



National Marine Fisheries Service
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov



Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

Prepared for the August 8-10, 2017
Meeting of the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

None at this time

Groundfish

Framework Adjustment 56 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP

The final rule for Framework 56 published in the Federal Register on August 1, 2017 (82 FR 35660). The action sets 2017 specifications for three U.S./Canada stocks (Eastern Georges Bank (GB) cod, Eastern GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder), as well as 2017-2019 specifications for witch flounder. This action also allocates northern windowpane flounder to the scallop fishery, revises the trigger for implementing the scallop fishery accountability measures (AMs) for GB yellowtail flounder and northern windowpane flounder, and increases the GB haddock allocation for the midwater trawl fishery.

The Framework 56 final rule also announced the implementation of AMs for northern and southern windowpane flounder due to a 2015 overage of the total annual catch limit (ACL) for both stocks. Based on new catch information, catch of both windowpane stocks was below the quota in 2016. The Groundfish FMP allows us to remove the groundfish fishery AM early if a subsequent overage does not occur. As a result, the AMs for groundfish vessels will only be in place for 1 month, through August 31, and will be removed on September 1. Because the FMP only provides us flexibility to remove the AM early for groundfish vessels, we are considering a future action to remove the AM for non-groundfish trawl vessels fishing with a codend mesh of 5 inches or greater. More information on the windowpane AM is available here: <https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/infodocs/windowpaneaminfosheet.pdf>.

Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Closure for Georges Bank Cod

On July 28, 2017, NMFS filed a temporary rule in the Federal Register to close the Trimester TAC area for Georges Bank Cod to groundfish common pool vessels fishing with hook, gillnet, and trawl gear. This closure includes statistical areas 521, 522, 525, and 561. This action is required when catch information shows the common pool fishery has harvested 90 percent of its Trimester 1 TAC for Georges Bank Cod. The area will reopen at the start of Trimester 2 on September 1, 2017. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255 or email at Claire.Fitz-Gerald@noaa.gov

Scallops

None at this time

Monkfish

Framework Adjustment 10 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan

NMFS approved Framework 10 through a final rule in the Federal Register (82 FR 32145) on July 12, 2017. Framework 10 sets monkfish specifications for fishing years 2017-2019 (May 1, 2017, through April 30, 2020). It also increases days-at-sea allocations and trip limits to provide additional operational flexibility and fishing opportunities. For additional information, please contact William Whitmore at (978) 281-9182 or email at William.Whitmore@noaa.gov.

Herring

None at this time

Skate

None at this time

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab

None at this time

Mid-Atlantic Council Actions

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

Massachusetts Commercial Summer Flounder Closure

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on July 21, 2017, (82 FR 33827) as notification that the 2017 commercial summer flounder quota allocated to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been harvested, and the fishery is closed for the remainder of the fishing year. Vessels holding Federal commercial permits are prohibited from landing summer flounder, effective 0001 hours, July 20, 2017, for the remainder of the 2017 calendar year, unless additional quota becomes available through a transfer from another state. This closure was coordinated with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' closure of its commercial summer flounder fishery to state permitted vessels and dealers on July 19, 2017. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

None at this time

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ Cost Recovery

On May 10, 2017, NMFS announced the 2017 cost recovery tag fees for the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries. This is the start of the new cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog ITQ fisheries. The 2017 tag fees are \$0.32 per surfclam tag and \$0.20 per ocean quahog tag. The fee to the ITQ shareholder will be based on how many cage tag numbers initial allocated to each shareholder are used to land clams, even if some or all of those tags are leased or otherwise transferred to another individual who uses them to land clams. NMFS will issue ITQ shareholders a single bill in March 2018 based on all of the cage tags used during 2017. Shareholders who do not use any tags will not receive a bill. The tag fee announcement is available online at:

www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/clam/. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Chub Mackerel

NMFS published a notice of intent in the Federal Register on March 22, 2017, (82 FR 14694) documenting the Mid-Atlantic Council's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to support integrating Atlantic chub mackerel into the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. This action would consider implementing annual catch limits, accountability measures, essential fish habitat designations, and a definition of the management unit for this species. The Council may also consider other measures such as permit requirements, annual catch targets, possession limits, minimum fish size restrictions, gear restrictions and reporting requirements. The comment period on the notice of intent closed on May 31, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Tilefish

Tilefish Framework 2

This action would modify the incidental possession limit, clarify allowed gear for recreational fishing, and make several improvements to the tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. We are currently preparing a proposed rule to seek public comment on the action. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Golden Tilefish Specifications 2018-2020

This action would identify separate quotas for the individual fishing quota and incidental fisheries, and implement golden tilefish specifications for fishing years 2018 through 2020. The proposed specifications represent an approximately 14-percent reduction in overall commercial quota from 2017 to ensure overfishing does not occur. We are currently preparing a proposed rule to seek public comment on the action. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Other Actions

Paperwork Reduction Act

Comment Period for Information Collection for the Greater Atlantic Region Vessel Identification Requirements

