



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 5, 2020

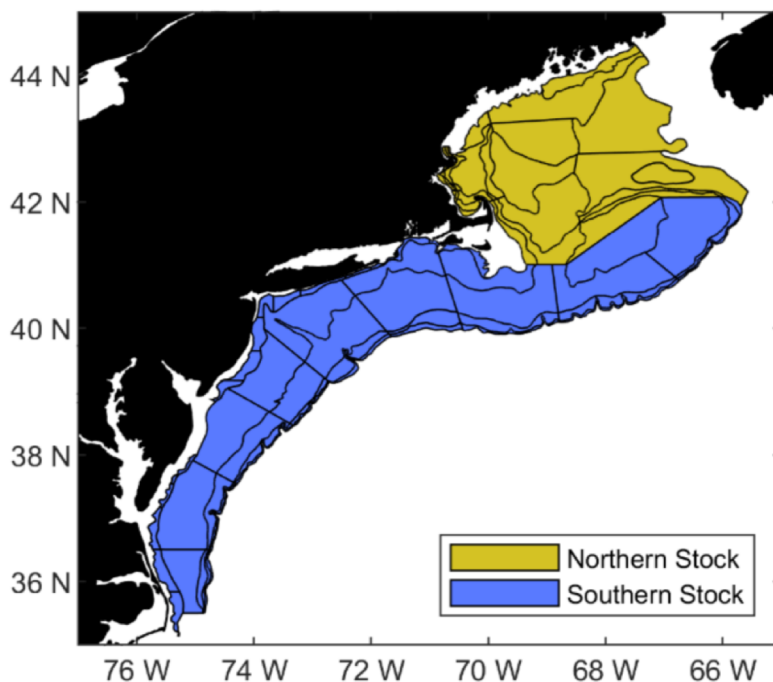
PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Red Hake: Council Reviews Preliminary Results from Research Track Assessment; Discusses Southern Stock Rebuilding Action

During its April 14-15, 2020 webinar meeting, the New England Fishery Management Council received a presentation from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center on preliminary results from the [Red Hake Stock Structure Peer Review](#) meeting. It then received a progress report on management measures that are under development to rebuild the southern stock of red hake. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this rebuilding package in June.

Currently, red hake is assessed as two distinct stocks – one northern and one southern (see map). As part of the research track assessment, a [working group](#) was established to evaluate whether it is appropriate to continuing using this two-stock assumption or whether an alternative approach would be better.

The working group was made up of scientists from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, state agencies, and academia. It met several times between November 2019 and February 2020 and examined red hake growth, maturity, spawning patterns, and other characteristics. The working group also was charged with evaluating how well the federal bottom trawl survey catches red hake and what that means for population assessments.



The trawl survey area for the northern stock of red hake roughly ranges from the Gulf of Maine to the northern edge of Georges Bank. The survey area for the southern stock spreads from Georges Bank to the Mid-Atlantic.

Although final reports from the peer review panel members were not available in mid-April, the Council was presented with the following preliminary findings.

- The working group concluded there was not enough evidence to reject the current two-stock structure. The peer review panel agreed with this conclusion.
- The working group concluded that the current model being used to assess the status of red hake should **not** be used



New England Fishery Management Council

for estimating stock status. The peer review panel agreed with this conclusion.

- The working group put forward an alternative assessment approach using catchability studies and life history data.
- The peer review panel found the alternative approach to be well thought out and potentially useful in future applications, but it did **not** formally adopt the approach in the current research track assessment.
- Given the information at hand, the review panel, qualitatively speaking, stated that “overfishing is not likely occurring on either stock.” The panel noted that it was “unlikely” the northern stock was overfished, but it was “not able to conclude whether or not the southern stock was overfished.”
- The working group and review panel noted that fishing activity was not likely to be the primary driver of changes in biomass.

The peer review panel’s comments are recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries), which will make the final status determination.

