



New England Fishery Management Council News Brief

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What Happened at the Council Meeting This Week?

Major Actions Taken by the New England Fishery Management Council June 18-20, 2013 - Portland, Maine

Newburyport, MA Several actions were approved for further development by the New England Fishery Management Council at its meeting earlier this week in Portland, ME. The 18-member Council directed its staff and technical groups to refine and analyze measures that would affect fishermen who participate in the Atlantic herring and groundfish fisheries. The latter includes cod, haddock, pollock, redfish and a number of flounder species.

The Council also identified measures to enhance groundfish fishery productivity by improving spawning and habitat protection as part of its work on a comprehensive plan to update essential fish habitat protections. After development, review and approval these measures may become fisheries regulations.

Atlantic Herring The Council agreed to formally develop measures that would protect river herring (alewife and blueback herring) and both American and hickory shad, because of concerns about the poor condition of these stocks. They are vulnerable to the fishing gear used to target Atlantic herring.

In considering a cap on the amounts of river herring and shad that may be taken in the Atlantic herring fishery the Council adopted the following goals:

- To provide strong incentives for the industry to continue to avoid and reduce the catch of these species to the extent practicable;
- To enhance coordination with the Mid-Atlantic Council to address overlapping fisheries; and
- To promote flexibility to adjust the cap in the future as more information becomes available.

Finally, the Council agreed that the river herring/shad catch cap would apply to all trips landing more than the open access possession limit of 6,600 pounds of Atlantic herring and gave direction that the catch cap areas for the Atlantic herring fishery be analyzed by statistical area clusters and gear type.

Groundfish After receiving updated information about the fishery, details about sector management operations and input from its Groundfish Advisory Panel, the Council unanimously voted to replace the existing goals and objectives of Amendment 18 to its Groundfish Fishery Management Plan with the following:

1. To promote a diverse groundfish fishery, including different gear types, vessel sizes, ownership patterns, geographic locations and levels of participation through sectors and permit banks;
2. To enhance sector management to effectively engage industry to achieve management goals and improve data quality;
3. To promote the resilience and stability of fishing businesses by encouraging diversification, quota utilization and capital investment; and
4. To prevent any individual(s), corporation(s) or other entity(ies) from acquiring or controlling excessive shares of the fishery access privileges.

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Work on this action will continue over the summer, fall and early winter, with Groundfish Committee meetings to be announced once they are scheduled.

Habitat The Council identified the range of alternatives that will be analyzed over the next several months as part of the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat 2 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In doing so, Council members approved management options for habitat and spawning areas on a regional basis and developed measures for these areas. Spawning areas will have seasonal restrictions on gears capable of catching groundfish; sensitive habitat areas will have year-round restrictions on mobile bottom tending gears or trawl gear modifications, with possible exemptions for hydraulic clam dredges. Three different Dedicated Habitat Research Areas were included in the alternatives.

Additional Habitat and Groundfish Committee work will focus on any necessary refinements to the management areas and measures. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be approved by the Council this November, with public hearings likely scheduled in mid-winter, followed by final action in April 2014.

The New England Council develops rules for both large and small-scale commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the coastlines of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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