

NOAA announces new management measures for Gulf of Maine cod for 2012

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NOAA announced today that fishermen will be allowed to catch up to 6,700 metric tons of Gulf of Maine cod in 2012. This is the end result of collaborative work with the fishing industry to find a solution that prevented a much larger cut to the allowable catch for the 2012 fishing year.

In late 2011, a new stock assessment for Gulf of Maine cod found the stock declined unexpectedly, making major reductions in catch limits necessary for the 2012 fishing year, as required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. NOAA and the New England Fishery Management Council, which includes state officials and fishermen, worked with the fishing industry to identify flexibility within federal fisheries law that could both protect cod and provide sustained fishing opportunities. As a result, the quota for 2012 will be set at 6,700 metric tons, which is within the range recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council. Without this collaborative approach, the catch limit for this fishing year would have been less than 1,500 metric tons.

“This extraordinary partnership among fishermen, members of the non-governmental organization community, federal regulators and scientists has provided us with some discretion to set higher catch limits in 2012 and a little more time for fishermen to plan and for all of us to work together to address the change in stock condition,” said Sam Rauch, acting assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “We are committed to continued evaluation of the current cod status and to working with our partners to develop a long-term rebuilding program that includes setting catch limits in 2013 that end overfishing.”

NOAA is granting commercial groundfish sectors (a group of fishing vessels that share an annual allocation) a carry-over of up to 10 percent of the 2011 allocation into the 2012 fishing year. The fishing industry requested this carry-over, which is part of the 6,700 metric ton catch limit. In addition, recreational fishermen who once had to discard cod smaller than 24 inches can now keep cod as small as 19 inches, decreasing the amount of fish discarded at sea. The daily bag limit will decrease from ten fish to nine.

NOAA will also conduct a new assessment of Gulf of Maine cod in 2012, in time to set fishing year 2013 catch limits. NOAA is exploring key science issues prioritized by the Council’s scientific committee, including the appropriateness of currently defined stock boundaries (stock structure), survival rates of discarded fish, and use of new recreational survey data.

“We are looking for ways to work cooperatively with fishermen in the groundfish fleet to conduct this research and, in particular, to better estimate the long-term survival of discarded cod in commercial and recreational fisheries,” said Richard Merrick, chief science advisor for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “Fishermen’s on-the-water experience is invaluable, and we hope that closer ties with them will improve our science and our understanding.”

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute has agreed to coordinate a comprehensive look at stock structure, an effort that will involve a variety of partners to evaluate what is known about the number and distribution of various cod stocks. NOAA is also developing new methodology to incorporate new marine recreational fishing data into the cod stock assessment.