



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



Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

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Meeting of the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

Proposed 2018-2020 Small-Mesh Multispecies Specifications

On April 11, 2018, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) filed a proposed rule to set the small-mesh multispecies specifications for the 2018-2020 fishing years as recommended by the Council. Overall, the proposed specifications represent increases in the catch limits of the northern hake stocks, and decreases in the limits of the southern hake stocks. The Council recommends increasing Northern red and northern silver hake total allowable landings (TALs) by 128 and 33 percent, respectively; and decrease southern red and southern whiting TALs by 59 and 39 percent, respectively. The most recent stock assessment update shows that the risk of overfishing in the northern red and silver hake stocks is relatively low; but that southern red hake is overfished and overfishing is occurring, and while southern whiting is not overfished, the stock is declining. The decrease in southern catch limits is intended to end overfishing on these stocks, and the Council will begin development of a rebuilding program within the next year. All other management measures in the small-mesh multispecies fishery (such as possession limits) will remain unchanged. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov

Groundfish

Framework Adjustment 57

On March 22, 2018, NMFS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (82 FR 12531) soliciting comment on Framework Adjustment 57 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. The comment period for the proposed rule closed on April 6, 2018. Framework 57 would increase quotas for 11 stocks compared to 2017, including: Georges Bank cod (139%), Gulf of Maine cod (41%), and Gulf of Maine haddock (190%). Quotas would decrease for nine stocks, including Southern New England yellowtail flounder (-75%) and Gulf of Maine winter flounder (-45%). Framework 57 would also adjust allocations for several fisheries, revise accountability measures, and make other minor changes to groundfish management measures. NMFS intends to implement approved measures for the start of the 2018 fishing year on May 1, 2018.

For more information, please contact Mark Grant at (978) 281-9145 or email at Mark.Grant@noaa.gov.

2018 Sector Rule

On March 23, 2018, NMFS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (82 FR 12823) to allocate annual catch entitlements to groundfish sectors and grant a new regulatory exemption for sector vessels. The comment period for the proposed rule closed on April 9, 2018. The 2018 sector allocations would be based on sector enrollment and updated catch limits in Framework 57. The proposed sector exemption would allow Day gillnet vessels to fish 50 additional gillnets if those nets are 10-inch or larger mesh and fished east of 70 degrees West longitude. NMFS intends to implement approved measures for the start of the 2018 fishing year on May 1, 2018. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email kyle.molton@noaa.gov.

2018 Recreational Measures for Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock, and Georges Bank Cod

On March 22, 2018, NMFS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (82 FR 12551) to set 2018 recreational measures for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock and Georges Bank cod. The comment period for the proposed rule closed on April 6, 2018. Recreational possession of Gulf of Maine cod would continue to be prohibited, and the minimum size for GOM haddock would be unchanged. The possession limit for Gulf of Maine haddock would be reduced from 12 to 10 fish for the charter/party (for-hire) fleet, and a new closed season for Gulf of Maine haddock would be implemented in May for private anglers. Status quo measures may be appropriate for Gulf of Maine cod **if** the Commonwealth of Massachusetts prohibits recreational anglers from retaining cod. For George Bank cod, the minimum size would increase from 22 to 24 inches, and a possession limit for the for-hire fleet would be set at 10 fish, which would match the private angler possession limit. NMFS intends to implement approved measures as close as possible to the start of the 2018 fishing year on May 1, 2018. For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116 or email Emily.keiley@noaa.gov.

Control Date for the Northeast Multispecies Charter/Party Fishery

On March 19, 2018, NMFS published an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) in the *Federal Register* (82 FR 11952) setting that date as the new control date for the groundfish charter/party fishery. The New England Fishery Management Council may use this new control date to set qualification criteria during the development of a limited entry program for the groundfish charter/party fishery. This ANPR does not obligate the New England Fishery Management Council to take action to control entry or access to the groundfish charter/party fishery. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email spencer.talmage@noaa.gov.

Scallops

Proposed Rule for Framework 29

NMFS published a proposed rule for Framework 29 in the *Federal Register* on March 15, 2018 (83 FR 11474). Framework 28 would:

- Allocate effort into four rotational access areas (Mid-Atlantic, Nantucket Lightship-West, Nantucket Lightship-South, and Closed Area I). Closed Area I and Nantucket Lightship-West would contain new areas that became available to scallop fishing through the Omnibus Habitat Amendment;
- Adjust the scallop fleet's accountability measures for two different flatfish stocks (Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder) and develop an accountability measure for northern windowpane flounder; and
- Allocate pounds that went unharvested from Closed Area I that were allocated to the limited access fleet in fishing years 2012 and 2013.

The comment period on this rule closed on March 30, 2018. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at travis.ford@noaa.gov.

