
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

PRESS RELEASE



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Three Amendments Gaining Momentum

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and eight of its Committees met in Galloway, New Jersey on February 11-13, 2009. In addition to addressing future amendment actions, the Council also convened a public workshop on bycatch reduction in the *Loligo* squid fishery.

For the Omnibus Annual Catch Limits (ACL) / Accountability Measures (AM) Amendment, the Council voted to have staff develop and compile options for all Council managed species, and create a scoping document prior to meeting again with the ACL / AM Committee. The Council also voted to remove the ACL / AM issue from Amendment 11 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Amendment 14 to the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog FMP as these issues will now be included in the Omnibus ACL / AM Amendment.

The Squid, Mackerel, and Butterfish Committee met and finalized the range of alternatives to be considered and analyzed for Amendment 11 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP. Amendment 11 addresses: 1) Cap fishing capacity in the mackerel fishery, 2) Update Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), 3) Mitigate gear impacts on *Loligo* egg EFH, 4) Establish ACLs / AMs, and, 5) Avoid at-sea processing problems. Several changes / additions were made including: finalizing EFH alternatives; finalizing a range of caps on at-sea processing; adding an alternative that considers a lower Tier 3 threshold (10,000 pounds); removing ACL / AM alternatives; adding higher trip limits to the range of considered trip limits; and, adding an alternative that considers a simplified two category limited access system. The Council ratified the Committee's motions and voted unanimously to develop the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Amendment 11. Barring delays, the Council anticipates adopting a draft EIS in April 2009 and conducting public hearings in the May / June 2009 timeframe.

A scoping session for Amendment 14 to the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog FMP was convened on the evening of Wednesday, February 11. Amendment 14 addresses six issues: 1) EFH update, 2) cost recovery, 3) annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs), 4) ocean quahog overfishing threshold, 5) excessive shares, and, 6) data collection. The Council voted to remove issue 3 regarding annual catch limits and accountability measures, and include the remaining five issues in Amendment 14 for purposes of public hearing document development.

Dr. Paul Rago of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) provided a report addressing Annual Discards for 2008 and Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Priorities for 2009. The Council also received a report from Dr. James Weinberg of the NEFSC on the Northeast Data Poor Stocks Peer Review Meeting which included scup and black sea bass. The Peer Review Group concluded that scup is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Peer Review Group also concluded that black sea bass is not overfished but overfishing is occurring.

The Council recognized James Donofrio with its 2008 Fisheries Achievement Award for his leadership, professionalism, and dedication in building a more engaged recreational community, a better educated recreational community, and a more solution-oriented recreational community.



Pictured is James Donofrio (left) receiving the Council's 2008 Fisheries Achievement Award from Rick Robins, Chairman (right).

To encourage early adoption of voluntary fishing practices to reduce butterfish bycatch in the *Loligo* squid fishery, there was a very well attended Public Workshop held during the Thursday session of the Council meeting. If NMFS approves Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP, it would establish a butterfish bycatch mortality cap for the *Loligo* squid fishery in 2011. The participants discussed ways to mitigate against possible future closures of the *Loligo* fishery owing to attainment of the butterfish mortality cap. The Workshop helped identify current problems in the *Loligo* fishery and possible solutions. Suggestions for solving the butterfish bycatch issue included: better communication amongst fleet members, peer pressures to fish in areas devoid of mixed stocks, implementation of rolling gear restricted areas, gear technology improvements in nets and sensing devices, and other gear modifications.

The Research Set-Aside Committee convened a public fact finding and comment session on the Council's RSA program. The Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee received a report from Dr. Mike Fogarty on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's recent efforts regarding development of an ecosystem based approach to fishery management.

The Council's Protected Resources Committee met with its Advisors to discuss an industry request to modify Bottle Nose Dolphin Take Reduction Team (TRT) Plan by adding one month to the current "tending requirement" period for medium gillnet fisheries. The Committee also discussed the Atlantic Trawl TRT strategy for pilot whales and common dolphin.

The Law Enforcement Committee met and discussed regulatory implications of transfer-at-sea authorizations, and monitoring of other than a daily trip limit in the party/charter boat fisheries.

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