



New England Fishery Management Council Press Backgrounder – Cod Assessments Released/SSC to Meet

Newburyport, MA: 1/22/2013

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Based on recent reports developed by fisheries scientists and peer reviewed by independent experts, there is little good news about the health of cod stocks in the Northeast. The reports, developed during two separate stock assessments held in December and released last week provide an update to the information received a year ago by fishery managers and fishermen alike about the poor condition of Gulf of Maine cod and Georges Bank cod.

A four-person panel was tasked by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to determine whether the work completed during the week-long assessment meetings on the two cod stocks provided a scientifically credible basis for developing fishery management advice. In its Summary Report, the panel agreed “the information presented in both the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank cod assessments represents the best available science,” while also recognizing the obvious challenges for both scientists and stakeholders.

Some excerpts from the 55th Stock Assessment Summary Report on Gulf of Maine Atlantic cod may help in understanding some of the issues at play. “The NEFSC 2011 fall and 2012 spring survey abundance indices were the 4th lowest and the lowest in their respective time series. The MADMF 2012 spring survey index was also the lowest in its times series. As the 2012 observations were not incorporated into the assessment formulations, the projections are likely to be optimistic.”

The information in the report about Georges Bank cod was similarly negative. “The last above average year class was 1991. Until spawning stock biomass gets above about 50,000 [metric tons], recruitment is likely to remain low and rebuilding will be slow.”

The Gulf of Maine cod and Georges Bank cod stock assessment documents are available on the Council website by clicking [SAW/SARC documents](#) here. The details of these reports will be reviewed by the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which will in turn set acceptable biological catches (ABCs) at its Wednesday, January 23, 2013 meeting in Boston, MA. Click the [SSC Meeting Notice](#) for details about that meeting.

Additionally, the SSC will review the Groundfish Plan Development Team’s candidate ABCs. They are listed below in *metric tons*, along with the approved 2012 ABCs for comparison. The SSC’s recommendations and rationale, including any alternative ABCs they may develop, will be presented to the full Council on January 30, 2013 during the NEFMC’s four-day meeting in Portsmouth, NH. [Council Meeting Agenda](#).

	<u>2013 Candidate ABCs</u>	<u>2012 ABCs</u>
2013-2015: Gulf of Maine cod	1,249 - 1,550	2012: 6,700
2013 only: Georges Bank cod	2,002 (U.S. Share)	2012: 5,616 (U.S. Share 5,103)