



More Opportunities to Sustainably Harvest Swordfish Proposed



NOAA photo

NOAA Fisheries is proposing changes to management of the commercial swordfish fishery in order to create more opportunities for commercial fishermen to catch and sell swordfish, while remaining within quota. The proposed changes include the creation of a new vessel permit, authorization of more gear types to commercially harvest swordfish, and the modification of fishing regulations for current Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Charter/Headboat permits.

Swordfish are managed internationally by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). In recent years, the North Atlantic swordfish stock has experienced significant growth due to domestic and international management measures designed to reduce mortality, protect juvenile swordfish, and reduce bycatch, among other things. The most recent ICCAT stock assessment (2009) found the North Atlantic swordfish population to be fully rebuilt and that overfishing is no longer occurring. In Draft Amendment 8 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP), NOAA Fisheries is proposing to maintain these gains, while increasing commercial access to the resource for U.S. fishermen.

Draft Amendment 8 proposes a new open-access swordfish vessel permit that would allow retention and sale of a limited

number of swordfish (0-6) by fishermen using hand gear including rod and reel, harpoon, handline, bandit gear, and green-stick. Larger fish are available to the fishery as the swordfish stock has rebuilt, and use of hand gear, which has lower bycatch interaction and post-release mortality rates, is more economically viable. Draft Amendment 8 also proposes to authorize HMS Charter/Headboat vessel permit holders to fish commercially under the open-access swordfish permit regulations when not on a for-hire trip.

Draft Amendment 8 is one of a number of actions that NOAA Fisheries has taken in recent years to increase use of the annual U.S. swordfish quota allocated by ICCAT. From 2007-2011, on average, the United States caught approximately 70 percent of its baseline swordfish allocation. The proposed changes would reduce some existing barriers that currently make entry into the commercial swordfish fishery difficult, yet would prevent the fishery from becoming over-capitalized.

The proposed rule for Amendment 8 will publish shortly. The comment period will be open for 60 days. A public hearing at the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA, is scheduled for March 28, 2013, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. For further information, please call Rick Pearson at (727) 824-5399 or email Rick.Pearson@noaa.gov.

Increased Quota Allows for a Directed Butterfish Fishery

For the first time since 2001, there is an opportunity for a directed butterfish fishery in federal waters. On Jan. 16, the 2013 butterfish quota was set at 2,570 metric tons (mt), which is 1,698 mt more than the 2012 quota of 872 mt and represents an increase of nearly 200%.

The butterfish fishery will now operate under a 3-phase management system to allow fishing throughout the entire year. Phase 1 began on Jan. 16 with trip limits according to mesh size used as shown in the table at the bottom of this column.

When the Phase 1 butterfish catch reaches the designated threshold (see table at right), the fishery will move into Phase 2, and the trip limit for limited-access vessels

3-Phase Butterfish Management System

PHASE	LIMITED ACCESS TRIP LIMIT		INCIDENTAL TRIP LIMIT
	>3 inch mesh	<3 inch mesh	Any Mesh Size
1	Unlimited	2,500 lb	600 lb
2	5,000 lb	2,500 lb	600 lb
3	500 lb	500 lb	600 lb

Butterfish Trip Limit Reduction Thresholds

MONTHS	PHASE 2		PHASE 3	
	Trip Limit Reduction Threshold (Percent of quota)	Corresponding Butterfish quota level (mt)	Trip Limit Reduction Threshold (Percent of quota)	Corresponding Butterfish quota level (mt)
Jan - Feb	40	1,028	58	1,491
Mar-Apr	47	1,208	64	1,645
May-Jun	55	1,414	71	1,825
Jul-Aug	63	1,619	78	2,005
Sept-Oct	71	1,825	85	2,185
Nov-Dec	78	2,005	91	2,339

using mesh size over 3" will drop to 5,000 pounds.

When the butterfish catch reaches the Phase 3 threshold, the trip limit for limited-access vessels using any mesh size will drop to 500 pounds for the rest of the fishing year.

We will notify butterfish permit holders of trip limit reductions as follows through: a notice in the Federal Register, which may be found online at <www.regulations.gov>; Northeast Fisheries Bulletins sent by mail; Coast Guard and NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts; vessel monitoring system messages; and on our website at <www.nero.noaa.gov>. For more information, call the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315.

