



New England Fishery Management Council - News Release

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Federal Fishery Council Hears From Fishermen About Catch Shares Program

Portland, ME Constructive civil and frank remarks from active New England fishermen have characterized the two-day workshop sponsored by the New England Fishery Management Council to address “lessons learned” relative to the catch shares management program that now governs the region’s historic groundfish fishery. Wrapping up this afternoon, the workshop included over 70 fishermen and managers representing more than a dozen fishing groups known as sectors, a type of harvesting cooperative authorized a year-and-a-half-ago to better manage a species complex that includes cod, haddock, pollock and flounders.

The new program replaces the onerous days-at-sea program that was in place since 2004 and eventually became almost universally despised by fishermen. Although limited fishing days resulted in measurable stock rebuilding, that system made it difficult for many businesses to remain economically viable.

Individual fishermen and sector managers identified the issues they face under the new program. One of the clear messages conveyed by the industry during the workshop was their need for management stability in order to promote long-term business planning. Portland, ME vessel owner Allyson Jordan said, “Don’t jump the gun and make drastic changes now. We need five years to make this work.” Frank Patania, a Boston fisherman added, “For the first time in years, I have control over my business.” Others identified the ability to trade their fish allocations, held collectively by each sector for its members, to obtain the mix of fish needed to conduct their businesses, as a system that functions well and also fosters more cooperation among sector members.

Fishermen were equally clear about the improvements that would be necessary to improve sector efficiency and profitability. These included: cost-sharing with the government to pay for expensive at-sea monitoring; elimination of the many rules that have been held over from the former days-at-sea program, in particular opening the large offshore areas in which fishing for groundfish is prohibited; and the many redundancies that exist in the current data collection and catch reporting system.

The full Council is set to consider the industry’s recommendations, only some of which are discussed here, at its November 15-17 meeting in Newport, RI. At that time it will approve priorities to be addressed in 2012.

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