



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 December 7-10, 2015
Meeting of the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

December 4, 2015

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

Notice of Intent for Whiting Limited Access Amendment (Amendment 22)

NMFS published a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Whiting Limited Access Amendment in the Federal Register on November 23, 2015 (80 FR 72951). The Council's public hearing schedule was also published in this notice. The comment period is open until January 7, 2016. The Council is announcing its intent to develop alternatives to limit entry into the small-mesh multispecies fishery and the notice provides information on how to participate in that process. The scoping document and other information can be found on the Council's webpage, www.nefmc.org. For additional information, please contact Moira Kelly at (978) 281-9218 or email at Moira.Kelly@noaa.gov

Groundfish

NMFS published a notice in the Federal Register on July 21, 2015 (80 FR 29634), requesting comments on a renewal for collection of information requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act. This collection of information involves the NE Multispecies fishery and covers a wide range of reporting requirements related to the sector operation and administration. NMFS is seeking comments on whether the collection is necessary, if NMFS's estimate of costs and burden is accurate, and ways to reduce these costs and improve data collection. The comment period for the information collection ended on June 16, 2014, but NMFS will accept comments until January 15, 2016.

Direct all written comments to Jennifer Jessup, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 6616, 14th and Constitution Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20230 (or via email at JJessup@doc.gov).

Requests for additional information or copies of the information collection instrument and instructions should be directed to Aja Szumylo, Fishery Policy Analyst, at (978) 281-9195 or email at Aja.Szumylo@noaa.gov.

Scallops

None at this time

Monkfish

None at this time

Herring

Herring Directed Fishery Closures

On October 22, 2015, NMFS closed the directed fishery in the herring Georges Bank Haddock Accountability Measure (AM) Area in order to ensure that herring vessels do not exceed the haddock catch allocated to the herring fishery. A 2,000 lb possession limit for Atlantic herring and a zero possession limit for haddock remains in effect until May 1, 2016. Mid-water trawl vessels may possess haddock if they are on a declared Northeast multispecies trip with a Northeast multispecies permit. The accelerated landings were due to an adjusted observer discard rate from an observed trip with a large number of discarded haddock. The new discard rate was then retroactively applied to all the landings from the AM area for the year. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978)282-8456 or email at Shannah.Jaburek@noaa.gov.

On November 2, 2015, NMFS closed the directed herring fishery in herring Management Area 1A to ensure the 2015 sub-ACL was not exceeded. A 2,000 lb Atlantic herring possession limit remains in effect for the remainder of the fishing year. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978)282-8456 or email at Shannah.Jaburek@noaa.gov.

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 Fisheries Reopening

NMFS filed a temporary rule published in the Federal Register on October 12, 2015 (80 FR 61995), as notice that the 2015 commercial summer flounder fishery has been reopened to utilize the 16,294 lb of remaining quota allocated to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Vessels holding Federal commercial permits are permitted to land summer flounder in Massachusetts for the remainder of the 2015 calendar year. This reopening is concurrent with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' reopening of its commercial summer flounder fisheries to state permitted vessels and dealers. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@NOAA.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

None at this time

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

None at this time

Tilefish

Tilefish IFQ Cost Recovery

NMFS anticipates slightly higher cost recovery fees for 2015 and 2016. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires all Limited Access Privilege Programs, such as the Tilefish IFQ Program, to undergo a periodic review every 5 years. The Council and NMFS have initiated a review to be conducted during 2015 and 2016. The work to complete this review and generate a report will result in additional staff time for both the Regional Office and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, which will be recoverable. Because this is the first such 5-year review conducted in this region, we do not have a good estimate of how much additional staff time this review will require.

Because of delays in conducting this review, some of the costs we had previously expected in 2015 will now occur in 2016. This will mitigate some of the increase in the 2015 cost recovery bills, but might increase the 2016 bills somewhat. We will try to provide the Council and tilefish IFQ shareholders an estimate of total recoverable costs as soon as possible, and before the 2015 cost recovery bills are sent out. For additional information, please contact Douglas Potts at (978)-281-9341 or e-mail at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Surfclam/Ocean Quahog Cost Recovery Amendment (Amendment 17)

The Council approved the Cost Recovery Amendment at the February 2015 meeting. This action proposes to implement a cost recovery program for the individual transferable quota (ITQ) fishery, revise the process for incorporating new biological reference points into the FMP, and remove the optimum yield range from the FMP. We are currently developing a Notice of Availability and Proposed Rule for this action to solicit public comment on approval of the amendment and our proposed implementing measures. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or email at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

2016 Surfclam Ocean Quahog Status Quo Quotas and Minimum Size Limit Suspension

As recommended by the Council, NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on September 22, 2015 (80 FR 57104), announcing the suspension of the surfclam minimum size limit and the status quo quota specification for the 2016 fishing year. Individuals must be issued a 2016 surfclam or ocean quahog ITQ permit in order to receive an allocation of 2016 cage tags or lease cage tags. ITQ permit application packages, including the new ownership form, were sent to all current 2015 allocation holders and are also available from our Permits Office. For additional information, please contact Douglas Potts at 978-281-9341 or at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Other Actions

