



## New England Fishery Management Council

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 John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., Chairman | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

April 29, 2020

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

Dear Mike:

At its April Council meeting, the Council discussed how the COVID-19 National Emergency is directly and negatively impacting the groundfish fishery – including the commercial and recreational fleets. The Council may request Emergency Actions or other forms of relief at its June meeting and is seeking additional information and guidance from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

### **Commercial groundfish fishery**

Several organizations - Associated Fisheries of Maine, Northeast Seafood Coalition, Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, and Maine Coast Community Sector - representing the commercial groundfish fishery requested relief from certain provisions in the sector program. Specifically they asked for an increase in the maximum allowable carryover from fishing year 2019 to fishing year 2020. The commercial fishery is losing money due to low ex-vessel prices as recent sales have plummeted to levels below production costs. Sector vessels face losses from their earlier investments in quota that cannot be landed by the end of the season. This situation has resulted from the national and global disruption in the food supply chain.

After discussing the requests, the Council passed the following motion (16/0/1):

That the Council write a letter to GARFO requesting guidance on mechanisms that could be utilized to enable Northeast Multispecies Sectors to carryover more than 10% of their unused FY 2019 ACE into FY 2020, including approaches that would enable Sectors to have a higher percentage of *de minimis* carryover available to them for use without potential penalty in FY 2020. Also request guidance on possible flexibility for common pool DAS carryover including number of DAS and type of DAS i.e. allocated or leased and the time period for use. Request GARFO provide this information prior to the June Council meeting, ideally at the Groundfish Advisors/Committee meeting, so if appropriate and necessary the Council could consider requesting emergency action to facilitate a solution that would help alleviate the economic and operational implications of COVID-19.

The Groundfish Advisory Panel and Groundfish Committee will meet on June 9 and June 10, respectively. Both groups will discuss possible mitigation of COVID-19 impacts. Our staffs are already working on preparing materials for the Groundfish Plan Development Team to review. Since the Council meeting discussion, some members of the common pool wrote to the Council requesting flexibility in the type of relief provided. I will forward this to the Groundfish Committee for consideration. Thank you to you and your staff for moving swiftly on this request.

### **Recreational groundfish fishery**

The Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association has members in the for-hire recreational groundfish fishery, also wrote requesting flexibility in the Gulf of Maine cod and Gulf of Maine haddock management measures for fishing year 2020. The for-hire sector is restricted due to federal and state guidelines on carrying anglers and are projecting losses until the situation improves.

The Council discussed on April 14 that a Recreational Advisory Panel meeting and Groundfish Committee meeting would be held prior to the June Council meeting to review the request.

We are planning for a qualitative discussion of possible measure because new data is expected to be very limited. In preparation, our staffs and the Center staff have begun discussing this topic and we appreciate their continued support leading up to the June Council meeting.

Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Tom Nies  
Executive Director

cc: Dr. Jon Hare, NEFSC