



2011 Spiny Dogfish Quota Set to Increase by 5 million Pounds

On March 16, NOAA Fisheries Service proposed increasing the federal waters spiny dogfish quota to 20 million pounds for the 2011 fishing year. This 5 million pound increase over 2010 catch limits is based on scientific information indicating that this stock continues to be rebuilt.

The 3,000-pound federal trip limit (per trip or calendar day) would remain in place for 2011.

Under the federal Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan, the annual quota is divided between two quota periods. NOAA Fisheries proposed that the 2011 quota be allocated as follows:

- 11.6 million pounds for the May 1-Oct. 31 period; and
- 8.4 million pounds for the Nov. 1-April 30, 2012 period.

More information on the spiny dogfish fishery, including updates on the 2011 quota, is available online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/sfd/sfddog.html>.

NOAA Fisheries Service reminds spiny dogfish permit holders that, while fishing in state or federal waters, the most restrictive state or federal measures apply. Please contact your state's fisheries office for the most up-to-date state trip limit and quota information.



Sign Up to Get Permit Holder Letters by E-mail

Federal fisheries permit holders who have an e-mail address may choose to receive permit holder letters electronically for specific fisheries or for all fisheries in the Northeast region.

To sign up, visit <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/nr/emailphl4.htm> or call NOAA Fisheries Service's Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315.

Please note that if you sign up to receive electronic copies of permit holder letters, you will continue to receive these letters by regular mail as well.

Time to Replace Older Boatracs VMS Units

Some older-model Boatracs Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) that do not use GPS technology will need to be replaced with a newer model that does have GPS technology when they reach the end of their service lives.

The older non-GPS units that will need to be replaced are either the 3-piece Mobile Communications Terminal (MCT) or the 2-piece Integrated MCT. The newer GPS unit is the 2-piece "GIMCT," also referred to as the Fishing Mobile Communications Terminal Global Positioning System (FMCT/G).

The only Boatracs VMS that is currently approved to operate in the NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Region is the GIMCT (FMCT/G). However, both the

MCT and IMCT may continue to be operated by vessel owner/operators until the units reach the end of their service lives and require replacement.

If you are unsure about the type of Boatracs VMS installed on your vessel, call Boatracs at 1-800-262-8722 or an authorized dealer.

Boatracs vessel owners who replace their MCT/IMCT may be eligible for the VMS Reimbursement Program. Details about the VMS Reimbursement Program may be found online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/fishermen/multispecies/gom/VMSRegs.htm>.

For more information, call the NOAA Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement VMS team at (978) 281-9213 or send an e-mail to <nmfs.ole.ne@noaa.gov>.

NOAA Fisheries Tests Walk-In Service Centers

In response to industry requests, NOAA Fisheries Service has started a pilot program in several fishing ports to provide opportunities for fishermen, seafood dealers, and others to meet with NOAA Fisheries staff to talk about their specific operational concerns.

This is a small-scale pilot program to test the concept of walk-in service centers to see if they are an effective way to assist fishermen.

The service centers are geared toward all vessels in all fisheries.

At service centers, NOAA Fisheries staffers are available to answer questions on issues such as vessel trip reports, vessel monitoring systems,

sector requirements, and Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) reporting. There are no presentations or opportunities for formal public comment at these sessions.

The first fisheries service center was held on March 23 at the Yankee Fishermen's Cooperative in Seabrook, NH. Eight industry members attended and asked a variety of questions ranging from permits to vessel monitoring to industry and dealer reporting.

"It was good to have a give and take with the people who represented the different facets of management," said Yankee Co-op Manager Bob Campbell. "They answered a lot of questions that we had. I see these meetings as a useful tool for industry."

As someone active in the fishing industry, Ellen Goethel added, "The information transmitted between NMFS and the fishermen at that meeting was invaluable. I believe that once the fishermen realize this is an ongoing thing, attendance will increase."

The second walk-in service center was scheduled to take place at the Eastham Town Hall on April 13. The third test service center will be held at the **Portland Fish Exchange in Portland, ME on May 25 from 8 -11 am**. NOAA Fisheries Service encourages fishermen, fish dealers, and the general public to drop in with operational questions and meet NOAA Fisheries staff.

If these sessions are useful and well attended, additional service centers will be scheduled. For more information, call Fisheries Outreach Coordinator Olivia Rugo at (978) 675-2167 or e-mail her at <olivia.rugo@noaa.gov>.