THIS SUPPLEMENT PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S NORTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE

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Collaborative Survey to Gather Black Sea Bass Assessment Data

The Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside (RSA) program is funding a pilot survey of black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*) from the Rhode Island Bight to Virginia waters. This survey will focus on species we do not have a lot of scientific data on, but one that is important to commercial and recreational fisheries from New England to the South Atlantic.

There are two stocks of black sea bass along the East Coast – one north and one south of Cape Hatteras, which serves as the geographic boundary.

These fish range from inshore to offshore areas at a depth of 1 meter to 165 meters. During their inshore season, black sea bass prefer hard or rocky bottom habitat. While offshore, they prefer ledges and hard-bottom banks.

Black sea bass generally are found in water temperatures ranging from 43° F to 84° F, and also are found in estuarine areas. They eat a large variety of crustaceans, fishes, mollusks, and sea worms. Predators of black sea bass include little skates, spiny dogfish, monkfish, spotted hake, and windowpane and summer flounder.

Black sea bass are important to commercial and recreational fisheries, with landings equally split between the two user groups. Current management measures include commercial gear restrictions, minimum fish sizes, and commercial and recreational catch limits.

Recent stock assessments for black sea bass have been characterized as “data poor,” but cooperative research can provide additional data to improve assessment results.

Black sea bass are protogynous hermaphrodites, which means that they change from female to male during their lifetime. These fish begin life as females, with most switching sex when they are between two and six years of age. In fact, few female black sea bass over the age of seven are found. The long-term effects of fishing activities that target large males are not well understood.

Data from this cooperative black sea bass survey will be integrated into the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP). The fixed-gear survey will be conducted using unvented fish pots and

will target black sea bass on hard bottom sites typically not sampled by the current trawl-based NEAMAP survey or by ongoing state and federal bottom trawl surveys.

Four separate hard bottom sites will be sampled from June through October in Southern New England and from April through August in the Mid-Atlantic.

The goal is to use the data collected to track year classes of fish, detect differences in abundance, and provide more accurate information on abundance, age and growth, and life history. The results are expected to improve stock assessments and help inform management of this species.

Fieldwork for this study is being conducted by four commercial vessels with technical support provided by the University of Rhode Island and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology.

Also participating in this collaborative effort are staff from: the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Division of Fish and Wildlife; the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife; the Virginia Marine Resources Commission; and NOAA Fisheries Service.

For more information, call Carolyn Woodhead at (978) 281-9197 or e-mail her at <Carolyn.woodhead@noaa.gov>.

Networks Work to Cut Squid Fishery Bycatch

In the fall of 2010, the NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Cooperative Research Program awarded more than \$3 million to a number of network groups to help them tackle difficult challenges in New England and Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

These network projects support fishing industry, academic, non-governmental, and state and federal government partners that are developing multi-disciplinary approaches to minimizing the catch of non-target species (or bycatch) while promoting the harvest of target species.

In the last edition of the *NOAA Fisheries Navigator*, we detailed a number of networks working on New England projects. We pick up here with two networks focused on Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

● **Squid Trawl Network** – This group is led by investigators from Cornell University Cooperative Extension (CCE), the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMASST), and the University of Rhode Island.

The network has developed a collaborative approach to reducing bycatch in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic longfin (*Loligo*) squid trawl fishery and is working to evaluate and optimize several potential gear solutions, including the use of drop chains, large-mesh panels, and sorting grids to reduce the non-target catch of flounder, scup, and butterfish.

The project team also has established an outreach website, located at <www.squidtrawlnetwork.com>, to reach as many stakeholders in the *Loligo* fishery as possible. The website includes information on the

squid fishery, current research, and an interactive discussion board for website subscribers to voice their concerns and opinions and post topics to begin online discussions.

The Squid Trawl Network is currently working with scientists from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to develop innovative survey techniques using both a traditional survey net and acoustic survey equipment to better estimate the catchability of pelagic species such as butterfish. This information may help to improve stock assessments for these species and alleviate some of the pressure on the squid fishery to avoid exceeding the butterfish bycatch cap.

