



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Council Releases SAFE Report for Five Stocks of Small Mesh Multispecies

*Northern Whiting and Northern Red Hake Rebuilt
Progress on Southern Whiting, Southern Red and Offshore Hake*

The New England Fishery Management Council announces the availability of its 2002 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for Small Mesh Multispecies --- whiting, red hake and offshore hake. The report was prepared by the Council's Whiting Monitoring Committee (WMC), an independent team of state and federal biologists, resource managers, social scientists and fishing industry representatives charged with tracking the Council's progress to meet fishery management plan goals. It summarizes the most recent information concerning the biological condition of stocks, as well as the social and economic conditions and the environment in which the fishery operates.

Of the five stocks regulated by the management program, northern whiting, southern whiting, northern red hake, southern red hake, offshore hake, none are considered overfished at this time. Two of the stocks, northern whiting and northern red hake, are considered "rebuilt" and are well above their biomass targets. The status of the southern stock of whiting has improved significantly, based on the high biomass levels observed in the 2001 National Marine Fisheries Service trawl survey. The southern stock increased from 41 percent of its biomass target (overfished) in 2000 to 71 percent of its biomass target (not overfished) in 2001.

Based on the current stock status, the WMC recommends that the very restrictive management measures scheduled for implementation in year four of the plan beginning in May, 2003 are not necessary in either stock area. Instead, the committee contends that fishing effort can increase modestly in the northern area, but cautions that it should not increase in the southern area. Increased fishing effort in the southern area is not recommended, according to the committee, because the stock is still rebuilding, and it is too early to tell whether or not the increases seen in the 2001 survey will continue. The WMC also recommends establishment of a new control date and implementation of a limited access program to safeguard the successes to date and continue stock rebuilding.

The Council will consider the WMC's recommendations during the development of Framework Adjustment 37 to the management plan. This will occur at its September 11 meeting in Providence, RI and again at the November Council meeting in Gloucester, MA. A framework adjustment is necessary in order to eliminate the year 4 default measure. A control date and limited access program will require development through a fishery management plan amendment.

The New England Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils established by federal legislation in 1976, is charged with conserving and managing fishery resources from three to 200 miles off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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