



New England Fishery Management Council

December 20, 2011

In November, the Gulf of Maine cod stock assessment underwent a peer review by a team of independent scientists at the 53rd Stock Assessment Workshop at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. We expect a final report from that peer review process in January. The preliminary results indicate that the stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring and that it will not rebuild by the 2014 deadline. If the final peer review report accepts the assessment, it will be necessary to set catch limits lower in 2012 than they were in 2011.

Given the potential implications for groundfish fishermen and fishing communities, NOAA Fisheries Service and the New England Fishery Management Council convened a working group. The working group explored possible options to maintain progress under the new sector management system and mitigate impacts on the fishing industry of lower cod catch limits in 2012.

Working group members met with fishing industry representatives, environmentalists, scientists and others during an open meeting on December 9, 2011 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire to discuss the stock assessment preliminary findings and solicit ideas and suggestions about how to address this challenge.

We want to thank all of those who were able to attend the meeting and share some of the ideas put forth with those who were not able to participate. A summary of the meeting can be found on the Council, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Office and Northeast Fisheries Science Center websites.

NOAA and the Council will consider these suggestions to determine if they are consistent with applicable federal fisheries law. Collectively, we are committed to exploring all options to ensure the highest catch levels possible that do not jeopardize cod stock health but minimize the economic impacts on the fishing industry. Updated information about our progress can be found at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/gomcod/>.

Sincerely,

Eric C. Schwaab
NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

C.W. Cunningham
New England Fishery Management Council Chair