



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 24, 2012

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Council Votes to Increase Commercial Quota and Trip Limits for Spiny Dogfish

DOVER, DE—Last week the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted to increase the commercial quota for spiny dogfish by 14% to 40.8 million pounds in 2013. If approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service, 2013 will be the fifth consecutive year with a higher commercial quota than the year before. At last week's meeting, the Council also voted to increase the trip limit for the first time since 2009, adopting a 4,000 pound trip limit for 2013-2015.

The Council began managing spiny dogfish under a ten year rebuilding plan in 2000 after the stock was severely depleted. In 2009, the fishery was determined to be above the target population size—one year ahead of the 2010 rebuilding deadline. As of mid-September the commercial fishery was on track to under-harvest this year's 35.7 million pound quota for the first time since the directed fishery was reopened. "When the rebuilding plan was implemented, it abruptly curtailed a 60 million pound fishery and resulted in significant impacts on the region's fishing and processing sectors," said Council Chairman Rick Robins. "It is encouraging to see a portion of the fishery recover to a 40 million pound level with strong scientific evidence that the dogfish population is above sustainable levels."

For some Council members and fishermen, the large number of trips with landings equal to the trip limit suggested that the current 3,000 pound trip limit was limiting the industry's efficiency. Others urged the Council not to raise the trip limit on the basis of limited processing capacity. The Fishery Performance Report provided by the Council's spiny dogfish advisory panel (AP) noted that underperformance of the fishery early this year was related to fish being pushed offshore by higher than normal water temperature. The Monitoring Committee noted that raising the trip limit would increase the likelihood of an early closure, but they determined that the decision was a question of policy rather than biology and chose not to make a specific recommendation.

Recent discussions of spiny dogfish management have attracted the interest of fishermen and stakeholders involved in other fisheries—many of whom have encouraged the Council to increase the spiny dogfish quotas and trip limits to keep pace with population growth. As top-level predators, spiny dogfish feed on other commercially and recreationally-targeted species in the region, and fishermen have become increasingly concerned about the impacts of dogfish on other species. In fact, the need for more effective consideration of predator-prey interactions was one of the most frequently cited ecological issues of the Council's Visioning Project.

Some fishermen and processors opposed higher quotas and trip limits because the changes might exacerbate existing economic challenges that have developed during the transition to a larger-scale fishery. Although the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) recently certified the spiny dogfish fishery as sustainably managed, the industry has faced reduced demand in recent years for the species in Germany and other European countries that import spiny dogfish from the United States.

In the 2012 Fishery Performance Report, the spiny dogfish AP suggested that a slower transition to a large-scale directed fishery may allow time for the market and processors to adjust to a larger supply of dogfish. Sean McKeon, President of North Carolina Fisheries Association, pointed out during public comments that the fishing industry needs to see consistency and continuity of regulations before they get back in to the dogfish fishery. McKeon, who acknowledged that processing capacity is a constraint in North Carolina, supported a higher quota and trip limit, but he urged the Council adopt management measures designed for long-term consistency so that processors will begin to accept dogfish again.

Upon discussion of staff and advisory group recommendations and public comments, the Council voted to adopt the higher quotas and trip limits for 2013-2015. The Council will have opportunities to revisit management measures for the 2014 and 2015 fishing years if necessary. “The Council has been working to identify areas where we can make decisions that will promote stability within the fishing industry,” said Chairman Robins. “This year we are setting multi-year specifications for the first time in many of our fisheries, and we intend to continue exploring stability in the quota setting process whenever it is feasible and practical.”

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) is one of eight regional councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council has primary responsibility for twelve species of fish and shellfish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between 3 and 200 miles off the Mid-Atlantic coast. Member states include New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. For more information, visit our website: www.mafmc.org.
