FINAL

ATLANTIC HERRING FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Incorporating the

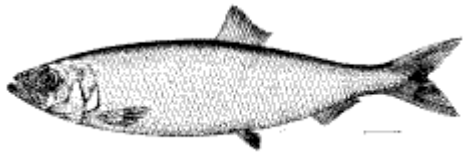
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

and

REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW

(Including the Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Volume I



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1.0 Executive Summary

The New England Fishery Management Council (Council, NEFMC) proposes management measures for the Atlantic Herring (*Clupea harengus harengus*) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). These measures are prepared under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. They have been closely coordinated with the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission (the Commission, or ASMFC), which is developing complementary measures to manage herring within state waters, and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC).

The Atlantic herring management unit is defined as all Atlantic sea herring within the U.S. territorial sea and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The herring resource is in an under-exploited state. Estimates of current stock size are based on the most recent fully–reviewed assessment (NEFSC 1998a) which estimated the 1997 biomass at 2.9 million metric tons (mt) and the spawning stock biomass at 1.8 million mt. The maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for the Atlantic herring coastal stock complex is estimated as 317,000 mt (including Canadian Georges Bank and New Brunswick fixed gear harvest). There is considerable uncertainty, however, about current stock size which could be overestimated. These estimates of a large exploitable biomass have increased commercial interest in developing this fishery, but there are concerns that specific spawning components (notably the Gulf of Maine component) may be unable to sustain current or increased fishing pressure.

The maximum fishing mortality established by this FMP is $F_{Threshold}$=0.30. The minimum biomass level is established as 1/2 the biomass at MSY, or approximately 500,000 mt. This FMP establishes a target fishing mortality of 0.28 when total biomass is larger than biomass at MSY. When biomass is less than the biomass at MSY, the target fishing mortality will be determined based on a five year rebuilding schedule.

The primary management measures recommended include: (1) the adoption of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the herring fishery and distribution of the TAC across time and area (2) closure of the directed herring fishery in an area when the TAC is reached (3) effort controls to limit catches as a TAC is approached (4) the permitting of all participating vessels, operators, dealers, and processors (5) mandatory data reporting for all licensed vessels, dealers, and processors (6) restrictions on size of vessels allowed in the fishery (8) spawning area closures (9) restrictions on joint venture processing activities, (10) adoption of an overfishing definition, and (11) designation of essential fish habitat.

The FMP will allow for the development of a sustainable fishery that targets the entire herring resource. Overfishing will be prevented through the use of effective management controls as the fishery develops. An annual scientific review of the resource will allow for adjustments to the fishery as a result of fluctuations in stock size.

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