

The Council Report summarizes major actions approved at NEFMC meetings or highlights items of interest to stakeholders.

At its April 23-25, 2013 meeting, the Council:

- ◆ Discussed and approved a number of groundfish-related motions
- ◆ Received the Groundfish Closed Area Technical Team's first report
- ◆ Developed a position on NOAA Fisheries monkfish interim emergency action
- ◆ Initiated Framework 25 to the Scallop Plan
- ◆ Established a Risk Policy Working

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Council Report

May 2013

Wide-Ranging Groundfish Issues Addressed

Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank Haddock Quotas Debated

Based on discussions about the disparate stock sizes of Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock and Georges Bank (GB) haddock and the difference it will make to groundfish fishermen in 2013, the Council approved a motion requesting that "NOAA Fisheries implement by emergency action a measure that will attribute up to 10 percent of GB haddock quota to the GOM haddock quota and up to 10 percent of the GOM haddock quota to GB haddock quota."

Concerns were expressed that even a small amount of migration into the GOM of GB haddock will put fishermen at risk for a closure of the fishery if their catches reach the annual catch limit which is currently set at a very low level.

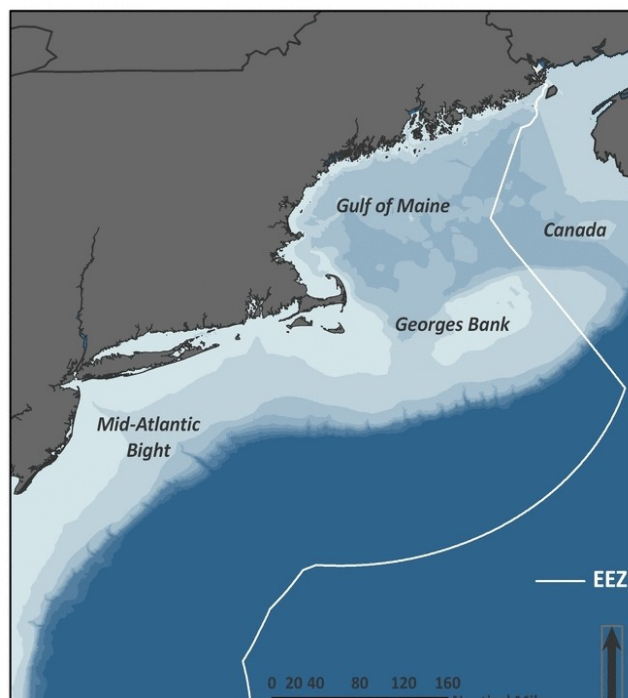
GB haddock, on the other hand, is an abundant stock, it is not overfished, nor is overfishing occurring. A transfer would not change that status, but could dramatically increase the amount of haddock fishermen in the Gulf of Maine are allowed to catch and allow the harvest of other species in the area to continue for a longer period of time.

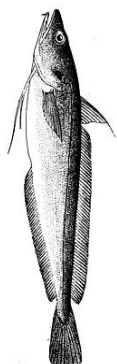
The motion at the Council meeting grew out of a Groundfish Committee debate in which

a "spillover hypothesis" was outlined. During that discussion, at least one committee member cited the work of a Northeast Fisheries Science Center scientist which provided a basis for the possibility that the GOM haddock fishery in the 1980s was completely supported by a spillover from the much larger GB stock.

There were varying views on this scenario, the rationale for the 10 percent transfer amount and the impacts of changing the fishermen's allocations.

Because some on the Council posed similar questions, its members passed a second motion that tasked the Groundfish Plan Development Team and the Scientific and Statistical Committee with examining the issue of GB haddock spillover into the GOM stock area, provide an estimate of the amount of spillover when large year classes of GB haddock occur, and provide suggestions as to how the anticipated spillover of the strong 2010 year class can be used to adjust the GOM haddock ABC for fishing years 2013-2015. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote.

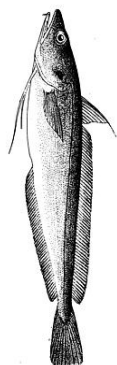




Joint Groundfish & Habitat Committee Meetings

Fri., May 17
Sheraton
Harborside
Hotel
Portsmouth,
NH

Tues., June 11
Providence
Biltmore Hotel
Providence, RI



More Groundfish ...

White Hake Availability Likely to Increase

The Council requested that NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to incorporate the most recent white hake assessment results provided by the 56th Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee and implement a revised 2013 annual catch limit as soon as possible during the fishing year to provide additional opportunities to the groundfish fleet.

As the Council previously announced, the improvements in the white hake stock condition opened the door for a higher than anticipated quota for fishing year 2013. Based on the new information, the 2013 allowable biological catch could be increased by 13 percent to just over nine million pounds from proposed limits of approximately eight million pounds.

