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NOAA REOPENS GEORGES BANK TO GROUND FISHING

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has lifted a ban on possessing Georges Bank yellowtail flounder and has reopened a large area on eastern Georges Bank. The changes, which apply to groundfish vessels are effective on Friday and will be maintained until a catch quota in the fishery is reached or through the end of the fishing year. NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"This action is another example of NOAA's ability to balance its responsibility to support sustainable fisheries and address the economic needs of the fishing community," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator.

Groundfish days-at-sea vessels may once again fish in the eastern U.S. Canada Management Area on Georges Bank. The daily poundage limits for cod and yellowtail flounder are eliminated. All other requirements, including the overall trip limits, are unchanged. In the western U.S. Canada Area vessels may also retain yellowtail.

"By reopening this area we will provide additional fishing opportunities while closely monitoring the hard quotas, and preventing overages we'd have to pay for next year," said Patricia Kurkul, Northeast Regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries.

The U.S. Canada Management Area is governed in part by quotas on cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder. When any one of the quotas is reached, the eastern U.S. Canada Area closes to groundfishing. When the yellowtail quota is reached, vessels may not retain yellowtail flounder caught anywhere in the U.S. Canada Management Area. Nearly 90 percent of the yellowtail flounder quota has been caught so far this year. Landings of cod and haddock are not as near the quota limits.

NOAA's National Marine 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 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 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 the nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>