



The Council Report summarizes major actions approved at NEFMC meetings or highlights items that may be of interest to stakeholders.

At its Dec. 16-18 meeting in Danvers, MA the Council:

- ◆ Reviewed the Habitat Amendment and added new alternatives
- ◆ Approved management priorities for 2014
- ◆ Finalized measures in FW Adjustment 51 to the Groundfish Plan
- ◆ Broadened the alternatives in Scallop FW 25

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Council Report

December 2013

More Habitat Analyses Needed to ID Preferred Alternatives

The Council planned to approve the draft Omnibus Habitat Amendment and its associated draft Environmental Impact Statement at the December meeting. But based on a majority vote and lengthy public testimony, Council members concluded that more work was needed before selecting “preferred” alternatives from the large number of options provided in the document.

The identification of preferred alternatives for management measures is not required in fishery management plan development, but does give the public an idea of how the Council might be “leaning.”

This also may not be the Council’s last word on preferences since its members are not bound to stick to those selected as “preferred” when it

comes to a final vote on the amendment next summer or fall.

The receipt of public comments on the final draft EIS prior to hearings is also an important part of the Council’s consideration of any management action.

In addition to delaying approval of the draft EIS, the Council added a Georges Bank alternative that will be analyzed by Council technical teams. This newly proposed measure would maintain the existing cod Habitat Area of Particular Concern located in Closed Area II on Georges Bank and also extend its western boundary to the 67.30 line. A variation of this measure would open an eight-mile wide “alley” along the Hague Line to fishing. The Council also added additional options for the

Dedicated Habitat Research Area in the western Gulf of Maine.

Approval of a completed draft EIS and the selection of the Council’s preferred alternatives is scheduled to occur within the next several months.

Photo courtesy of the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration; Mountains in the



Sea Research Team, 2004; Location, New England Seamount Chain

Management Priorities for 2014 Approved

The New England Council spent considerable time identifying its management priorities for 2014, all of which have implications for fishing activities in the Northeast. In addition to the priorities that are intended to take a year to complete, this year the Council also approved those that are expected to be developed over multiple years.

Please note that priorities for Atlantic herring were approved at the NEFMC’s November meeting in Newport, RI.

New Groundfish

The Council added a new groundfish priority to its list of tasks for 2014 — development of a process to address catches of groundfish stocks in non-

groundfish fisheries. This item will be in addition to the specifications for two winter flounder stocks and pollock, and setting annual catches for the three stocks managed jointly through the U.S./Canada Resource Sharing Understanding.

⇒ *Additional Priorities, p.2*

More Groundfish Priorities

Following discussion of an omnibus observer amendment, the Council instead approved the establishment of a committee to explore observer issues in the Northeast. The committee would include NEFMC and MAFMC members and representatives of the fishing industry and will meet as frequently as staff resources allow.

Ongoing Groundfish Work
This list includes: 1.) Completing the Habitat

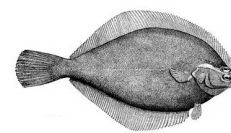
Omnibus Amendment;

2.) Continuing work on Amendment 18, an action intended to promote fleet diversity, enhance sector management, promote resilience and stability of fishing businesses, and prevent excessive shares in the fishery;

3.) Developing alternative strategies for setting catch advice for the purpose of creating more stability in setting annual catch limits;

4) Working on a mechanism to allow quota transfers under the U.S./Canada Understanding; and

5.) Continued development of an effective electronic monitoring program in the groundfish fishery.



Lineart courtesy of NEFSC/NOAA

EBFM

Last but not least, the NEFMC adopted the development of an ecosystem-based fisheries management plan as a multi-year priority. The first steps will involve consulting with the Mid-Atlantic Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to coordinate activities.

Priorities for Other Fisheries

Sea Scallops

The Scallop Committee will work on Framework Adjustment 26 to set specifications for 2015-2016 and modify scallop access areas as necessary to achieve consistency with the Habitat Amendment.

Monkfish

Amendment 6 will continue as planned – to include modifications to the days-at-sea program, including leasing, and

catch shares in the form of sectors and IFQs.

