



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 12-15, 2016
Meeting of the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

None at this time

Groundfish

Reimbursement of Sector At-Sea Monitoring Costs

For the 2016 fishing year, NMFS was able to fully fund our SBRM monitoring program and, are using remaining funds to offset some of industry's costs for the groundfish at-sea monitoring program through a cooperative agreement with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The ASMFC is reimbursing sectors for 85 percent of their ASM and electronic monitoring costs for sector trips beginning on or after July 1. To date, all 13 sectors actively fishing have submitted invoices and been reimbursed for ASM trips, on a total of 489 days, that occurred from July through October. Two sectors have also been reimbursed for a combined 14.5 days of electronic monitoring. For additional information, please contact Mark Grant at (978) 281-9145 or email at Mark.Grant@noaa.gov.

Approval of At-Sea Monitor Providers for Groundfish Sectors in Fishing Years 2017 and 2018

On December 9, 2016, NMFS published a Federal Register notice (81 FR 89065) approving at-sea monitoring providers for the Northeast multispecies fishery for fishing years 2017 and 2018. Five companies, all of which are currently approved to provide at-sea monitoring services to sectors, submitted applications and have been approved for the next two fishing years. There will be an opportunity for additional providers to apply to provide services for 2018. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978)281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

Inseason Actions to Close Trimester Total Allowable Catch Areas for Witch Flounder and Georges Bank Cod

On November 9, 2016, NMFS filed a temporary rule closing the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Area for witch flounder to all common pool vessels on a groundfish trip fishing with trawl gear, through December 31, 2016. On November 15, 2016, NMFS filed a temporary rule closing the TAC Area for Georges Bank cod to all common pool vessels on a groundfish trip fishing with gillnet, trawl, or hook/longline gear, through December 31, 2016, and set the common pool possession and trip limits for Georges Bank cod to 25 lb per day-at-sea, up to 50 lb per trip. NMFS took these actions because over 90 percent of the Trimester 2 TACs for these stocks is projected to be caught. For additional information, please contact Liz Sullivan at (978) 282-8493 or Liz.Sullivan@noaa.gov.

Monkfish

None at this time

Scallops

Final Rule for Amendment 19

NMFS published a final rule for Amendment 19 in the Federal Register on November 3, 2016 (81 FR 76516). The final measures incorporate a specifications process into the Scallop FMP and changes the start of the fishing year from March 1 to April 1, effective March 1, 2018. The ability to develop specifications to set annual or biennial allocations allows for a more timely process for setting annual allocations than currently possible with framework adjustments. By adjusting the start of the scallop fishing year from March 1 to April 1, NMFS will be able to implement simple specification actions at the start of the fishing year on a more consistent basis. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at travis.ford@noaa.gov.

Herring

Atlantic Herring Specifications and Management Measures for Fishing Years 2016-2018

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on November 1, 2016, (81 FR 75731) setting the 2016-2018 specifications and management measures for the Atlantic herring fishery along with the river herring and shad catch caps. The specifications set the annual catch limit at 104,800 mt, 3,000 mt lower than 2015, for all three years. The river herring and shad catch caps were increased for most areas by varying amounts, with the exception of the Gulf of Maine Midwater Trawl catch cap area which was reduced by nearly 12 percent. The final rule is effective December 1, 2016. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.

Skate

Season 2 Temporary Skate Bait Possession Limit Reduction

NMFS published a rule in the Federal Register on October 17, 2016, (81 FR 71641) announcing the skate bait commercial possession limit was temporarily reduced to prevent the fishery from exceeding its Season 2 quota. Vessels holding federal skate permits and skate bait letters of authorization were prohibited from possessing or landing more than 9,307 lb of skate bait per trip through the remainder of Season 2, which ended on October 31, 2016. The possession limit was increased to 25,000 lb per trip at the start of Season 3 on November 1, 2016. For additional information, please contact William Whitmore at (978) 281-9182 or email at William.whitmore@noaa.gov

