



New England Fishery Management Council

News Brief

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 16, 2012

Patricia M. Fiorelli
978.465.0492, ext 106

What Happened at the Council Meeting This Week? Highlights from the New England Fishery Management Council's Discussions November 13-15, Newport, RI

Newburyport, MA Key decisions that will affect fishermen who harvest stocks of groundfish and sea scallops in the Northeast were made earlier this week by the New England Fishery Management Council.

The decision of most consequence was the overall catch, or acceptable biological catch, of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder that would be available to participants in both fisheries for next year. With nine members voting yes and eight no votes, the Council passed the following motion for three transboundary stocks, including yellowtail, that are managed jointly with Canada through an agreement called a "Resource Sharing Understanding

- Eastern Georges Bank cod – 600 metric tons (mt) (U.S. share 96 mt, Canadian share 504 mt);
- Eastern Georges Bank haddock – 10,400 mt (U.S. share 3,952 mt, Canadian share 6,448 mt); and
- Georges Bank yellowtail flounder – 1,150 mt (U.S. share 495 mt, Canadian share 656 mt).

The catch approved for Georges Bank yellowtail was critical to nearly everyone who awaited the Council's decision because it is taken as a bycatch in the very lucrative sea scallop fishery and also is fished by the region's struggling groundfish fleet. Scallopers cannot avoid all of their encounters with the fish despite that they have developed and adopted fishing strategies and gear innovations to reduce their bycatch.

Groundfish fishermen inevitably catch yellowtail flounder because it aggregates with other valuable species in the groundfish complex and is taken despite gear modifications to avoid the stock to the extent practicable. The issue quickly became divisive over the last several months because the stock is at extremely low levels, potentially limiting the activities of both fisheries given that the already low acceptable catch is shared with Canada and also must be split up between the U.S. groundfish and scallop fleets.

A second important decision affecting both fisheries was the allocation of yellowtail flounder which the Council set at 40 percent to the scallop fleet for 2013 and a fixed percentage of 16 percent for 2014-2015.

Other scallop measures were approved as part of Framework Adjustment 24 to the Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan. Rules were substantially revised because the overall catch is expected to be lower in fishing year 2013 than in recent years due to lower biomass in the scallop rotational access areas. While vessels will be allocated similar open area effort levels, 33 days-at-sea for full time vessels, only two access area trips will be allowed at a reduced limit of 13,000 pounds compared to four trips at 18,000 pounds in 2011 and 2012.

Vessels also will receive two trips from four different access areas on Georges Bank and in the Mid-Atlantic region. In addition, the action will close two additional Mid-Atlantic areas to protect small scallops until they reach a size at which they are more valuable when harvested.

Look for more details about these and other decisions in the NEFMC's newsletter to be published next week.

#