

The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Collaborative Effort Aims to Expand Electronic Data Collection and Reporting

Both NOAA Fisheries Service and the fishing industry are interested in expanding electronic vessel trip reporting (eVTR). It's a cost-effective data collection system with fewer chances of errors due to illegible handwriting and manual data entry factors associated with paper vessel trip reports.

A collaborative effort among the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries' Northeast Cooperative Research Program, Northeast Fisheries Science Center Data Management Services, and the Northeast Regional Fisheries Data Services Division is now underway to support Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic industry groups in expanding electronic vessel trip reporting and scientific data collection.

With funds obtained by the Commission to expand electronic reporting, this initiative is preparing an additional 119 commercial vessels to submit eVTRs using existing Fishery Logbook Data Recording Software. This software was developed with fishermen's input through the Cooperative Research Study Fleet Program.

By partnering industry with the Northeast Cooperative Research Program and using this software, this project also allows a subset of vessels to participate in expanded scientific data collection.

Approximately 47 of the 119 vessels will report their catch and discard data on a tow-by-tow basis, allowing for much more fine-scale analysis of catch and discard and hot-spot mapping to identify areas likely to incur high bycatch of non-target species.

These vessels also will be equipped with temperature-depth loggers to record fine-scale bottom temperatures combined with GPS polling data during commercial fishing activities. Fishermen can use the information to make inferences between temperature and depth and catch composition to better target desired species and avoid bycatch.

New Bedford Port Agent Office Closes

NOAA Fisheries Service has closed the port agent office in New Bedford, MA. Services previously performed from that office are now being covered by Walter Anoushian out of the Point Judith, RI office, which is located at 83 State St.

Walt can be reached by phone at (401) 783-7797. He also will be in New Bedford approximately one day a week, working out of space provided by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries at 1213 Purchase St.

If you need assistance or wish to schedule an appointment with Walt when he is in New Bedford, please call him at the above phone number. We apologize for any inconvenience.

The temperature/depth information also is of great interest to oceanographers and stock assessment scientists trying to better understand the role these factors play in ecosystem and fish population dynamics.

Oceanographers and climate researchers, including those working with the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Regional Association of Coastal Ocean Observing Systems, can use bottom temperature data to refine and improve models based on sea surface temperature and other criteria. These models then can be applied to historical observer data, correlating bottom temperatures to catch rates and species abundance. This information will support more advanced spatial and habitat-based models of fishery practices and species distributions.

A longer-term goal for modelers is to create bottom temperature forecasts that can be made available to industry members to help guide strategic fishing decisions.

Primary industry and academic groups collaborating on this initiative include: the Garden State Seafood Association, the North Atlantic Clam Association, the Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology, and Rutgers University.

Fishermen involved in the project will be working in a variety of Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic fisheries, including squid, mackerel, herring, flatfish, monkfish, surf clam, ocean quahog, and sea scallop, as well as fishing for Northeast multispecies out of ports from New Bedford, MA to Barnegat Light, NJ.

Currently, Northeast Cooperative Research Program staff are working with participating groups to provide Fishery Logbook Data Recording Software demonstrations to identify additional data collection needs for specific fisheries and to begin scheduling training sessions and vessel installations.

Cooperative Research Study Fleet staffs Kevin Jackson and Chris Sarro will be leading the field scientist team providing initial system set-up and technician training and preparing partner institutions to continue supporting participating fishermen in the coming year. This advancement in electronic reporting and data collection represents a significant step toward developing more timely and robust fleet-wide data streams for important fisheries on the East Coast.

For additional information on this initiative, please contact Cooperative Research Director Dr. John Hoey at <John.Hoey@noaa.gov> or Study Fleet/Commission Initiative Field Coordinator Kevin Jackson at <Kevin.G.Jackson@noaa.gov>.



At left, Kevin Jackson, NCRP Study Fleet Field Coordinator and Chris Sarro, at right, NCRP Senior Field Scientist, will be working closely with partner institutions to provide support for vessel equipment installations and training to expand eVTR and data collection activities in Southern New England and the mid-Atlantic.



NOAA Seeking 2013 S-K Proposals

NOAA is now requesting proposals for the FY 2013 Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) Grant Program. The solicitation, which is open for 60 days, closes on Sept. 29, 2013.

Research priorities for 2013 include: aquaculture; optimum utilization of harvested resources under federal or state management; fisheries socioeconomics; conservation engineering; ecosystem studies; and territorial science.

