



ISSUE BRIEF:

HADDOCK: Mitigation Options and Underfishing our U.S. Quotas

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In August, the [New England Fisheries Management Council and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration indicated](#) that "Several important fish stocks are in poor condition and some catch limits for 2013 will be reduced markedly from 2012." The anticipated severe cuts could be approximately 70% for cod, [Gulf of Maine](#) haddock and American plaice. Yellowtail flounder stock cuts are predicted to be approximately 50%. At the time these announcements were made, Samuel Rauch, head of NOAA Fisheries, and C.M. "Rip" Cunningham Jr., chair of the New England Fishery Management Council, stated "While there is unlikely to be any solution to fully mitigate the challenges in 2013, we plan to continue to work closely with the industry to explore every possible option."

One perennial problem in U.S. northeastern fisheries management has been a patchwork of regulations that prevent U.S. fishermen from harvesting healthy stocks to their full sustainable levels as determined by best available science. This problem exists in several fisheries, including pollock, redfish, and haddock. This issue brief examines options that could allow U.S. fishermen to fish [Georges Bank](#) haddock up to the scientifically determined total allowable catch.

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United States Georges Bank haddock, especially when compared to Canadian haddock from the same stock, is underfished. By "underfished," we refer to the fact that US fishermen routinely fish significantly less than the scientifically determined total allowable catch.

Several regulatory barriers are preventing the successful exploitation of haddock, ultimately resulting in fishermen leaving hundred of millions of dollars in the ocean and the continuation of pressure on unhealthy stocks. There are a variety of precipitant factors influencing underfishing in the US:

- In the United States, fishermen may only keep haddock that are over 18 inches in length. In Canada, which shares the haddock resource with the US, no such minimum fish size is set. The US is the only country in the world to require a minimum fish size. Thus, Canadians are able to catch 15 and 16-inch haddock, and export them after processing to US markets as fillets. Our fishermen cannot do this because they have to meet the US minimum length size for the whole fish. There is no minimum size for processed fillets, nor is there any way to determine from examining a processed fillet the length of the fish from which it came.
- While the US requires a minimum size for haddock landings, fishermen often catch smaller fish in their nets. These fish, most of which are already dead, need to be discarded.

- In 2003, the year class of haddock was the largest recorded at the time. Because of size limits, these fish could first be caught by the US fishery starting in 2007. Since 2007, the US catch of haddock has averaged around 18 percent of the assigned haddock quota. During the same time period, and exploiting the same resource, Canadian fishermen caught an average of 94 percent of their quota.
- If the United States caught the same percentage of its haddock quota as the Canadians, industry observers estimate that it could have translated to an extra \$485 million in landings for the period between 2007-2011.

There are several reasons that Canadian fishermen are able to catch so much of their quota, while the US has been much less successful with its own.

- The fishery is currently managed by a combination of input controls (that attempt to restrict fishing by limiting fishing effort) and output controls (regulations that control the total allowable catch). Doing both at the same time is impractical, as two different tools are being used to manage the fishery simultaneously. If strong output controls are enacted, such as a hard TAC, input controls can be relinquished and a more efficient catch can result.
- NMFS studies demonstrate that the wrong minimum mesh size on haddock nets is being used in the United States. Currently, the United States has a minimum mesh size of six and one half inches, while the Canadian minimum mesh size is 5-1/4 inches. This allows Canadian fishermen to fish more efficiently. With the current mesh size, about 50 percent of the legal-size fish that are caught by US fishermen escape from the net.
- The closed areas for haddock in the United States were implemented to protect haddock. The haddock stock no longer needs this protection, and is experiencing record highs for the population.
- One US closed area goes up to the Hague line, allowing Canadians to fish on its edge, giving Canadian fishermen the ability to gain from a US closed area, but depriving Americans of the that benefit.

Suggestions and Implications

- The 2010 year class of haddock is the largest ever recorded. These fish are now becoming large enough to harvest. Canadian fishermen are already taking advantage of this. Because of the size of the year class, the US quota next year will be very large, estimated to be about 50,000 tons.
- The United States needs to become better at catching and landing these fish in order to lessen pressure on unhealthy stocks.

The United States can mitigate and minimize the harm of the oncoming cuts to New England groundfish by eliminating the barriers that have been preventing fishermen from fulfilling quotas of the healthiest stocks.

Recommendations:

1. Re-open the closed areas where possible, as the haddock stock is healthy.
2. Change to the appropriate mesh size.
3. Lower the minimum possession size. (Under consideration in Framework 48)
4. Change to a full retention fishery. (Under consideration in Framework 48)