



Contact: Maggie Mooney-Seus
NOAA Fisheries Service
978-281-9175

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 22, 2010

Northeast Groundfish Amendment 16 Approved

A revision of federal groundfishing rules known as Amendment 16 has been approved by NOAA's Fisheries Service. The final regulations required to implement these measures will be published prior to May 1, 2010, the start of the new fishing year.

The amendment includes new procedures to establish annual catch limits for groundfish stocks and expands the use of fishing sectors, a type of catch share program whereby a group of fishing vessels is allotted a share of the total catch, as a means for regulating the groundfish fishery.

Under the proposed measures, all limited access groundfish permit holders would be able to form groups or "sectors" that would get a share of the year's allowable catch. Each sector's share would be based on the historic landings of their members. They would also be able to develop their own rules for allocating that catch among the sector members.

These sectors would be an integral part of a catch share program for Northeast groundfish. Such programs have been shown to maintain stable fish populations, resulting in more consistent income for fishing communities.

One measure proposed in Amendment 16 was disapproved, a pilot program that would have allowed sink gillnet vessels to use specialized nets to target haddock between January through April. NOAA's Fisheries Service rejected this measure to better protect pollock and Gulf of Maine cod stocks that are rebuilding but that would likely be taken as bycatch in this fishery. However, the agency will consider whether this mesh exemption could be allowed as a special exemption for vessels fishing in requesting sectors, given that any pollock or cod caught in this exemption would be counted against the sectors quota, thus limiting how much of these two stocks can be taken.

Two other separate regulatory actions, which currently are underway, are expected to be effective, along with Amendment 16 management measures, on May 1, 2010, if approved.

One action implements fishing year 2010 operations plans for those vessels fishing in a groundfish sector. The public comment period for this proposed action closes today.

The other action defines what actual annual catch limits for each groundfish stock for fishing years 2010 through 2012 will be, revises trip limits submitted in Amendment 16, and includes authority for NOAA's Fisheries Service to make in-season adjustments to trip limits and days-at-sea counting rates for vessels not participating in sectors.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>. or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/noaa.lubchenco>.