



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 14, 2011
TO: Hannah Goodale, Assistant Regional Administrator, Fisheries Statistics
FROM: Whiting PDT
SUBJECT: ACL monitoring of hake landings

As you may know, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is considering monitoring red, silver, and offshore hake landings by stock area and possibly by small mesh management program in the northern stock area and by quarter in the southern stock area. Red and silver hake catch should be monitored separately, but all offshore hake catches are lumped into a silver/offshore hake annual catch limit (ACL) in the southern stock area. Draft Amendment 19 includes an alternative to require vessel trip reports (VTRs) to be submitted weekly, but this requirement may only apply to vessels enrolled in the small mesh exemption program or to any vessel that lands red, silver, or offshore hake.

Total catch will be monitored on a fishing year basis to compare with the ACL to determine whether post-season accountability measures are needed. Traditional landings reported by dealers, transfers-at-sea for bait, and catches for personal use as bait reported on VTRs will also need to be monitored. Although the landings allocations by stock area, management program, or quarter are considered targets (i.e. landings may exceed these values without triggering a closure), there is a proposed trigger at 90% of the landings allocation that would reduce possession limits to incidental levels (greatly reducing targeting of hakes by vessels using small mesh trawls, or encouraging more selective fishing when red hake landings reach the 90% trigger).

Several questions were raised during the development of Amendment 19 alternatives that may have bearing on how the alternatives are written or which ones are favored.

First, if the amendment requires weekly submission of VTRs, how will NMFS assign dealer reported landings to stock area and/or management program? The ABC was determined for stock areas based on procedures used to estimate landings and catch in the benchmark assessment, using the Northeast Fishery Science Center's (NEFSC) "area allocation tables." As you know, these tables use the reported statistical area or reported latitude and longitude of

fishing for VTRs that match dealer data with VTR serial numbers. For unmatched trips, the NEFSC uses a published procedure for allocating landings to statistical area. Will the procedures that the Regional Office uses to monitor landings differ significantly from the NEFSC area allocation table procedures? If so, how?

Allocation by management program is more difficult. The Council's intention is that landings from trips by vessels in the small mesh exemption program should be associated with that program. The Cultivator Shoals Exemption Area Program fishing should be monitored separately, but the inshore exemption areas (Gulf of Maine Grate Raised Footrope Trawl Exemption Area, Small Mesh Areas I and II, and the Raised Footrope Trawl Exemption Area) will be combined. Reported red, silver and offshore hake landings that come from vessels using large mesh trawls, other gears, and herring fishing should be monitored against a landings allocation for the Gulf of Maine/Northern Georges Exemption Areas. Small-mesh multispecies landings by vessels using shrimp trawls should be monitored against the inshore small mesh exemption area program allocations. To do this, the industry advisors suggested that vessels using small mesh to target red, silver, and offshore hake could use the defunct 'OTW' gear code (Otter Trawl-Whiting), so that the small mesh exemption program landings can be monitored using the weekly VTR reports. Is this possible? If not, how would the Regional Office monitor the landings in these areas?

The transfers-at-sea for bait were used in the benchmark assessment to estimate the catch time series and develop ABCs, and need to be monitored under ACL management. 'Landings' by vessels catching hake for their own bait and reported on VTRs under groundfish regulations should be treated the same way, but the reports may not be made on the same frequency as the planned weekly VTRs in the whiting fishery under Amendment 19. Do you foresee any problems with identifying these data from VTRs and adding them to the dealer reported landings to monitor the fishery in real time? If so, what are the problems, and how might Amendment 19 be structured to better address them?

We are also aware that there are efforts underway to audit the accuracy of VTR data with respect to reports made by some fishermen. Apparently, some fishermen believe that there are significant red hake landings that are missing in the NMFS data, either because the data were not entered or the data were mis-coded (for example, red hake landings being recorded as silver hake). Could you let us know how that effort is progressing and what corrections might be made? Many are concerned that more accurate landings data used to monitor ACLs may be inconsistent with the ACLs derived from the benchmark assessment using historic data.

There may be some other reporting issues that we have overlooked. If you have other related questions or concerns, please let the Council know.