



New England Fishery Management Council

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SCOPING MEETING SUMMARY

Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan Amendment 23 March 21, 2017

NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

The Council held a scoping hearing to accept public comments on the intended scope of Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan. The purpose of Amendment 23 is “to adjust the groundfish monitoring program to improve reliability and accountability.” Copies of the scoping document were available at the meeting and the Council website.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Terry Stockwell (Groundfish Committee Chair); and Jamie Cournane and Robin Frede (Council Staff). In addition, 10 members of the public attended, including several GARFO staff.

The meeting began at 6:05 pm.

Hearing Chairman Terry Stockwell began the meeting with a brief introduction, explaining the procedure for public scoping. Dr. Jamie Cournane gave a brief presentation, detailing the public scoping process, explaining the purpose and need of Amendment 23, and highlighting some relevant questions from the public scoping document. After addressing clarifying questions, Mr. Stockwell opened the hearing for public comments.

Comments:

Ms. Katharine Deuel, Pew Charitable Trusts, said that the sector system and annual catch limits that were implemented in Amendment 16 were steps in the right direction, but lack of monitoring and accountability are preventing the broader recovery for the overfished groundfish stocks. Ms. Deuel explained that Pew thinks that a monitoring program that records and verifies 100% of landings and discards on all fishing trips is the best option for a truly accountable fishery that uses best available science, and that this would generate vital data to improve stock assessments and set appropriate catch limits. Ms. Deuel stated that 100% monitoring should capture all fishing activity, accurately record all discards at sea, and verify landed catch, and that this can be

achieved through a variety of tools designed to be cost effective, efficient, and make best use of monitoring technology. She recommended that a wide variety of options and combinations including electronic monitoring, at-sea and dockside monitors, and improved enforcement measures be analyzed in Amendment 23. She stated that improved monitoring will lead to improved scientific information and hopefully a more accountable and sustainable era for this region's iconic fishery.

Ms. Jackie Odell, Northeast Seafood Coalition, recommended that Amendment 23 reexamine provisions in Amendment 16 related to administration requirements, and specifically look at ways to provide guidance to the Agency (National Marine Fisheries Service) to reduce reporting redundancy. She explained that while Framework 55 did examine ways to meet coefficient of variation (CV) requirements, there needs to be more statistical analysis done to create more stability in monitoring coverage, as there have been huge swings in coverage from year to year for many of the stocks, Georges Bank winter flounder and redfish being recent examples, depending on the activity of the fishery. She said that it is important to look at other statistical analysis that would consider smoothing for the coverages, particularly given that the industry is now paying for monitoring. Ms. Odell spoke on the timeline requirements for industry to submit their operations plans, and said that the industry would like this to go both ways and to see a more timely nature of when they receive reports from the Agency for what they can expect for coverage rates for the following fishing year, and this would be greatly appreciated as it would help them better consider sector rosters in time for the fishing year. She emphasized the importance of improving reliability and accountability not only with catch monitoring and reporting with the industry, but also with reconsidering elements of the monitoring and reporting requirements that could be more streamlined.

Ms. Odell referred to recent discussions of the costs and benefits of the monitoring program and said this should be looked at very closely, to consider what information is being acquired, how it is being used in science and management, and what the tangible benefit is to the fishing industry in paying for the at-sea monitoring program. She explained there has also been some discussion of diminishing returns where the costs far exceed any benefit of monitoring discards, and that this amendment should examine that and expand on the preliminary discussion in the [Groundfish Plan Development Team] white paper. She thought that whether using at-sea monitoring or electronic monitoring, there should be basic standards to be achieved regardless of the technology or program used, and that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for monitoring since some technology may be better suited for some in industry and not work for others. She said this amendment should provide guidance and standards to sectors so they can tailor a monitoring program most appropriate for their operations. Ms. Odell also spoke on the observer effect, and recommended analysis and alternatives that would look at this with a different perspective to examine at what point the observer bias comes into play when considering stock assessments (as in, when there are few fish there should be less concern with having an observer onboard), and to examine whether the assessments are accurate or are unrealistic compared to what is seen on the water, halibut being one example.

The scoping hearing adjourned at 6:32 pm.