

Limited Entry Program for the Party/Charter Sector in the Gulf of Maine

Rationale: Rationale is two-fold. First, management of the private recreational and party-charter sectors in the GOM groundfish fishery has historically been linked primarily to the performance of the commercial sector. When overall mortality targets have not been met, the recreational sector has been required to cut back as well, often disproportionate to the recreational fishery's impact on the resource. This makes it very difficult for those in the P/C sector to plan, and invest in, their businesses. Secondly, any additional restrictions such as further decreases in the bag limit for GOM cod (which stands at ten fish per person per day, a number widely recognized as the very minimum to attract passengers), increases in minimum size, or further shortening of the season will likely result in the loss of economic viability for the P/C sector. If entrants continue to stream into the sector and the catch of GOM cod increases, these restrictions are imminent. P/C operators feel they deserve the same protection provided by a limited entry program that the commercial sector enjoys.

No separate allocation of GOM cod or haddock (of the total recreational cod/haddock TAC requested independent of this LEP proposal) for the P/C sector is contemplated at this time.

Control Date: Already established, March 30, 2006

Management Area: The GOM Regulated Mesh Area. P/C boats fishing in other areas (i.e. the GB/CC/SNE/MA stock areas) would not be affected.

Species: GOM groundfish species regulated by the NEFMC in FMPs including cod, haddock, pollock, yellowtail flounder, witch flounder, windowpane flounder, American plaice, winter flounder, Atlantic halibut, white hake, ocean pout, redfish, silver hake, offshore hake, monkfish, and skates. A limited entry P/C permit would be needed for the retention of any of these regulated groundfish species taken aboard a P/C vessel within the GOM Management Area.

Qualifying Criteria for Vessels: Party/charter boats with a federal party/charter permit or limited-access commercial groundfish permit whose owner or operator furnished to NMFS at least one Vessel Trip Report *for a P/C trip* showing landings of regulated groundfish species taken in the GOM no more than five (5) years prior to the control date. Vessels that so qualify yet are currently inactive would be included in the LEP. Vessels under construction with a written construction agreement as of the control date would qualify for the program.

Upgrading: No passenger-capacity upgrading will be allowed for uninspected (six-passenger) vessels. Inspected vessels (more than six passengers) would be allowed a one-time passenger-capacity upgrade of no more than 10 percent. (Example: A party boat with a CG-certified capacity of 40 persons could upgrade to 44 persons). A vessel upgraded in passenger capacity after the control date but before implementation of the plan would not be allowed a further upgrade. There would be no restrictions on upgrading horsepower or boat size.

Permit Transferability: A participant in the LEP could transfer his permit to a new or replacement vessel subject to the upgrading restrictions. A permit would be transferred with the vessel in the case of a sale to a second party, unless retained via a written agreement with the purchaser.