



New England Fishery Management Council News Brief

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Council Meeting Highlights Major Actions Taken by the New England Fishery Management Council November 20, 2013 - Newport, Rhode Island

Newburyport, MA The Council's one-day meeting in Newport, RI addressed outstanding issues that followed on its early fall meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday through Wednesday, December 16-18, at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Danvers, MA. Please see the published agenda at http://www.nefmc.org/calendar/agendas/dec13_agenda.pdf for detailed information.

Atlantic Herring

The Council debated and heard several hours of public testimony on a motion postponed from the September Council meeting that, if approved, would have requested that NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to ban herring midwater trawl gear --- at least until 100 percent at-sea monitoring and dumping regulations are implemented.

As background, NOAA Fisheries' disapproval of management measures in Amendment 5 to the Herring Fishery Management Plan two months ago triggered a long discussion of herring midwater trawl operations and at-sea monitoring issues at the September Council meeting as well as the debate at last week's meeting. Specific issues were the level of at-sea monitoring necessary to adequately assess herring fishery activities, funding for the observer coverage, net slippage and dealer weighing of catch.

After lengthy discussion, the Council agreed the initial request did not meet the defined requirements for an "emergency" action. It also based its decision, in part, on observer reports that were reviewed on November 20, which indicated relatively low levels of midwater trawl gear encounters with groundfish stocks, such as haddock.

Council members did agree that the issues identified in testimony are of concern, and acknowledged this by approving the following motion in lieu of the emergency request: "To task the Herring Committee to have a one-day meeting with the appropriate personnel from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, NOAA General Counsel's office, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and [including] the NOAA Regional Administrator, to address all the disapproved elements of Amendment 5 [to the Herring Fishery Management Plan] prior to the New England Council meeting in December or January."

Herring Management Priorities for 2014

In additional motions related to Atlantic herring, the Council also supported pursuing solutions to the disapproved Herring Amendment 5 issues as management priority in 2014, ensuring further attention to the issues identified above. This will take the form of a framework adjustment that will be initiated at the January Council meeting. A related consideration is that the NOAA Fisheries/Northeast Region has discussed taking the lead on an omnibus amendment that would create a mechanism to accommodate industry-funded observers across all fisheries, and suggested addressing the Herring Amendment 5 industry-funded observer issues in this same action. The Council's Executive Committee supported this approach but the Council may discuss the issue further. Other herring priorities included staff preparation of a paper on river herring and shad stocks.

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Amendment 18 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP)

The Council staff brought members up to date on the development of Amendment 18 to the Groundfish Plan. The amendment is focused on the development of measures to promote fleet diversity, enhance sector management, promote resilience and stability of fishing businesses, and prevent excessive shares in the fishery.

A number of measures have been considered by the Groundfish Committee, including accumulation caps for permit banks and other entities. Associated motions were postponed from the November meeting, because of time constraints, until the January 28-30 Council meeting in Portsmouth, NH. The next Groundfish Committee meeting is scheduled for December 9 in Providence, RI. However, only a brief update on Amendment 18 is expected. Please see http://www.nefmc.org/nemulti/meeting_notice/131209-10MtgNotice.pdf for the notice. The Committee meeting in January (date TBD) will focus on Amendment 18.

Open Public Comment Period at Council Meetings

The Council approved a new policy to address a standing item on most Council meeting agendas. For a number of years the Council has held an *Open Period for Public Comment* so that the public may address issues not listed on the NEFMC meeting agenda, but that could be of interest to Council members.

This opportunity will remain intact, but with a few caveats. Individuals bringing issues to the Council during this agenda item will be limited to between three and five minutes and will be asked to sign up before making comments. This is intended to enable all who would like to speak to do so.

As stated in the policy and as Council members emphasized at the meeting, this identified period would not serve as, take the place of or preclude any comments that are traditionally called for at the discretion of the Chairman during the consideration of listed agenda items. The public comment period is open to anyone who would like to make comments about issues not on the agenda but that could be of interest to the Council.

As always, NEMFC members encourage public comments and intend to accommodate as many people as time allows.

The New England Council develops rules for both large and small-scale commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the coastlines of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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