The Saltonstall-Kennedy Act established a fund for use by the Secretary of Commerce to provide grants or cooperative agreements for fisheries research and development projects addressing aspects of US fisheries, including, but not limited to, harvesting, processing, marketing, and associated business infrastructures.

The objective of the S-K Grant Program is to address the needs of the fisheries and fishing communities by optimizing economic benefits in the context of rebuilding and maintaining sustainable fisheries and dealing with the impacts of conservation and management measures.

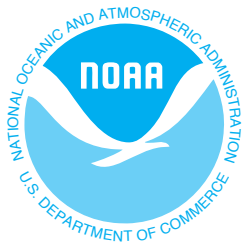
The Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) document and full grant application for this competition is available on the Grants.gov website at <www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=Saltonstall-Kennedy>.

The FFO provides important information for grant applicants, including more details on 2013 research priorities, eligibility requirements, amount of available funding, instructions for submitting proposals, review criteria and review process, and more. We encourage you to read the FFO in its entirety before submitting proposals.

For further assistance, call Daniel Namur, NOAA Headquarters, at (301) 427-8730 or e-mail him at <Dan.Namur@noaa.gov>.

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

Olivia Rugo • Managing Editor • 978-675-2167 • olivia.rugo@noaa.gov



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NOAA Fisheries Seeks Comments on Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Amendment 7

Atlantic bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) is regarded as one of the most important and prized species in the ocean. Weighing upwards of 550 pounds and reaching more than 6' long, bluefin tuna are near the top of the ocean food chain, giving them an important role in the marine ecosystem. They also are extremely valuable on the commercial market, which makes them particularly vulnerable to unreported and unregulated fishing internationally.

Currently, NOAA Fisheries Service lists bluefin tuna as a "species of concern," but bluefin are not considered threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

NOAA Fisheries is now seeking public comment on proposed measures to address bluefin tuna management issues. The proposed rule would amend the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan to reduce discards of bluefin tuna.

It also outlines measures that would ensure continued compliance with overall quotas. The measures outlined in the proposed rule support our goals of ending overfishing and rebuilding the bluefin tuna stock.

The proposed rule – Draft Amendment 7 – builds upon an extensive regulatory framework for management of the domestic bluefin tuna fisheries in line with a rebuilding program adopted in the 1999 HMS Plan and continued under the 2006 Consolidated HMS Plan.

The existing rebuilding program and the total allowable catch set by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) take into account uncertainties in the scientific information regarding the status of the bluefin tuna stock.

Draft Amendment 7 would not increase or decrease the overall authorized US bluefin tuna quota. Rather, it would affect the time, place, and manner in which US fishermen may harvest the US quota and the relative volumes of fish that may be caught by the domestic fisheries. These measures are designed to maximize resource sustainability and fishing opportunities while minimizing, to the greatest extent possible, negative socio-economic impacts on affected fisheries.

Quota reallocation

First, Draft Amendment 7 proposes to reduce dead discards by reducing and controlling bluefin tuna bycatch and landings in the pelagic longline fishery and collecting dead discard information from commercial fisheries targeting bluefin tuna.

All bluefin tuna catch – landings and dead discards – would have to be counted against the US bluefin tuna quota, which is established through negotiations at ICCAT. Draft Amendment 7 also reconsiders quota allocation among domestic user group categories in light of recent changes to binding ICCAT recommendations.

NOAA Fisheries began developing Amendment 7 in response to a growing concern about the disparity between bluefin tuna bycatch by the pelagic longline fleet and its allocated quota.

Pelagic longline vessels, which primarily target yellowfin tuna and swordfish, are not allowed to directly fish for bluefin tuna, although longliners are allowed to land a limited amount of bluefin tuna incidentally



caught during these fishing operations to prevent waste. Both discards and landings are counted against the longline category's quota.

During the last several years, bluefin tuna bycatch by the longline category has exceeded the category's allocation of the domestic quota, but we have been able to account for this overage using underutilized purse seine category quota and through the management flexibility provided by the reserve category quota.

This increase in longline bycatch is due to a number of factors, including improvement in the methodology used for estimating bluefin tuna discards in that fishery and changes in ICCAT recommendations. The disparity in catch and quota has become critical because of the combined effects of an ICCAT recommendation limiting the amount of unused quota that may be carried over from one year to the next and recent increases in domestic landings in other categories.

