



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116
John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

February 15, 2017

Mr. John Bullard
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear John:

At its September 2016 meeting, the Council passed the following motion:

Motion: The Council requests that the Agency [NMFS] consider revising the catch/mortality estimates of Atlantic halibut to account for discard mortality rates that are lower than 100% by utilizing available scientific information on the subject. The Council envisions a process to do so that is synonymous with the change in discard mortality rates for GOM cod in the recreational sector made by the agency in Framework 53.

The motion carried on a show of hands (16/0/1).

Recent published peer review literature, tagging studies by the State of Maine, and the most recent Canadian assessment of Atlantic halibut suggest the discard mortality rate for Atlantic halibut is well-below 100% for long-line gear and less than 100% for otter-trawl gear (see References). The Council requests that NMFS review this information and potentially make changes starting in-season in fishing year 2016 with respect to monitoring discards in the fishery.

The Council makes this request in light of the availability of scientific studies on the subject, the use of the results (specifically den Heyer, et al. 2011 and 2013) in the 2014 Canadian assessment of Atlantic halibut, and evidence from the State of Maine's tagging studies. The tagging studies reveal that the majority of tagged returns in the last four years are from Canadian waters with many at liberty for greater than 8 years (see letter from NEFMC to State of Maine re Atlantic halibut, dated Nov. 21, 2016). This information and studies were not considered in 2012 – our previous correspondence with the NEFSC on the subject (see letter from NEFMC to NEFSC on groundfish discard mortality on June 25, 2012 and the response on Aug. 23, 2012).

Further, the Council requests that GARFO apply a similar approach to examine Atlantic halibut discard mortality in the commercial groundfish fishery as was considered for Gulf of Maine cod in the recreational fishery (see letter from GARFO to NEFMC, dated Apr. 23, 2015).

Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Nies
Executive Director

cc: Dr. Jon Hare, NEFSC

References

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- Neilson, J.D., K.G. Waiwood, and S.J. Smith. 1989. Survival of Atlantic Halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*) caught by longline and otter trawl gear. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 46:887-897.
- Trumble, R.J., Kaimmer, S.M. and Williams, G.H. (2002) A review of the methods used to estimate, reduce, and manage bycatch mortality of Pacific halibut in the commercial longline groundfish fisheries of the northeast Pacific. In: Lucy, J.A., Studholme, A.L. (eds.), Catch and Release Symposium in Marine Recreational Fisheries. American Fisheries Society Symposium. 30, Bethesda, MD, pp. 88–96.
- den Heyer, C., C. Schwarz, and K. Trzcinski. 2011. Atlantic Halibut Fishing Mortality Estimated from Tagging on the Scotian Shelf and the Southern Grand Banks. DFO Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat Research Document 2011/001: vi + 24 p.
- den Heyer, C.E., C.J. Schwarz, and M.K. Trzcinski. 2013. Fishing and Natural Mortality Rates of Atlantic Halibut Estimated from Multiyear Tagging and Life History. Transactions of the American Fisheries Society 142:690–702.