Monitoring of Catch Size Composition Requested
NEFMC and ultimately NOAA Fisheries approval of a reduction in the minimum sizes of a number of groundfish stocks through Framework Adjustment 48 to the Northeast Mul-

tiespecies Fishery Management Plan has generated concern among some fishermen as well as state fisheries officials that the change may lead to an undetected shift in the size composition of the catch. To address any potential problems, the Council voted to ask that NOAA Fisheries:

- Monitor and determine the catch size composition of cod, haddock, gray sole, yellowtail flounder, plaice and redfish;
- Perform targeted port sampling to determine size composition of landings of these groundfish (supplementing expected low levels of at-sea coverage;
- Provide the Council and public with quarterly updates of monitoring results including whether catch of small fish as a proportion of total catch has increased relative to FY 2011; and
- Determine if fishermen are targeting smaller fish leading to a different fishery selectivity having negative implications for yield per recruit, status determination criteria and rebuilding progress.

The measures were approved as a means to reduce regulatory discards and increase revenue from catch. In the groundfish fishery, all catch, including landings and discards, are counted against the annual catch limits.

Amendment 18 on Track

The Council was briefed on the progress of PDT data analysis that will support the refinement of goals and objectives for Amendment 18, as well as fishery performance up through the first half of fishing year 2012. No motions were made relative to the amendment. The PDT is expected to report its work in June.

Electronic Monitoring Group to be Established

In another unanimously approved motion, the Council agreed to convene an electronic monitoring working group for the purpose of identifying existing barriers and/or future steps to be taken by NOAA Fisheries to expedite implementation. The group will provide an update at the June Council meeting and a full overview of its recommendation in September.

Big Picture Items Approved

Several other groundfish-related motions were approved at the meeting.

1. Members voted to send a letter to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center asking:

a.) that it establish a research track to map changes to spawning sites and general distribution of all groundfish and explore what these changes mean to long term yield from the fishery; and b.) incorporate

ecosystem reference points as a term of reference in all future groundfish assessments.

2. The Council agreed to consider the development of an ecosystem management plan as a management priority in 2014.

3. The Council requested that the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) or Science Center initiate the develop-

ment of a new set of groundfish reference points that take into account current environmental conditions in the Northeast.

Once that work is completed, the SSC would calculate new ABCs and ACLs as revised reference points were made available, according to the Council motion.

First CATT Report Presented

The Council received the first report from its Closed Area Technical Team (or CATT). The group of fisheries experts spent the last three months responding to a Council request to examine area management options that could enhance groundfish fishery productivity.

The Council's objectives were to improve spawning protection, protection of critical groundfish habitats, refuge for critical life history stages; and access to both use and non-use benefits arising from closed area management across gear types, fisheries and groups.

Specific options were presented that would protect areas with aggregations of juvenile groundfish --- for example, young cod up to 10 inches in spring and summer and up to

14 inches in the fall and winter --- by limiting fishing gears that have adverse habitat impacts. Further, seasonal "hot spots" of spawning-sized groundfish, older and larger animals, were used to identify times and places during which fishing could have a negative effect on spawning activity.

While a motion did not pass that would have provided specific direction to the CATT as it further refines the options presented, many NEFMC members expressed their opinions about narrowing the scope of the CATT analyses during the discussions.

Because the Council's Habitat Committee and Habitat Plan Development Team have also been examining the adverse effects of fishing on vulnerable bottom substrates and habitats,

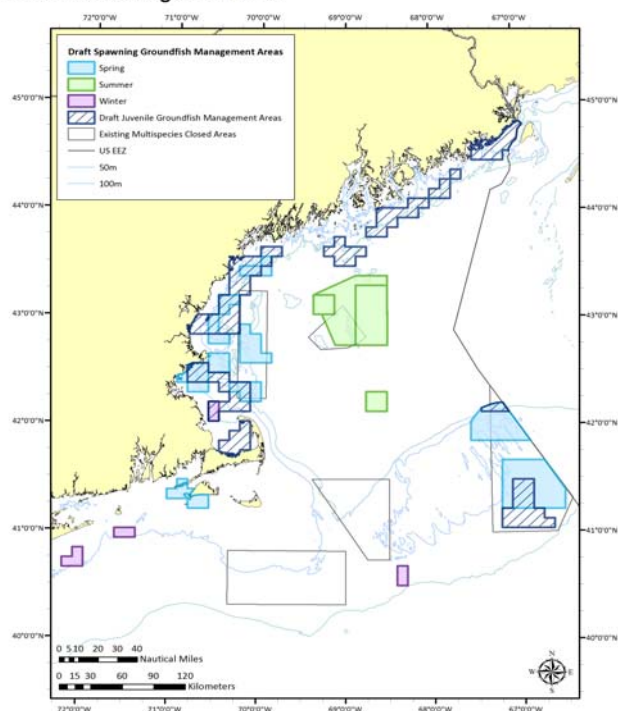
next steps were discussed to integrate that work, including a number of proposed area closures, with the CATT's options. Joint Groundfish/Habitat Committee meetings are scheduled for May 17 in Portsmouth, NH and June 11 in Providence, RI. The end product will ultimately become an action that amends all New England Council Fishery Management Plans in Habitat Omnibus Amendment 2.

