



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 7, 2007

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Framework Adjustment 5 to the Monkfish Management Plan Approved

Newport, RI Based on a recent peer review of a new scientific model, which indicates the monkfish resource is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, the New England Fishery Management Council yesterday took final action to update and modify its Monkfish Fishery Management Plan. The rules will improve the conservation and management of a species that generates landings that are worth \$40 million annually.

Measures approved by the Council would allow a vessel to carry over four unused days-at-sea from the previous year's allocation, a reduction from the current level of 10 days. The Council views the reduced allowance as a way to better control and manage fishing effort.

The action also calls for all monkfish gillnet trips that are 15 hours or less to be counted as 15 hours. Current rules allow vessels returning to port in less than three hours to only be charged time used, otherwise the vessel is charged a minimum of 15 hours. Currently, during some periods of the year vessels in certain locations are able to land a full day's trip limit of monkfish in under three hours, thereby significantly increasing their annual landings.

The Council also approved a cap on the amount of incidentally caught monkfish that may be landed by vessels using large mesh and fishing in Southern New England east of 74° and also not fishing on a monkfish, scallop or multispecies day-at-sea. Such vessels currently retain monkfish up to five percent of the total weight of fish on board. The new rule would place a total limit of 50 pounds per day, to a maximum of 150 pounds, measured in tail weight. With this change, the Council is aligning the incidental catch limit on vessels that are in the high-volume skate bait fishery with the incidental limit on other high volume fisheries using small mesh.

The Council also agreed to eliminate the requirement that vessels fishing in the Northern Management Area obtain a Letter of Authorization to fish for monkfish under the less restrictive limits in that area, if the vessel uses the electronic Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) to declare its intent to fish only in the Northern Area. Vessels without a VMS still would be required to carry the Letter.

Today the Council further agreed to begin work on a follow-up action, Framework Adjustment 6 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan. The intent is to replace an existing measure that could shut down of the fishery in 2009 if monkfish landings in the current year exceed specified target. Such an extreme backstop provision, the Council believes, is no longer appropriate under the updated stock status.

Because the monkfish resource is managed jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, changes to the plan must also be approved by that group which is scheduled to meet December 12-14. Once approved by both Councils, the framework adjustment will be finalized and regulations published by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the agency that has oversight of all federal fishery management plans.

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