Individual bluefin quotas

Draft Amendment 7 proposes to allocate "individual bluefin quotas" (IBQs) to vessels in the longline category as a means to increase individual accountability, reduce bluefin tuna interactions, and provide a strong incentive for longliners to avoid bluefin.

Under this proposal, each active pelagic longline vessel would be assigned an individual allocation of incidental bluefin tuna catch each year based on past performance in landing target catch while avoiding bluefin tuna. These allocations could be leased annually to other permit holders to provide flexibility and ensure that all vessels are able to account for bluefin catch during the course of their fishing activities. Electronic and vessel monitoring would provide accurate and timely data to support the IBQ program.

Draft Amendment 7 also would allow us to close the

pelagic longline fishery for all species when the longline category's bluefin tuna quota has been reached.

To further manage bluefin tuna catch by pelagic longline vessels, we are proposing seasonal gear restricted areas off Cape Hatteras, NC and in the Gulf of Mexico. Limited access to gear restricted areas and other areas closed to pelagic longline fishing would be provided to those longline vessels with a demonstrated ability to avoid bluefin tuna and comply with observer and logbook requirements.

Longline quota increase

Draft Amendment 7 proposes an increase in the quota for the longline category, with accompanying reductions to quota allocations for all domestic categories.

The amount of quota previously allocated to all of the categories was established based on landings and did not account for dead discards because dead discards used to be accounted for under a separate ICCAT quota allowance. However, in 2006, ICCAT discontinued the separate dead discard allowance, so dead discards now must be accounted for within each country's annual quota allocations.

Draft Amendment 7 proposes to add enough quota to the longline category subquota to account for the previous dead discard allowance and would reduce each category subquota to balance the quota allocation.

Currently, reliable estimates of dead discards are available only for the pelagic longline fishery, which has a 100% logbook reporting requirement and minimum 8% observer coverage.

These measures were needed to collect better data on bycatch of sea turtles and to protect ESA-listed and other species. Draft Amendment 7 proposes to improve accounting for dead discards in all bluefin tuna fisheries by requiring directed commercial bluefin tuna categories to report all catches of bluefin tuna, not just landings.

To hear back from the public on these measures, we are holding numerous public hearings for this action along the Atlantic Coast, including in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico regions, until the comment period closes on Oct. 23, 2013. During these hearings, we will accept public comments on the proposed management measures. Dates, times, and locations of the public hearings will be announced in the near future. In addition, we will consult with the HMS Advisory Panel during its Sept. 9-12, 2013 meeting.

Comments may be submitted using the identifier "NOAA-NMFS-2013-0101" through Oct. 23, 2013 through any of the following methods.

- Electronically – Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0101>, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- Mail – Mail comments to: Thomas Warren, HMS Management Division, NOAA Fisheries, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Or,
- Fax – Fax comments to (978) 281-9340, Attn: Thomas Warren.

For more information, call Tom Warren, HMS Management Division, at (978) 281-9347 or e-mail him at <Thomas.Warren@noaa.gov>.

River Herring Progress; More Needs to Be Done

NOAA Fisheries Service recently announced our decision on whether to list alewife and blueback herring, collectively known as river herring, under the Endangered Species Act. On Aug. 9, 2013, we published a notice in the *Federal Register* indicating that listing is not warranted for either species at this time. However, given the uncertainties and data deficiencies for both species, we have committed to revisiting the listing decision in three to five years.

This decision was made after reviewing the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) river herring stock assessment completed in May 2012, peer reviewed reports from 2012 NOAA Fisheries Stock Structure, Extinction Risk, and Climate Change Workshops, the 2013 population modeling results from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and other available scientific and commercial information.

In order to assess extinction risk, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center conducted an analysis of the trends in relative abundance for each species both range-wide and for the specific stock complexes. The trends coast-wide (including Canada where data were available) indicate stable or significantly increasing trends for both species. This information, combined with information noted in the listing decision, indicates that neither species warrants listing at this time.

