



New England Fishery Management Council Press Backgrounder - June 26, 2009

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Council Adopts Catch Share Program to Manage Groundfish Stocks

NEWBURYPORT, MA -- A plan that will dramatically expand a program that gives fishermen a more direct role in making decisions about when, where and how to fish was overwhelmingly approved by the New England Fishery Management Council yesterday in Portland, ME.

Working on the comprehensive plan for more than two years, the Council added 17 new “sectors”, or fishing cooperatives, to the two existing groups that have operated on Cape Cod since 2005. To date, more than 700 groundfish permit holders, who harvest species such as cod, haddock and flounders, have expressed interest in joining one of the proposed sectors.

To ensure that strict stock rebuilding programs continue while allowing each sector to develop its own unique set of rules, the Council will cap each group’s harvest level or Total Allowable Catch (TAC) based on the historic levels of catch each member brings to the group. Prior to receiving their annual TAC or quota, each sector will be required to submit an operations plan that details the internal allocation of fish among members, method of fishing and areas to be fished. Fishermen who do not join a sector will be subject to the current system of limited days, certain areas in which to fish and rules concerning gear type.

While the use of fishing days has resulted in measurable fish stock rebuilding, the current program has made it difficult for some fishing businesses to remain economically viable. Working under TACs or quotas in lieu of the current program, sectors can better respond to market conditions, weather concerns and reduce wasteful discards. With greater flexibility, sector members also should be able to avoid any “race to fish”, a circumstance that frequently produces a temporary oversupply in the marketplace, resulting in lower prices to fishermen.

The entire groundfish fishery will be governed by overall annual catch limits and accountability measures if catch overages occur. The use of these tools should provide for more structured management of the fishery and help the Council address the possibility of overfishing in a timely manner.

While optimistic about the success of the enhanced sector management program, both the Council and its management and science partner, the National Marine Fisheries Service, acknowledge there are challenges. These include the need for improved science as well as more effective monitoring and enforcement. The new rules are expected to go into place in May, 2010.

Regional Fish Facts

- **Gulf of Maine cod is no longer overfished and is at a stock size that has not been seen in 30 years;**
- **Georges Bank haddock and Gulf of Maine haddock are being harvested at sustainable levels; neither are overfished, nor is overfishing occurring.**
- **Increases in many of the stocks in the groundfish complex are being observed for the first time in nearly a decade.**
- **When fully rebuilt, these same stocks should produce nearly triple the current catches.**

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