

Greater



National Marine Fisheries Service  
Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
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# Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

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Prepared for the April 11-13, 2017  
Meeting of the  
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

April 12, 2017

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## **New England Council Actions**

### **Small-Mesh Multispecies**

None at this time

### **Groundfish**

#### **Amendment 18 to the Multispecies FMP**

On March 6, 2017, NOAA Fisheries approved Amendment 18 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 18 establishes accumulation limits for limited access groundfish permits and removes several limited access handgear vessel restrictions. A final rule implementing the Amendment should be publishing soon.

#### **Inseason Action to Increase the Common Pool Possession and Trip Limit of Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock**

On March 16, 2017, NMFS filed a temporary rule in the Federal Register increasing the possession and trip limit for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock through April 30, 2017. NMFS took these actions because catch data indicated that the common pool was not expected to fully harvest its annual quota for these stocks at the trip limit already in place. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or [Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov](mailto:Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov)

#### **Final Adjustment to the Yellowtail Flounder Allocations for the Groundfish and Scallop Fisheries**

On March 13, 2017, NMFS filed a temporary rule in the Federal Register that transferred unused quota of Georges Bank and Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder from the scallop fishery to the commercial groundfish fishery for the 2016 fishing year, through April 30, 2017. NMFS transferred 40 metric tons of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, and 15 metric tons of Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder, to the groundfish fishery (sector and common pool vessels). For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978)281-9116 or [Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov](mailto:Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov).

### **Monkfish**

None at this time

## **Scallops**

### **Final Rule for Framework 28**

NMFS published a final rule for Framework 28 in the Federal Register on March 27, 2017 (82 FR 15155). Framework 28: sets specifications for the scallop fishery for fishing year 2017; revises the way we allocate catch to the limited access general category individual fishing quota fleet to reflect spatial management of the scallop fishery; and implements a 50-bushel shell stock possession limit for limited access vessels inshore of the days-at-sea demarcation line north of 42° 20' N. lat. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at [travis.ford@noaa.gov](mailto:travis.ford@noaa.gov).

### **2017 Closure of the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area**

On March 23, 2017, NMFS announced that the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area will close for the remainder of the 2017 fishing year (82 FR 15164). The closure ensures that the scallop fleet will not overharvest the 2017 total allowable catch set for the management area. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at [Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov](mailto:Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov).

## **Herring**

None at this time

## **Skate**

### **Commercial Skate Wing and Skate Bait Possession Limit Increase**

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on March 14, 2017, (82 FR 13564) which increased the skate wing possession limit from 500 lb to 4,100 lb of skate wings per trip, and increased the skate bait possession limit from 1,135 lb to 9,307 lb per trip, effective March 15, 2017, through April 30, 2017. Adjusting these possession limits were necessary to allow fishermen the opportunity to fully harvest the remaining skate wing and skate bait annual commercial quota. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at [Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov](mailto:Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov).

## **Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab**

### **Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Specifications for Fishing Years 2017-2019**

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on February 22, 2017, (82 FR 11322) approving the 2017 Atlantic deep-sea red crab quota and projecting quotas for 2018-2019. Based on the recommendation from the New England Fishery Management Council, we are continuing the existing red crab fishery quota of 1,775 metric tons for fishing years 2017. This action is necessary to establish allowable red crab harvest levels that will prevent overfishing and allow harvesting of optimum yield. Because the final rule did not publish before the start of the 2017 fishing year (March 1, 2017), rollover specifications were in effect and were replaced when the final rule became effective on March, 24, 2017. For additional information, please contact Allison Murphy at (978) 281-9122 or email at [Allison.Murphy@noaa.gov](mailto:Allison.Murphy@noaa.gov).

## **Mid-Atlantic Council Actions**

### **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass**

#### **Commercial Summer Flounder Quota Transfer – North Carolina to Virginia**

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on February 22, 2017, (82 FR 11321) allowing a transfer of 11,030 lb of commercial summer flounder quota from North Carolina to Virginia. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2017 are: North Carolina, 1,542,203 lb; Virginia, 1,217,402 lb. This transfer was requested by North Carolina to repay landings by a North Carolina-permitted vessel that landed in Virginia under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at [Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov).

