



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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New Groundfish Rules to Target Stocks of Concern

Portland ME Late yesterday afternoon the New England Fishery Management Council formally approved management measures to further protect stocks of cod and yellowtail flounder. The action, Framework Adjustment 42 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, proposes to modify the rules that control fishing in order to rebuild the region's groundfish stocks. The Council is meeting targets to address overfishing for 12 of 19 stocks managed through its "groundfish" management plan. Those that have proven to be much more difficult to address include Gulf of Maine cod, Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder --- and to a lesser degree Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder, Georges Bank winter flounder, and white hake.

The eighteen-member Council considered seven different alternatives. Generally, they differed in their approaches to the way days at sea are used, either within defined areas or throughout the fishery, and included additional limits on the number of groundfish days allowed per vessel. The Council rejected proposals that would have charged vessels a minimum of twenty-four hours for any part of a day used because of concerns that small vessels with limited crews might fish the entire period to maximize revenues, a scenario that could lead to fatigue and contribute to accidents at sea.

The Council ultimately chose to reduce allocated days for all vessels by eight percent and to count days at sea at a rate of two hours for every hour underway in a defined area in the inshore Gulf of Maine and an area off Southern New England. These two areas were chosen to reduce fishing mortality on four of the stocks of concern (Gulf of Maine cod, Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder,) as opposed to a broader approach that would affect all stocks, including those that are successfully rebuilding. Adjustments were also made to various trip limits. While the measures will help rebuild groundfish stocks and will benefit the industry, over the short term they will substantially reduce groundfish landing revenues for many inshore fishermen. In particular, fishermen from Gloucester MA, Scituate MA, Provincetown MA, and New Hampshire ports will be affected.

To possibly mitigate some of the negative impacts of this latest action, the Council also approved the formation of a second sector that will target Georges Bank cod using fixed gear, extended a program that allows permit holders to lease days-at-sea, and made changes to several programs designed to target the healthy Georges Bank haddock stock.

During the discussion, the Council received an industry proposal for a different yet possibly effective set of management measures that includes a "total allowable catch management option". Council members agreed to have that proposal analyzed by its technical teams. The results will be discussed at the April Council meeting in Mystic, CT. Framework 42 will be submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service for review. After approval, the Council expects regulations will be implemented late this summer.

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