

Regional Administrator's Report

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) **General**

Groundfish Fishery Disaster Funding

On May 28th, NOAA Fisheries announced that State fishery directors from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York, with support from NOAA Fisheries, reached agreement on a regional approach to distributing disaster funds to the New England multispecies fishery. The 2014 fiscal budget includes \$75 million for six fishery disasters around the country, \$32.8 million of which is for the multispecies fishery.

The plan funds several key components developed by the state directors and industry. It splits the \$32.8 million into thirds (roughly \$11 million in each), allocating:

- One-third towards direct assistance to qualifying fishery participants (any limited access multispecies permit holder that landed 5,000 lb of regulated multispecies in any one fishing year from 2010 through 2013),
- one-third to be split among the states “to restore the fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future, and to assist a fishing community affected by such failure,” and
- one-third to be held in reserve for development of a federally funded buyout or an industry-funded buyback.

ONLY if asked about state shares:

Under this plan, one third, or \$11 million, would be set aside for the potential development of a government led buyout program or to support an industry-funded buyback program. The remaining two-thirds, approximately \$22 million, would be divided between the six states as follows:

- Connecticut: \$250,000
- Massachusetts: \$14,512,618
- Maine: \$2,260,034
- New Hampshire: \$2,039,825
- New York: \$814,012
- Rhode Island: \$1,938,617

Gear Stowage Measures

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on **May 29, 2014**, requesting comments on a new method for on-reel trawl gear stowage when fishing vessels are transiting closed areas or fishing in areas with mesh size restrictions. The comment period closes **June 30, 2014**.

Specifically, this action proposes to allow the use of a highly visible orange mesh material, in addition to the current requirement to use a tarp or similar canvas material. Also, this action would remove the requirement to detach the towing wires from the doors for all on-reel gear stowage. This action would be implemented under authority delegated to the NMFS Regional Administrator, at the request of the Council, and is intended to improve safety of fishing operations while at sea.

Northeast Electronic Monitoring Workshop

We hosted a workshop with The Nature Conservancy and New England Council in Portsmouth, NH, on **May 7-8, 2014**, to discuss next steps for implementation of electronic monitoring (EM) in the groundfish and Atlantic herring fisheries. Nearly 100 participants attended the meeting, representing a wide range of interests. Participants developed a series of preliminary recommendations for the Council and NOAA Fisheries to consider, including next steps for advancing EM as an option for monitoring the Atlantic herring fishery. These recommendations are contained in a Summary Report that will be presented for discussion at the New England Council meeting next week. A final report from the workshop is expected in August, and both the Final Report and Summary Report will be available on our website.

Federally Permitted Dealer Data Collections

NMFS published a notice in the Federal Register on **April 23, 2014**, requesting comments on the extension of the collection of information from federally permitted dealers under the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. The comment period is currently open and closes **June 23, 2014**. Details on the notice are in our handouts Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions.

Vessel Name and Number Data Collection

NMFS published a notice in the Federal Register on **May 5, 2014**, requesting comments on a renewal for collection of information requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act. This collection of information involves the requirement for Federal permit holders to display their vessel name and official number on the vessel. The comment period is currently open and closes **July 7, 2014**. Details on the notice are also in our handout Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions.

(2) **Tilefish**

2013 Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Cost Recovery Report

The fourth annual report on the tilefish Individual Fishing Quota cost recovery program will be available shortly, but was not ready in time for this meeting. Copies will be sent to the Councils and will be available on the Regional Office website. The report details how the recoverable costs were determined across the Regional Office divisions and how the fee for each allocation holder was calculated based on their landings during the 2013 calendar year. For questions on the tilefish cost recovery program, or to request a copy of the report, please call Douglas Potts at the Regional Office.

