

New England Fishery Management Council
Draft Amendment 19 to the Multispecies FMP
(Small-mesh Multispecies)
Hotel Indigo – Riverhead, NY

DRAFT Meeting Summary
April 10, 2012

Purpose of meeting: Take public comments on Draft Amendment 19 alternatives.

Attendance: David Goethel (chair), Andrew Applegate (staff), and one whiting fisherman: Dan Farnham

Summary

Mr. Goethel started the meeting at 5:30 in case there were any people arriving late. Since Mr. Farnham was an advisor and familiar with the FMP, the presentation was skipped over and the hearing started with questions about the amendment and analyses, followed by comments on the alternatives.

To start out, Mr. Goethel asked for comment on the incidental possession limit. Mr. Farnham replied that the 400 lbs. red hake and the 2000 lbs. silver hake incidental possession limit would be the best choice. The limits would reduce landings and also could cause small-mesh vessels to reduce their catches of red hake when targeting whiting.

Mr. Farnham and other fishermen in the area that fished the Cultivator Shoals Area were concerned that red hake will be the choke species for the silver hake fishery. Mr. Farnham asked how the data in Table 7 were analyzed.

Mr. Applegate answered that they were developed from 2004-2010 data derived from vessel trip reports, using the Center's area allocation tables. Most of the trips in these tables were matched by VTR serial number, or when that was not possible by an approved procedure that assigned landings to statistical area and gear based on the vessel number, port, and month. Using these data, the location and gear data were derived from the VTR reports, which were combined with dealer landings to estimate the proportion of landings coming from the Cultivator Shoals Area, the inshore small-mesh exemption areas, and from other parts of the northern stock area by vessels using other gears (e.g. large mesh trawls).

Mr. Farnham supported using the VTR data in combination with dealer reports to allocate landings, but more evaluation of the accuracy of the data would be helpful. He indicated that his dealer data has been off by millions of pounds and had to be corrected. Errors may exist in dealer data for other vessels but have not been corrected, he said,

Mr. Goethel added that the Regional Office reported that it would be difficult to monitor landings by exemption area in real time. Mr. Farnham asked what would happen if the Cultivator Shoals Area fishery landed 80% of the red hake. Mr. Goethel answered that the other

exemption areas would be open for a very short period of time before the incidental possession limit would drop to 400 lbs., reducing opportunity to fish in the inshore exemption areas.

Mr. Farnham asked if there were consideration of a red hake year round possession limit for the Cultivator Shoals Area (not just for the entire stock area). Mr. Farnham agreed with the results in the table on page 15 (percent of trips affected and impact on landings and discards). He said that the results would be representative of trips in the Cultivator Shoals Area. He thought that some people may target red hake in the southern area, but this is currently rare because red hake aren't worth as much (as whiting and other species). Having a possession limit might not create more of a discard problem as people might expect, Mr. Farnham said. Mr. Goethel added that the Oversight Committee had some concern about more restrictive possession limits applied to trips fishing in both areas on the same trip. Mr. Farnham didn't think this would be a significant problem, but would think about it when he submits written comments.

Asked about the post-season AM by Mr. Goethel, Mr. Farnham said he will consider the results in the analyses and provide written comments. He thought that the table in the amendment and public hearing document was very helpful

Mr. Goethel took comments on other whiting issues, such as limited access. Mr. Farnham hopes that the Council will follow through (with promises) and put whiting limited access on the agenda soon. This issue has been on the back burner for years, since the Regional Office disapproved an earlier limited access amendment quite a few years ago. All it would take is an increase in the whiting market to set off new participants in the fishery and rapidly increase catch.

Responding to changes in the fishery and high fuel prices, Mr. Farnham suggested that the Council consider increasing the possession limit (as a weekly limit) to counter the increasing fuel price, especially since the silver hake stocks appear to be in a healthy condition. One option that should be considered is allowing a 30,000 lbs possession limit as a double limit (60,000 lbs.) as a weekly limit to reduce fuel costs from steaming (on one trip, rather than two).

No further comments were offered and Mr. Goethel closed the meeting at 6:30.