cod. (Mr. Plaia/Mr. Dipersia)

**The motion carried on a show of hands (6-1-1).**