Final Rule for the Northern Gulf of Maine Measures in Framework 29

NMFS published a final rule for the Northern Gulf of Maine Measures (NGOM) in Framework 29 in the *Federal Register* on March 26, 2018 (83 FR 12857). This action sets new management measures in the NGOM for the 2018 fishing year, including prohibiting the limited access fleet from accessing the NGOM while on days-at-sea, developing a method for limited access vessels to access the NGOM through research set-aside compensation fishing, and dividing the annual total allowable catch between the limited access and limited access general category fleets for the 2018 and 2019 (default) fishing years. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at travis.ford@noaa.gov.

Herring

2018 Adjustments to Atlantic Herring Fishery Catch Limits

NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* on February 15, 2018, (83 FR 6797) adjusting the Atlantic herring annual catch limit (ACL) and sub-ACLs for 2018. This action is required to account for Atlantic herring catch overages and underages in 2016. The adjusted 2018 Atlantic herring ACL is 100,969 mt and the adjusted sub-ACLs are as follows: Area 1A is 31,962 mt, Area 1B is 3,649, Area 2 is 31,137 mt, and Area 3 is 43,853 mt. This action became effective on February 15, 2018, and will be effective through December 31, 2018. For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352 or email at alyson.pitts@noaa.gov.

2018 River Herring and Shad Catch Cap Reached for the Atlantic Herring Midwater Trawl Fishery in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Area

NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* on March 15, 2018, (83 FR 11428) implementing a 2,000 lb Atlantic herring possession limit for midwater trawl vessels fishing in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic River Herring and Shad Catch Cap Closure Area. This action is required when NMFS determines that 95 percent of the river herring and shad catch cap for midwater trawl vessels fishing in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Catch Cap Area has been reached and it reduces the Atlantic herring possession limit to 2,000 lb per trip for midwater trawl vessels fishing in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Catch Cap Closure Area for the remainder of the calendar year. This action became effective on March 14, 2018, and will be effective through December 31, 2018. For additional information, please contact Dan Luers at (978) 282-8457 or email at daniel.luers@noaa.gov.

Monkfish

None at this time

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab 2018 Specifications

On February 2, 2018, NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* (83 FR 4849) approving the 2018 Atlantic deep-sea red crab quota. Based on the recommendation from the New England Fishery Management Council, NMFS is continuing the existing red crab fishery quota of 1,775 metric tons for fishing years 2017. Because the final rule will not be effective before the start of the 2018 fishing year (March 1, 2018), rollover specifications will be in effect and until replaced when the final rule became effective on March 5, 2017. For additional information, please contact Allison Murphy at (978)281-9122 or email at Allison.murphy@noaa.gov.

Skate

2017 Commercial Skate Wing Possession Limit Adjustment

NMFS filed a temporary rule in the *Federal Register* on April 9, 2018, to remove the prior commercial skate wing possession limit reduction, and increase the possession limit to 4,100 lb wing weight (9,307 lb whole weight) per trip for the remainder of the 2017 fishing year, ending April 30, 2018. A possession limit reduction to the incidental limit of 500 lb (wing weight) was implemented in December 2017, after the commercial skate wing fishery landed 85 percent of the annual total allowable landings (TAL). However, updated landings projections showed that the annual TAL would likely not be attained by the end of the fishing year under the reduced incidental limit. Therefore, in an effort to provide an opportunity for industry to fully attain the 2017 TAL, the skate wing possession limit was increased from 500 lb of skate wings (1,135 lb whole weight) to 4,100 lb of skate wings (9,307 lb whole weight) per trip for the remainder of the fishing year (through April 30). This action applies to the skate wing fishery only, and does not affect vessels fishing in accordance with a skate bait letter of authorization. When the 2018 fishing year begins on May 1, 2018, the commercial skate wing possession limit will return to the skate wing season 1 (May 1 to August 31) possession limit of 2,600 lb of skate wings (5,902 lb whole weight) per trip. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Skate Framework 4 Final Rule

On February 13, 2018, NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* (83 FR 6152) to implement Framework Adjustment 4 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. This rule implements several measures to reduce the risk of the skate bait fishery from effectively closing down as it did in fishing year 2016. This action will reduce the skate bait season 3 (November 1 – April 30) possession limit from 25,000 lb to 12,000 lb, and will de-couple the skate wing and bait in-season possession limit adjustments. This action is designed to better control the catch of skate bait and provide a more consistent supply of skate bait to the lobster fishery. These measures become effective March 15, 2018. For additional information, please contact Deb Lambert at (301) 427-8560 or email at deb.lambert@noaa.gov.

