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**NOAA releases socio-economic study to assist stakeholder workshop
on how to improve groundfish management**

NOAA today released the 2010 Final Report on the Performance of the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery. This report builds upon earlier release of catch and value information for the 2010 groundfish season and includes new information on fishery performance, leasing of quota, costs and employment.

NOAA is presenting the findings from the report at the New England Fishery Management Council's "lessons learned" workshop this week in Portland, Maine. The workshop is expected to yield important new recommendations for the groundfish fishery that NOAA and the Council can work to put in place. These actions, coupled with other actions underway at NOAA and through the Council, will help fishermen and fishing communities operate successfully despite low quotas required by Congress to end overfishing and rebuild stocks.

NOAA is committed to working with the Council to allow fishermen to take full advantage of available quotas. Sector management is part of that effort, as well as actions taken in the 2011 fishing year to improve the industry's access to fish. Over the last year, NOAA moved quickly to increase catch levels based on new science on fish stocks and allowed fishermen to fish in some previously closed areas, in particular areas close to the shore where smaller vessels fish. NOAA and the Council are considering additional actions, such as allowing fishing in previously closed areas and rolling over unused quota to the following fishing year.

Recognizing the continuing financial challenges in the fishery, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco announced on October 19, 2011 that NOAA would fund at-sea monitoring through the end of the 2012 fishing year which ends on April 13, 2013. Today's report, and related economic information makes clear that the fishery is not yet in position to assume these costs. The report found that if sector vessels paid for monitoring in 2010, trip costs as a percent of revenue would rise by 38 to 42 percent for vessels in the 30 to 50 foot size, for example.

The report shows that groundfish revenues decreased in 2010 compared to 2009. But overall revenues to groundfish vessels, including revenues from non-groundfish species, increased. Despite lower catch limits required to end overfishing and rebuild stocks, the groundfish industry obtained more value from fewer fish landed and less fishing effort expended.

Estimates of the average vessel owner's net and gross revenues increased for groundfish vessels in all size classes, owing largely to higher prices for fish. Overall vessel trip costs increased for many vessels in comparison to 2009. The study also showed the continuation of trends begun during the past decade of fewer, more efficient fishing operations and declining numbers of active boats.

The trend of consolidation of revenues on fewer vessels that began during the last decade continued in 2010. In 2007-2009, 20 percent of vessels captured about 60 percent of gross revenues and just over 68 percent of groundfish gross revenues. In 2010, 20 percent of vessels captured just over 65 percent of gross revenues and nearly 80 percent of groundfish gross revenues. Knowing the likelihood these trends would continue, NOAA urged the New England Fishery Management Council to reconsider current limits on accumulation of catch

shares. In response, the Council is working on an amendment to reduce the likelihood that groundfish permit holders will control excessive shares of the resource.

“The long-term trend of consolidation in the New England groundfish industry continues and the impact it is having on individual fishermen and fishing communities concerns us, especially in these hard economic times,” said Eric Schwaab, NOAA assistant administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service. “We are releasing this study today for stakeholders to help us identify ways to improve the management of the fishery. NOAA will use feedback from the workshop to develop a series of regulatory and non-regulatory reforms that we will bring to the Council for review and action at its November meeting.”

As reported earlier this year, the groundfish fleet caught 38 percent of the fish allocated for catch in 2010. This is an increase in the percentage of allowable catch captured compared to recent years and an indication that sector management is helping the industry increase use and take full advantage of available quotas.

“There are many possible reasons for this 38 percent figure, including lack of availability of fish in certain local areas, difficulties in balancing annual catch allocations, lack of capital to purchase annual catch allocations, and the inability to target certain species while avoiding others” said Andrew Kitts, an economist and one of the study’s authors. NOAA will continue to work with the industry on regulatory and non-regulatory action to increase this percent in the future.

The report looks at the fishery in 2010, a year in which annual catch limits required by Congressional legislation designed to prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks took effect. Under Amendment 16, fishermen can form groups and fish an allotted share of the total allowed catch, or fish individually with a limit on the number of days spent fishing. Most vessels with a substantial history of landing groundfish are fishing under the sector option. To read the report, go to <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd1119/>.

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