A qualitative threats assessment completed during the status review unequivocally identified dams and barriers as the most important threat to alewife and blueback herring populations both range-wide and across all stock complexes. Efforts to restore access to essential spawning habitats in rivers, streams, and lakes are critical for migratory, anadromous fish like river herring. There have been many restoration projects to improve access to river herring habitat which have included large scale projects involving many partners such as the St. Croix River effort, as well as the Penobscot River Restoration Project. However, it is important to highlight that smaller scale restoration efforts can be equally important to conservation. On the Acushnet River in Massachusetts, we helped modify/partially remove dams and construct nature-like fishways, and the river herring return has gone from <300 fish in 2006 to over 6,000 herring in 2013 (<http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/highlights/herringrunacushnet.html>). Further, removal of two dams in Sedgeunkedunk Stream in Maine allowed a small (few hundred) but growing river herring population to re-colonize Fields Pond within just one year of the dam removals. The re-colonization of Fields Pond occurred without any stocking. Additionally, in 2009, the culvert (located in East Lyme, Connecticut) connecting Bride Brook to Long Island Sound was enlarged. Recent river herring counts on Bride Brook have included 287,000 in 2012 and 363,224 in 2013, which are much higher than the larger runs documented in the mid-1970s which numbered around 125,000.

Continued restoration, research and monitoring efforts are important to river herring conservation. Unrestricted access to freshwater spawning habitats throughout the full range of both species is urgently needed.

During the next three to five years, we plan to work with our partners to collect data and information to fill in key data gaps for these two species and to develop a river herring conservation plan. Additionally, we intend to work with our partners to further conservation efforts during this time. While both are at low abundance compared to historic levels, NOAA Fisheries does not believe that there is any imminent risk to the recovery or long-term survival of alewife or blueback herring at this time.

Within the next five years, we plan to do the following:

- Coordinate with ASMFC to develop a long-term and dynamic conservation plan that establishes priority

and conservation efforts that will benefit river herring throughout their entire range, as well as fund high priority research needs;

- Attempt to quantify the impact of ongoing restoration and conservation efforts and new fisheries management measures that are being considered such as catch caps in two federal fisheries that should benefit the species;
- Review any new information produced from ongoing scientific studies on genetic analyses, ocean migration patterns, and climate change impacts that are completed in the next several years; and
- Assess available data to determine whether recent reports of higher counts of river herring in many rivers along the coast in the last two years represent sustained trends.
- Review available information on the population level effects of upstream and downstream survival at remaining dams.

We believe the development of a long-term and dynamic conservation plan for river herring that considers the full range of the species from Canada through Florida will be a significant step toward addressing uncertainties associated with these species.

A technical expert working group will be convened to help with plan development. The plan will consider both previously identified threats and research and conservation efforts and describe a coordinated and prioritized coastwide approach for continuing to address data gaps and conserving river herring and their habitat.

We are committed to working with ASMFC and other state, federal, tribal, and academic partners on this initiative to ensure the continued restoration of these two species, which are critical to fully functioning marine, estuarine, and freshwater ecosystems.

During this time, we also are committed to working with our partners and tribal trustees to continue implementing important conservation efforts and funding river herring research. Examples include the following:

- Continue to support small and large scale restoration

efforts. For example, NOAA Fisheries recently awarded and additional \$1.4 million to support the Penobscot River dam removal efforts as well as conduct scientific monitoring post-removal, including gathering information on fish migration, water quality, habitat, and vegetation. Through this multi-million dollar, collaborative effort, two dams have been removed and fish passage will be installed at a third dam which has restored access to significant amounts of habitat in this watershed. To date, NOAA Fisheries has contributed an estimated \$21.4 million to restore the Penobscot.

- We have provided \$95,000 to ASMFC to not only develop assist in developing a comprehensive river herring conservation plan, but also fund high priority research projects determined with input from a technical expert working group.
- Continue to partner with the Passamaquoddy Tribal Leaders, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to continue restoration of the St. Croix River. Passage to many important upstream alewife spawning lake habitats was restored during the spring of 2013, and we have provided funds to assist in monitoring alewife passage on this river.
- Continue to work with collaborators to assess impacts of climate change on river herring in the marine and freshwater environments.

These are just a few of the efforts we and others are planning over the next several years to further conservation efforts and research for river herring.

For more information on the listing determination, conservation plan development or technical expert working group, call Kim Damon-Randall, Protected Resources Division, at (978) 282-8485 or e-mail her at <Kimberly.Damon-Randall@noaa.gov>.

Information and updates also are available online at <www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/CandidateSpeciesProgram/RiverHerringSOC.htm>

Flatfish Research Increased on Georges Bank

Intense interest in the yellowtail flounder stock on Georges Bank is one driver behind two industry-based survey projects developed by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) and commercial flatfish fishermen.

