



Contact: Maggie Mooney-Seus  
978-281-9175 (office)  
774-392-4865 (cell)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 15, 2011

**NOAA proposes procedures for setting annual catch limits and accountability measures for all Mid-Atlantic fisheries, seeks public comment**

NOAA today proposed procedures for setting annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent overfishing for 10 federally managed fish stocks managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Once the procedures are final, the Mid-Atlantic Council will be on its way to establishing catch limits and accountability measures for all its required fisheries. According to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, all federally managed fisheries must be managed with those tools by the end of 2011. Already, NOAA and the eight regional Fishery Management Councils have implemented annual catch limits to prevent overfishing for 203 of the nation's 528 managed marine fish stocks.

"Annual catch limits and measures have been a major part of the successful rebuilding of fish stocks we have seen in this country, and they help ensure populations are being sustainably fished," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "When we have well-managed fisheries, it pays off for fishermen, consumers, coastal communities, and ecosystems."

The proposed amendment applies the fishery management requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and increases the role of science in setting management measures for all of the Mid-Atlantic council's fishery management plans. The council felt that it was more efficient to establish a common set of ground rules for all the management plans at once through an omnibus amendment, rather than developing them for each management plan separately.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act, the major law that sets how fisheries will be managed, required that by the end of 2010 fish species experiencing overfishing must be managed with annual catch limits and accountability measures, and expanded that requirement to all federally managed fisheries by the end of 2011. Historically, species in this region have been managed by more indirect controls, such as limits on the number of days vessels could fish and the number of fish that could be caught per trip.

The amendment also includes measures to prevent fishermen from exceeding the catch limits, and addresses how any overages that occur would be handled.

The fish species in the Mid-Atlantic affected by this proposed action include Atlantic mackerel, butterfish, Atlantic bluefish, spiny dogfish, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, tilefish, Atlantic surfclam, and ocean quahog. Actual catch limits and accountability measures for each fish stock will be set within the respective fishery management plans for these stocks. However, the amendment formalizes the process for how scientific advice from the council's Scientific and Statistical Committee will be integrated in fishery management plans.

"The measures proposed today will ensure the council and NOAA will have a consistent approach for establishing catch limits, accounting for scientific and management uncertainties,

and preventing overfishing,” said Patricia Kurkul, northeast regional administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service.

Unaffected by the proposed action will be the *Illex* and *Loligo* squid species. Since these creatures live less than a year, they are managed differently than longer-lived fish species.

NOAA is seeking public comment on the proposed omnibus amendment and will issue a final rule after reviewing comments. Comments must be received by July 18 and may be submitted:

Electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal  
By fax to 978-281-9135, or  
By mail to:  
Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office  
55 Great Republic Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930  
Attention: Comments on the Mid Atlantic ACL/AM Omnibus Amendment

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth’s environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Find us on Facebook.