

New England Fishery Management Council

SUMMARY

Monkfish Amendment 6 Scoping Hearing

Fairfield Inn, New Bedford, MA

January 11, 2011

Hearing Chair: Terry Stockwell

Staff: Phil Haring

Attendance: approx. 40

Howard King, Monkfish Committee Vice Chair and Mid-Atlantic Council member also attended.

The first commenter noted that the stocks are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, and he suggested that the fishery is well managed under the current system. He asked what the impetus is for exploring catch shares, and said the Councils should consider other alternatives if they want to improve economic performance of the fishery. He also said, if the Councils follow through with catch shares, that captains and crew should get shares, and everyone should know their share before the referendum vote.

A fisherman also commented that he needs to know what his share would be before commenting on any proposals. He pointed out that he thought he would have a reasonably large share of groundfish based on his history until he received his actual allocation.

One person alerted the audience to an independently prepared economic profile of the fishery which is available on the web.

A monkfish gillnetter since 1990 with no groundfish permit said the biggest problem with the current system is the lack of flexibility to land trip limit overages. The staff informed him that pending in Amendment 5 is just such a provision, which will allow a one-day's trip limit overage with automatic accounting on the DAS. He also pointed out that the current permit system already allocates fishing privileges in a sense. He asked why the Councils can't just make some adjustments to the current system to achieve the objectives outlined at the beginning of the scoping document.

One commenter stated that he believed the decision to go to catch shares has already been made. The process now is all about the allocation. He said we should use a 10-year history and that permit holders be allowed to select their best five years.

The next commenter asked if there will be a referendum even if the Councils adopt a sector approach. She asked how many boats and jobs would be eliminated under monkfish catch shares, and based on what is happening in groundfish, believes it will likely be substantial. She says the Councils should not be eliminating jobs at this point in the economy. She also said that under the current federal budget climate, the government is not going to continue funding catch share monitoring and enforcement programs, and that the costs will fall to the industry who can least afford it. She said catch shares do not work, and they are not the answer for monkfish management.

Another commenter stated that he has a substantial investment in fisheries, including monkfish, amounting to more than \$25 million. He said that while he is successful under the groundfish sector program, it is not working for the 99% of the industry. He said well-capitalized businesses can buy the quota they need, and can absorb short-term losses. Most smaller operators who have to buy quota to go fishing, have to do so without knowing what the price of fish will be when the vessel returns to port, and often it is at a loss. He feels strongly that the Councils should not allocate shares to dealers and processors. He asked how crew/captain allocations would work. If a crew member has quota that he is bringing to the vessel, but he does not show up for work when his quota is needed, the operator will have to purchase quota at great risk. He says that the allocation process should use the permit qualification as the initial qualification; it takes into account history before the distributional effects of different regulations, and there would be no need for appeal. He says, however, that catch shares will create World War III in the industry, and only 25% of the businesses will survive.

The next commenter pointed out that the previous commenter is opposed to catch shares even though he would survive and succeed because he knows it is bad for the industry and the community. This individual believes that the federal government has a goal for the fishery, and it is not to protect the fishermen. He said catch shares is not managing the resource, but managing the people. He feels it is ironic that despite the industry's sacrifices since 1994, the government is trying to take away from them the payback for their conservation efforts. He continued, that the costs of catch shares is going to have to borne by the industry, and that those costs will come out of the fish money, reducing what's left for the crews, and, eventually, those costs will be passed on to the consumers.

An earlier commenter returned to point out that a problem will arise with respect to financing. The financial institutions will only lend to the big players. The small boat operators will not get the financing they need to purchase quota and have a successful business plan. He urges the Councils to develop a program that is fair to small-boat operators if they proceed with catch shares.

The next individual agreed with the previous comments and then proceeded to strongly oppose catch shares. She said those systems only benefit a few, while the rest suffer and have to leave the industry. She said that just because someone has a share of the resource, they do not become better shepherds of the resource, as some have claimed. There are all kinds of people in the industry, some are good and some are not, regardless of the management system. She thinks that sectors should be subject to a referendum, and that calling them "sectors" rather than "cooperative quotas" is just a way to get them out from the referendum requirement. She added that catch shares eliminate jobs, and that they have nothing to do with the resource, but are, rather, simply social engineering. She pointed out that sectors are not achieving optimum yield in groundfish, but are eliminating boats and jobs. She also observed that in Alaska, most of the quota is owned by foreign companies, even if the fish is caught on American boats.

A previous commenter returned to add that it will be a serious problem if the fishery gets into a situation where bycatch of monkfish is capped and becomes a constraint on other fisheries, particularly the scallop fishery.

Another earlier commenter returned to highlight the unemployment impacts of catch shares. He said that the fishing industry provides a good opportunity for many people who lack a higher education, and who have difficulty finding other work. As vessels and jobs are reduced, the impacts are felt most by those people who have the fewest alternatives for employment.

The hearing started at 9:10 p.m. and adjourned at about 11:00.