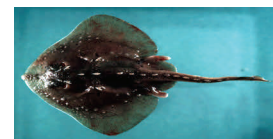
Whiting

The Council supported setting harvest specifications for 2015-2017 and initiation of a multi-year effort to adopt a limited entry program for the fishery.

Skates

While the Council did not support the development of a

skate limited entry program, the Skate Committee will begin work to address overfishing of winter and thorny skates.



Thorny skate photo courtesy of NEFSC/NOAA

Framework 51 Approved

The Council took final action on Framework Adjustment 51 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) FMP. The following items were approved and will be submitted as a package to NOAA Fisheries for final approval. Framework 51 is expected to become effective at the beginning of the groundfish fishing year on May 1, 2014.

* 10-year rebuilding plan for Gulf of Maine cod and

American plaice, including a rebuilding plan review analysis for both species.

* Annual catch limits for white hake (which is neither overfished nor is overfishing occurring), Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (a 53% reduction), Eastern Georges Bank cod (60% increase), and Eastern George Bank haddock (a 166% increase). Catch limits for the latter three stocks,

which are managed jointly between the U.S. and Canada, were set at the November 2013 Council meeting.

* A gear modification accountability measure in the small-mesh fisheries for the sub-ACL of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder when the sub-annual catch limit is exceeded.

⇒ *More on Framework 51, p.3*

Alternatives Added to Scallop Framework 25

During its review of work to date on the annual scallop specifications 2014-2015, the Council approved motions that supported further exploration of several new specs package alternatives that would increase open area fishing mortality and days-at-sea to help stabilize the scallop catch in 2014. As it stands, catch is expected to decline in 2014 by about 17 percent --- from a projected catch in 2013 of 38.2 million pounds --- to a projected catch of 31.7 million pounds next year.

The details of the alternatives that would result in higher 2014 landings of between 36 to 38 million pounds are labelled Alternative 4, 5, and 6 in the draft document provided at the Council meeting – for the details see www.nefmc.org/scallops/council_mtg_docs/Dec%202013/Doc1FW25%20Dec%20Council.pdf. The document also contains measures to protect smaller scallops in Delmarva (for example, seasonal restrictions and crew limits). Final approval of Framework 25 is scheduled to occur at the Council's January 28-30, meeting.

New England Council Meetings in 2014

*January 28-30, Sheraton Harborside Hotel
Portsmouth, NH*

*April 22-24 - Hilton Hotel
Mystic, CT*

*June 17-19, Holiday Inn by the Bay
Portland, ME*

*September 23-25, Sea Crest Beach Hotel
North Falmouth, MA*

Groundfish Framework 51 *cont.*

* Authority for the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator to facilitate U.S./Canada quota trades consistent with the current ABC distribution; this authority is limited to trades available through 2014 only.

* Revised discard strata for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder; this measure would modify the stratification used for estimating discards of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder for in-season quota monitoring of sector catches. It would not change the stratification used in assessments, nor would it change the stratification used to monitor common pool fishing trips. Pending final approval by NOAA Fisheries, yellowtail flounder discards on groundfish trips would be calculated for two different areas: statistical area 522 and all other Georges Bank yellowtail flounder statistical areas.

* Zero possession of yellowtail flounder in the limited access scallop fishery to discourage those vessels from targeting yellowtail.

East Coast Climate Change and Fisheries Governance Workshop March 20-21, 2014

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council plans to host a workshop on climate change and fisheries governance. The primary objective is to establish a shared frame of reference regarding the potential impacts of climate change on marine fisheries governance.

With support from the Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum, the MAFMC is planning the workshop in conjunction with the New England and South Atlantic Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA Fisheries.

Invited participants will include east coast fishery managers, scientists, support staff and others from each region and NOAA Fisheries.

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The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, initially enacted in 1976.

The Council develops rules for both large and small-scale commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the region's coastline. NEFMC management authority extends to fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and southern New England and overlaps with the Mid-Atlantic Council for some species.

**Happy New Year from the New England
Fishery Management Council**