"They [NMFS] answered a lot of questions that we had. I see these meetings as a useful tool for industry."

—Bob Campbell, Yankee Fishermen's Co-op.



New Groundfish Measures Proposed for 2011

On March 3, based on recommendations from the New England Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries Service proposed several new measures for the 2011 groundfish year through Framework 45 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan.

Key measures being proposed include extending the rebuilding period for Georges Bank yellowtail

flounder by two years until 2016 and increasing the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder total allowable catch limit to 2.5 million pounds. The increase, which was recommended by US and Canadian fishery managers, represents an 18% increase over 2010 levels.

Catch limits for 2011 were set last year for 20 groundfish stocks. This action proposes changes to

limits for five of those stocks – pollock, white hake, Georges Bank haddock, Georges Bank cod, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder.

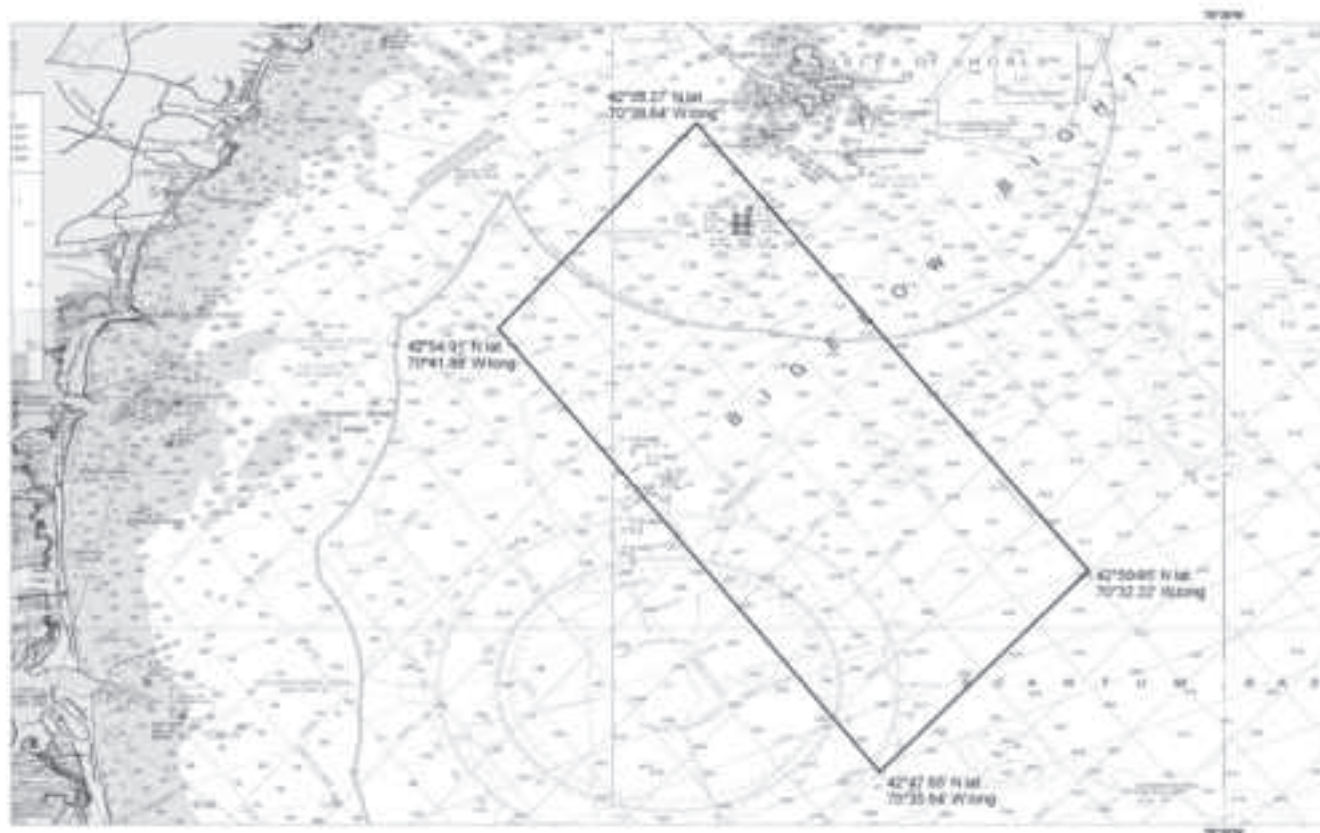
Scallop fishermen would benefit from a Framework 45 proposal to lift a ban on some scallop vessels operating in part of the Great South Channel on Georges Bank during the spring. Because there are restrictions on the amount of scallops fishermen can take, the amount of yellowtail flounder taken from the area also will be limited.