● **GSSA** – Another network group is coordinated by the Garden State Seafood Association (GSSA) and includes scientists from CCE, Rutgers University, the University of Delaware, and the University of New Hampshire.

This collaborative effort is focused on developing ecologically informed models that can be used to help reduce butterfish bycatch in the Mid-Atlantic Bight squid fishery. The models will use Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) habitat models developed in conjunction with the Fisheries and the Environment (FATE) project, merging them with behavioral models of squid fishermen.

Additional aspects of this project include a diet analysis of *Loligo* to

better understand the species' role as a predator in the Northeastern US continental shelf ecosystem. The results of this study are expected to improve ecosystem-based management of *Loligo* and their prey species.

This group also is modeling bycatch reduction and the effects of predation by squid on the population dynamics of butterfish. The goal of this portion of the project is to combine the results of the habitat modeling, *Loligo* diet analysis, and gear modifications developed through the Squid Trawl Network to gauge population-level impacts of different bycatch reduction strategies.

For more information on any of these projects or on the Northeast Cooperative Research Program, visit our website at <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch> or contact Carolyn Woodhead by e-mail at <carolyn.woodhead@noaa.gov> or by phone at (978) 281-9197.

Harbor Porpoise Closure Reminder

As a reminder, the Coastal Gulf of Maine Consequence Closure Area for the Northeast sink gillnet fishery was recently triggered due to high levels of harbor porpoise bycatch in this area. The closure was originally scheduled for October and November 2012, but NOAA Fisheries Service temporarily shifted this closure to run Feb. 1, 2013 through March 31, 2013. For more information, visit the NOAA Fisheries Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/hptrp> or contact Kate Swalis by phone at (978) 282-8481 or by e-mail at <Kate.Swalis@noaa.gov>.

Maine Forum Workshop: Avoiding Gear Conflicts in Newly Reopened Areas

Gear conflicts are frustrating and can be costly. Your fishing business depends on your gear, so the last thing you want is accidental damage. We want fishermen to understand how different fishing areas are used, especially as their uses change. We also want fishermen to know about a recent gentleman's agreement regarding gear conflicts that is included in several groundfish sector operations plans, how it affects you, and what to do if a conflict occurs.

To explain these developments, NOAA Fisheries Service's Office of Law Enforcement is partnering with the Maine Marine Patrol, the US Coast Guard, and the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association (AOLA) to host a gear conflict workshop during the Maine Fishermen's Forum on Friday, March 1 at 9 am.

This session will provide fishermen with an opportunity to talk about gear conflict issues with each other and with NOAA enforcement personnel. We encourage industry members to attend and participate in this important discussion.

Framework 48 proposals

During its Dec. 20, 2012 meeting, the New England Fishery Management Council approved Framework Adjustment 48 to the federal groundfish plan, which includes measures that would enable groundfish sectors to request access to fish in areas that have been closed to commercial groundfish fishing for many years.

NOAA Fisheries is considering these requests for fishing year 2013 and will seek public comment through a proposed rule published in the Federal Register before approving any of them.

Cash Rewards for Tagged Dogfish!

Since 2010, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Northeast Cooperative Research Program has tagged over 34,000 spiny dogfish in collaboration with commercial fishermen in Gulf of Maine, Southern New England, and Georges Bank waters. This project seeks to answer questions about spiny dogfish stock structure, movement patterns, and life history in order to improve stock assessments for this species.

NOAA Fisheries Service is offering the following cash rewards for the return of information on tagged dogfish, including tag number, fork length, and date and location where the fish was caught – \$20 for each white tag and \$100 for each orange tag.

Important! There are green tags out there, too. However, dogfish with a green tag have been injected with oxytetracycline for an age and growth study, so we need you to return the *whole* fish in order to qualify for a \$100 cash reward.

You can report the capture of tagged spiny dogfish in the following ways: call toll free (877) 826-2612; report online at <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sharktagreport>; or e-mail the tag information to <sharkrecap@noaa.gov>.

Whole fish with green tags should be iced or frozen. We'll provide you with shipping instructions when you report the capture.

