



# Greater Atlantic Region Bulletin

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## **NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES (GROUND FISH)** **FISHING YEAR 2016 REGULATIONS**

*Effective Date: May 1, 2016*

We have approved Framework Adjustment 55 to the groundfish plan and are announcing fishing year 2016 management measures for the groundfish fishery. These changes take effect on May 1, 2016. To see which regulations apply to you, this Bulletin is divided into four sections:

**Framework 55: Measures For All Vessels** – page 1  
**Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measure** – page 5  
**Sector Measures** – page 5  
**Common Pool Measures** – page 8  
**Recreational Fishery Measures** – page 11.

### **Framework Adjustment 55**

We have briefly summarized Framework 55 measures that become effective on May 1, 2016. More detailed information can be found in the Framework 55 final rule at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) and <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/multispecies/>. The approved measures include:

#### Fishing Year 2016 Catch Limits

We set fishing year 2016 catch limits for all 20 groundfish stocks based on 2015 operational groundfish assessments. The 2016 catch limits are listed in Table 1. The 2016 catch limits will increase for 10 stocks compared to 2015. However, there are large reductions from the 2015 catch limits for several stocks, including Georges Bank (GB) cod (-62%), Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder (-62%), witch flounder (-41%), GB winter flounder (-67%), and SNE/MA winter flounder (-53%). The U.S./Canada quotas are shown in Table 2.

Because there may be changes to sector rosters through April 30, 2016, it is possible that the sector and common pool allocations included in this Bulletin may change. Also, after we finalize fishing year 2015 catch information, we will subtract any sector sub-ACL or common pool overages from the respective fishing year 2016 sector or common pool catch limits and make any necessary adjustments to the catch limits in a future management action as close to May 1 as possible.

#### Approval of a New Sector

Framework 55 approves the formation of a new sector, Sustainable Harvest Sector II, for operation in the 2016 fishing year. Additional details are provided under Sector Measures on page 5.

### Modifications to the Sector Approval Process

This action also modifies the sector approval process so that new sectors no longer have to be approved through a fishery management plan amendment or framework adjustment. Moving forward, proposed sectors will submit operations plans to us and the New England Fishery Management Council at the same time. When we receive an operations plan, we will notify the Council in writing, and will present the submitted sector operations plans and any supporting analysis at a Groundfish Committee meeting and a Council meeting. The Council will submit written comments to us and indicate whether it supports the formation of the new sector. We will then make a final determination about the new sector in a rulemaking. We will only approve sectors endorsed by the Council. This modified process will make the sector approval process faster and more flexible.

### Modifications to the Industry-Funded At-Sea Monitoring Program

Framework 55 adjusts the groundfish sector at-sea monitoring (ASM) program to ensure effective monitoring of groundfish discards while making the program more cost-effective. We are making a number of changes to the method we use to set the annual target ASM coverage level. These include:

- Removing the administrative standard of monitoring 80 percent of discard pounds at a 30-percent CV or better;
- Removing the ASM coverage requirement for sector trips using gillnets with 10-inch or greater mesh in the SNE/MA and Inshore GB Broad Stock Areas;
- Using 3 years of data, rather than 1, to determine necessary ASM coverage levels; and
- Filtering our use of data so that healthy stocks that are not fully utilized will not be used as the predictor for the annual target ASM coverage level for all groundfish stocks.

We will announce the target ASM coverage level that results from these adjustments on an annual basis. Further details about the 2016 target ASM coverage level are included under Sector Measures on page 5.

### Conversion of Eastern U.S./Canada Area to the Western U.S./Canada Area

Beginning May 1, sectors may convert their eastern GB cod allocation into western GB cod allocation using the same process previously implemented for GB haddock. This measure is intended to prevent the Western U.S./Canada Area from prematurely closing to a sector before its overall GB cod allocation has been caught, and provides additional flexibility for sectors to harvest their GB cod allocations.

### Adjustments to Selective Trawl Gear Requirements

Beginning October 27, 2016, the separator panel in a haddock separator trawl will be required to be a contrasting color to the portions of the net that it separates in order to make the panel highly visible. The new requirement is intended to improve identification of the panel during vessel inspections, which is expected to allow for faster inspections and more effective enforcement.

### Removal of the Gulf of Maine (GOM) Cod Prohibition for Recreational Anglers

Framework 55 removes the prohibition on recreational possession of GOM cod that was established as part of the protection measures implemented for this stock in 2015 by Framework 53. Removing the permanent prohibition on recreational possession of GOM cod returns authority to us to set the recreational bag limit for GOM cod. We are also implementing the 2016 recreational management measures for GOM cod and haddock, published in a separate rule (see page 11).