To assist with the transition to sector management, the proposed Framework 45 measures include a council-recommended delay in shifting the responsibility of catch monitoring costs to fishing vessels. NOAA Fisheries Service currently pays these costs. Under the proposal, industry would have up to two more years – until 2013 – to prepare to cover these costs.

Another proposal would close an area in the nearshore Gulf of Maine to commercial groundfish fishing in June and to recreational fishermen from April through June to protect spawning aggregations of cod.

Commercial and recreational fishermen, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, and scientists from the University of New Hampshire recommended the closure to boost and sustain the recovery of the Gulf of Maine cod stock.

For more information on the Framework 45 proposed rule, visit <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews>.



Proposed Gulf of Maine Cod Spawning Protection Area.

New Toll-Free Number for Pre-Trip Notification

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) has a new toll-free number for the Pre-trip Notification System (PTNS) for groundfish and *Loligo* squid fishing vessels: 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Notifications for multi-species groundfish trips must be made 48 hours in advance to determine whether observer coverage will be assigned.

The PTNS coordinator will be answering calls on the new phone line during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, 8 am-5pm. All calls received after normal business hours and on weekends and holidays will be directed to a trained answering service.

Answering service operators can process routine notifications, answer frequently asked questions, and help troubleshoot standard industry PTNS issues. In emergency situations, operators will immediately contact a NEFOP representative for assistance.

To notify NEFOP of multispecies groundfish and

1-855-FISHES1
(1-855-347-4371) 

Loligo squid trips, sector vessels must use one of the following options.

- Internet – This should be the primary means of trip notification and trip changes. The PTNS website address is <<http://fish.nefsc.noaa.gov/PTNS>>.
- E-mail – This should be the secondary means of trip notification. The e-mail address is <nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov>.

- Telephone – This is the backup means of notification. The toll-free phone number, 1-855-FISHES1, offers 24-hour service 7 days a week. Please cancel trips that have notifications and don't sail.

For more information, call PTNS Coordinator Sarah Cierpich at 1-855-347-4371 or e-mail <nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov>.

Species Highlight: Atlantic Wolffish

Atlantic wolffish (*Anarhichas lupus*) are found in northern latitudes of the eastern and western North Atlantic Ocean. In the western North Atlantic, they range from Davis Straits off Greenland, along Newfoundland and Labrador to the Grand Banks, and southward to Cape Cod, MA. In US waters, wolffish occur mostly in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank, but are found occasionally from southern New England to New Jersey.

Little is known about the biology, migration patterns, spawning, and movement of Atlantic wolffish. There is no directed fishery in US waters, and they are caught primarily as bycatch in bottom-trawl fisheries.

However, catches of wolffish have declined from a peak of almost 1,200 metric tons (mt) in 1983 to a low of 48 mt in 2008. Atlantic wolffish currently are designated as overfished and, under Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fisheries Management Plan, both commercial and recreational fishermen have been prohibited from possessing them in federal waters since May 1, 2010.

In 2009, the Conservation Law Foundation petitioned NOAA Fisheries Service to list Atlantic wolffish as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

A biological review team compiled information on the status, trends, threats, and risk of extinction to this species. Based on this information, NOAA Fisheries determined that listing under the ESA was not warranted. Still, wolffish was placed on the species-of-concern list due to remaining uncertainties.

Scientists at the NOAA Fisheries' Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) recently assessed Atlantic wolffish stocks. All fishery survey results analyzed showed a decline in wolffish population figures over time. However, wolffish are associated with rocky bottom habitat which may not be well sampled by trawl surveys.

Wolffish tagging

Last year, the NEFSC Northeast Cooperative Research Program funded the Maine Department of Marine Resources, working with the University of Maine and commercial fishermen, to conduct a three-year project entitled "Exploratory fixed gear survey targeting Atlantic wolffish in the inshore Gulf of Maine utilizing trap gear."

