



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Georges Bank Habitat Protection Reconfigured

Newport, RI On the first day of its June meeting the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) approved a plan to address the adverse impacts of fishing gear used in the groundfish, clam, and sea scallop fisheries operating on Georges Bank. In reconfiguring existing closed areas, the Council's proposal would allow fishing opportunities on healthy stocks for the economically strapped groundfish fleet, while also providing greater access to a portion of the Georges Bank sea scallop resource that has not been open to the fishery since 1994.

Currently, there are close to 7,000 square miles of habitat and groundfish closures on Georges Bank and in the Great South Channel. The measures selected by the Council would maintain some portions of the existing closures, and open others, resulting in 2,000 square miles of habitat closures going forward. Generally, the reconfigured closures recommended by the Council will include more complex seabed habitat than the existing closed areas.

The Council approved the Georges Bank approach by an eight yes and six no vote, with two abstentions and one recusal. Additionally, protection for two groundfish spawning closures could also be in place between February and April.

Known as Habitat Omnibus Amendment 2, the Council's proposed action evaluated the effectiveness of existing closed areas throughout the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank and, using the most recent scientific information available, determined if, when and where other closures might be more beneficial in terms of habitat conservation.

The Habitat Amendment will be submitted to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service for final approval, and should be implemented sometime next year.

The Council is a group of 18 fishery officials that includes representatives from each New England coastal state, the federal government, and appointees from the region. Its 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.

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