

New England Fishery Management Council
Whiting Public Hearing
Holiday Inn – Mansfield, MA

Public Hearing Summary
May 29, 2012

Purpose of hearing: Take public comments on the Amendment 19 alternatives to increase the southern whiting possession limit in some or all of the Mid-Atlantic and Southern New England Exemption Areas

Attendance: David Goethel (chair), Frank Blount, Pete Kendall, Mark Alexander and Laurie Nolan (MAFMC). Dan Farnham (advisor), Bob Conrad, Tom Testeverde (advisor) and Joe Testeverde were present in the audience. Also present were Andy Applegate (NEFMC staff), David Thomas (NEFMC staff) and Moira Kelly (NMFS staff).

Summary: David Goethel opened the hearing with an introduction explaining the main purpose of the hearing and the procedure of the public hearing. Andy Applegate gave a brief presentation concerning the three alternatives being proposed, explaining the potential effects of raising the possession limit to 40,000 lbs., including effects on catches of whiting by the existing fleet, on effort shifts from other Mid-Atlantic and Southern New England trawl fisheries, on non-target species, and on price.

The committee had no comments or questions following Andy Applegate's presentation so David Goethel opened the floor to the public for comment on the alternatives.

Tom Testeverde and Joe Testeverde both spoke against the increase claiming that the increase in activity in the whiting fishery would negatively impact all vessels. They said that the current possession limit is working just fine and they do not want to see the resource abused. They favored staying with current limits that have helped keep a consistent price and stability.

Joe Testeverde pointed out that whiting have not rebuilt equally in all areas, that there have been changes in productivity (since the 1970s and 1980s), ecosystem effects, and effects from climate change. He expressed concern that there has not been enough scientific research considered in the alternatives and that the increased possession limit would affect product quality and price. He said that the Council should consider gear research through an experimental fishery, focusing on using the raised footrope trawl in the Cultivator Shoals Area and other areas on Georges Bank.

Tom Testeverde added that decreases in price could mitigate the higher revenue from landing more whiting with a higher possession limit. Tom Testeverde expressed concern that if the Council were to pass this suggested increase to 40,000 lbs. it would lead to successive increases in the future. He thought that the fishery with a higher possession limit could be an attractive alternative for displaced herring boats.

Dan Farnham and Bob Conrad both supported the possession limit increase in all parts of the Mid-Atlantic and Southern New England Exemption Areas. They cited concern over the fuel cost for the offshore trips and stated that the possession limit increase would mitigate the higher fuel costs. Mr. Farnham stated that when the original 30,000 lb. possession limit went into effect it was to help rebuild the fishery, not help the individual American fisherman. He pointed out that the amendment had very few changes to allow fishermen to profit from the higher ACL. A seasonal increase of the possession limit during January to June would be least productive to the fishery. He stated concern over having to compete with Canadian imports and that the only way to help out the fishermen is to allow them to land more fish. In response to Pete Kendall's question about the average duration of a trip that lands 30,000 lbs. of whiting, Dan Farnham explained that they catch the fish over the course of one night yet have to steam 25 hours there and back, stating that the fuel costs were a major expense on those offshore trips. Most of these trips are targeting whiting east of 68° W longitude and if the higher possession limit applied to a smaller area, he supported mandatory VMS use and trip declaration.

Mrs. Nolan asked Mr. Applegate how soon the Council would be able to make a future possession limit readjustment, if the Council approved the Amendment 19 alternatives in June. Mr. Applegate explained that there is a regular 3-year specifications process when the Council could reset specifications like possession limits. He said that amendment also includes an annual monitoring report when the Council could change measures by initiating a special framework action if that issue were high enough on the Council's priorities. After hearing Mr. Applegate's answer, Mrs. Nolan expressed her support for the possession limit increase.

No other comments were made by the public or the committee, and David Goethel closed the hearing at 10:57 AM.