



New England Fishery Management Council News Release

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Council Delays Vote on Groundfish Catches, Opens Additional Areas to Fishing

Wakefield, MA Amid fishermen's testimony about negative economic impacts to the region's groundfish fishery and its obligations under the rules that govern fisheries management in federal waters, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) today voted to delay setting controversial catch limits for 2013-2015 until its late January 2013 meeting in Portsmouth, NH.

In recognizing the potentially devastating consequences of cuts of up to 70 and 80 percent from 2011 levels for some commercially important groundfish species, the 18-member federally appointed Council agreed to examine possible options available to it between now and its January 29-31 meeting in Portsmouth, NH. "There is too much on the line," as one Council member commented during the discussion. Importantly, the Council will by then have received the results of the most recent cod assessments, reports that will outline the health and abundance of both the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank stocks.

Other significant issues were approved that will affect the groundfish fishery that harvests cod, haddock, pollock and several types of flounders. The NEFMC supported a measure that allows groundfish sectors, a type of harvesting cooperative established in 2010, to request exemptions from the longstanding prohibition on fishing in the year-round groundfish closed areas on a limited basis. These restrictions provide that:

- Access would only be granted for the parts of areas that are not defined as habitat closed areas, or that have not been identified as potential habitat management areas currently under consideration in a habitat action that is currently in development;
- Access to Closed Area I and Closed Area II (on Georges Bank) would only be granted for the period May 1 through February 15 to protect spawning fish;
- Access to the Western Gulf of Maine Closed Area (off MA and NH) would only be granted during periods not subject to rolling closures that are applicable to sectors and already specified in the Groundfish Management Plan;
- Access to defined portions of Cashes Ledge would be allowed year round; and
- Access to defined portions of the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area would be allowed year round.

The Council will submit these and other measures in final documents to the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Secretary of Commerce for final approval and implementation as soon as possible. Measures approved today will in place at the start of the new fishing year that begins on May 1, while others will likely be delayed as a consequence of the postponed decision on 2013-2015 catches.

The NEFMC, one of eight regional organizations 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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