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ATLANTIC HERRING FISHERY ON GEORGES BANK GETS HADDOCK LIMIT

NOAA Fisheries Service today announced that the Atlantic herring fishery can proceed on Georges Bank while retaining small amounts of haddock. Without the action, these vessels would likely not fish on Georges Bank this year, risking about \$3 million in revenues and bait supply for the region's top-valued fishery, American lobster.

"This is only a temporary solution," said NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Administrator Patricia Kurkul. "The rules are intended to allow the herring fleet to operate normally for the 2005 fishing year without damaging haddock stock rebuilding. Meanwhile, the fishery management council can consider the larger issue of how to manage these fisheries as groundfish stocks rebuild and become more widely distributed."

The emergency action is effective beginning Monday, is in place for six months, and can be extended for an additional six months. It changes a long-standing provision in the region's groundfish rules that prohibited Atlantic herring vessels, which trawl in middle water depths, from retaining any groundfish such as haddock.

Haddock bycatch in the Atlantic herring landings was detected last year. At the same time, record numbers of young haddock, born in 2003, were reportedly rising into mid-water depths where herring nets could inadvertently catch them. Usually, groundfish like haddock stay near the ocean bottom, below herring schools.

The Georges Bank haddock stock dipped to record low levels in the 1990s, but has seen rapid rebuilding in the past few years, owing to both reduced fishing rates and good reproductive success in the stock.

The new rules will apply to vessels permitted to land more than 500 metric tons of Atlantic herring, regardless of where they fish. Haddock bycatch will be reported for each trip, culled from the landings, and set aside for fishery enforcement agents to inspect. There will be no haddock size limit, and no purchase or sale for human consumption. There is also an overall haddock bycatch limit, equal to one percent of the Georges Bank haddock total allowable catch. If reported haddock bycatch in the fishery exceeds that limit, the Georges Bank herring fishery will close, and the zero haddock possession limit for herring vessels will be reinstated.

NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce and 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.

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. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.