Both the US and Canada routinely conduct large-scale research surveys for multiple species on Georges Bank, though none of these are specifically focused on flatfish like yellowtail flounder.

Yet, species-specific surveys often can reveal more about that species' condition and help scientists to better interpret data from broad-scale surveys and other data sources such as sea scallop dredge surveys and data collected by video and other image-based instruments.

In August, two commercial trawlers each were tasked with sampling about 75 stations over 12 days. The survey was designed by a panel, made up of researchers, fishermen, and gear manufacturers, to: take place at a time when no other dedicated surveys were occurring; use a net more like a commercial flatfish net; and sample using methods and protocols similar to those used in the biannual broad-scale bottom trawl survey.

The pilot survey should determine: how a dedicated survey for flatfish could augment the biannual bottom trawl survey; whether such a survey can be done exclusively and consistently over time using commercial vessels; and the resources required to establish and maintain such a survey.

The net used for the survey was a modified version of one built by Superior Trawl for a Southern New England industry-based yellowtail flounder survey

conducted from 2003 to 2005 through NEFSC's Northeast Cooperative Research Program.

The two-seam, two-bridle flounder net with a cookie sweep was modified from the original design for the 2013 work in two ways: the twine in the lower wings and first belly was reduced to 12 centimeters and a 1" liner was added to the codend to improve the capture of small fish so that more year classes could be measured.

In comparison to the large-scale resource survey conducted twice each year by the NEFSC using the NOAA fisheries survey vessel Henry B. Bigelow, the pilot survey is designed to specifically target flatfish and to sample more locations on Georges Bank.

The areas surveyed were selected by the design panel, but the sampling stations were generated randomly as they are for the biannual survey. A larger proportion of the stations were in areas where yellowtail flounder aggregations have historically been comparatively dense, while a Bigelow survey generates stations without regard to particular fish densities. As on Bigelow surveys, samples were taken to gather sex, age, and maturity information and for other biological investigations.

Sampling operations were conducted both day and night in waters ranging from 15 to 60 fathoms. Fishing protocols were standardized to minimize vessel and operator effects on catch rates since the goal of a survey is to collect samples in the most consistent way possible rather than to catch as many fish as possible, as would usually happen on a commercial trip.

See FLATFISH RESEARCH, next page

How to Create a Groundfish Sector

By now, everyone knows about groundfish sectors. They are the foundation of a catch share program that allocates portions of the commercial groundfish quotas to groups of permit holders. Sector management was expanded in 2010 as part of Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. One of the goals of the sector system is to give industry members greater control over their own fishing practices.

Anyone can form a sector. Sectors are self-selecting, which means groundfish permit holders may form a sector of their own choosing and determine who else may join their sector.

Permit holders have the flexibility to form a sector around any common ground, including fishing style, geographic area, or community organization. The minimum size for a sector is three permits with three distinct owners.

Forming a sector is a two-part process. First, the sector must submit a proposal to the New England Fishery Management Council and request that the Council implement the sector through a management action. Second, each sector must submit a binding contract and an annual operations plan to NOAA Fisheries Service for approval to be allocated quota and to fish.

Proposals for new sectors must be submitted to the Council at least one year before the sector would first operate. That means May 1, 2014 is the deadline to submit a proposal for a new sector for fishing year 2015 (May 1, 2015 to April 30, 2016).

Sector proposals are required to include an analysis that assesses the impact of the proposed sector in order to comply with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. However, in recent years the Council typically has handled the analysis as part of its management action.

The requirements for the content of a sector proposal are not spelled out in the regulations, although a proposal must include enough information about the proposed sector, such as membership, areas to be fished, and gears to be used, for the Council to determine whether or not to undertake an action to implement the sector.

Operations plans, contracts

Each sector must submit an operations plan and contract to NOAA Fisheries by Sept. 1 if it wants to be approved to be allocated quota and to fish the following fishing year.

The contract is a legally binding agreement between and among the sector members. The operations plan details how the sector will operate. The operations plan and contract may be two separate documents or may be combined into a single document.

The annual approval process is designed to allow sectors and NOAA Fisheries to work collaboratively to make sure the sector has an effective operations plan to monitor and manage its allocation and to solicit public comment through the federal rulemaking process.

The regulations detail a number of requirements for sector operations plans and contracts. Among the

contract requirements are length of commitment, rules for joining and leaving the sector, and information about people authorized to act on behalf of the sector.