The goals of this study are to: assess the catchability of wolffish using modified trap gear; estimate seasonal and individual movements and migration patterns; collect biological information on growth, spawning, length/weight relationship, and genetic composition; and survey areas where the Maine/New Hampshire and NEFSC bottom trawl surveys are unable to sample in the nearshore Gulf of Maine.

During 2010, the study team deployed three pop-off satellite tags on large, healthy wolffish provided by local fishermen. Two of these tags have transmitted what is expected to be high-resolution data on the movements and habitat of these fish. One recovered satellite tag



Trisha deGraaf photo

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will be rebuilt and deployed on a fourth fish during 2011.

In addition, the study has begun a controlled

experiment to implant live wolffish with acoustic

telemetry tags. Release of the implanted fish will allow investigators to track them for as long as they are within transmitting distance of an array of acoustic receivers.

Plans for 2011 include the use of 10 acoustic tags and six receivers. Information from this portion of the study should provide valuable insight into wolffish movement patterns and habitat use in the Gulf of Maine, leading to better sampling strategies to estimate population levels.

For more information on this study, call Timothy Bennett of the Maine Department of Marine Resources at (207) 633-9408 or e-mail him at <timothy.d.bennett@maine.gov>.

Habitat Conservation in the Northeast

The NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) works to protect and sustain healthy marine coastal and ocean habitat and the communities and economies that depend on them.

Human activities have significantly altered coastal and marine habitat over time. Valuable habitat has been degraded, lost, or made inaccessible due to coastal development, pollution, dredging, gravel mining, dams, and other blockages that restrict access for migratory fish species.

When habitats are degraded or lost, the health and productive capacity of the ecosystem is stressed. This can result in significant economic, social, and environmental consequences.

For example, habitat degradation and loss affects the size and diversity of fish populations, which in turn impacts commercial and recreational fisheries and the service industries that depend on them. Once habitat is damaged or lost, it is difficult and costly to recover the ecosystem benefits that it provided.

Threats to habitat from human activities often can be avoided or minimized if projects are designed with measures to protect habitat.

EFH consultations

HCD's work begins with the Mid-Atlantic and New England Regional Fishery Management Councils, which identify essential fish habitat (EFH) for all fish and shellfish stocks that are managed under federal fishery management plans. An EFH designation triggers the development of fishery management measures to protect essential fish

habitat (EFH) and also informs other federal agencies if their actions have the potential to impact fish resources.

EFH consultations are required when a federal agency such as the US Coast Guard or US Army Corps of Engineers authorizes, funds, or undertakes an action that may adversely affect EFH. An adverse effect may include direct or indirect physical, chemical, or biological alterations of the water or ocean floor and loss of or injury to organisms, prey species, and their habitat.

Through EFH consultations, HCD recommends ways federal agencies can minimize potentially negative effects of their actions on the habitat of federally managed commercial and recreational fisheries. The federal agency must provide HCD with an assessment of the potential negative impacts of these actions to EFH. In response, the HCD provides the agencies with conservation recommendations to protect EFH.

Among the newest challenges for the HCD is the development of large-scale energy projects such as wind farms, tidal and current power generation pipelines, and offshore terminal facilities.

In addition, the Northeast Region has many traditional hydropower dams for which HCD provides recommendations for creating safe fish passage. Impacts of climate change on marine habitats also are a priority issue for habitat conservation.

For more information, contact Peter Colosi at (978) 281-9332 or <Peter.Colosi@noaa.gov>, or visit <www.nero.noaa.gov/hcd>.

New Longline Weak Hook Protects Bluefin Tuna in the Gulf of Mexico

NOAA Fisheries Service now requires commercial fishermen who fish with pelagic longlines for highly migratory species such as tunas, swordfish, and shark in the Gulf of Mexico to use a new type of hook. Called a weak hook, the gear is designed to reduce the incidental catch of Atlantic bluefin tuna. The hooks will be required starting May 5.

The Gulf of Mexico is the only known spawning area for the western stock of Atlantic bluefin tuna. Directed fishing for bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico has been prohibited since the early 1980s.

However, bluefin tuna are caught incidentally by longline fishermen who target other pelagic species.

Many incidentally caught bluefin tuna die from the physiological stress of the encounter, which is compounded by the warm water temperatures of the Gulf of Mexico, even if the intent is to release the fish.

