



New England Fishery Management Council

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Rick Bellavance, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

February 6, 2025

Mr. Michael Pentony
GARFO Regional Administrator
NMFS/NOAA Fisheries
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Mike:

Consistent with the consultation requirements of 50 CFR 648.89(f)(3), the Council developed recommendations for proactive accountability measures (AMs) for Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) cod and Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock for fishing year (FY) 2025. These AMs require development by the Regional Administrator (RA) in consultation with the Council because the appropriate suite of measures (e.g., bag limit, minimum fish size, season) depends on the annual catch limits (ACLs) specified for the upcoming fishing year. The RA may adjust measures to ensure the recreational fishery will achieve, but not exceed, its sub-ACLs. Framework Adjustment (FW) 69 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan proposes a recreational fishery sub-ACL of 99 mt for WGOM cod and 1,075 mt for GOM haddock for fishing year 2025.

This year a new process was introduced for developing recreational measures for WGOM cod and GOM haddock. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) developed a cloud-based Decision Support Tool (DST), which automates the bioeconomic model process and allows primary users (i.e., Recreational Advisory Panel and Groundfish Committee members) to directly run the model and explore possible measures. The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on January 21, 2025, to discuss potential measures. The Groundfish Committee (Committee) discussed the RAP's recommendations on January 22, 2025. The RAP focused their discussion on several alternative measures that were run in the DST, with the goals of optimizing haddock catch and including an additional season for cod, and for measures that demonstrated at least 75 simulation runs out of 100 not exceeding the sub-ACL for either cod or haddock, a higher standard than the minimum criteria of at least 50% of runs not exceeding the sub-ACL.

The RAP put forward a recommendation for several measures in order of prioritization for the Committee to consider. Their first preference was for measures that include: for WGOM cod, an open season during the month of May (May 1 – May 31) in addition to the current season (September 1 – October 31), maintaining the minimum fish size at 23 inches and 1-fish per angler limit; and for GOM haddock, a decrease in the minimum fish size to 17 inches, maintaining the current season and 15-fish bag limit. The RAP's second choice for measures for WGOM cod decreases the minimum fish size to 22 inches, maintaining the current season and 1-fish per angler limit; and for GOM haddock decreases the minimum fish size to 17 inches, maintaining the current season and 15-fish bag limit. The RAP's third choice for measures for WGOM cod includes an open season during the month of May (May 1 – May 31) in addition to

the current season (September 1 – October 31), maintaining the minimum fish size at 23 inches and 1-fish per angler limit; and makes no changes to existing GOM haddock measures. The Committee reviewed the RAP’s recommendations and recommended the RAP’s first choice in measures to the Council. The Council, at its January 2025 meeting, then reviewed the Committee’s recommendations.

Based on these discussions, the Council passed the following motion on January 29, 2025:

The Council recommends to GARFO for recreational measures for:
Western Gulf of Maine Cod:

- *Open season: May 1 – 31 and September 1 - October 31,*
- *Minimum size: 23 inches, and*
- *Possession limit: 1 fish per day*

Gulf of Maine Haddock:

- *Open season: May 1 - February 28/29 and April 1 – 30,*
- *Minimum size: 17 inches, and*
- *Possession limit: 15 fish per day*

The motion *carried* on a roll call vote 12 to 4 with 1 abstention (Mr. Pentony).

The Council reviewed the recreational catch and effort information provided by the NEFSC and Council staff on the WGOM cod and GOM haddock stocks. An updated run of the bioeconomic model indicates that opening an additional month in May for WGOM cod and decreasing the GOM haddock minimum fish size would be unlikely to lead to overages of the sub-ACLs in FY2025. The bioeconomic model indicates that under the Council’s proposal, the sub-ACLs for WGOM cod and GOM haddock would not be exceeded in 95 out of 100 simulation runs and 86 out of 100 simulation runs, respectively.

The Committee and Council discussed concerns about potential impacts to spawning cod in May. However, they concluded that the 1-fish limit would convert some dead discards of cod into landings while recreational fishermen were primarily targeting haddock in the spring, which the model suggests has economic benefit to recreational anglers. Further, the Council recognized that the existing cod spawning protection areas and restrictions would remain in effect.

Additionally, the Council included in Framework 69 a measure to establish a temporary regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for Eastern (EGOM) cod and Georges Bank (GB) cod for FY2025 only. The Council passed the following motion regarding recreational measures for EGOM cod and GB cod:

The Council recommends to GARFO that recreational measures for Western Gulf of Maine cod should also be applied to Eastern Gulf of Maine cod and Georges Bank cod.

The motion *carried* with two abstentions (Mr. Salerno and Mr. Pentony).

The Council’s intent is for recreational measures to be consistent across the WGOM, EGOM, and GB cod stocks. EGOM cod and GB cod have minimal recreational catches, and consistency in measures is intended to facilitate compliance and enforcement.

The Council expresses its continued appreciation to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff for addressing information needs in advance of the RAP, Committee, and Council

meetings. Additionally, the Council offers its support for the DST developed by NMFS staff for use in recommending recreational measures for WGOM cod and GOM haddock. The DST helped to streamline the decision-making process and was positively received by Recreational Advisory Panel and Groundfish Committee members. The Council looks forward to continued utilization of the DST in future years.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cate O'Keefe".

Cate O'Keefe
Executive Director

CC: Dr. Jon Hare