



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2006

Patricia Fiorelli
978.495.0492

NE Fishery Council Limits Access to the Herring Fishery and Protects Inshore Stock Components

Portland ME The management of a number of fisheries in New England is complicated by excess fishing capacity, a situation characterized by the often-repeated phrase “too many vessels chasing too few fish”. The New England Fishery Management Council took action during its meeting at the Holiday Inn by the Bay yesterday to avoid this scenario in the Atlantic herring fishery. By limiting the number of vessels eligible to fish for herring in all management areas the Council adopted a proactive approach to a fishery in which harvest and fleet capacity have grown significantly since 1999. By approving specified criteria to participate in the fishery the Council established a fleet of approximately 39 vessels that will qualify for the directed herring fishery and 61 additional vessels that will qualify for the incidental catch fishery. The Council also approved an open-access permit category that will allow other vessels to keep up to 3 metric tons of herring on each trip. The overall herring catch will continue to be capped by a total allowable catch limit to prevent overfishing.

The Council also approved a purse seine/fixed gear only area from June to September each year in Area 1A, essentially establishing a midwater trawl gear restricted area inshore in the Gulf of Maine. While access to the fishery for some midwater trawl vessels may be affected, the Council agreed the measure could produce indirect biological benefits to the herring resource and the Gulf of Maine ecosystem in general.

Reducing midwater trawl effort on the inshore component of the resource during the summer months, when both fishing effort and interactions with other important fisheries are highest in the Gulf of Maine, became an important consideration during the Council’s deliberations. Advocates of the measure stressed the importance of maintaining a sufficient amount of herring as prey for other fish species in the area, as well as whales and other marine mammals. The Council views the purse seine/fixed gear only area as a precautionary measure to minimize the risk of overfishing the inshore component of the herring resource.

Amendment 1 to the Herring Plan will be finalized by the Council staff and forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval and implementation by early 2007.

#