The maps below depict the Closed Area Technical Team's identification of areas to protect juvenile and spawning groundfish. These areas as well as the Habitat Committee's proposals below will be revised prior to the June 2013 Council meeting in Portland, ME.

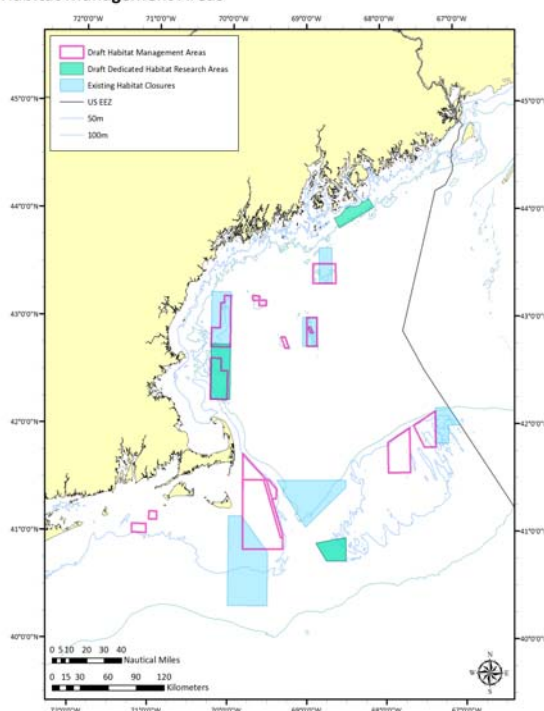
Correction

On April 26, a Council press release incorrectly stated that the Council narrowed the focus of the CATT analyses to the region's two cod stocks, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, the two haddock stocks, halibut, ocean pout, Southern New England winter flounder and wolffish. Although there was extensive discussion and public comment, specific stocks were not explicitly identified at the April Council meeting.

Groundfish Management Areas



Habitat Management Areas



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**Next Council
Meeting
June 18-20
Holiday Inn
by the Bay
Portland, ME**

More News - Monkfish, Sea Scallops, New Working Group

NOAA Fisheries has proposed an emergency action that would eliminate monkfish trip limits while vessels are on a monkfish day-at-sea (DAS) in the Northern Management Area. The purpose of the action is to alleviate some of the economic impacts of upcoming cuts in the 2013 quotas for several important groundfish stocks. Many members of the public and Council expressed a belief that the proposed action would be insufficient to accomplish its purpose.

In response, the Council requested that the agency expedite an increase in the monkfish possession limit while vessels fish on a *groundfish* DAS as follows: 600 pounds (tail weight) per groundfish DAS for Category D vessels and 1,250 pounds (tail weight) per DAS for Category C vessels in the Northern Management Area

The Council formed an ABC Control Rule Working Group to help develop a "risk policy" that would guide the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee in making ABC recommendations. The need for an ABC risk policy was the focus of a workshop held by the Council in March. The Working Group would provide the Council with risk policy alternatives for ABC control rules and options about how to implement them.

only. These are equivalent to the current trip limits on vessels fishing on a *monkfish* DAS. Since the Council meeting NOAA has published a temporary emergency action with an effective date of May 1 and a May 30, 2013 comment period deadline because it is a temporary rule. The Council intends to formally communicate its concerns and remedy during this period.

The Council initiated Framework Adjustment 25 to the Scallop Plan at the April meeting. It will include specifications for fishing year 2014 and default measures for 2015. Specifications include acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limits (ACLs), days-at-sea (DAS), access area allocations, total IFQ for limited access general category (LAGC) vessels, a Northern Gulf of Maine hard-total allow-

able catch (TAC), a target TAC for incidental LAGC catch permits and set-asides for observer and research programs. Framework Adjustment 25 will also include accountability measures for the sub-annual catch limit allocated to the scallop fishery for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic windowpane flounder.

Finally, the Council agreed to consider an item recommended by the Scallop Committee – measures to address low catch rates in Closed Area I. Due to very low catch rates it is possible that all 2013 trips may not be taken. Accordingly, Framework 25 will address measures to potentially extend the deadline for these trips or other measures that would address the issue. Final action is scheduled for November 2013 with a May 2014 implementation date.

The workgroup will consist of two members from the following groups, the Council and Council staff, the SSC and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and a representative from the NMFS Northeast Regional Office. The Working Group will report in September to enable the Council to decide in November how to prioritize further development of an ABC risk policy in terms of committing its resources.



The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, initially enacted in 1976. The Council develops rules for both large and small-scale commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the region's coastline. NEFMC management authority extends to fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and southern New England and overlaps with the Mid-Atlantic Council for some species.