### **Atlantic Bluefish**

#### **2017 Atlantic Bluefish Sector Quota Transfer Adjustment**

NMFS published a rule in the Federal Register on March 13, 2017, (82 FR 13402) that revises the sector quota transfer amount from the recreational to the commercial bluefish fishery to account for 2016 harvest information. As a result of the updated harvest information, we have increased the sector quota transfer by 2,471,354 lb; resulting in a revised recreational harvest limit of 9,653,715 lb, and a revised commercial quota of 8,542,221 lb. The individual state quota allocations have been updated to reflect the sector transfer, and the recreational season and daily possession limits for 2017 remain unchanged. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at [Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov).

### **Spiny Dogfish**

None at this time

### **Surfclam and Ocean Quahog**

#### **Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ Cost Recovery**

The 2017 fishing year marks the start of the new cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries. At the end of 2017, ITQ shareholders will be responsible for a fee based on how many of their 2017 cage tags are used to land surfclams or ocean quahogs throughout the year. The fee to the ITQ shareholder will be based on the cage tag numbers initial allocated to each shareholder, even if some or all of those tags are leased or otherwise transferred to another individual who uses them to land clams. We will announce the new fees per tag shortly, and will issue bills in March 2018, based on all of the cage tags used in 2017. Details about the new cost recovery program were published in the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Amendment 17 final rule (81 FR 38969; June 15, 2016). For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or [Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov](mailto:Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov).

## **Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish**

### **Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Chub Mackerel**

NMFS published a notice of intent in the Federal Register on March 22, 2017, (82 FR 14694) documenting the Mid-Atlantic Council's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to support integrating Atlantic chub mackerel into the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. This action would consider implementing annual catch limits, accountability measures, essential fish habitat designations, and a definition of the management unit for this species. The Council may also consider other measures such as permit requirements, annual catch targets, possession limits, minimum fish size restrictions, gear restrictions and reporting requirements. The comment period on the notice of intent closes on May 31, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at [douglas.christel@noaa.gov](mailto:douglas.christel@noaa.gov).

## **Tilefish**

None at this Time

## **Other Actions**

## **Paperwork Reduction Act**

### **Comment Period for New Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment Data Collections**

NMFS expects to publish a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register soon, requesting comments on new collection of information requirements associated with this action. The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 requires the Department of Commerce to attempt to reduce paperwork and respondent burden on proposed and continuing data collections. Comments are invited on the necessity of the collections, the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden, ways to enhance the collection, and ways to minimize the burden on respondents. Direct all written comments to [OIRA\\_Submission@omb.eop.gov](mailto:OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov), or fax to (202) 395-5806. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at [douglas.christel@noaa.gov](mailto:douglas.christel@noaa.gov).

## **Forage Species**

### **Notice of Availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment**

NMFS published a notice of availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register on March 28, 2017 (82 FR 15311). The Forage Fish Amendment would: Set a 1,700 lb/trip cumulative possession limit for certain previously unmanaged forage species in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; establish a 2.86 million lb annual landing limit for Atlantic chub mackerel and a 40,000 lb incidental trip limit once the annual landing limit is reached; require a Federal commercial vessel, operator, and dealer permit to fish for, possess, land, and purchase forage species or Atlantic chub mackerel in or from Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; require vessel operators and dealers to report catch and landings of forage species and chub mackerel on logbooks and dealer reports, respectively; allow vessels to transit Mid-Atlantic waters with forage species and chub mackerel caught outside of the Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; and specify certain measures that can be revised through a future framework action. The comment period on the notice of availability closes on May 30, 2017. A proposed rule is expected to publish soon. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at [douglas.christel@noaa.gov](mailto:douglas.christel@noaa.gov).