Operations plan requirements focus more on the fishing operations of the members, including such things as distribution of allocation, areas and methods for fishing, methods to monitor and manage catch, reporting requirements, and how the rules will be enforced.

So, generally, the contract addresses the legal issues of the sector as an organization and the operations plan describes how the members will fish.

For more details about sector operations plans and contracts, please call the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315. We're happy to answer questions and discuss options with anyone interested in forming a sector.

Flatfish research

Continued from previous page

Catchability experiment

In October, an experiment will get underway on Georges Bank in which three different survey instruments will be used to compare how efficiently each tool samples for flatfish.

The area covered will be between 50 and 100 square miles, much smaller than that covered by the pilot flatfish survey. The sampling area will be selected about two weeks prior to the experiment after reviewing the pilot survey data to find the location with the greatest densities of flatfish. This experiment will involve the Bigelow and two contracted commercial fishing vessels.

To begin the experiment, one of the commercial vessels will deploy the HabCam, a multi-sensor sampling instrument developed by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the NEFSC.

The HabCam carries stereo cameras and strobes to take color images, as well as a high-resolution side-scan imaging system and a variety of other sampling instruments. It will be towed continuously over as much of the area as possible, flying about 6' off the bottom and providing a very detailed view of what it encounters.

The second commercial vessel then will sample about 60 stations using the same net used in the flatfish pilot survey – the two-seam, two-bridle flounder net with a cookie sweep.

Meanwhile, the Bigelow will be in the midst of the regular NEFSC fall bottom trawl survey. Five additional days have been added to the cruise time so that it can sample the experimental area at the same time as the commercial vessels.

The results of this study will provide three independent estimates of fish density for the same area and should provide insights into the approximate flatfish catchability rates of the Bigelow survey system and the industry vessel survey system.

Both of these projects will focus on yellowtail and winter flounder but also will attempt to assess as many other flatfish species as possible. This work may shed new light on yellowtail flounder distribution and abundance and will be another opportunity for industry members and federal researchers to work together directly on research-based surveys.

In the long run, this should help each group learn more about the similarities and differences between fishing and sampling and find ways of using collective knowledge to better understand and measure stock status.

For more information on these studies, please e-mail Rob Johnston at <Robert.Johnston@noaa.gov> or Michael Martin at <Michael.Martin@noaa.gov>. Both are at the NEFSC.

How to Keep Up to Date on Groundfish Regs

Groundfish rules change for many reasons. Among the most common ones are revised annual quotas for the start of a new fishing year, in-season adjustments if quotas are reached, approval of new sector exemptions, or when changes to management measures are developed and recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council for NOAA Fisheries Service to implement.

Here are some of the best ways to stay current on regulations, as well as a look ahead to the upcoming year.

The Council recently initiated Framework Adjustment 51 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and is developing Amendment 18 to the FMP. The best way to stay informed on the development of these actions and others and to know when Groundfish Committee and Council meetings will be held is by visiting the Council website at <www.nefmc.org>, signing up for the Council's mailing list, or calling the Council office at (978) 465-0492.

One of the easiest ways to get information on current commercial and recreational groundfish management rules is to call NOAA Fisheries directly since we are responsible for implementing approved groundfish regulations developed and recommended by the Council.

Our number is (978) 281-9315, and phones always are manned during the workday. After hours, on weekends, and during those times when we are

answering another call, please leave a message.

We will get back to you as soon as possible, but be aware that your question might require some research or discussion with other offices, such as the Office of Law Enforcement, which may take some time.

New website

Another great source of information is our newly revamped website at <www.nero.noaa.gov>, where you will find prominent tabs for commercial and recreational fishery information, as well as fishing quota and landings information. Up-to-date information on changes to regulations can be found in the "Latest News" feed on the right side of the page.

You also can sign up for automatic e-mail updates on just the fisheries that interest you at this website: <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/nr/emailphl4.htm>.

We use these permit holder letter e-mail updates to announce changes to regulations and generally include any additional information you need to know to fish in compliance with new or revised regulations.

You also can send questions to us by e-mail at <nmfs.ner.feedback@noaa.gov>. Or visit our Fisheries Data Service Division website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/fso> and log in to "Fish-On-Line" to submit a question or request a logbook. We also respond to written requests sent to our mailing address at: NOAA Fisheries Service, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

We value your questions, comments, and feedback, so please stay connected with us using any of the methods outlined above.



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