



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116  
E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

September XX, 2016

Mr. Patrick Keliher  
Commissioner  
Maine Department of Marine Resources  
21 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0021

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

Dear Patrick:

On September XX, 2016, the Council passed a motion:

*That the Council write a letter to the State of Maine explaining the impacts to the federal commercial groundfish fishing if the Atlantic halibut acceptable biological catch is exceeded.*

Motion XXX (///)

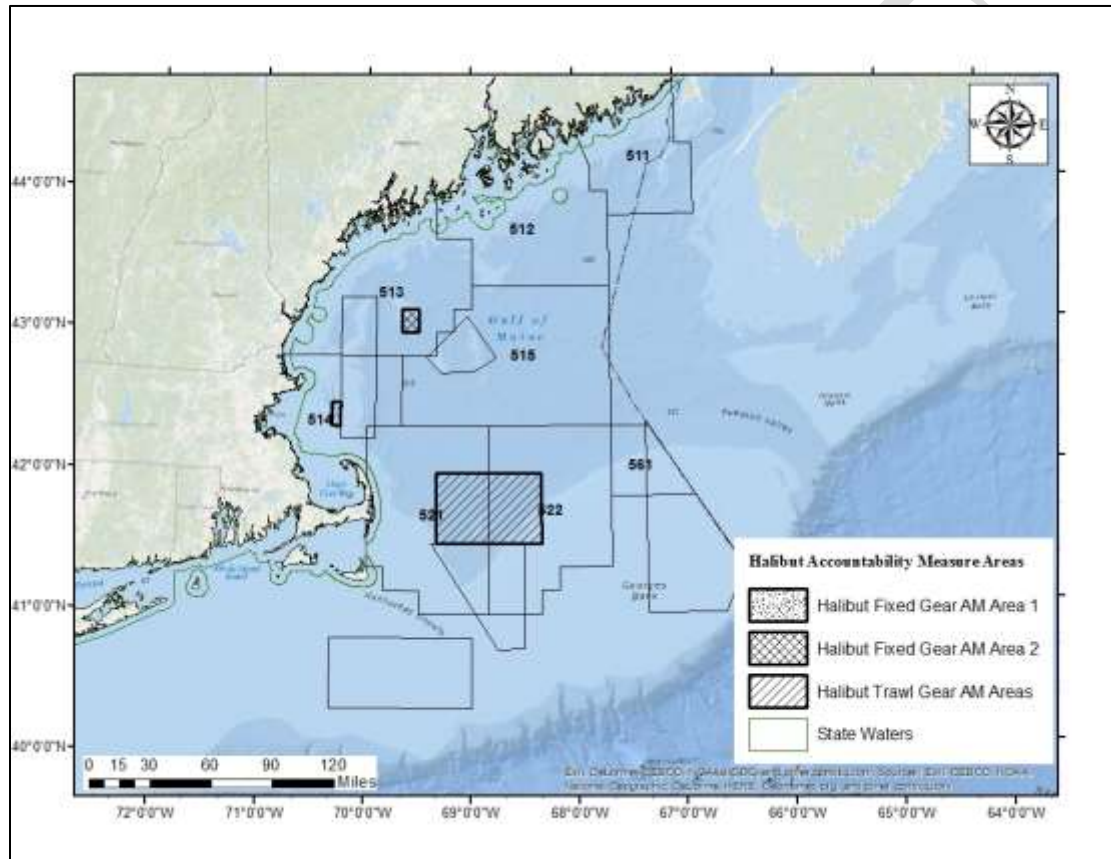
Briefly, Atlantic halibut is incidental caught with other species in the federal commercial groundfish fishery. The federal commercial groundfish fishery is subject to strict catch limits with associated accountability measures (AMs) for Atlantic halibut. Vessels with a Northeast multispecies permit are currently allowed to land one legal sized Atlantic halibut per trip, while all other halibut must be discarded.

The Council anticipates that the ABC may have been exceeded in fishing year 2015 (May 1, 2015- April 30, 2016). The federal groundfish fishery (sectors and common pool vessels) are the only components of the Atlantic halibut fishery held accountable for an overage of the catch limits should one occur. Catches in state waters are considered in the evaluation to determine if an overage occurred.

Once the AMs are triggered and put in place, fishing opportunities would be reduced, particularly within the AM areas, and would cause adverse economic impacts to the federal commercial groundfish fleet. The most recent evaluation of the AM used fishing year 2010 data and estimated that the economic impacts to gross revenue for the federal commercial groundfish fishery could be up to \$6.5 million if the fishery could not relocate outside of the closures or operate effectively in the gear-restricted areas to target other species. Many of these vessels that would be adversely impacted land in Maine ports. The AMs for Atlantic halibut do not apply to state only permitted vessels and other subcomponents of the Atlantic halibut fishery.

The AMs for Atlantic halibut are triggered when there is an overage in the overall annual catch limit (ACL) that is greater than the uncertainty buffer in any fishing year (i.e., exceeding the ABC). If the AM is triggered, vessels possessing a Northeast multispecies permit or vessels operating under a Category C or D limited access monkfish permit would not be allowed to retain Atlantic halibut. In addition, gear restricted areas would be implemented. Trawl vessels possessing a Northeast multispecies permit must use approved selective gear (e.g., haddock separator trawl, Rhule trawl, rope separator trawl) that reduces catch of flounders in the Atlantic Halibut Trawl Gear AM Area. Gillnet and longline vessels possessing a Northeast multispecies permit may not fish within the Atlantic Halibut Fixed Gear AM Areas.

*Map of Atlantic Halibut Accountability Measure Areas*



The Council requests that the State of Maine consider this information when making adjustments to the management of Atlantic halibut. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

XXX

cc: XXXX