**Table 1. Fishing Year 2016 Catch Limits (mt, live weight)**

Stock	Total ACL	Total Groundfish Fishery	Preliminary <sup>1</sup> Sector	Preliminary <sup>1</sup> Common Pool	Recreational Fishery	Midwater Trawl Fishery	Scallop Fishery	Small-Mesh Fisheries	State Waters sub-component	Other sub-component
GB Cod	730	608	595	13					23	99
GOM Cod	473	437	273	8	157				27	10
GB Haddock	53,309	51,667	51,209	458		521			561	561
GOM Haddock	3,430	3,344	2,385	31	928	34			26	26
GB Yellowtail Flounder	261	211	207	4			42	5	NA	3
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	255	182	145	37			39		5	29
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	409	341	325	16					43	26
American Plaice	1,235	1,183	1,160	23					26	26
Witch Flounder	441	370	361	8					12	59
GB Winter Flounder	650	590	584	6					NA	60
GOM Winter Flounder	776	639	604	35					122	16
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	749	585	514	71					70	94
Redfish	9,837	9,526	9,471	55					103	207
White Hake	3,572	3,459	3,434	25					38	75
Pollock	20,374	17,817	17,705	112					1,279	1,279
N. Windowpane Flounder	177	66	N/A	66					2	109
S. Windowpane Flounder	599	104	N/A	104			209		37	249
Ocean Pout	155	137	N/A	137					2	17
Atlantic Halibut	119	91	N/A	91					25	4
Atlantic Wolffish	77	72	N/A	72					1	3

<sup>1</sup>Updated catch limits based on final sector rosters will be announced as soon as possible in the 2016 fishing year.

**Table 3. 2016 Fishing Year U.S./Canada Quotas (mt, live weight) and Percent of Quota Allocated to Each Country**

Quota	Eastern GB Cod	Eastern GB Haddock	GB Yellowtail Flounder
Total Shared Quota	625	37,000	354
U.S. Quota	138 (22%)	15,170 (41%)	269 (76%)
Canada Quota	487 (78%)	21,830 (59%)	85 (24%)

## Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measure

Available information indicates that 2015 fishing year catch was below the total limits for northern and southern windowpane flounder. Therefore, we have determined it is not necessary for vessels to use selective trawl gear in the windowpane flounder accountability areas for the 2016 fishing year. Once final 2015 catch information is available, we will re-evaluate whether an overage in the total catch limits for northern or southern windowpane flounder occurred. If we determine there was an overage in 2015, the selective trawl gear accountability measure areas will be implemented at the start of the 2017 fishing year. More information on windowpane flounder AMs can be found here: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/regs/infodocs/windowpaneaminfosheet.pdf>.

### Sector Measures

#### Approved Sectors

We have approved 19 sectors to operate in fishing year 2016 (May 1, 2016, through April 30, 2017).

Seventeen sectors were previously approved to operate in fishing years 2015 and 2016:

- Georges Bank Cod Fixed Gear Sector
- Maine Coast Community Sector
- Northeast Coastal Communities Sector
- Northeast Fishery Sectors I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, and XIII
- Sustainable Harvest Sectors 1 and 3.

Framework 55 has approved operations plan for an additional 2 sectors for fishing year 2016:

- Northeast Fishery Sector 12
- Sustainable Harvest Sector 2.

All approved sectors receive “universal” exemptions from trip limits for allocated stocks, the GB Seasonal Closure Area, and the requirement to use groundfish DAS to land groundfish. All sector vessels may use a 6-inch mesh codend on haddock separator trawls, rope trawls, and Ruhle trawls when fishing on GB. We previously approved 19 additional exemptions for fishing years 2015 and 2016. Additional information on these previously approved sector exemptions can be found in the sector operations plan final rule at <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/2015/May/15mul20152016sectoropsfr.pdf>.

#### At-Sea Monitoring Changes

##### *ASM Coverage Rate Requirement*

Framework 55 adjusts the ASM program to ensure effective monitoring of discards while making the program more cost-effective and providing additional stability to the industry. Based on these changes, we have determined that **the target ASM coverage level for 2016 is 14 percent, including Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology observer coverage paid in full by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP)**. Assuming NEFOP covers 4 percent of trips as it has in recent years, this action results in sectors paying for ASM on approximately 10 percent of their vessels' trips in 2016.