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Specifications for Fishing Years 2017-2019

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on December 1, 2016, (81 FR 86703) proposing the 2017 Atlantic deep-sea red crab quota and proposing projected quotas for 2018-2019. The New England Fishery Management Council's recommendation is to continue the existing red crab fishery quota of 1,775 metric tons for fishing years 2017-2019. This action is necessary to establish allowable red crab harvest levels that will prevent overfishing and allow harvesting of optimum yield. The comment period is open through January 3, 2017. For additional information, please contact Allison Murphy at (978) 281-9122 or email at Allison.Murphy@noaa.gov.

Mid-Atlantic Council Actions

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

Summer Flounder Specifications for Fishing Years 2017-2018

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on November 15, 2016, (81 FR 80038) proposing revised summer flounder specifications for the 2017 and 2018 fishing years. The comment period ended on November 30, 2016. These specifications are proposed based on updated information regarding the status of the summer flounder stock and represent a 30-percent decrease from those implemented through the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass specifications set in 2015 for the 2016-2018 fishing years. The previously established specifications for scup and black sea bass remain unchanged by this action. A final rule is expected prior to the January 1, 2017, start of the fishing year. For additional information, please contact Emily Gilbert at (978) 281-9244 or email at emily.gilbert@noaa.gov.

Final Rule for Scup Gear Restricted Area Modifications Framework

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on November 9, 2016, (81 FR 78728) that modifies the Southern Scup Gear Restricted Area. The purpose of this action is to increase access to traditional squid fishing areas, while maintaining protection for juvenile scup. This action, effective January 1, 2017, adjusts the southern and eastern boundaries of the current area, which remains in effect from January 1 through March 15 of each year. For additional information, please contact Emily Gilbert at (978) 281-9244 or email at emily.gilbert@noaa.gov.

Summer Flounder Safe Harbor Quota Transfer – New Jersey to Virginia

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on December 9, 2016, (81 FR 89010) allowing New Jersey to transfer 226 pounds of summer flounder commercial quota to Virginia. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2016 are: New Jersey, 1,381,653 lb; and Virginia, 1,759,787 lb. This transfer was requested by New Jersey to repay landings by a New Jersey-permitted vessel that landed in Virginia under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

Commercial Bluefish Quota Transfer – New Hampshire and North Carolina to New York

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on October 26, 2016 (81 FR 74308) allowing a transfers of commercial bluefish quota from New Hampshire and North Carolina to New York totaling 70,000 lb (20,000 lb from New Hampshire and 50, 000 lb from North Carolina). The revised bluefish quotas for calendar year 2016 are: New Hampshire, 247 lb; North Carolina, 1,341,100 lb; New York, 797,289 lb. This transfer was prompted by the diligent efforts of state officials in New York not to exceed the commercial bluefish quota. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@NOAA.gov.

Commercial Bluefish Quota Transfer – Maine to Rhode Island

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on November 22, 2016 (81 FR 83715) allowing a transfers of 32,000 lb of commercial bluefish quota from Maine to Rhode Island. The revised bluefish quotas for calendar year 2016 are: Maine, 655 lb; Rhode Island, 464,561lb. This transfer was prompted by the diligent efforts of state officials in Rhode Island not to exceed the commercial bluefish quota. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

Commercial Bluefish Quota Transfer – Virginia to New York

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on November 29, 2016 (81 FR 85904) allowing two transfer totaling 80,000 lb of commercial bluefish quota from Virginia to New York. The revised bluefish quotas for calendar year 2016 are: Virginia, 370,287 lb; New York, 877,289 lb. This transfer was prompted by the diligent efforts of state officials in New York not to exceed the commercial bluefish quota. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

