

Northeast Multispecies (Large Mesh/Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan

Species Managed Under Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

Fifteen species of groundfish are managed under this plan. Twelve species are managed as large mesh species, based on fish size and type of gear used to harvest the fish: Atlantic cod, haddock, pollock, yellowtail flounder, witch flounder, winter flounder, windowpane flounder, American plaice, Atlantic halibut, redfish, ocean pout and white hake. Three species – silver hake (whiting), red hake, and offshore hake – are managed under a separate small mesh multispecies program, Amendment 12 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. Several large mesh species are managed as two or more separate stocks, based on geographic region. For example, Atlantic cod is managed as two stocks: Georges Bank cod and Gulf of Maine cod.

While these fifteen groundfish species exhibit unique body types, behaviors and habitat preferences, all are demersal, living near the bottom and feeding on benthic organisms. Groundfish are found throughout New England waters, from the Gulf of Maine to Southern New England.

Management Plan Overview

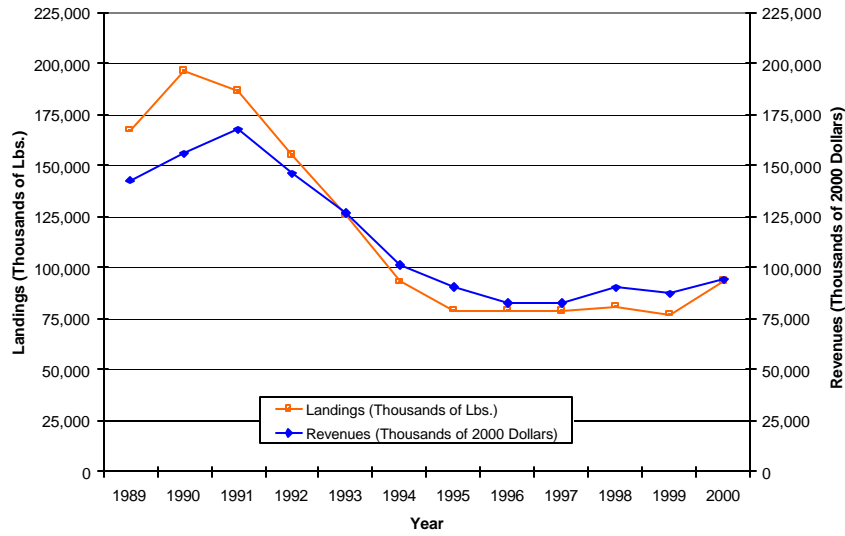
The Northeast Multispecies FMP was implemented in 1986 to reduce fishing mortality of heavily fished groundfish stocks and to promote rebuilding to sustainable biomass levels. The groundfish complex has been managed by seasonal and year-round area closures (no fishing in certain areas), gear restrictions (specified mesh size, number of nets/hooks, etc.), minimum fish size limits, trip limits (limiting fishermen to a certain poundage of fish per trip), limited access (limiting the number of participants in the fishery) and restrictions on the number of days a vessel is allowed to fish for groundfish each year (days-at-sea).

Over the years, the plan has been amended and adjusted through the Council's public process. Currently the Council is developing Amendment 13 which will further reduce fishing mortality for some stocks with specific measures to limit fishing effort, address bycatch issues and protect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). After further Council deliberation and a series of public hearings, Amendment 13 will be submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service for implementation in August 2003.

History of the Fishery

For centuries, Atlantic groundfish stocks have supported a fishery which has served to shape the economy and culture of New England. Development of advanced gear technologies, electronic navigation, fish-finding tools, and increased vessel power during the 20th century greatly expanded the New England groundfish fishery. Total commercial landings of groundfish increased 19.4% between 1995 and 2000, since Amendment 5 (1994) capped fishery participation and established additional measures to reduce fishing effort. Landings have increased 24.2% since Amendment 7 (1996). The value of commercial groundfish landings for New England in the year 2000 was estimated at \$100 million. Approximately 1,888 vessels were active in the fishery at that time.

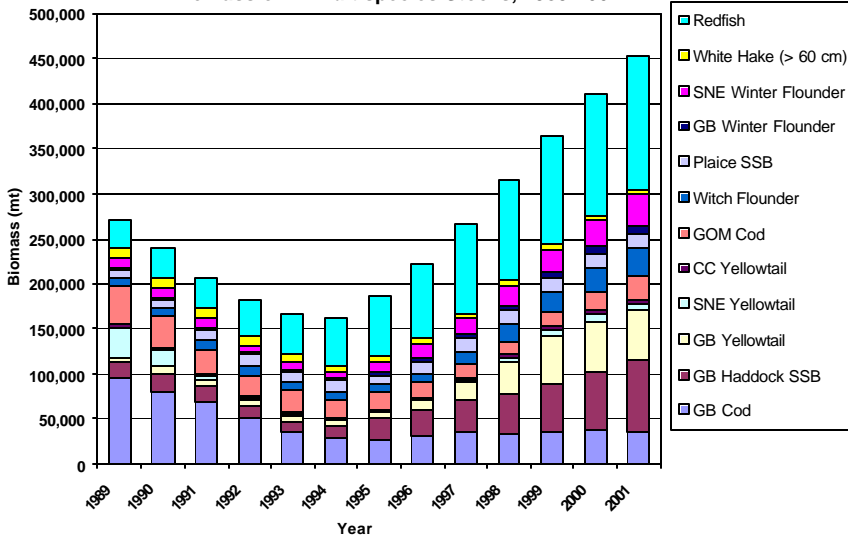
Landings and Revenues in the New England Groundfish Fishery



Fishery Status

Since the implementation of Amendment 5 in 1994, the aggregate biomass of New England groundfish stocks has nearly tripled, increasing from 161,217 metric tons (mt) in 1994 to 451,346 mt in 2000. Among the species that have demonstrated dramatic increases since 1994 are Georges Bank haddock, yellowtail flounder, and winter flounder. The increasing trend of overall biomass of New England groundfish is a positive sign that stocks are regaining vitality and moving towards long-term sustainability.

Biomass of 12 Multispecies Stocks, 1989-2001



Key:
 SSB = spawning stock biomass (total mass of the stock capable of spawning)
 GB = Georges Bank
 GOM = Gulf of Maine
 SNE = Southern New England
 CC = Cape Cod