So keep your eyes out for these white, orange, and green tags! NOAA Fisheries scientists will greatly appreciate your efforts and reward your wallet in return.

Although we have not made any decisions yet, some of the requests we are reviewing could affect the following areas.

- Portions of Closed Area I and Closed Area II on Georges Bank could re-open to groundfishing from May 1 through Feb. 15.
- A portion of the eastern edge of the Western Gulf of Maine Closed Area off of Maine and New Hampshire could open to mobile gear during times that are not subject to existing rolling closures. More information on the rolling closures can be found in this document, which you can download from our website online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/regs/infodocs/MultsClosedAreas.pdf>. And,
- Access to defined portions of the Cashes Ledge and Nantucket Lightship Closed Areas could be allowed year-round.

In an effort to minimize potential gear conflicts in Closed Area II, AOLA and some groundfish sectors have signed an agreement to access Closed Area II. This agreement is included in the draft operations plans for those groundfish sectors that signed the agreement.

If these operations plans are approved, starting on May 1, 2013, certain areas of Closed Area II will be designated for either lobster trap fishing or groundfish trawling during specific times of the year. By following this agreement, all parties involved can avoid unintentionally damaging someone else's gear. We will evaluate potential gear conflicts as we consider sector exemption requests.

Surf clam areas open

Additionally, we have reopened a portion of the Georges Bank Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Closed Area to Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog harvesting. This area had been closed to the harvest of Atlantic surf clams and ocean quahogs since 1990.

Framework Adjustment 48 to the federal groundfish plan includes measures that would enable groundfish sectors to request access to fish in areas that have been closed to commercial groundfish fishing for many years.

If you fish in the northern portion of the reopened area on Cultivator Shoals, please take note of this reopening since most surf clam and ocean quahog fishing effort likely will be focused within that area.

For more information on this reopening and how it may affect fixed gear, please refer to the bulletin we mailed out in December or download it from our website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nr/doc/12/12scoqgeorgesbankareareopenlobphl.pdf>.

The most important factor in avoiding gear conflicts is ensuring that there is open communication between different users of the same area. However, gear conflicts may still happen. If you are involved in a gear conflict, please call NOAA Fisheries' Office of Law Enforcement for assistance at (978) 281-9213 and press "2" for the Compliance Line.

Be Sure to Carry Your Marine Mammal Authorization Certificate

The Marine Mammal Authorization Program is a mandatory registration program that provides exemptions for commercial fishermen from the Marine Mammal Protection Act's prohibition on the unintentional taking of marine mammals that are not endangered or threatened during commercial fishing activities.

In the Northeast Region, fishermen are automatically registered for the year if they have a valid state or federal permit license as of Jan. 1.

This program applies to all fishermen who have a valid state or federal commercial fishing license that permits the use of: gillnets; longlines; traps/pots; midwater or bottom trawls, including pair trawls and flynets; menhaden purse seines in the Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico; long haul seines in North Carolina; roe mullet stop nets in North Carolina; pound nets in Virginia; and any high seas fisheries targeting Atlantic Highly Migratory Species outside of 200 nautical miles.

The Marine Mammal Authorization Program requires fishermen participating in the fisheries listed above to:

- Carry an Authorization Certificate, which is valid Jan. 1- Dec. 31 of each calendar year, during fishing activities;
- Carry an observer when requested;
- Comply with applicable take reduction plans; and
- Report any serious injury or mortality of a marine mammal caused by a fishing operation within 48 hours of the interaction using the Marine Mammal Mortality/Injury Reporting form. This form is available online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/mmap> or by calling (978) 281-9328.

If you participate in an applicable fishery and have not received your Authorization Certificate in the mail yet, please visit the Marine Mammal Authorization Program website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/mmap> to download one or call us at (978) 282-8462 so we can mail one to you.

Oyster Restoration Project Helps Chesapeake Bay and Beyond

Oysters are great multitaskers. Not only do they support an important fishery – in 2010, more than 28 million pounds valued at nearly \$118 million were harvested in the United States – but they grow in reefs that serve as important habitat for other species. Fish and crabs, especially juveniles, shelter from predators among the reefs. And oysters are filter feeders, so they help clean the water.

