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NOAA Announces Rules for Start of 2006 Northeast Groundfish Year

NOAA Fisheries Service today announced rules for managing the groundfishery in the Northeast. The rules are effective May 1 and are expected to continue until measures recently passed by the New England Fishery Management Council can be implemented. The rules cover groundfishing in federal waters for 19 stocks, including those of cod, haddock, and several flounders. This action is intended to keep groundfish stock rebuilding on track and to ensure that overfishing is gradually eliminated.

The emergency interim final rule announced today implements all but two of the measures as they were proposed on February 28, 2006.

The Agency initially proposed to count each Category A day-at-sea used anywhere in the region as 1.4 days. The rule announced today implements this measure in all areas except the U.S. Canada Management Area on Georges Bank. Vessels will use Category A days-at-sea at a 1:1 ratio when fishing in that area.

The agency initially proposed no trip limits for Georges Bank winter flounder or for white hake. The rule announced today implements the trip limits for these species that were developed by the New England Fishery Management Council as part of its 2006 adjustments to the plan.

The final rule is effective for 180 days. Because it is an emergency interim final rule, public comments will be taken on it through May 15, 2006. Comments will be considered for making adjustments to the rule if needed, or in developing an extension for the rule, if one is required.

For details on the emergency interim final rule, visit the NOAA NMFS Northeast Regional Office website for this action:

NMFS Northeast Region: www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/index.html