**Proposed Rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment**

NMFS expects to publish a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register soon. This amendment would implement measures to prevent the expansion of existing commercial fisheries for certain previously unmanaged forage species and Atlantic chub mackerel. As detailed above, proposed measures include possession limits, an annual landing limit for chub mackerel, permit and reporting requirements, a transiting provision, and a list of allowable framework measures. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at [douglas.christel@noaa.gov](mailto:douglas.christel@noaa.gov).

**Lobster**

None at this time

**Jonah Crab**

None at this time

**Blueline Tilefish**

None at this time

**Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment**

None at this time

**Protected Resources Actions**

None at this time

**Research Document Applications Under Review**

On March 28, 2017, NMFS published a notice and request for comments for an application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) submitted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). The EFP application under consideration would support the NEFSC Study Fleet biological sampling program. It would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Minimum fish size restrictions; fish possession limits for species not protected under the Endangered Species Act; gear specific fish possession restrictions for the purpose of at-sea sampling; and retaining and landing of prohibited fish species. The comment period for this notice closed on April 12, 2017. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at [Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov](mailto:Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov)

On November 29, 2016, NMFS received a request for an EFP from William G. Brown in support of a study investigating the economic viability of electronic jigging machines to target pollock. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using electronic jigging machines in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area between June and August of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at [Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov](mailto:Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov)

## **Research Document Application Review Completed**

On February 23, 2017, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program to conduct an evaluation of new conservation gear technology designed to reduce black sea bass bycatch in the small-mesh longfin squid fishery. Seven research days are planned from May through September, and the participating vessel will conduct six to eight hour-long tows per day out of Point Judith, RI, comparing both experimental and control (standard squid fishery) nets. Longfin squid and black sea bass catch from this study may be retained for sale. All other catch will be discarded as soon as possible. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at [Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov).

On March 2, 2017, NMFS issued a revision to the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) "American Lobster Ventless Trap Study" Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) issued on August 24, 2015, to allow three additional vessels to join the survey fleet full time, and nine additional ventless traps to be deployed in Area 3 for the remainder of this project. The study period, sampling protocol, requested Federal exemptions, and overall project remain the same. Increased survey coverage in Area 3 is in response to reports of recruitment failure in the Southern New England lobster stock, and the need for more information on population abundance in offshore regions (such as Area 3). For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at [Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov).

On March 27, 2017, NMFS issued a LOA to Rutgers University to conduct a trap survey of black sea bass, tautog, and lobster on two artificial reefs (Sea Girt and Little Egg Inlet) off the coast of New Jersey. For three phases from April through November, 22 ventless fish traps will be deployed at each site for 4-5 weeks per phase; and hauled and sampled every 5-9 days during research phases. Over the course of the year's research, a random sample of 150 black sea bass, 150 tautog, and 100 lobsters will be retained for further sampling, and everything else will be promptly returned to the sea. No fish from this project will be landed for sale. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at [Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov).

An EFP extension was issued on April 7, 2017, to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology (SMASST) extending their 2016 Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program until April 30, 2018. This project will allow vessels to conduct compensation fishing to support funding for monkfish research. The EFP exempts vessels from monkfish DAS possession limits in the Northern and Southern Monkfish Fishery Management Areas. Fishing activity will otherwise be conducted under normal monkfish commercial fishing practices. Extending the EFP will allow flexibility for the industry and will assist in harvesting the entire set-aside awarded. Vessels that are collectively operating under this EFP could use up to 250 monkfish RSA DAS or catch 888,000 lb of whole monkfish, whichever occurs first. For additional information, contact Reid Lichwell at (978)-281-9112, or e-mail at [Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov](mailto:Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov).

On March 28, 2017, NMFS received a request for a letter of authorization (LOA) from Normandeau Associates Inc. (NAI) in support of an ongoing winter flounder assessment survey in Western Cape Cod Bay. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using trawl gear in areas off Plymouth Bay, Massachusetts in April and May of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at [Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov](mailto:Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov)



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