



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

April 12, 2022

Eric Reid, Chairman
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear Eric:

On behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, I am pleased to inform you that we have approved Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP), including all the management measures recommended by the Council. Amendment 23 revises the monitoring program for the voluntary sector catch share program to improve the accounting and accuracy of collected catch data (landings and discards). The approved measures will not be in place by May 1, 2022, but we expect to publish a final rule implementing these measures in May 2022. We will inform the Council when the final rule is scheduled to publish in the *Federal Register*.

Approved Measures

As recommended by the Council, Amendment 23 makes a number of changes to the industry-funded sector monitoring program, in order to:

- Replace the current process for calculating an annual at-sea monitoring coverage target for the groundfish sector monitoring program with a fixed coverage target as a percentage of trips.
 - The at-sea monitoring coverage target for a given year would be dependent on Federal funding.
 - The at-sea monitoring coverage target would be 100 percent of trips for four years, provided Federal funding can support agency and industry costs.
 - The at-sea monitoring coverage target in years 1-4 may be less than 100 percent and would be set at the maximum level for which there are sufficient Federal funds to support all agency and industry costs.
 - The at-sea monitoring coverage target would default to 40 percent in years 1-4 if Federal funding cannot completely support all industry costs for a coverage target greater than 40 percent.
 - Beginning in year 5, the at-sea monitoring coverage target would be 40 percent of trips.
 - NMFS could increase at-sea monitoring coverage above the 40-percent target in years 5 and later when Federal funding is available to support all industry costs.
 - In years with a 40-percent coverage target, Federal funding would be used to first pay NMFS costs and then support as much of industry costs as possible. Sectors would only be responsible for industry costs above the portion supported by Federal funding.



- Allow electronic monitoring technologies as an alternative to human at-sea monitors.
 - Amendment 23 would approve implement two electronic monitoring programs that sector vessels could use to satisfy the sector monitoring requirements necessary to ensure catch accountability.
 - Amendment 23 does not remove or alter the existing authority for the Regional Administrator to deem additional types of electronic monitoring technology sufficient to be used in place of human at-sea monitors.
- Exclude from the monitoring requirement all trips west of 71 degrees 30 minutes west longitude due to low groundfish catch.
 - The current exclusion of trips with 10-inch gillnets in southern New England and on inshore Georges Bank would be maintained.
- Require periodic evaluation of the monitoring program, including exclusions from the monitoring requirement.
 - The Council would review the efficacy of the coverage target once two full years of catch data are available (year 3), and periodically thereafter, to determine how well the monitoring program improves catch data accuracy while maximizing the value of the data and minimizing costs.
 - Exclusions from the monitoring requirement (e.g., trips west of 71 degrees 30 minutes west longitude) would be reviewed once two full years of catch data are available (year 3), and every three years after that, to evaluate whether groundfish catch remains low enough to justify the exclusion.
- Allow removal of the uncertainty buffer from the portion of the acceptable biological catch allocated to the sector catch share, if suitable, when the monitoring coverage target is 100 percent.
- Grant new authority to the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator to streamline reporting requirements for the sectors, such as eliminating the requirement for sectors to submit weekly and daily reports in lieu of the agency providing monitoring summaries for the sectors to use while continuing reconciliation to confirm accuracy.

We appreciate the Council's and Council staff's efforts to develop this amendment and ongoing efforts to improve the Northeast multispecies fishery. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator

Cc: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council
 Michael Luisi, Chairman, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
 Dr. Christopher M. Moore, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
 Robert E. Beal, Executive Director, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission