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NORTHEAST GROUND FISH RULES READY ON SCHEDULE

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) today announced that new management measures for the Northeast region's groundfish fleet will become effective on May 1, 2004.

Since May 2002, the fishery has been managed under a series of interim measures in response to a court-ordered settlement agreement. These measures were designed to reduce overfishing while Amendment 13 was being developed.

"Through an outstanding effort by the New England Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries, the fishing industry and other interested stakeholders, we have a significant plan, developed with public input and industry cooperation," said NOAA Fisheries Director William Hogarth. "This plan will prevent overfishing and rebuild groundfish stocks, while providing flexibility and long-term economic benefits to the Northeast fishing industry."

Amendment 13 caps four years of intense effort to develop and implement an effective plan to end overfishing, rebuild stocks of fish such as cod, reduce bycatch, and minimize adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat, in this historically important Northeast fishery. Fully recovered groundfish stocks could yield three times the landings of recent years, and the plan is structured to provide long-term benefits to these important groundfish stocks.

The plan announced today revises significant groundfish management measures such as target catch rates, adjustments to trip limits, and reductions in the number of days-at-sea that can be fished. In addition, Amendment 13 includes several new features such as:

- Leasing and transferring fishing days among limited access Northeast groundfish permit holders;
- Allowing sectors of the groundfish fishery to develop their own sector allocation plans;
- Creating a Special Access Program to target healthy stocks such as yellowtail flounder;
- Implementing a U.S./Canada Sharing Understanding whereby an allocation of total allowable catch for portions of some Georges Bank groundfish stocks would be allocated to U.S. fishing vessels; and
- Implementing phased and adaptive rebuilding strategies for groundfish stocks.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

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On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region Amendment 13 Web site: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/amend13>