New York Commercial Bluefish Closure

NMFS filed a temporary rule published in the Federal Register on December 6, 2016 (81 FR 87844) as notification that the 2016 commercial bluefish quota allocated to the State of New York has been harvested and the fishery has been closed for the remainder of the fishing year. Vessels holding Federal commercial permits are prohibited from landing bluefish, effective 0001 hours, December 2, 2016 for the remainder of the 2016 calendar year. This closure is concurrent with the State of New York's closure of its commercial bluefish fishery to state permitted vessels and dealers. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ Cost Recovery

The 2017 fishing year marks the start of the new cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries. At the end of 2017, ITQ shareholders will be responsible for a fee based on how many of their 2017 cage tags are used to land surfclams or ocean quahogs throughout the year. The fee to the ITQ shareholder will be based on the cage tag numbers initial allocated to each shareholder, even if some or all of those tags are leased or otherwise transferred to another individual who uses them to land clams. NMFS will announce the new fees per tag in March 2017, and will issue bills in March 2018 once we know which tags were used. Details about the new cost recovery program were published in the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Amendment 17 final rule (81 FR 38969; June 15, 2016). For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog 2017-2018 Specifications

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on November 23, 2016 (81 FR 84544), which proposed harvest quotas and to suspend the default surfclam minimum size limit. All of the proposed measures represent the status quo for these fisheries. Public comments were accepted through December 8, 2016. A final rule is expected to publish before the 2017 fishing year starts on January 1, 2017. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

None at this time

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. NMFS is currently reviewing the framework environmental assessment document and preparing a proposed rule. Because of anticipated delays related to the upcoming change in administration, a proposed rule may not publish until March 2017. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Other Actions

Lobster

None at this time

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Blueline Tilefish

None at this time

Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

None at this time

Protected Resources Actions

None at this time

Research Document Applications Under Review

None at this time

Research Document Application Review Completed

On October 6, 2016, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to Rutgers University to acoustically tag recreationally-caught black sea bass as part of a discard mortality study. Research sampling for this project will be conducted aboard recreational charter vessels using rod-and-reel fishing gear to capture black sea bass during eight trips from November 2016 through June 30, 2017. Sampling will be conducted out of Sea Isle City, New Jersey at the site of a deepwater shipwreck approximately 55 km off the coast. No species caught during the surveys will be retained for commercial purposes. There will be no research sampling within areas that are closed to recreational fishing or within habitat closed areas. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On October 13, 2016, NMFS issued an LOA to the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, SMAST, for a study that will use video technology placed in the cod-end of an otter trawl to survey groundfish. For additional information, please contact Liz Sullivan at (978) 282-8493 or email at Liz.Sullivan@noaa.gov.

On October 6, 2016, NMFS issued an LOA to Rutgers University to acoustically tag recreationally-caught black sea bass as part of a discard mortality study. Research sampling for this project will be conducted aboard recreational charter vessels using rod-and-reel fishing gear to capture black sea bass during eight trips from November 2016 through June 30, 2017. Sampling will be conducted out of Sea Isle City, New Jersey at the site of a deepwater shipwreck approximately 55 km off the coast. No species caught during the surveys will be retained for commercial purposes. There will be no research sampling within areas that are closed to recreational fishing or within habitat closed areas. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On December 2, 2016, NMFS issued an LOA to Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary to conduct monthly research trawls for northern sand lance within Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary to study the life history, abundance, and distribution of the sand lance; and evaluate the potential impact of ocean acidification on the species' larval development. Study trawls are conducted monthly in within the sanctuary, and two days a year in two additional locations off Race Point and on Cape Cod Slope to provide a comparison. Each trawl will be towed at two to four knots with a target catch of roughly 100 to 200 sand lance per trip. No species caught during the surveys will be retained for commercial purposes, and no take of marine mammals is expected. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On November 21, 2016, NMFS issued an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management in support of a black sea bass sampling study. Black sea bass will be sample by vessels utilizing different gear types, including trawlers, lobster pots, gillnet, and hooks and line gear. This EFP authorizes eight vessels to retain black sea bass with exemptions from the minimum size requirements and the possession limit requirements while catch is measured before discarding. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.