##### *Certain Extra-Large Mesh Gillnet Trips Excluded from ASM Coverage*

Framework 55 also removes the ASM coverage requirement for sector trips using 10-inch, or larger, mesh gillnet gear and fishing exclusively in the inshore GB and SNE/MA broad stock areas. To minimize the possibility that this measure could be used to avoid ASM coverage, only vessels declared into the SNE/MA and/or Inshore GB Broad Stock Areas using 10-inch, or larger, mesh gillnets will be exempt

from the ASM coverage requirement. Vessels declaring into the GOM or Offshore GB Broad Stock Areas will not be excluded from the ASM coverage requirement. In addition, a vessel is already prohibited from changing its fishing plan for a trip once a waiver from coverage has been issued. Sector vessels must continue to declare gear type and Broad Stock Area to be fished in the Pre-Trip Notification System, which will allow us to easily identify trips that are excluded from ASM coverage.

#### Eastern GB Cod Conversion

Beginning in fishing year 2016, sectors are allowed to convert eastern GB cod allocation into western GB cod allocation at any time during the fishing year, and up to 2 weeks into the following fishing year to cover any overage during the previous fishing year. A sector's proposed allocation conversion must be submitted to NMFS for approval.

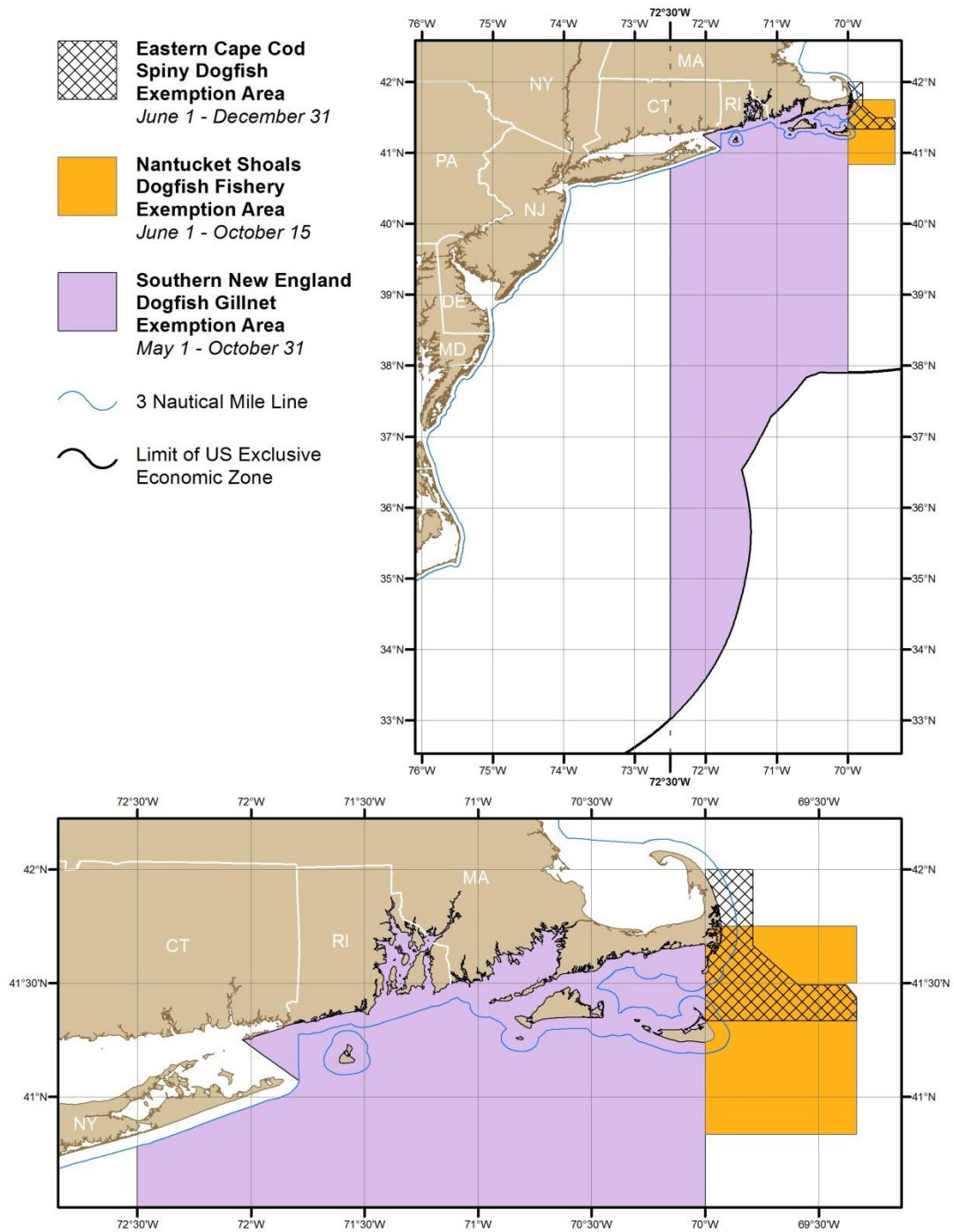
#### New Sector Exemption

A new sector exemption, intended to complement the Framework 55 measure that removes the ASM coverage requirement for certain sector trips using extra-large mesh gillnets, allows vessels on these non-ASM sector trips to also target dogfish using 6.5-inch mesh gillnet gear within the footprint and season of either the Nantucket Shoals Dogfish Exemption Area (June 1 to October 15), the Eastern Area of the Cape Cod Spiny Dogfish Exemption Area (June 1 to December 31), or the Southern New England Dogfish Gillnet Exemption Area (May 1 to October 31) (See **Figures 1** and **2** on page 7).

We will monitor the use of this exemption using the existing vessel trip report (VTR) requirement. Vessels are required to send separate VTRs for each statistical area in which fishing occurred on a trip, and for each gear type used on a trip. This means that vessels must submit a VTR to document catch on the extra-large mesh portion of the trip, and a separate VTR for the portion of the trip in which the vessel deploys 6.5-inch mesh gillnet gear within the footprint and season of the existing dogfish exempted areas. Sector trips using this exemption will be excluded from ASM coverage, but all legal-sized allocated groundfish stocks caught during these trips must be landed and the associated catch of groundfish will be deducted from the sector's ACE.

We will grant this exemption to any sectors that modify their operations plans to include this exemption. Any sector may submit a written request to amend its approved operations plan to the Regional Administrator.

**Figures 1 and 2. Dogfish exemption areas where dogfish may be targeted on non-ASM sector trips**



**Common Pool Measures and Trip Limits**

**Tables 3 and 4** (below) show the trip limits that will apply to common pool vessels beginning on May 1, 2016. We may increase or decrease these limits during the fishing year to ensure that the common pool catch limits are fully caught, but not exceeded. We will announce any necessary changes in a future management action.

Any landings prior to midnight on April 30, 2016, are subject to the fishing year 2015 landing limits. All landings after 0001 hours on May 1, 2016, are restricted to the fishing year 2016 limits in this Bulletin.

**Table 3. Initial Fishing Year 2016 Common Pool Possession and Trip Limits**

Stock	2016 Trip Limit
GB Cod (outside Eastern U.S./Canada Area)	500 lb per DAS, up to 2,500 lb per trip
GB Cod (inside Eastern U.S./Canada Area)	100 lb per DAS, up to 500 lb per trip
GOM Cod	25 lb per DAS up to 100 lb per trip
GB Haddock	100,000 lb per trip
GOM Haddock	200 lb per DAS up to 600 lb per trip
GB Yellowtail Flounder	100 lb per trip
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	250 lb per DAS, up to 500 lb per trip
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	750 lb per DAS up to 1,500 lb per trip
American plaice	1,000 lb per trip
Witch Flounder	250 lb per trip
GB Winter Flounder	250 lb per trip
GOM Winter Flounder	2,000 lb per trip
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2,000 lb per DAS, up to 4,000 lb per trip
Redfish	Unlimited
White hake	1,500 lb per trip
Pollock	Unlimited
Atlantic Halibut	1 fish per trip
Windowpane Flounder	Possession Prohibited
Ocean Pout	
Atlantic Wolffish	

**Table 4. Fishing Year 2016 Trip Limits for Handgear and Small Vessel Category Permits**

Permit	2016 Trip Limit
Handgear A GOM Cod	25 lb per trip
Handgear A GB Cod	300 lb per trip
Handgear B GOM Cod	25 lb per trip
Handgear B GB Cod	25 lb per trip
Small Vessel Category	300 lb of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder combined
	Maximum of 25 lb of GOM cod and 200 lb of GOM haddock within the 300-lb combined trip limit



Common Pool Trimester Total Allowable Catches

The common pool catch limit for each stock is divided into trimester total allowable catches (TACs): Trimester 1 (May 1-August 31); Trimester 2 (September 1-December 31); and Trimester 3 (January 1-April 30). *Fishing Year 2016 trimester TACs are listed in Table 5 below.*

Area Closures

Once we project that 90 percent of a trimester TAC for a stock is caught, we will close that Trimester TAC Area to common pool vessels fishing with gears capable of catching that stock. The area will remain closed until the end of that trimester, and will re-open at the start of the next trimester. The areas that will close for each stock, and the gears that the closure will apply to, are listed in **Table 6** on page 10.

During the fishing year, we will post weekly quota monitoring reports here:

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>.

**Table 5. FY 2016 Trimester TACs (mt)**

Stock	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3
GB Cod	3.3	4.9	5
GOM Cod	2.1	2.7	2.8
GB Haddock	123.5	151	183
GOM Haddock	8.4	8.1	14.6
GB Yellowtail Flounder	0.8	1.2	2.1
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	8.2	14.4	16.4
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	5.5	5.5	4.7
American Plaice	5.4	8.1	9.1
Witch Flounder	2.3	2.6	3.6
GB Winter Flounder	0.5	1.4	3.9
GOM Winter Flounder	12.8	13.2	8.7
Redfish	13.7	17	24.2
White Hake	9.5	7.8	7.8
Pollock	31.4	39.3	41.5

\* SNE Winter Flounder is not managed under a trimester quota

**Table 6. Common Pool Trimester TAC Area Closures**

<b>Stock</b>	<b>Statistical Area</b>	<b>Gear</b>
GOM cod	513, 514	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GB cod	521, 522, 525, 561	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GOM haddock	513, 514, 515	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GB haddock	521, 522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
CC/GOM yellowtail flounder	514, 521	Trawl, gillnet
GB yellowtail flounder	522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl, gillnet
SNE/MA yellowtail flounder	537, 539, 538, 613	Trawl, gillnet
GOM winter flounder	514	Trawl, gillnet
GB winter flounder	522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl
Witch flounder	512, 513, 514, 515, 521, 522, 525	Trawl
American plaice	512, 513, 514, 515, 521, 522, 525	Trawl
Pollock	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Gillnet, trawl, longline/hook
Redfish	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Trawl
White hake	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Gillnet, trawl

Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program

Common pool vessels may not target yellowtail flounder within the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program (SAP) in fishing year 2016. Vessels are not allowed to fish in this SAP using flounder trawl nets.

Common pool vessels may fish in this SAP in 2016 to target haddock, but must fish with a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or hook gear. This SAP is open from August 1, 2016, through January 31, 2017.

Eastern U.S./Canada Area

Starting on May 1, 2016, common pool vessels using trawl gear may fish in the Eastern U.S./Canada Area. Common pool vessels must use a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or a flounder trawl in this area.

## Recreational Fishery Measures

### Removal of the Gulf of Maine Cod Possession Prohibition

Framework 55 removes the prohibition on recreational possession of GOM cod that was implemented in 2015. For 2016, the GOM haddock recreational sub-ACL is increasing 149 percent compared to 2015, based on continued growth of the stock biomass. Although GOM cod remains overfished and subject to overfishing, biomass has increased slightly, and the GOM cod recreational sub-ACL is increasing 30 percent compared to 2015.

### New Recreational Measures for Fishing Year 2016

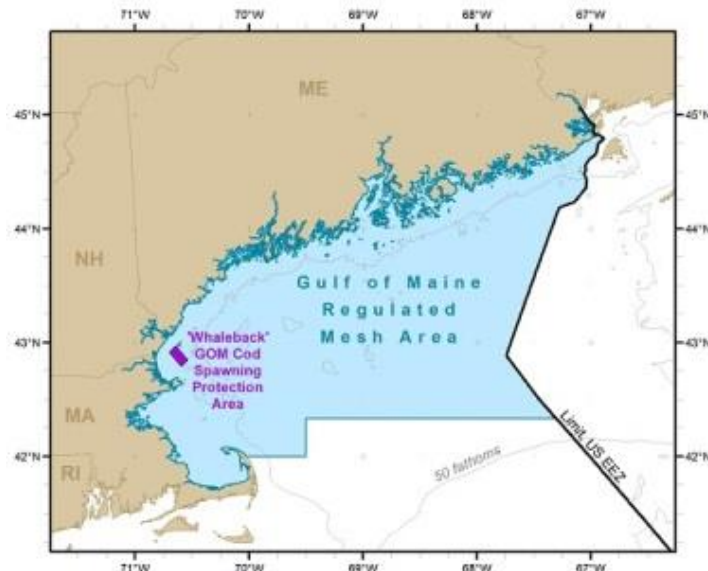
After consulting with the Council, we are increasing recreational fishing opportunities for GOM cod and haddock. Starting May 1, 2016, anglers may retain 1 cod per day during August and September, and may keep up to 15 haddock per day for most of the fishing year. **Table 7** (below) provides the new measures effective May 1, 2016.

Bag limits are per person per day and size limits are minimum total length. Recreational measures for cod and haddock outside the GOM Regulated Mesh Area (Figure 3 below) remain unchanged. Additional information on the fishing year 2016 recreational measures can be found at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/recfishing/regs/index.html>.

**Table 7. Fishing Year 2016 Recreational Fishing Measures for GOM cod and haddock**

Year	GOM Haddock			GOM Cod		
	Bag Limit	Size Limit	Open Season	Bag Limit	Size Limit	Open Season
2016	15	17 inches	May 1, 2016 – February 28, 2017 and April 15, 2017 – April 30, 2017	1	24 inches	August 1, 2016 through September 30, 2016

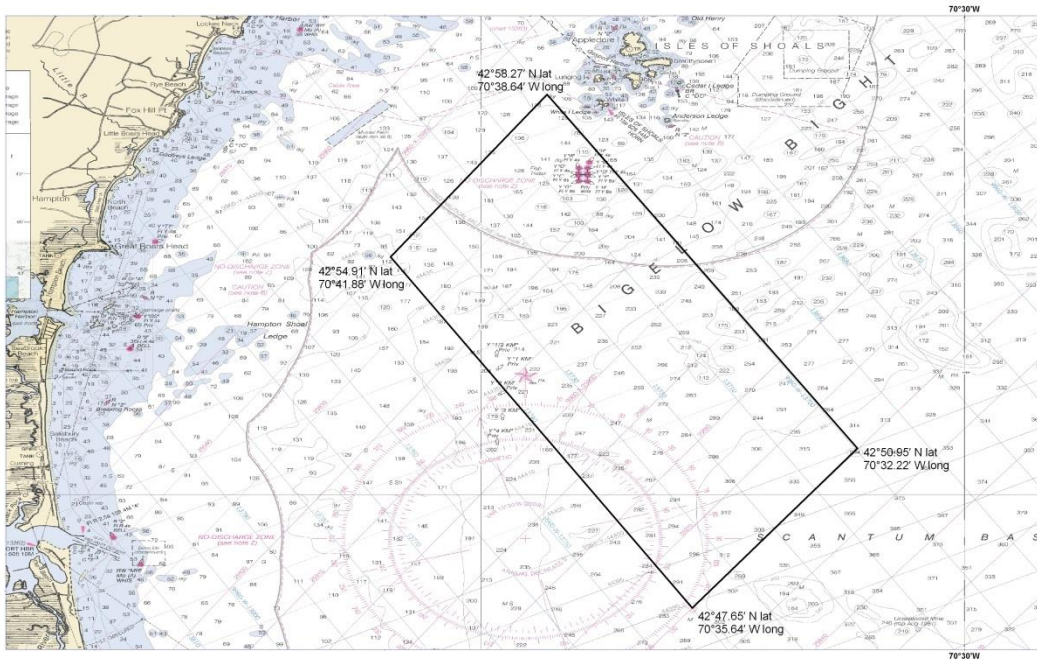
**Figure 3. GOM Regulated Mesh Area**



## Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area

Recreational vessels remain subject to the Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area (**Figure 4** below).

**Figure 4. Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area**



### **Gear Restrictions**

From April 1 through June 30 of each year, all recreational vessels, including private recreational and charter/party vessels, may only use pelagic hook-and-line gear, as defined below, when fishing in the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area.

<b>Point</b>	<b>N. Latitude</b>	<b>W. Longitude</b>
CSPA1	42° 50.95'	70° 32.22'
CSPA2	42° 47.65'	70° 35.64'
CSPA3	42° 54.91'	70° 41.88'
CSPA4	42° 58.27'	70° 38.64'

Pelagic hook-and-line gear is defined as handline or rod and reel gear that is designed to fish for, or that is being used to fish for, pelagic species. No portion of this gear may be operated in contact with the bottom at any time.

### **Possession Restrictions**

Any vessel fishing in the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area, including pelagic hook-and-line gear by recreational vessels, is prohibited from possessing or retaining regulated species or ocean pout from April 1 through June 30 of each year.

### **Transiting**

Recreational and commercial vessels are allowed to transit the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area, provided all gear is stowed in accordance with the regulations.