Decreasing bluefin tuna bycatch in the Gulf of Mexico may help rebuild the western bluefin tuna stock. These bluefin tuna usually are available to New England fishermen during late spring through early fall when they inhabit Gulf of Maine feeding grounds.

“NOAA worked with longline fishermen from the Gulf of Mexico to carefully test the weak hook over the last three years,” said Eric Schwaab, NOAA’s assistant administrator for fisheries. “Our cooperative scientific research is showing that this new technology can be used to protect bluefin tuna in the Gulf while still allowing fishermen to target yellowfin tuna and swordfish.”

The weak hook is a circle hook constructed of thinner gauge wire and designed to straighten out when a large fish, such as bluefin tuna, is hooked, thus releasing the fish.

The average size of bluefin tuna landed in the Gulf of Mexico longline fishery is 485 pounds while the average for yellowfin tuna is 86 pounds. The study found that fishermen could continue to catch yellowfin tuna on weak hooks while large bluefin tuna were able to bend the weak hook and escape capture.

“During our tests, we used regular hooks for half our hooks and half were the new weak hooks,” said Capt. Mike Carden, a yellowfin longline fisherman from Panama City, FL who took part in the cooperative research.

“We were so happy with them we quit using the heavy hooks,” Carden continued. “The weak hook releases fish we don’t want to catch. Because it’s smaller and lighter, we catch more fish on the weak hook. I’ve been using the weak hook now for a couple of years.



“The weak hook releases fish we don’t want to catch.”

—Capt. Mike Carden

There are several of us who have gone to the weak hook.”

ICCAT compliance

By putting the weak hook rule into effect as

early as possible during the 2011 spring bluefin tuna spawning season, NOAA Fisheries also is following a recommendation from the scientific committee of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The US is a member of ICCAT, which manages Atlantic tunas in partnership with other member nations.

The scientific committee advised ICCAT that it was important to protect the 2003 western Atlantic bluefin tuna year class that is now reaching maturity and beginning to spawn.

Scientific data has shown that this year class of Atlantic bluefin tuna includes more fish than those spawned in subsequent years. Protecting these fish during spawning can help the long-term rebuilding of the depleted population.

As longline fishermen transition to use of the weak hook, NOAA Fisheries intends to hold educational workshops to help fishermen learn how to use weak hooks and maintain normal levels of target catch. The agency also will continue research on weak hooks to better understand bluefin tuna post-release mortality, and the effects on sea turtles, white marlin, and other Gulf of Mexico resources.

For more information about the weak hook rulemaking, visit <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/breaking_news.htm> or contact Dianne Stephan by phone at (978) 281-9260 or by e-mail at <Dianne.Stephan@noaa.gov>.

ESA Status Considered for Atlantic Sturgeon

Atlantic sturgeon is an anadromous species whose marine range extends from Canada to Florida. Within the Northeast Region, spawning is known to occur in only four rivers: the Kennebec, Hudson, Delaware, and James. However, Atlantic sturgeon historically have used at least 16 rivers from Maine to Virginia for spawning.

Currently, there is no commercial fishery for Atlantic sturgeon in the US due to a moratorium imposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in 1998. Retention of Atlantic sturgeon bycatch from the Exclusive Economic Zone also is prohibited. Vessel

strikes, bycatch, dredging, and water quality have been identified as threats to Atlantic sturgeon that originate in Northeast Region rivers.

A status review was initiated for Atlantic sturgeon in 2005 and a summary report was released in 2007. While NOAA Fisheries Service was considering the information from the status review, it received a petition in 2009 to list Atlantic sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). NOAA Fisheries made a positive 90-day finding on the petition.

As a result, NOAA Fisheries is currently reviewing comments received on the proposed ESA listing for five populations of Atlantic sturgeon. The Gulf of Maine population is proposed for listing as threatened and endangered status is proposed for the Chesapeake Bay, New York Bight, Carolina, and South Atlantic populations. Notice of the proposed listings was published in the Federal Register on Oct. 6, 2010. Comments were accepted for 120 days.

NOAA Fisheries anticipates publishing a final determination on the proposed listing by Oct. 6, 2011. Additional information on Atlantic sturgeon and the proposed listing is available on the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/atlsturgeon>.



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR