

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.

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) **Atlantic Sea Scallops**

Framework Adjustment 25 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register for Framework Adjustment 25 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan on **June 16, 2014**. The final rule was effective upon publishing. It sets 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 also sets precautionary default FY 2015 specifications in case the next framework is implemented after **March 1, 2015**, which is the start of FY 2015, and transitional measures are needed. In addition, Framework 25 allows 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 (effective **July 16, 2014**); and provides full-time scallop vessels the option to exchange their allocated Delmarva Access Area trip for 5 DAS.

(3) **Multispecies**

In May, we issued two Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) for seven vessels to fish in some of the groundfish closed areas. Details on the EFPs are in our handout Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions.

(4) **Atlantic Herring**

Proposed Rule for Atlantic Herring Framework 3

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on **June 13, 2014**, to implement measures adopted under Framework Adjustment 3. The comment period closes **July 14, 2014**. This action would establish a process for setting river herring (alewife and blueback) and shad (American and hickory) catch caps for the herring fishery and would set these catch caps for the 2014 and 2015 fishing years.

Possession Limit Implemented for Atlantic Herring Management Area 1B

On **May 22, 2014**, NMFS established a 2,000-lb herring possession limit for Herring Management Area 1B because it projected that 92 percent of the 2014 catch limit for that area was harvested. Vessels issued Federal herring permits may not fish for, catch, possess or land more than 2,000 lb of herring in or from Area 1B per trip or calendar day, beginning **May 24, 2014, through December 31, 2014**. This action is necessary to comply with the Herring Fishery Management Plan, and is intended to prevent over harvest in Area 1B.

(5) **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.

(6) **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 closed **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.

(7) **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.

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

1. Industry Funded Monitoring Amendment

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

2. 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 Vessel Monitoring System 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 that may be carried over, beginning in FY 2014, without being subject to potential accountability measures.

3. Multispecies 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.

4. 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. The comment period on the amendment closed on **May 27, 2014**. The Decision Date for Amendment 3 is **June 26, 2014**.

5. Spiny Dogfish 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**. A final rule is under development at the Regional Office.

6. 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.

7. Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass 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).

8. 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 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**.