(3) **Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish**

Potential for Joint Atlantic Mackerel Science and Management with Canada

Representatives from Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans have expressed interest in potentially pursuing joint United States/Canadian stock status review and quota establishment for Atlantic mackerel. The results of a 2014 Canadian stock assessment suggest that the Atlantic mackerel stock is in poor condition in North Atlantic Fisheries Organization Subareas 3 and 4, but coordination on science and management may help address stock abundance issues throughout the entire Atlantic mackerel range. We will keep the Council informed as these discussions progress.

(4) **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass**

Summer Flounder Quota Transfers

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on **May 20, 2014**, that transferred 2,634 lb of commercial summer flounder quota from Virginia to New Jersey. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2014 were: Virginia, 2,572,766 lb; and New Jersey, 1,912,290 lb. This transfer was prompted by safe harbor landings in New Jersey by a Virginia vessel.

NMFS published a second temporary rule in the Federal Register on **June 4, 2014**, that transferred 2,758 lb of commercial summer flounder quota from North Carolina to Virginia. This further revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2014 as: North Carolina, 2,729,195 lb; and Virginia, 2,388,012 lb. This transfer was prompted by safe harbor landings in Virginia by a North Carolina vessel. Additionally, this rule corrected the New Jersey 2014 summer flounder commercial quota to account for quota transfers to date that were not included in the final rule for the 2014 summer flounder specifications. The 2014 New Jersey summer flounder quota is 1,765,195 lb.

(5) **Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog**

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Closed Area

NMFS is developing a proposed rule to lift the area referred to as the Northern Temporary Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) Closed Area for bivalve harvesting.

NMFS is developing this action at the request of the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The action is based on the premise that the area has not been subject to a toxic algal bloom for several years, and testing of bivalve shellfish has demonstrated toxin levels well below those known to cause human illness.

In addition, the FDA has developed an agreement with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to conduct PSP monitoring of bivalves from the area in accordance with currently accepted PSP testing procedures. NMFS is expecting to publish a proposed rule early this summer.

(6) **Atlantic Sea Scallops**

Framework Adjustment 25 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on **May 9, 2014**. This rulemaking would set specifications for the scallop fishery for fishing year (FY) 2014, including days-at-sea (DAS) allocations, individual fishing quotas, and sea scallop access area trip allocations. This action would also set precautionary default FY 2015 specifications in case we implement the next framework after **March 1, 2015**, which is the start of FY 2015, and we need transitional measures.

In addition, Framework 25 considers allowing pounds that went unharvested in the Closed Area I Access Area in 2012 and 2013 to be landed in a future year; develops Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic windowpane flounder accountability measures; and provides full-time scallop vessels the option to exchange their allocated Delmarva Access Area trip for 5 DAS. The comment period for this rule closed on **May 27, 2014**, and we are currently preparing a final rule.

(7) **Multispecies**

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Catch Reporting Requirements and Unused Catch Carryover

On May 30, 2014, NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register to modify the VMS catch reporting for vessels declared to fish in the Eastern U.S./Canada Area. The revision to the reporting requirement is necessary to better ensure accurate and timely Eastern U.S./Canada Area catch reporting for quota monitoring purposes. This rule also announced that the *de minimis* amount of unused FY 2013 sector annual catch entitlement (ACE) that may be carried over, beginning in FY 2014, without being subject to potential accountability measures.

Fishing Year (FY) 2014 Sector Operation Plans

On April 28, 2014, NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register that approved sector operations plans for 2014, allocated quota for 15 groundfish stocks to each sector, and granted the sector vessels a number of exemptions. Seventeen sectors will operate, 16 of which will have active fishing vessels, and one sector that is a private permit bank. In addition to the universal sector exemptions, we granted 20 exemptions, including 3 new exemptions for 2014 as described below.

- Exemption from portions of the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area for groundfish vessels on a sector trip;
- Prohibition on combining a small-mesh exempted fishery and a sector trip on the same trip; and
- 6.5-inch minimum mesh size requirement for trawl nets to target redfish.

(8) **Spiny Dogfish**

Proposed Rule for Amendment 3

A proposed rule for Amendment 3 to the Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) published in the Federal Register on **April 10, 2014**. The comment period on the amendment closed on **May 27, 2014**. The Decision Date for Amendment 3 is **June 26, 2014**.