Mid-Atlantic Council Actions

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

Scup Commercial Quota Period Modification Framework Adjustment

On February 26, 2018, NMFS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (83 FR 8236) proposing modifications to the commercial scup quota period, as recommended by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. This action would move the month of October from the Summer Period to the Winter II period. The intent of this rule is to increase fishing opportunities by allowing for more scup to be landed by extending the Winter II Period when possession limits are higher. The comment period closed on March 13, 2018. For additional information, please contact Emily Gilbert at (978) 281-9244 or email at emily.gilbert@noaa.gov.

Scup Specifications 2018-2019

On December 22, 2017, NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* (82 FR 60682) establishing scup specifications for the 2018 fishing year and projecting specifications for 2019. This action replaces previously established 2018 catch limits in response to updated information about the scup stock. The specifications increase the 2018 commercial quota by 38 percent and increase the 2018 recreational harvest limit by 41 percent. For additional information, please contact Emily Gilbert at (978) 281-9244 or email at emily.gilbert@noaa.gov

Summer Flounder Safe Harbor Quota Transfer – North Carolina to Rhode Island

NMFS published a temporary rule in the *Federal Register* on February 9, 2018, (83 FR 5735) allowing North Carolina to transfer 5,008 pounds of summer flounder commercial quota to Rhode Island. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2018 are: North Carolina, 1,761,439 lb; and Rhode Island, 1,001,381 lb. This transfer was requested to repay landings by a North Carolina-permitted vessel that landed in Rhode Island under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Summer Flounder Safe Harbor Quota Transfer – North Carolina to Massachusetts

NMFS published a temporary rule in the *Federal Register* on March 14, 2018, (83 FR 11146) allowing North Carolina to transfer 5,450 pounds of summer flounder commercial quota to Massachusetts. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2018 are: North Carolina, 1,755,989 lb; and Massachusetts, 410,192 lb. This transfer was requested to repay landings by a North Carolina-permitted vessel that landed in Massachusetts under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

2018-2020 Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Specifications

NMFS published final specifications for the 2018 through 2020 Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries in the *Federal Register* on February 6, 2018 (83FR5212). The management measures for 2018 are status quo, including commercial harvest quotas and a suspension of the surfclam minimum size limit. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

None at this time

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

2018-2020 Squid and Butterfish Specifications

NMFS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* on March 1, 2018, (83 FR 8764) implementing final 2018 and projected 2019-2020 squid and butterfish specifications. This action maintained existing *Illex* squid catch limits and slightly increased longfin squid catch limits, but decreased butterfish catch limits for 2018. These specifications became effective on April 2, 2018. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

2018 River Herring and Shad Catch Cap Reached for the Directed Atlantic Mackerel Commercial Fishery

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on February 28, 2018, (83 FR 8635) implementing the possession limit reduction of Atlantic mackerel for Federal limited access Atlantic mackerel permitted vessels based on a projection that the 2018 river herring and shad catch cap for that fishery had been reached. This action is required when 95 percent of the river herring and shad catch cap has been projected to be caught by the directed Atlantic mackerel fishery and reduces the possession limit to 20,000 lb of Atlantic mackerel per trip for the remainder of the calendar year. This action became effective February 27, 2018, and will be through December 31, 2018. For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352 or email at alyson.pitts@noaa.gov.

Tilefish

Tilefish Framework 2

The final rule to implement Tilefish Framework 2 published in the *Federal Register* on March 13, 2018 (83 FR 10803). This action made several improvements to the golden tilefish management program. Effective immediately, vessels harvesting tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) are no longer required to report through the interactive voice response (IVR) call-in system. However, regular vessel trip report and dealer report requirements still apply. All other measure in the rule are effective April 12, 2018. The incidental landing limit will be 500 lb (whole weight) or 50-percent of the weight of all fish being landed (including the tilefish), whichever is less. All commercial tilefish must be landed with the head and fins attached. Commercial vessels harvesting IFQ quota can only fish under one IFQ allocation at a time. The recreational fishery is limited to using rod and reel gear with a maximum of five hooks per rod. Anglers can use either manual or electric reels. Finally, a change to how assumed discards are accounted for will result in a slight reduction in the incidental quota for 2018 and small increases to each IFQ allocation. Revised IFQ allocation permits have already been issued. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Other Actions

Blueline Tilefish

None at this time

Paperwork Reduction Act

None at this time

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

None at this time

Omnibus Acceptable Biological Catch Framework

On April 11, 2018, NMFS published the final rule in the *Federal Register* (83 FR 15511) for the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Acceptable Biological Catch Omnibus Framework Adjustment. This action implements an Omnibus Framework Adjustment to the Council's acceptable biological catch setting process, allows for adoption of peer-reviewed scientific information more quickly, and clarifies language in the Council's catch control rules. For additional information, please contact Erin Wilkinson at (301) 427-8561 or email at erin.wilkenson@noaa.gov.

