



New England Fishery Management Council

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Groundfish: Council Postpones Final Action on Amendment 23; Pursues COVID-19 Impact Options; Receives Catch Share Report

The New England Fishery Management Council, which met April 14-15, 2020 exclusively by webinar for the first time in the Council's history, confronted several issues challenging the groundfish industry during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council discussed mid-range planning at the start of its meeting. Given ongoing travel restrictions and limitations on public gatherings due to COVID-19, the Council voted to postpone final action on Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23. The amendment is being developed to improve catch accounting in the fishery while minimizing costs to industry but still maximizing the value of the data that's collected.

Final action on Amendment 23 was slated to occur at the Council's [June meeting](#). The Council voted to postpone final action until "after the June meeting." Given these extraordinary times, the Council did not set a specific date for when it intends to take final action. Instead, the Council agreed to:

- Conduct the [April 15, 2020 webinar public hearing](#) as originally scheduled;
- Line up two additional webinar public hearings with dates to be determined soon; and
- Allow the Council's Executive Committee to review the status of the COVID-19 situation at its early June meeting and determine whether it is feasible and safe to conduct in-person public hearings during the late spring and early summer.

The Council will provide additional information about Amendment 23 as it becomes available. Updates will be posted on the [groundfish webpage](#) and the [Amendment 23 webpage](#).

**Amendment 23:
Commercial Groundfish
Monitoring Action**

Council Staff

Amendment 23 Public Hearing
Webinar
April 15, 2020

New England
Fishery Management Council

The Amendment 23 public hearing document, presentation, executive summary, and a link to the full archive of amendment-related materials is available at Northeast Multispecies [Amendment 23 April 15 public hearing](#).



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Also in the COVID-19 vein, the Council was asked by several industry associations to consider requesting emergency action to allow for an increase in carryover of unused 2019 groundfish annual catch limits into the 2020 fishing year. In short, industry was asking for relief from certain provisions of the groundfish sector program due to drastic reductions in fishing activity and associated negative impacts on fishing businesses.

The Council itself does not take emergency action. This happens through the Secretary of Commerce with extensive feedback and analyses from NOAA Fisheries. However, the Council can make recommendations to NOAA Fisheries, which typically are considered very seriously but must abide by [strict criteria](#).

Once the Council began discussing the potential for emergency action, it quickly became clear that additional information and steps would be needed. Therefore, the council voted to:

- Write a letter to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) requesting guidance on mechanisms that could be utilized to enable Northeast multispecies sectors to carry over more than 10% of their unused fishing year (FY) 2019 annual catch entitlements (ACE) into FY 2020, “including approaches that would enable sectors to have a higher percentage of *de minimis* carryover available for use without potential penalty in FY 2020”;
- Request guidance on possible flexibility for common pool days-at-sea carryover, including the number and type of days-at-sea allocated or leased and the period for use of those days; and
- Request that GARFO provide this information in time for the Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP) and Groundfish Committee to review the details and make recommendations prior to the June Council meeting. This way, if appropriate, the Council could consider requesting emergency action at its full June meeting to “facilitate a solution that would help alleviate the economic and operational implications of COVID-19.”

Groundfish Catch Share Program Review



The Council also received a presentation on the final DRAFT report of the Groundfish Catch Share Program Review. The Council had the opportunity to ask questions and provide comments on the results of the review. Next, the Groundfish Plan Development Team and a sub-panel of the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee will provide technical comments on the report, and then the Groundfish Committee and GAP will go through the report and suggest future Council priorities. The draft report, presentation, and all related materials are available at [April 2020 meeting and Catch Share Program Review webpage](#).