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**EMBARGOED UNTIL**  
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**DIRECTED MONKFISH FISHERY REOPENS**  
**Temporary Amendment Accounts for Rebuilding Progress**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has issued new rules for the Northeast monkfish fishery. The action reopens the directed fishery effective at 5:00 p.m. today and is expected to maintain monkfish landings at recent levels.

We used the most recent assessment of the stock to update two criteria used in the plan to determine if overfishing is occurring, said Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries director. We can now allow directed fishing to continue while the stock rebuilds.

In addition to updating the biological underpinnings of the plan, today's action sets the target total allowable catch for this fishing year, extends all of last year's measures, and lowers the trip limit in the southern management area to 450 pounds (tail weight) or 550 pounds (tail weight), depending on the permit category.

Monkfish are a relatively high-valued species sought for their tails and livers. A directed fishery developed in the late 1980s from North Carolina north with landings escalated quickly and dramatically. A management plan to end overfishing and rebuild this stock has been operating for the past three years, and stocks have responded positively. The fourth year of the plan included an end to the directed fishery. That measure had been in effect since May 1.

Earlier, scientific results were not available to fishery management councils during development of a change to the monkfish plan for this year that would have replaced the directed fishery closure.

In December 2001, the monkfish stock status was reviewed, using all available data, including that from highly successful cooperative research cruises conducted by NOAA Fisheries and the monkfish industry. The results confirmed that the stock condition is improving, that fishing removals are declining, and further, provided improved estimates of harvest rates that would end overfishing and continue stock rebuilding.

The councils proposed action was disapproved today, since it was not consistent with the management plan under which it was developed.

With today's action, NOAA Fisheries temporarily amended the fishery management plan to include the revised scientific advice on overfishing. The result is that the measures that could not be approved under the old plan, can be implemented under the amended plan.

The temporary amendment is effective for 180 days, with possible extension for another 180 days while the fishery management councils conduct their public process to amend the plan.