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NOAA Proposes Rules for Start of 2006 Northeast Groundfish Year

NOAA Fisheries Service has [proposed rules for managing the groundfishery](#) in the Northeast beginning May 1, and continuing until new measures developed by the New England Fishery Management Council can be made effective. The rules would cover groundfishing in federal waters for 19 stocks, including cod, haddock, and several flounders.

Among the proposed measures is counting each day-at-sea used as 1.4 days. A program for using a portion of available days to target stocks that are healthier is continued, but limited to Georges Bank. Days-at-sea leasing would be continued, providing a way for vessel owners to benefit from their allotted sea time without fishing. These measures are in addition to the 8% reduction in days-at-sea already called for in the plan beginning May 1. For Gulf of Maine cod, recreational fishermen and charter/party vessels would see an increase in the minimum legal size and a seasonal restriction.

The proposed actions are similar to those approved recently by New England Fishery Management Council, which writes the fishery management plan for this fishery. The Council's plan adjustment, if approved by NOAA Fisheries Service, will be in effect through April 30, 2009.

"We're in the early years of a multi-year plan to bring overfishing under control and rebuild stocks," said Patricia Kurkul, Northeast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. "Under the plan, fishing rates are to come down gradually. If we stray too far from the annual expected reductions, even more significant restrictions would likely occur in 2009."

Major changes to the groundfish management plan were finalized in 2004. They were devised to end overfishing and rebuild 12 overfished stocks, primarily by reducing fishing effort, over a period of years. The plan is intended to rebuild most stocks by 2014.

An analysis of groundfish stock status was conducted in 2005. Results indicated that fishing rates on seven stocks are higher than called for at this point in the plan's gradual rate reduction schedule. Measures announced today, in conjunction with Council actions, are intended to get those rates down and to keep other rates on schedule. In 2008, stock condition and fishery activity will be reviewed again, and steps taken to ensure that both effort reduction and rebuilding goals are met.

The proposals announced today are available for public comment through March 9, 2006. A final rule is expected by April. The fishing year begins May 1. The council's action, if approved by NOAA Fisheries Service, is expected to be in place no earlier than August.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats 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.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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