In the Chesapeake Bay, oysters have suffered from poor water quality, diseases, and overharvesting. Once, oyster reefs were so large that ships had to navigate around them. Now, the Chesapeake's oyster population stands at less than 1% of historic levels.

A healthy oyster population in the Chesapeake benefits more than just the Bay. Many coastal species, including striped bass, use Bay tributaries as nurseries. Estimates are that 70% to 90% of striped bass along the Atlantic Coast spend some portion of their life cycle in the Chesapeake. Because increased oyster populations would provide habitat and improved water quality, healthy reefs in the Chesapeake could mean healthier fish populations for the East Coast, making oyster restoration a high priority for NOAA.

Selecting the location for an oyster restoration project is a complex process. Oyster reefs need hard bottom for survival. If the bottom is muddy, as much of the Chesapeake and its tributaries are, newly planted oysters easily could sink into the mud and be smothered.

Oysters also need water with sufficient salinity and oxygen levels. To ensure restoration projects are located where they are most likely to succeed, NOAA scientists and their partners develop detailed analyses of existing reefs and map potential restoration sites from data obtained using highly specialized bathymetric equipment, including single-beam, side-scan, sub-bottom, and multi-beam sonar, as well as ground-truthing methods such as high-definition video and grab sampling.

Some existing reefs only need additional juvenile oysters to “jump start” populations. In other areas, reefs must be reconstructed from the ground up. Reconstruction requires placing large amounts of old oyster shell, recycled concrete, stone, and/or concrete “reefballs” into the water onto which juvenile oysters can then be planted.

To support this important effort, a team, including NOAA, the US Army Corps of Engineers Baltimore District, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, is working alongside academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to restore healthy oyster populations through large-scale restoration projects in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake. Currently, the team's focus is a project in Harris Creek off the Choptank River on Maryland's Eastern Shore near Tilghman Island. The goal is to restore healthy oyster reefs to 377 acres and, so far, roughly 100 acres have been restored.



Each agency on this team brings specific capabilities to the project. For example, the US Army Corps of Engineers has expertise in large-scale construction efforts. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, which regulates use of the Bay bottom and manages the oyster fishery, has declared Harris Creek an oyster sanctuary, where harvest of oysters is prohibited. The University of Maryland produces the juvenile oysters that the nonprofit Oyster Recovery Partnership plants on reefs. And NOAA provides critically needed science and policy guidance. Representatives from these organizations and others meet regularly to plan projects collaboratively and review progress, ensuring the project is accomplished effectively and efficiently.

NOAA and its partners will monitor the restoration sites to determine the long-term success of these reefs. The future health of the Chesapeake Bay, as well as fish and other species in the Bay and beyond, depend on this science.

For more information, call Stephanie Westby, NOAA Restoration Center, at (410) 295-3153 or e-mail her at <Stephanie.Westby@noaa.gov>.

Go Paperless! Dealers Now Have the Option



In response to requests by seafood dealers in the Northeast to “go paperless,” NOAA Fisheries Service and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) are providing the opportunity for federally permitted dealers to receive Northeast Region bulletins by e-mail.

Dealers can now log in to their Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) account and choose whether they would like to receive bulletins by mail, e-mail, or both. If you choose to receive bulletins by e-mail, you can enter multiple addresses.

Every permitted dealer has a SAFIS account and this option is available to all federally permitted dealers, even those who do not routinely use SAFIS to submit reports. If you need your SAFIS user name and password, please call the SAFIS help desk at (978) 281-9212.

To sign up for this service, log in to your SAFIS account and follow the instructions to enter the e-mail address(es) of your business(es). If you already had an e-mail address associated with your SAFIS account, please log in and verify that it is correct.

Important! If you choose to receive bulletins by e-mail, it will not change how we mail permit-specific information to you, such as permit applications and purchase/landings information, or how we contact you with questions about the data you submit to us through SAFIS.

Instructions to go paperless can be found on the ACCSP website at <www.accsp.org/safis.htm>.

For more information, call Ted Hawes at (978) 281-9296 or e-mail him at <ted.hawes@noaa.gov>. You may also contact your local port agent for assistance.



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR