



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Northeast Stock Assessment Update

Groundfish, monkfish, bluefish, black sea bass, scup, and groundfish stocks shared by the U.S. and Canada are up for assessment reviews in 2019. In addition, assessments for several other stocks will be updated throughout the year by adding new catch and survey data. Each assessment gives a picture of stock health, and provides the scientific basis for management advice.

In July, the U.S.-Canada Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee assessed eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder. In August, selected Mid-Atlantic stocks (monkfish, bluefish, scup, and black sea bass) and in September, stocks from the Northeast groundfish complex will be assessed and reviewed by independent experts. The results of these assessments will then be provided to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils this fall.

Some stocks will incorporate new data sources. These data include the newly revised

recreational catch estimates for bluefish, black sea bass, scup, Gulf of Maine cod and haddock, and pollock. Assessment scientists will also incorporate new estimates of survey efficiency for some groundfish species that were developed with the commercial fishing industry through the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel.

The data used in stock assessments come from many sources. Research surveys give baseline information about the population. Data that describe catch come from commercial and recreational fishermen, dealers, port samplers, and fishery observers. Stock assessment scientists use these data to estimate the numbers and ages of fish in a population, numbers of incoming young fish, and harvest rates consistent with building and maintaining sustainable fisheries.

During 2020, we will phase new approaches into the process. These include:

- Grouping assessments into management and research tracks.

• Management track assessments will include assessment information required for fishery management actions.

• Research track assessments will investigate new assessment approaches.

• Conducting more research on topics that affect single or multiple species groups.

• A 5-year assessment schedule.

• Improved opportunities for fishermen and fishery scientists to have input into the process.

• Several assessments focused on management and two assessments focused on research will occur in 2020. Our research assessments will focus on red hake stock structure and methods for conducting index-based assessments.

For more information visit: www.nefsc.noaa.gov/assessments/ or contact Ariele Baker at 508-495-4741 or ariele.baker@noaa.gov

Meet our Protected Resources Gear Team

Our gear team is made up of six individuals along the coast who combine different skill sets to meet three main goals:

Analyze recovered fishing gear from marine mammal and sea turtle interactions.

Respond to data requests and support the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team discussions about the impacts humans may be having on large whales.

Work with industry to develop operational, gear-related mitigation measures that consider safety and practical application in the field, while providing conservation benefit to marine mammals and sea turtles.

Through the combination of research, data analysis, and policy, the gear team provides essential feedback and coordination to help us better understand the impacts of commercial fishing gear on marine mammals and sea turtles and how gear modifications can be implemented in a safe and effective manner. Feel free to reach out to them!



John Higgins

Location: Maine

Expertise: Communication with fishing industry, commercial fishing operations, gear analysis, trap/pot and gillnet large whale and harbor porpoise take reduction requirements

Reason to call: Questions about specific take reduction plan requirements or areas, recovered gear analysis process and specific cases

Contact Info: john.higgins@noaa.gov



Henry Miliken

Location: Woods Hole, MA

Expertise: Gear research, bycatch reduction, collaborative research with commercial fishing industry, grant opportunities

Reason to call: Questions about collaborative gear research activities

Contact Info: henry.miliken@noaa.gov



Dave Morin

Location: Gloucester, MA

Expertise: whale disentanglement coordination, disentanglement data analysis

Reason to call: Questions about entanglement reports or disentanglement network, outcomes of specific cases

Contact Info: David.morin@noaa.gov



Eric Matzen

Location: Woods Hole, MA

Expertise: Gear research, collaborative research with commercial fishing industry, grant opportunities, disentanglement support

Reason to call: Questions about collaborative research opportunities and underway Northeast gear research projects

Contact Info: eric.matzen@noaa.gov



Mark Minton

Location: New Bedford, MA

Expertise: Recovered gear curation and tracking

Reason to call: To schedule visit to Narragansett, RI recovered gear storage facility

Contact Info: mark.minton@noaa.gov



Nick Hopkins

Location: Pascagoula, MS

Expertise: Gear development, recovered gear analysis

Reason to call: Questions about Southeast gear and bycatch reduction research

Contact Info: nick.hopkins@noaa.gov

NOAA photos

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Why Sampling Your Catch is So Important

We conduct many different types of sampling programs in order to characterize fisheries in our region. One program is the port biological sampling program. This is a fishery-dependent data collection as the samples are collected from commercial landings at fish dealers, docks, or pack houses.

Commercial port sampling begins with the development of an annual sample request list by the Population Dynamics Branch at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Stock assessment scientists review recent landings trends, expected changes in fisheries, their data needs, and other information to develop the requests for the coming year.

Sample requests are stratified by species, geographic region, market category, gear used, stock area, and calendar quarter.

The sampling request for this year covers about 40 species. Our region, Maine to Virginia, is divided into seven geographic sampling areas to ensure the samples are representative of the fisheries in each area. Market categories, taken from the dealer landings reports (e.g., small, medium, large, etc.), are used so that samples are proportional to the volume of fish landed in each market category. Fishing gear types are those common to the commercial fisheries in our region, and include otter trawl, gill net, longline, lobster pots, and clam and scallop dredge.



NOAA photo

Sampling is done by stock area for those species having multiple stocks (e.g., Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank). However, samples are often requested from different areas for single-stock species to ensure a good representation of the fishery. Vessel trip reports provide information on stock area for each sample, which is required in order for a sample to be useable.

For this year, all of the stratification resulted in a request for more than 4,000 samples. Each of which may include up to 100 individual fish and 25 age structures. The entire request represents several hundred thousand individual measurements, and tens of thousands of age specimens collected over the course of one year.

Greater Atlantic Region Port Program Section's staff do the actual collections and initial processing of the samples. We use a contractor to collect most of the samples and enter the resulting data into our database. The contract staff are skilled in fish identification, and the techniques necessary to collect samples. Samplers work within geographic sampling area and work with our port agents to know what is going on with landings.

Recently, we upgraded the technology used to collect samples. Instead of paper forms and wooden measuring boards, the samplers have electronic measuring boards and calipers, and rugged field computers. As each sample is collected, the length of each fish or shellfish is measured and the data stored in the field computer. Hard parts (otoliths) are collected from a sub-sample of the fish measured, which are then processed by the Center's Population Biology Branch to determine the age of that individual fish. After quality checks, the data are made available to NOAA and other scientists for use in stock assessments. We expect this new equipment will decrease the amount of time needed to collect the samples.

We would like to thank seafood dealer staff and vessel owners and captains for their continued assistance in collecting these important data.

For more information, contact either Victor Vecchio (victor.vecchio@noaa.gov) for the collection program or Brian Linton (brian.linton@noaa.gov) for the sample request development and use of the data.

Cooperative Research Branch Seeks Fishermen's Input

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Branch is holding a series of workshops in August and September to hear from the region's fisheries stakeholders. The branch is reorganizing and is focusing on building more effective cooperative research projects and a stronger relationship with fishing communities.

The goals of the workshops are to:

- Engage with fishing communities and fisheries stakeholders
- Identify and learn from the successes and shortfalls of previous research
- Discuss research ideas and priorities for future projects
- Recognize and build upon the strengths of our partners

For more information, contact Giovanni Gianesin at 508-495-2308 or email him at Giovanni.Gianesin@noaa.gov.

Date	Day	Time	Location	Venue
Aug. 13	Tue	3-5 pm	Portland, ME	Custom House
Aug. 14	Wed	3-5 pm	Gloucester, MA	MA DMF
Aug. 20	Tue	3-5 pm	New Bedford, MA	SMAST East
Aug. 27	Tue	3-5 pm	Riverhead, NY	Cornell Marine Program
Aug. 28	Wed	3-5 pm	Point Judith, RI	Superior Trawl Conference Room
Sept. 10	Tue	6:30-8:30 pm	Toms River, NJ	Rutgers Extension Office
Sept. 11	Wed	3-5 pm	Cape May Court House, NJ	Rutgers Cooperative Extension
Sept. 24	Tue	3-5 pm	Hampton, VA	VSAREC

Proposal to Reduce Gear Restricted Areas for Pelagic Longline Fleet

We are currently considering adjustments to several management measures designed to limit bycatch of bluefin tuna in the pelagic longline fishery. The Individual Bluefin Quota (IBQ) catch share program successfully reduced pelagic longline bluefin bycatch, which prompted us to review other measures with this same goal. We intend to eliminate any redundancies while maintaining the objectives of the original actions.

Background

The pelagic longline fishery for Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) targets swordfish and “BAYS” tunas (i.e., bigeye, albacore, yellowfin

and skipjack). Managing bycatch of bluefin tuna is a challenging aspect of this fishery. Previously, management measures included a retention limit based on target catch; however, this approach resulted in a large number of dead discards.

In 2015, we implemented the IBQ catch share program, and refocused fleetwide management measures for bluefin interactions (i.e., bycatch and dead discards) to individual permit-holder accountability. The preliminary findings of our [draft IBQ program three-year review](#) showed that both bycatch and dead discards were reduced under the IBQ program. However, the draft review also found

that effort in the pelagic longline fishery--as defined by number of vessels, trips, sets, and hooks--has continued to decrease, and that the swordfish quota is not being fully utilized.

It is difficult to separate the effects of the IBQ Program on pelagic longline effort from other factors, including the effect of swordfish imports on the market for U.S. product, other regulations such as closed and gear restricted areas, as well as target species availability/price. In part because of these preliminary findings, we are reviewing several

See WEAK HOOK, next page

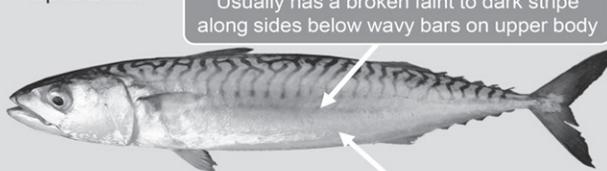
HOW TO IDENTIFY MACKERELS AND TUNAS

Several species of mackerel and small tunas look very similar and can be easily misidentified. With help from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, we developed a guide to help captains and recreational anglers identify some of the mackerel and small tuna species caught in our region. This guide includes key characteristics that will help captains, dealers, and anglers distinguish between these species when filling out vessel trip reports (logbooks), reporting purchases or participating in recreational angler surveys. This guide is available on the Council's website and on our FishRules app.

For more information, contact Douglas Christel, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at 978-281-9141 or Douglas.Christel@noaa.gov

Atlantic mackerel, *Scomber scombrus*

- Other common names: tinker mackerel, Boston mackerel, common mackerel
- Up to 2 feet



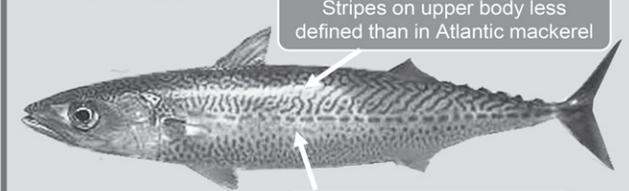
Usually has a broken faint to dark stripe along sides below wavy bars on upper body

VTR CODE: MACK

No spots on lower sides

Chub mackerel, *Scomber colias*

- Other common names: tinker mackerel, hardhead, bullseye
- Up to 22 inches



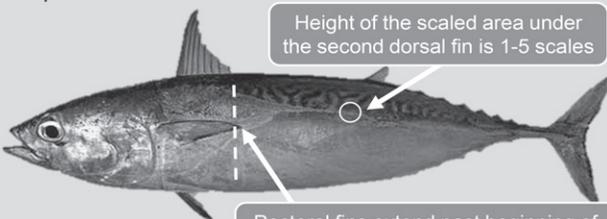
Stripes on upper body less defined than in Atlantic mackerel

VTR CODE: MACC

Dusky spots on lower sides

Frigate mackerel/tuna, *Auxis thazard*

- Up to 2 feet



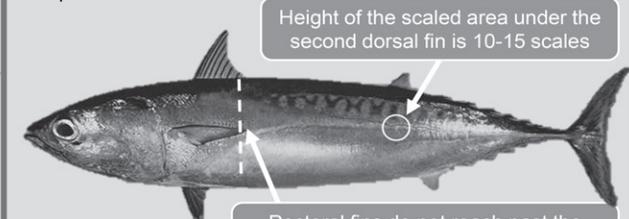
Height of the scaled area under the second dorsal fin is 1-5 scales

VTR CODE: MACF

Pectoral fins extend past beginning of scaleless, striped area on upper body

Bullet mackerel/tuna, *Auxis rochei*

- Up to 20 inches



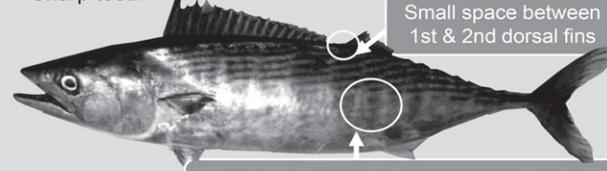
Height of the scaled area under the second dorsal fin is 10-15 scales

VTR CODE: MACB

Pectoral fins do not reach past the scaleless, striped area on upper body

Atlantic bonito, *Sarda sarda*

- Up to 3.2 feet
- Body covered in scales; larger scales below striped area
- Sharp teeth



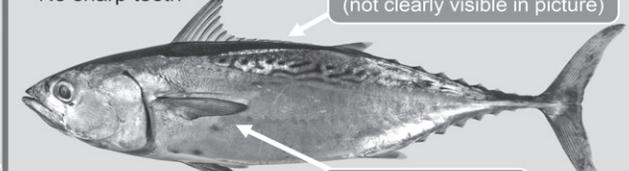
Small space between 1st & 2nd dorsal fins

VTR CODE: BON

Straight, oblique stripes on upper body sometimes underlain with lighter vertical bars

Little tunny, *Euthynnus alletteratus*

- Other common names: false albacore, vaquita, bonito
- Up to 3.5 feet
- No sharp teeth



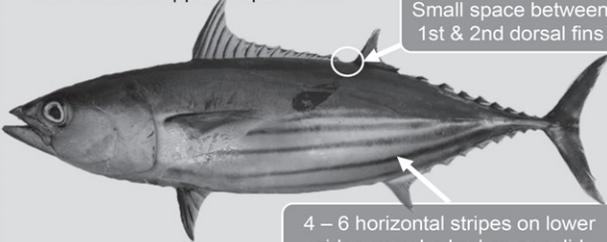
Dorsal fins connected (not clearly visible in picture)

VTR CODE: LTA

Spots on sides near pectoral fins

Skipjack tuna, *Katsuwonus pelamis*

- Up to 3.8 feet
- No scales on upper striped area



Small space between 1st & 2nd dorsal fins

VTR CODE: SKJ

4 - 6 horizontal stripes on lower sides, may be broken or solid

For more information, contact:
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Photos Atl. mackerel: Hans Hillewaert. Chub mackerel: Alessandro Duci. Bullet mackerel: Jack Randall. Frigate mackerel: Robertson & Van Tassell. Bonito: MBL/Flesher Collection. Little tunny: J. T. Williams. Skipjack: R. Freitas.



Weak hook

Continued from previous page
management measures that were implemented with the objective of reducing bluefin interactions, to determine whether they are still necessary in addition to the IBQ program.

Proposed rule

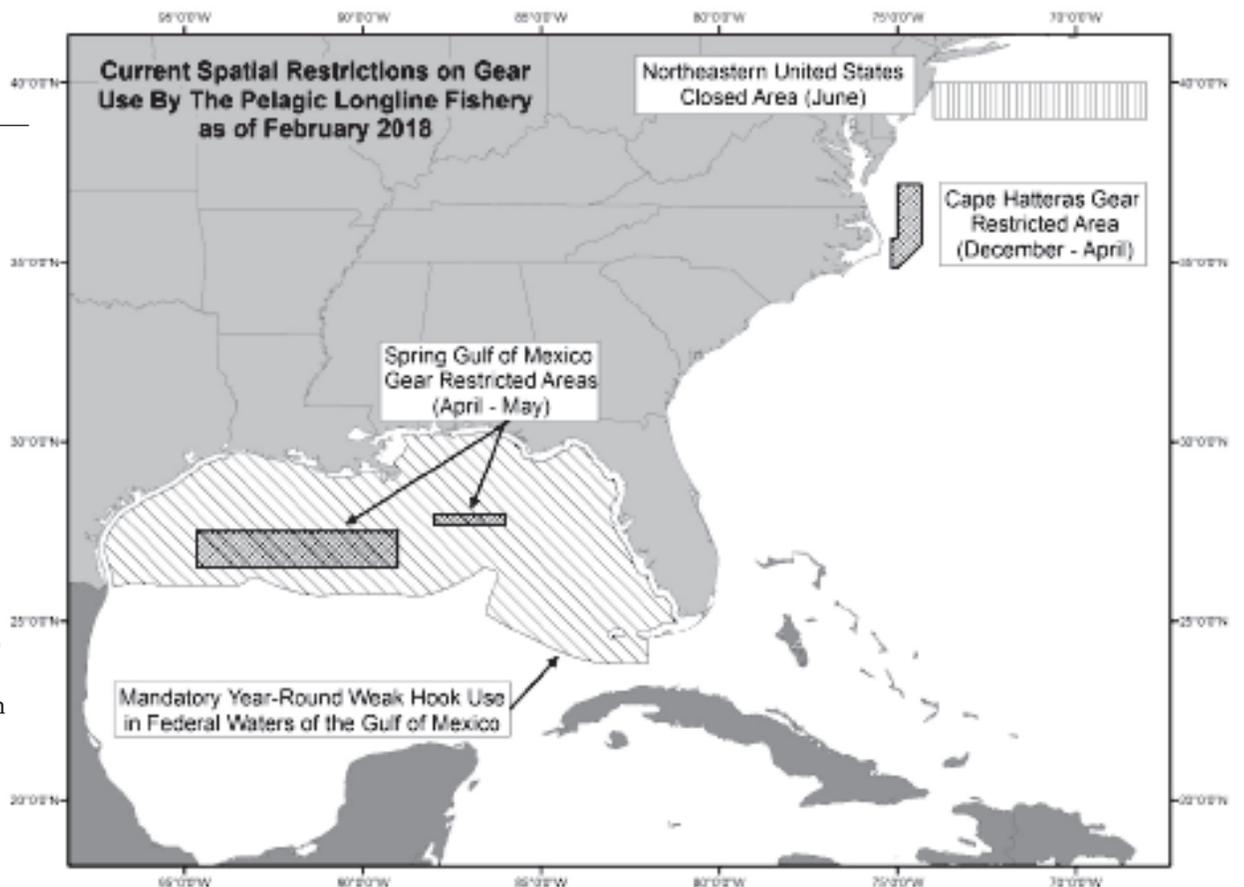
The proposed rule includes alternatives that would adjust two area-based measures in the Greater Atlantic region. Preferred alternatives would change two closed or gear-restricted areas to “monitoring areas,” and allow closely monitored fishing with pelagic longline gear as long as bluefin interactions remain below an established annual IBQ threshold. This approach is proposed for the Northeastern United States Closed Area (see figure) which is closed for the month of June, and was implemented by the 1999 Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Sharks, and Swordfish (1999 HMS FMP) as a measure to reduce dead discards of bluefin tuna. The analysis at the time of the 1999 HMS FMP showed that annually closing this area to pelagic longline gear for the month of June could greatly reduce area bluefin tuna discards, without any substantial changes to target catch.

The preferred alternative for the other area-based action in our region is to eliminate the Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area, which was established by Amendment 7 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP, and is in place from December 1 through April 30 annually. The Amendment 7 analysis found that the area encompassed by the Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area had a high level of bluefin interactions, but the majority of those interactions were by only a few pelagic longline vessels.

Due to this dynamic, Amendment 7 implemented an annual performance metric to grant fishery participants that met certain criteria access to the Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area. Pelagic longline vessels are evaluated on their ratio of bluefin tuna interactions to target species landings, compliance with the Pelagic Observer Program, and timely submission of logbooks. Under this preferred alternative, performance-based access to this gear-restricted area would be eliminated.

Public comment

Public hearings are underway for this proposed rule that would adjust the two gear restricted areas in this region, in addition to reducing weak hook requirements and adjusting a third gear-restricted area in the Gulf of Mexico. The comment period for the proposed rule is open until September 30, 2019. You can provide oral comments at public hearings, or submit written comments via the federal rulemaking portal using the identifier NOAA-NMFS-2018-0035. For further information, see our website or contact Jennifer Cudney (727-824-5399; jennifer.cudney@noaa.gov) or Craig Cockrell (301-427-8503; craig.cockrell@noaa.gov).



Map Including the Northeastern U.S. Closed Area, Amendment 7 Gear Restricted Areas, and Affected Area for Weak Hooks

Improving Communication about Groundfish Monitoring

Background

The New England Fishery Management Council is evaluating the current groundfish monitoring program, and considering ways to improve it in Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan.

The groundfish monitoring program is a complex system, and changes to this program have important implications for the industry. In order to encourage industry participation in the development of Amendment 23, we are working on ways to reach fishermen and other industry members with answers and information about groundfish monitoring in preparation for the Council process.

Developing a Plan to Improve Communications

We have recently completed interviews with and a survey of stakeholders, and are drafting a communications plan that will address:

Which aspects of our current monitoring program, analyses, or processes industry members want more information on, and

How industry members like us to communicate about groundfish monitoring with them, such as workshops, websites, printed materials, question and answer sessions, or other methods.

We are working with a team of public outreach specialists from Vision Planning and Consulting to help us improve our communication about the groundfish monitoring programs. Our efforts will not duplicate the Council's development of policies or alternatives for Amendment 23, but instead complement that development process and focus on making sure industry members have the information and access they need as the Council moves forward.

We also expect this process to provide us with tools and resources that we can use to improve the clarity and effectiveness of our communications with industry members about all fisheries actions.

Look for more information on Amendment 23, our current monitoring system, and the Strategic Communications Plan on our new website: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/nema/Amendment23