NFMS published a notice in the Federal Register on April 17, 2017, (82 FR 32175) announcing a 60-day comment period on a proposed extension to the Greater Atlantic Region Gear Identification collection of information as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden. Regulations require that owners of vessels over 25 ft in registered length that have Federal permits to fish in the Greater Atlantic Region display the vessel's name and official number. The name and number must be of a specific size at specified locations to be clearly visible from enforcement vessels and aircraft. The display of the identifying characters aids in fishery law enforcement. The public comment period is currently open, and ends on September 11, 2017. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Forage Species

Decision on the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment

On June 16, 2017, NMFS partially approved the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. NMFS disapproved the inclusion of bullet and frigate mackerel as ecosystem component species, but approved all other measures, including forage species and chub mackerel possession limits, an annual landing limit for chub mackerel, permit and reporting requirements, a transiting provision, and a list of allowable framework measures. We will publish a final rule documenting this decision, our responses to public comments, and final regulations shortly. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Lobster

None at this time

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Blueline Tilefish

Blueline Tilefish Amendment

NMFS published a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on June 14, 2017 (82 FR 27223), and a proposed rule on June 28, 2017 (82 FR 29263) for Tilefish Amendment 6. This amendment would add blueline tilefish to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and establish management measures for the resource in the Mid-Atlantic. The comment period on the proposed rule has closed, but we are accepting comments on the notice of availability through August 14, 2017. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or email at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

None at this time

Electronic Vessel Trip Report Omnibus Framework

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on May 24, 2017, (83 FR 23774) soliciting public comment on the eVTR Omnibus Framework Adjustment. The comment period closed on June 23, 2017. The eVTR Framework would implement a requirement for charter and party vessels that hold a Federal permit to fish for species managed by a Mid-Atlantic Council FMP, while on a trip carrying passengers for hire, to submit VTRs by electronic means. Vessels would be required to submit these reports through a NOAA-approved software application within 48 hours following the completion of a fishing trip. NMFS anticipates publishing a final rule shortly. For additional information, please contact Dan Luers at 978-282-8457 or Daniel.Luers@noaa.gov.

Omnibus Acceptable Biological Catch Framework

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Omnibus Acceptable Biological Catch Framework Adjustment

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on July 19, 2017, (82 FR 33036) that would provide consistency with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's risk policy for the Scientific and Statistical Committee to recommend constant multi-year ABCs if the overfishing probability average adheres to the appropriate risk policy overfishing probability goal. This action would also automatically incorporate new or updated status determination criteria at the conclusion of stock assessment peer-reviews for the Atlantic Bluefish, Golden Tilefish, and Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). In addition, this action would add regulatory language clarifying the assessment level designations for the Council's ABC control rule. The comment period for this proposed rule will close on August 18, 2017. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at 978-281-9112 or email at Reid.lichwell@noaa.gov.

Cost Recovery Programs

Cost Recovery Transition to CRS

The Regional Office is working with Centralized Receivables Service (CRS) to handle some aspects of billing and collections for the cost recovery aspects of our catch share programs; specifically Tilefish IFQ, LAGC Scallop IFQ, and Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ. CRS is a free service of the U.S. Treasury Dept. that assists other Federal agencies to issue bills and collect funds. This transition should help streamline our process and reduce some administrative costs that are currently charged to the industry. We are still working out some aspects of this change. When we finalize the new system, we will have a larger outreach effort to make sure the Council and the industry know exactly what these changes mean for them. The transition may be complete before the LAGC Scallop IFQ bills scheduled for November, and more certainly before the Tilefish IFQ and Surfclam/Ocean Quahog ITQ bills scheduled for March 2018. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or email at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Protected Resources Actions

None at this time

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Applications Under Review

On March 7, 2017, NMFS received an initial Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) request from the Environmental Defense Fund and Gulf of Maine Research Institute to test a maximized retention electronic monitoring (EM) program. A revised and complete EFP request was submitted on April 17, 2017. The application requests that participating vessels be exempt from commercial minimum fish sizes and be required to retain all allocated groundfish catch, regardless of size. Vessels would run EM on 100 percent of trips, and the video footage would be used to verify compliance with retention requirements. Catch would be sampled through a dockside monitoring program for all EFP trips. The applicants also requested that participating vessels be granted access to closed areas and be exempt from minimum mesh size requirements for trawl gear. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978)281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@gmail.com.

