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NOAA Announces New Fishing Rules for Northeast Groundfish

NOAA Fisheries Service today announced a new rule for managing the groundfishery in the Northeast's federal waters. The measures are effective November 22, 2006 and cover the fishery for 19 stocks including cod, haddock, and many flounders. The action is intended to keep groundfish stock rebuilding on track, to ensure that overfishing is gradually eliminated, and to better account for the effects of some groundfish measures on monkfish catches.

The rule announced today puts in place adjustments to the groundfish fishery management plan submitted to NOAA by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) early in 2006 as Framework 42. The NEFMC creates management plans for the region's fisheries in federal waters. A provision that would have allowed trip limits for six species to be raised during a fishing year was disapproved. Otherwise, measures as proposed by the NEFMC are unchanged.

Since May, the fishery has been governed by interim measures put in place by NOAA Fisheries Service so the fishery could operate while the measures proposed by the NEFMC were reviewed and approved by the federal government. The rule published today adds some new measures and modifies some of the existing ones.

One new measure is that all vessels operating under a groundfish day-at-sea must be equipped with an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS). Vessel operators who obtain a VMS unit to comply with the new requirement are eligible for reimbursement of the purchase cost through a national program instituted by NOAA Fisheries Service earlier this month.

One modified measure is that governing how some groundfish days-at-sea are counted. Days that are currently being counted as 1.4 days for every 1 day used will be counted as 2 days for every day used. Also, the fishing areas where this differential counting applies will be different.

These are just two examples of additions and changes to the measures that are currently in effect. For a full description of the action and instructions for permit holders, please visit us on the web at: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/nr/>

The most recent major changes to the federal groundfish management plan were made 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 the first two years under the plan was conducted in 2005. Results indicated that fishing rates on seven stocks were higher than called for at that point in the plan's gradual rate reduction schedule. In 2008, stock condition and fishery activity will be reviewed again and, if necessary, steps taken to ensure that both effort reduction and rebuilding goals are met.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving the 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.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. Starting with the establishment of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

The agency is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by 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, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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NOAA Fisheries Service: www.noaa.nmfs.gov

NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Office: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/>