Lobster

Lobster Conservation Management Area 4 Seasonal Closure Modification

Based on recommendations by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, NMFS is changing the Lobster Conservation Management Area 4 seasonal closure from February 1-March 31 to April 30-May 31. We published a final rule in the Federal Register (80 FR 69619) on November 10, 2015, which becomes effective on December 10, 2015. This action is necessary to reduce fishing effort in Area 4 by 10 percent, and is intended to ensure regulations for the lobster fishery in Federal waters remain consistent with the Commission's Interstate Fishery Management Plan, previously implemented state measures, and the intent of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act. For additional information, please contact Allison Murphy at (978) 281-9122 or email at Allison.Murphy@noaa.gov.

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Blueline Tilefish

Blueline Tilefish Emergency Rule Extension

On November 30, 2015, NMFS published a temporary rule (80 FR 74712) to extend the emergency action for the Mid-Atlantic blueline tilefish fishery through June 3, 2016. The original emergency rule, which included permitting requirements and possession limits for commercial and recreational blueline tilefish vessels, published on June 4, 2015 (80 FR 31864) and was set to expire on December 1, 2015. The extension is intended to provide the Council additional time to complete its management plan for blueline tilefish. For additional information, please contact Tobey Curtis at (978) 281-9273 or e-mail at Tobey.Curtis@noaa.gov.

Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology

None at this time

Electronic Monitoring

None at this time

Recreational Fishing

None at this time

Protected Resources Actions

Thorny Skates

NMFS received a petition from the Animal Welfare Institute and Defenders of Wildlife on May 28, 2015, to list the "Northwest Atlantic" or "United States" population of thorny skate as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On October 26, 2015, we published a "positive" 90 day finding in the Federal Register (80 FR 65175) noting our determination that the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted and that we are initiating a status review. The FR notice requests scientific and commercial information pertaining to this species to be submitted to us by December 28, 2015. 90 day findings are only a preliminary step in the listing process and afford thorny skate no additional protections under the ESA. For additional information, please contact Julie Crocker at (978) 281-9328 or email at Julie.Crocker@noaa.gov.

Experimental Fishery Actions

Research Document Applications Under Review

None at this time

Research Document Application Review Completed

On October 16, 2015, NMFS issued an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to the Coonamessett Farm Foundation to conduct research for their 2015 Saltonstall-Kennedy grant project studying the effect different scope ratios have on dredge pitch and catch rates using the Turtle Deflector Dredge and Low Profile Dredge designs. The EFP would exempt four vessels from scallop days-at-sea, crew size restrictions, Georges Bank scallop rotational closed area requirements, and possession limits and minimum size requirements in order to sample the catch for scientific purposes only. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.Jaburek@noaa.gov.

On November 23, 2015, NMFS issued a letter of authorization (LOA) to Northeastern University for vessels to participate in compensation fishing trips under the sea scallop RSA program to generate the revenue to fund their associated research project awarded under the 2015 RSA program. The LOA allows the vessels to fish outside of the sea scallop days-at-sea program and access area possession limits while on a declared RSA trip. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.Jaburek@noaa.gov.

On November 24, 2015, NMFS issued an EFP to the Coonamessett Farm Foundation to conduct research for their 2015 Saltonstall-Kennedy grant project to investigate questions associated with spawning winter flounder in Southern New England. The EFP would exempt five vessels from scallop days-at-sea, crew size restrictions, observer program notification requirements, and possession limits and minimum size requirements in order to sample the catch for scientific purposes only. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.Jaburek@noaa.gov.

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On November 17, 2015, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to the New England Aquarium to conduct a thorny skate satellite-tagging study to assess the movement patterns and stock structure of thorny skate. The study will take place over a two-year period within the Gulf of Maine. The participating vessel will sample thorny skates using otter trawls and hook and line gear over the course of 16 one-day trips. A total of 120 Mark-Report Pop-up Archival tags will be used to tag 120 thorny skate over the course of the project. Any incidental catch deemed viable will be discarded, and other catch will be retained for sale. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 282-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On September 29, 2015, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology (SMASST) to continue a study that investigates the application of video technology in a survey trawl to help improve estimates of the abundance, spatial distribution, size structure, and length-weight relationship of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder. For additional information, please contact Liz Sullivan at (978) 282-8493 or email at Liz.Sullivan@noaa.gov.

On October 22, 2015, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) to collect Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod. This project is being funded through the Northeast Consortium to improve knowledge of the GOM cod winter spawning component by conducting a synoptic acoustic and trawl survey of Ipswich Bay. For additional information, please contact Liz Sullivan at (978) 282-8493 or email at Liz.Sullivan@noaa.gov.