If approved, Amendment 3 would include the creation of a research set-aside quota for spiny dogfish, update Essential Fish Habitat definitions, allow the rollover of specifications from one year to the next, and remove the seasonal allocation of the commercial quota.

Proposed 2014-2015 Specifications

Proposed 2014-2015 specifications for the spiny dogfish fishery published in the Federal Register on **May 13, 2014**. The comment period closed on **June 12, 2014**.

The proposed specifications include increased annual catch limits and commercial quotas for the 2014-2015 fishing years. Based upon the New England Council's recommendation, NMFS proposed an unlimited trip limit for spiny dogfish, but will consider public comments before making a final decision.

(9) **Monkfish**

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on **May 27, 2014** to implement measures adopted under Framework Adjustment 8. The comment period closes **June 11, 2014**. This action would increase monkfish DAS allocations and landing limits, allow monkfish-only DAS to be used at any time, and allow Category H vessels to fish throughout the Southern Fishery Management Area. We expect to publish a final rule implementing any approved measures in early July.

(10) **Northeast Skates**

Proposed Rule for Framework 2

A proposed rule for Framework 2 to the Northeast Skate Complex FMP published in the Federal Register on **May 21, 2014**. The comment period on the framework closes on **June 20, 2014**.

Framework 2 would implement skate fishery specifications for the 2014-2015 fishing years, including reduced annual catch limits and total allowable landings. It also proposes changes to skate reporting requirements for vessels and dealers.

Status of Pending Actions - Not Necessarily for Public Announcement, and Other Informational Items

1. Atlantic Bluefish

The draft final rule for the 2014 Atlantic bluefish specifications was sent to Headquarters on **May 29th**, where it is under review.

The proposed allowable biological catch for bluefish is 24.432 million lb; the proposed rule will also specify total allowable landings (TAL) of 21.081 million lb, including a research-set-aside of 632,418 lb, a recreational harvest limit of 13.179 million lb, a transfer of 3.340 million lb from the recreational sector to the commercial sector, a commercial quota of 7.269 million lb, and a 15-fish recreational possession limit. This action is in response to a bluefish population model that was update in September 2013 and will adjust the current 2014 bluefish specifications that published in the Federal Register on **May 7, 2013**.

2. Vessel Baseline Amendment

The Council was scheduled to approve the draft amendment for public comment at this meeting. Since this did not get on the agenda, we will bring the draft amendment to the Council in August instead. This does not affect the implementation timeline.

3. Industry Funded Monitoring Amendment

Development of the draft amendment continues. We expect to bring a draft document to the Council in October.

4. Special Management Zones for Five Delaware Artificial Reefs

The proposed rule for Special Management Zones (SMZs) on Five Delaware Artificial Reefs has been sent to Headquarters for final review. We expect it to publish by the end of June.

This proposed rule responds to the recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The proposed five Delaware artificial reef SMZ sites are off the coast of Delaware at various distances from approximately 4 to 58 nautical miles (7.4 to 107.0 km), rectangular in shape, and, including their 500 yard (0.46 km) buffer zones, encompass areas from 7.42 to 8.81 square km. Within the established areas of the SMZs, all vessels would only be allowed to conduct fishing with hook and line and spear (including the taking of fish by hand).

5. Spiny Dogfish Amendment 3

A final rule for Spiny Dogfish Amendment 3 is under development at the Regional Office. It is expected to be sent to Headquarters in the next several weeks.

6. Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Seabass Recreational Specifications

The proposed rule comment period to implement recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass ended on **May 27, 2014**. We are working to publish a final rule as quickly as possible. Proposed measures include:

- Summer Flounder: Regional conservation equivalency
- Scup: 9" min. size (down from 10" last year); 30-fish bag limit; open-year round.
- Black Sea Bass Federal waters: 12.5" minimum size; 15-fish bag limit; Open May 19-September 18, October 18-December 31 (state measures will differ).