Lobster

None at this time

New Jersey Special Management Zone Action (NJ SMZ)

Special Management Zone Designation for 13 Artificial Reef Sites in the Exclusive Economic Zone

On February 13, 2018, NMFS published a rule in the *Federal Register* (83 FR 6152) proposing to designate 13 New Jersey artificial reef sites as Special Management Zones. This action would allow only handline, rod and reel, or spear fishing (including the taking of fish by hand), in the artificial reef designated areas (year round). This action would not prohibit commercial fishing on these reef sites but would prohibit the use of pot and trap gear commonly used by commercial anglers. The comment period on this action closed on March 15, 2018. We are currently considering the public comments and developing a final rule. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at travis.ford@noaa.gov.

Community Resilience

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) are hosting a fishing community resilience workshop on Monday June 4, 2018, at the Grand Hotel in Cape May, NJ. This one-day workshop will convene community leaders and fishing industry representatives. Speakers from the fishing industry and Mid-Atlantic region communities will share their challenges and insight on addressing issues that affect fishing community resilience. We hope to learn how GARFO and NEFSC can assist communities and the industry to be more adaptive to changes in infrastructure and economic diversity due to ecological, regulatory, and economic conditions. For additional information and to register for the workshop, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180 or email at cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Cost Recovery Programs

Cost Recovery Transition to CRS

GARFO is working to transition some aspects of cost recovery billing and collections for our catch share programs (LAGC Scallop IFQ, Tilefish IFQ, and Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ) to Central Receivables Service (CRS). CRS is a free service of the Treasury Dept. that assists other federal agencies to issue bills and collect past-due funds. This transition should help streamline our process and reduce some administrative costs currently charged to the industry. We are still finalizing 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. For additional information, contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341. 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 6, 2018, NMFS received a complete application from The Nature Conservancy to renew an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) issued in 2017. The EFP renewal under consideration would exempt 21 commercial fishing vessels from the Atlantic halibut possession and minimum size limit. Vessels would collect biological samples of Atlantic halibut in support of research focusing on halibut stock structure, seasonal movements, behavior, and life history. The project is funded through the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at spencer.talmage@noaa.gov.

On March 20, 2018, NMFS received a complete application from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute to renew an EFP issued in 2017. The EFP renewal under consideration would exempt a commercial fishing vessel from minimum mesh size and possession limits in order to test the efficacy of an off-bottom trawl fitted with a small-mesh codend, designed to target redfish and haddock. The project is funded through the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at spencer.talmage@noaa.gov.

On February 9, 2018, NMFS received a complete application from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center for an EFP in support of the 2018 Study Fleet Program. On March 16, 2018, NMFS published a notice and request for comments on the EFP application under consideration. The comment period closed on April 2, 2018. The EFP would exempt 31 commercial fishing vessels from several regulations, including: Minimum fish size restrictions; fish possession limits for species not protected under the Endangered Species Act; gear specific fish possession restrictions for the purpose of at-sea sampling; and retaining and landing of prohibited fish species. The Study Fleet Program allows the Center to provide sampling opportunities for research when traditional sample sources would otherwise be unavailable. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at spencer.talmage@noaa.gov.

On March 28, 2018, NMFS received a complete application from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center for a Scientific Research Permit (SRP) in support of the 2018 Gulf of Maine Longline Industry-Based Survey. The SRP would allow two commercial fishing vessels to conduct a bottom longline survey in the western and central Gulf of Maine that are inaccessible to mobil trawl gear. The survey focuses on providing information about species that utilize rocky habitats that may be under-represented in the Center's Bottom Trawl Survey. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232.

In February of 2018, NMFS received complete applications for renewal of a EFP issued in 2017 from the Northeast Coastal Communities Sector and commercial fishermen William G. Brown and Richard Burgess. The EFP renewals under consideration would exempt up to 5 commercial fishing vessels from closed area restrictions in the Gulf of Maine to test the selectivity of hook gears for catching haddock and pollock while avowing bycatch of cod and other species. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at kyle.molton@noaa.gov.

On April 2, 2018, NMFS received a complete application for renewal of a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) issued in 2017 from the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). The LOA renewal under consideration would allow 3 commercial fishing vessels under the control of DMR to capture, tag, and release halibut in support of DMR research into halibut distribution, habitat use, and other biological characteristics. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at kyle.molton@noaa.gov.

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Application Review Completed

On March 19, 2018, NMFS issued an LOA to the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries to carry out their 2018 Gulf of Maine Cod Industry Based Surveys. A single vessel will be conducting survey work in the western Gulf of Maine, starting on April 1, 2018 and ending on January 31, 2019. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On March 16, 2018, NMFS issued an LOA to the Normandeau Associates Inc. to carry out a winter flounder assessment survey in the vicinity of Plymouth, Massachusetts. A single vessel will be conducting survey work starting on April 9, 2018 and ending on May 18, 2018. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.