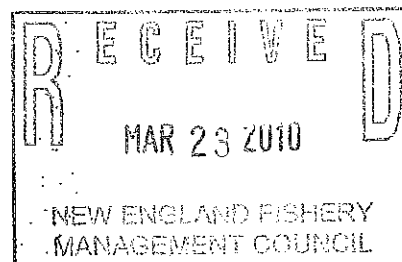




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930-2276

MAR 23 2010

Mr. John Pappalardo, Chair
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street
Newburyport, MA 01950



Dear John:

I am pleased to inform you that today, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), approved Amendment 3 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (Skate FMP). As you are aware, Amendment 3 is intended to prevent overfishing of, and rebuild, smooth and thorny skate; promote biomass increases in other skate stocks; and implement annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for the skate complex. This amendment is also intended to update the Skate FMP with the best available scientific information on skate stock status, and includes revised biomass reference points based on a recent stock assessment. Specifically, Amendment 3 introduces a new annual review and specifications process to help improve fishery monitoring and management, including the establishment of an annual catch target (ACT) that is set equivalent to 75 percent of the ACL, and total allowable landings (TAL) levels for the skate wing and bait fisheries. Amendment 3 also establishes reduced possession limits for the skate wing and bait fisheries, seasonal quotas for the bait fishery, and in-season possession limit triggers.

We appreciate your comments submitted on the proposed rule that published in the Federal Register on January 21, 2010 (74 FR 3434), and will respond to and address all comments in the final rule to implement Amendment 3. Our intent is to publish a final rule as soon as possible.

Additionally, NMFS is aware of the March 17, 2010, meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at which the SSC revised the interim acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the skate complex based upon new scientific information. My staff and I look forward to working with the Council, as necessary, to address the outcome of this meeting. I appreciate the hard work that you and your staff put into developing Amendment 3 and the Council's ongoing efforts to rebuild overfished skate species.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Kurkul
Regional Administrator

