



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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New England Fishery Management Council Approves Groundfish Amendment

NEWBURYPORT, Mass. The New England Fishery Management Council late last night approved by a wide margin a new initiative to enhance the rebuilding of New England groundfish stocks. The program was voted on following three days of deliberations in Peabody, Mass. The controversial package of management measures will further restrict fishing on groundfish species such as cod and flounders and is expected to take effect next spring. The Council's next step is to submit the plan to the Secretary of Commerce for review and final approval.

The new measures, collectively referred to as Amendment 13 to the Council's Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, are based on a proposal developed by a diverse group of fishermen from Maine to Long Island. As adopted by the Council, 60 percent of the days available for groundfish fishing can be used to fish for any species of groundfish, while the remaining 40 percent can only be used under specific programs that allow fishing on healthier stocks. On average, most fishermen will see a 20 percent decrease from the days they are currently allocated for groundfish fishing.

Council Chairman David Borden captured the flavor of the meeting at the outset of the three days of decision-making. "There has been an unparalleled level of industry cooperation up and down the coast, and I would like to extend my thanks to all including the conservation organizations. This bodes well for the future of the fishery management process in New England. "

In addition to reducing the days available to pursue groundfish, the new program includes several key features that will assist the stock rebuilding efforts:

- ◆ Special programs allowing fishermen to target more abundant groundfish stocks on a limited basis in areas otherwise closed to fishing; at this meeting the Council approved programs targeting yellowtail flounder and haddock on Georges Bank and a program to reduce discards of winter flounder in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic summer flounder fishery.
- ◆ Approval of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's proposal allowing them to operate as a distinct sector with their own quota for Georges Bank cod.
- ◆ Elimination of an excess number of fishing days that, to date, have not been used by fishermen, but could be re-activated and jeopardize the stock rebuilding achieved to date.
- ◆ Leasing groundfish fishing days to other boats to reduce some of the economic hardship that will occur as a result of the new measures.
- ◆ Adoption of a landmark agreement developed with Canada to manage transboundary stocks of cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder with a cap on the Total Allowable Catch, or "hard TAC" for these species to ensure the intended conservation benefits.
- ◆ Indefinite closure of areas on Georges Bank and in the western Gulf of Maine to bottom-tending mobile gear to protect benthic habitat and minimize the impacts fishing.