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New England Fishery Management Council

Groundfish: Council Approves Framework 59; Receives Progress Report on Monitoring Amendment 23

During its early December meeting in Newport, RI, the New England Fishery Management Council approved Framework Adjustment 59 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Among other provisions, the framework includes 2020-2022 specifications for 15 groundfish stocks in the Northeast multispecies complex, as well as total allowable catches (TACs) for three groundfish resources on Georges Bank that the U.S. shares with Canada.

Also on the groundfish end, the Council received:

• A presentation from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) on the recent operational assessments for 14 groundfish stocks – the report and presentation are available here;

• A report from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on the SSC’s overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for groundfish stocks and Atlantic sea scallops – the presentation and related documents can be found here;

• A progress report on Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23;

• A report on this spring’s recreational public listening sessions, which were held to gauge interest in whether the Council should pursue developing a limited access program for the groundfish party and charter

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### Commercial Groundfish Sub-Annual Catch Limits (sub-ACLs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock</th>
<th>FY2019 (adjusted for FY2017 overages*)</th>
<th>Proposed FY2020</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GB Cod</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>1,073</td>
<td>-32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOM Cod*</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Haddock**</td>
<td>53,276</td>
<td>69,521</td>
<td>+30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOM Haddock**</td>
<td>8,312</td>
<td>7,020</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Yellowtail Flounder</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>+12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>+73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Plaice**</td>
<td>1,467</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>+79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch Flounder</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>1,310</td>
<td>+53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Winter Flounder</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOM Winter Flounder</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>-19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNE/MA Winter Flounder</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redfish</td>
<td>10,972</td>
<td>11,231</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Hake</td>
<td>2,735</td>
<td>2,019</td>
<td>-26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollock**</td>
<td>37,400</td>
<td>13,895</td>
<td>-63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key

- GB: Georges Bank
- GOM: Gulf of Maine
- SNE: Southern New England
- MA: Mid-Atlantic
- CC: Cape Cod

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Commercial groundfish sub-ACL

1. Sub-ACLs are for sectors/common pool combined.
2. Georges Bank cod reflects updated information from the NEFSC.
3. Stocks marked ** will be revisited by the SSC for further consideration and are subject to change.
The proposed specifications in Framework 59 are based on OFL and ABC recommendations from the Council’s SSC, which developed this advice using:

1. Results from the latest peer-reviewed groundfish assessments; and
2. Input from the Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT).

The Council then used the SSC’s recommendations to determine catch limits for 2020-2022, although it did vote to send the ABCs for four stocks – Gulf of Maine haddock, Georges Bank haddock, American plaice, and pollock – back to the SSC for reconsideration. In short, the SSC supported a “constant catch” approach for these stocks, keeping the ABC fixed for all three fishing years. The Council asked the SSC to review whether to maintain this approach or allow the ABC to change based on the catch associated with 75% of the fishing mortality rate at the stock’s maximum sustainable yield (MSY). This second approach is part of the default ABC control rule for groundfish in Amendment 16 and would result in higher catch limits compared to the constant catch approach. All four stocks are healthy and well above their spawning stock biomass targets based on the latest assessments.

The Council agreed in advance to accept the SSC’s final recommendations for the four stocks “without objection” following this ABC review in order to prevent a delay in implementation, which is targeted for May 1, the start of the 2020 groundfish fishing year pending NOAA Fisheries review and approval.
As part of the framework, the Council also voted to:

- Revise the allocation between the commercial and recreational fisheries for Gulf of Maine cod and Gulf of Maine haddock based on the new 2019 assessments for those stocks, which used updated data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP);
- Revise the Georges Bank cod incidental catch TAC to remove the allocation to the Closed Area I Hook Gear Haddock Special Access Program; and
- Increase the Atlantic herring midwater trawl fishery’s sub-ACL for Georges Bank haddock from 1.5% to 2% of the U.S. ABC for the stock.

**Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23**

The Council spent time reviewing the latest updates to Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23, which is being developed to improve the reliability and accountability of catch reporting in the commercial groundfish fishery. The Council is working to ensure that both landings and discards are precisely and accurately represented in the fishery. Proposals under consideration include a wide range of potential sector monitoring standards and tools, monitoring coverage levels, reporting provisions, possible use of dockside monitoring, and much more.

“It is the Council’s intent that the catch reporting requirements are fair and equitable for all commercial groundfish fishermen while maximizing the value of collected catch data and minimizing costs for the fishing industry and the National Marine Fisheries Service.”

– Draft Amendment 23

At its January 28-30, 2020 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, the Council will approve the Amendment 23 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) containing the full range of alternatives going out to public hearing this spring. The Council also will approve preliminary preferred alternatives in January.

- Visit the Amendment 23 webpage.
- All groundfish-related materials using during the Council’s December meeting can be found here.
- Questions? Contact Dr. Jamie Cournane, the Council’s groundfish plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 103, jcournane@nefmc.org.