Southern Red Hake Rebuilding Action

The Council is working on a management action to rebuild southern red hake. It initiated this action well before receiving preliminary results from the research track assessment. In short, here is how this complicated course of events unfolded.

- The Northeast Fisheries Science Center completed an assessment for southern red hake in 2017 using data through 2016. The assessment concluded the stock was overfished and overfishing was occurring. The report is available [here](#).
- NMFS’s Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) informed the Council of this change in stock status through a January 8, 2018 letter and asked the Council to prepare a relevant action “within two years of the date of this letter.” The status change and rebuilding requirement were published on [March 5, 2018](#) in the Federal Register.
- If the Council does not take action, the Secretary of Commerce, through NMFS, is required by law to develop and implement a rebuilding plan within nine months of when the Council’s two-year window for doing so expires. Technically, the Council’s two-year rebuilding clock for southern red hake expired in January. Under this timeline, NMFS must implement rebuilding measures in September 2020.
- The Council voted during its [September 2019](#) meeting to initiate an action to rebuild southern red hake. In December, the Council reviewed [conceptual approaches](#) to southern red hake rebuilding. In January 2020, the Council approved the [range of alternatives](#) for further analysis, and the Council received another update at its [April meeting](#).



Fishing vessels do not target red hake in either stock area. Very few trips have noteworthy landings. In general, red hake are not marketable. Most are discarded rather than landed. Stock rebuilding measures for southern red hake are expected to have a relatively small economic impact on the industry.



New England Fishery Management Council

The Council determined that developing measures through its own process, utilizing the expertise of its Whiting Committee and Advisory Panel, was the appropriate way to move forward versus having independent secretarial action if rebuilding measures are necessary.

Next Steps: In light of these events, here's what will happen next.

- NMFS will review the results of the research track assessment and make a formal determination on whether overfishing is occurring and if the stock is overfished.
- Meanwhile, the Council will continue to develop a rebuilding plan unless the agency determines it is not necessary. Barring further guidance from NMFS, the Council is planning to take final action on southern red hake rebuilding measures at its [June 23-25, 2020](#) meeting.
- GARFO informed the Council that it will work expeditiously to use the Council's framework adjustment as the basis for the rebuilding plan that the agency is obligated to implement in September.
- A management track assessment – used to develop catch advice – is scheduled for later this year (see blue box for details).

What's in the Framework?

The Council's framework adjustment includes alternatives to establish a new rebuilding timeline for southern red hake and a new possession limit that would apply to all fisheries in the southern management area. The alternatives are:

- No Action: a 5,000-pound possession limit until landings reach 40.4% of the total allowable landings (TAL), which triggers a reduction to 400 pounds;
- Status Quo: a 5,000-pound possession limit until landings reach 90% of the TAL, which triggers a reduction to 400 pounds (these are the measures that existed when the stock became overfished);
- A 1,000-pound possession limit with a 400-pound accountability measure (40.4% of the TAL) ;
- A 600-pound possession limit with a 400-pound accountability measure (40.4% of the TAL);
- A 400-pound possession limit; and
- A zero-pound possession limit.

➤ *Here is the [presentation](#) the Council received in April about the framework adjustment.*

Fall 2020 Management Track Assessments

Northern red hake, southern red hake, silver hake, and offshore hake will undergo management track assessments this fall.

- **These assessments will begin with an assessment oversight panel (AOP) meeting on [May 27, 2020](#) where the level of technical review needed for each stock will be determined.**
- **The resulting assessments will undergo peer review during a [September 14-18, 2020](#) meeting.**
- **The findings will be used by the Council to develop 2021-2023 specifications for small-mesh multispecies. Learn more at:**
 - [2020 Management Track Assessments](#)
 - [Northeast Region Stock Assessment Process](#)

➤ **Questions?** *Contact Andrew Applegate, the Council's small-mesh multispecies coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 114; aapplegate@nefmc.org.*