On April 5, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to expand TNC's existing electronic monitoring project. Data collected through this EFP would be used to further explore an audit-based EM model, in which a subset of EM video footage is reviewed to ensure accurate reporting. Participating vessels would use EM on 100 percent of sector trips and adhere to catch handling and reporting requirements. Participating vessels may be granted access to closed areas and other measures to improve business flexibility. NMFS published a notice for comment in the Federal Register on July 14, 2017 (82 FR 32534), and public comment closed on July 31, 2017. Vessels are in four separate sectors and use trawl, gillnet, tub trawl, and handline gear. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On April 27, 2017, NMFS received a complete EFP application from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) to test an experimental, off-bottom trawl net outfitted with 5.1-inch, or 4.5-inch codend mesh to target haddock and redfish. The EFP would allow researchers to test the experimental net during commercial fishing operations. This project was funded through the 2015 Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. Testing of the off-bottom trawl would occur August-December 2017. For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On May 23, 2017, NMFS received a request for a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) to test an experimental, off-bottom trawl net. This project was funded through the 2015 Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. Testing of the off-bottom trawl would occur in July and August 2017. For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On July 7, 2017, NMFS received a request for an LOA from GMRI in support of a study on the age structure of Atlantic cod inside and outside of the Cashes Ledge closed area. This project is funded by the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. Cod will be collected at 21 sites during a total of four research trips. For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On July 24, 2017, NMFS received a complete application from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center requesting EFPs for a pair of studies evaluating the catch rates of trawls equipped with cable turtle excluder devices (TEDs) compared to standard trawls (without the TEDs) in both the longfin squid and summer flounder fisheries. These EFPs would allow one commercial longfin squid vessel and two commercial summer flounder vessels to conduct paired comparative studies from August 2017-October 2018; evaluating TED-equipped otter bottom trawls against standard trawls without a TED to determine any change on the target catch. Participating vessels would be exempt from minimum mesh-size gear requirements of their respective fisheries to allow for the TED extension, and general possession limits and minimum fish size requirements specified in 50 CFR part 648, subsections B and D through O, for sampling purposes only. Vessels would be allowed to sell normal/legal catch consistent with their permits during the study, and all undersize or non-permitted would be returned to the water after being recorded. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Application Review Completed

On March 31, 2017, NMFS issued an LOA to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology in support of an Atlantic halibut tagging project. Chartered commercial fishing vessels will use longline gear to capture and tag Atlantic halibut to study Atlantic halibut stock structure and life history. The research is taking place from May 1 – October 31, 2017. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov.

NMFS issued a LOA to Northeastern University on April 28, 2017, to conduct a cod population dynamics study. A revised LOA for this project was issued on May 31, 2017, to incorporate a small change to the project's research design. For additional information please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

NMFS issued an authorization of exempted educational activities (EEAA) to the University of New Hampshire (UNH) on June 5, 2017. The EEAA will be conducted to support the Shoals Marine Laboratory's academic program through UNH as part of two courses: Sustainable Marine Fisheries and Marine Immersion. Both courses are intended for students interested in marine conservation, and explore the theory and practice of fisheries sustainability through lectures, field work, and interactions with the fishing community. One day of trawling and two days of gill-netting occurred during the period of June 11-28, 2017, and one day of trawling will occur during the week of August 14-21, 2017. For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On June 19, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to one commercial fisherman to conduct an independent project testing the economic viability of using electronic jigging machines to selectively target pollock in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area. This EFP authorizes a total of 15 trips in the closure area. The participating vessel is required to carry 100 percent observer coverage on research trips as a condition of the EFP. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236, or email at kyle.molton@noaa.gov.

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On June 23, 2017, NMFS issued EFPs to three commercial fishermen to conduct independent projects testing the economic viability of using hook gear to selectively target pollock and haddock stocks in the Western Gulf of Maine and Cashes Ledge Closure Areas (excluding Cashes Ledge Habitat Closed Area), while avoiding bycatch of cod. These EFPs authorize a combined total of 200 trips in these closure areas. Participating vessels are required to carry 100 percent observer coverage on research trips as a condition of the EFP. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978)281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On July 21, 2017, NMFS issued a scientific research permit (SRP) to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in support of a research project to estimate the capture efficiency of the Center's survey bottom trawl. A chartered commercial fishing vessel will conduct survey work using a twin trawl rig in southern New England and mid-Atlantic Bight waters from August 7 – 27, 2017. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov.

On July 25, 2017, NMFS issued an extension of an LOA to the Maine Department of Marine Resources in support of a tagging study of adult halibut. The participating commercial fishing vessels will conduct halibut for tagging using longline gear in the Gulf of Maine in through September 30, 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On July 20, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) for their Southern New England Cooperative Ventless Trap Survey, which they are conducting in cooperation with the University of Rhode Island to better understand the distribution and habitat use of American lobster and Jonah crab in the RI/MA Wind Energy Area in Lobster Management Area 2. This EFP is a cooperative expansion of a Letter of Acknowledgement project (issued on May 10, 2017), in order to allow the participation of CFRF, and will expire on November 30, 2017. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On July 7, 2017, NMFS issued a revision to an EFP originally issued to the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) on November 21, 2016; extending the project period nine months, and adding the F/V Johnny B. The extension is not an expansion of effort or scope, but an attempt to reach the initial sampling data target that was not reached due to unforeseen financial and scheduling obstacles. The captain of the new additional vessel is already a current fleet participant, and because sampling effort in this project applies to each individual captain and not a particular vessel, this addition will not alter the sampling maximums for the research fleet. The sampling protocol, requested Federal exemptions, and overall project remain the same. The new expiration date of this project is April 30, 2018. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On July 6, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to the Coonamessett Farm Foundation to conduct a scallop resource survey in the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area. The vessel will deploy both the HabCam video survey, as well as the NMFS survey dredge for 10 tows. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.