

Use of New Gears in the B-Regular DAS Program and the Eastern U.S./Canada Haddock SAP

In response to a Council request in June 2007, NMFS issued a final rule (72 FR 72965) on December 26, 2007 to amend the procedures and requirements for approval of additional gear types for use in the Eastern U.S./Canada Haddock Special Access Program (SAP) or additional trawl gear in the Northeast multispecies Regular B DAS (Days-at-Sea) Program.

The regulations allow the Council or its Executive Committee to request the Regional Administrator to authorize additional gear for use in both programs through a notice action if the proposed gear meets one of two standards in the regulations.

The standards require that new gear either reduce the catch of each regulated stock of species of concern or other non-groundfish stocks that are overfished or subject to overfishing, by at least 50% (by weight on a trip-by-trip basis); or that its catch of each regulated stock of species of concern, or other non-groundfish stocks that are overfished or subject to overfishing, be less than 5% of the total catch of regulated groundfish (also by weight on a trip-by-trip basis). The approval process is as follows:

- 1) Before the Council considers recommending a new gear for either program, the proposed gear must have been the subject of a completed experiment and results reviewed by the Council's Research Steering Committee (RSC) in accordance with that committee's research review policy. (This step is specified in the final rule cited above). The RSC report to the Council will contain a recommendation concerning the sufficiency of the experimental results for management decision-making.
- 2) If the gear merits further consideration based on the RSC review of the quality of the research, a formal request by the proponents should be made to the Executive Director who will ensure that the Council, through its appropriate groups, consider adding the new gear type to the allowed gears in the two programs.
- 3) The Council's Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) will then determine whether the gear meets the gear performance standards specified in the final rule, taking into account the comments and recommendations provided by the RSC. The PDT's finding will be forwarded to the Groundfish Committee for a review of the technical determination provided by the PDT and consideration of any relevant management considerations.

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- 4) The Groundfish Committee will forward its findings to the full Council or the Council's Executive Committee, as appropriate, for development of a recommendation to the Regional Administrator.