



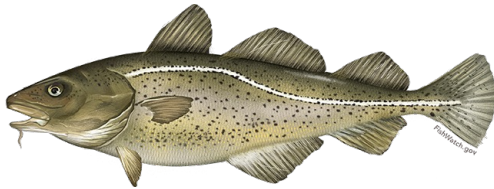
New England Fishery Management Council

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PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Groundfish: Council Takes Final Action on Framework 65 with Gulf of Maine Cod Rebuilding Plan, 2023-2025 Specifications

The New England Fishery Management Council selected final measures for Framework Adjustment 65 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan when it met [December 5-8, 2022 in Newport, RI](#). The Council also voted to submit the framework to NOAA Fisheries for approval and implementation. The framework will guide the 2023 fishing year for groundfish, which begins on May 1. Several provisions and specifications in this action will apply to fishing years 2024, 2025, and beyond.



Atlantic Cod Measures

Gulf of Maine Cod: Gulf of Maine cod is overfished and experiencing overfishing. Framework 65 contains a new 10-year rebuilding plan, which has a 70% probability of rebuilding this stock by 2033. The strategy: (1) utilizes a fishing mortality rate set at 60% of what the rate is that would produce maximum sustainable yield; and (2) produces a fishing mortality rate of 0.104, which is very low and will continue to result in low catch limits during the 10-year rebuilding period.

The Council initially considered a higher fishing mortality rate of 0.121 for Gulf of Maine cod as recommended by its Groundfish Committee. However, the higher rate, while still extremely restrictive, resulted in a lower probability of stock rebuilding during the 10-year period and led to higher catch limits.

After fully debating the best course forward, the

Commercial Groundfish Sub-Annual Catch Limits in Metric Tons with Percentage Change for Fishing Year 2022 vs. Proposed Fishing Year 2023

| Commercial groundfish sub-ACLs (mt) | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| | Stock | FY2022 | Council's Proposal FW65 FY2023 | % Change |
| | | | | |
| Allocated Stocks | GB Cod | 244 | 374.9 | 54% |
| | GOM Cod | 270 | 278 | 3% |
| | GB Haddock | 75,382 | 11,080 | -85% |
| | GOM Haddock | 7,056 | 1,149 | -84% |
| | GB Yellowtail Flounder | 97 | 84.3 | -13% |
| | SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder | 16 | 33.3 | 108% |
| | CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder | 692 | 985 | 42% |
| | American Plaice | 2,630 | 5,360 | 104% |
| | Witch Flounder | 1,317 | 1,145 | -13% |
| | GB Winter Flounder | 563 | 1634 | 190% |
| | GOM Winter Flounder | 281 | 607 | 116% |
| | SNE/MA Winter Flounder | 288 | 441 | 53% |
| | Redfish | 9,559 | 9,469 | -1% |
| | White Hake | 1,990 | 1,735 | -13% |
| | Pollock | 14,135 | 13,124 | -7% |
| Non-allocated Stocks | GOM/GB Windowpane Flounder | 108 | 105 | -3% |
| | SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder | 43 | 45 | 5% |
| | Ocean Pout | 50 | 49 | -2% |
| | Atlantic Halibut | 73 | 56 | -23% |
| | Atlantic Wolffish | 86 | 86 | 0% |

KEY: Georges Bank (GB); Gulf of Maine (GOM); Southern New England (SNE); Mid-Atlantic (MA); and Cape Cod (CC).



New England Fishery Management Council

Council agreed by consensus to adopt the lower fishing mortality rate to offer more protection for Gulf of Maine cod and give the stock a better chance of rebuilding.

This new rebuilding plan will not change the 551 metric ton (mt) acceptable biological catch (ABC) that the Council adopted for fishing years 2023 and 2024. Allocations to the fishery will be based on these existing ABC values, which the Council supported in part because of uncertainty over stock projections. Also, the 551 mt ABCs will promote stock rebuilding since they are lower than they would be if calculated under the new fishing mortality rate in the rebuilding plan.

The rebuilding plan will begin in 2024 and remain in place for 10 years unless the Council is notified by NOAA Fisheries that Gulf of Maine cod is rebuilt or the plan is modified.

Georges Bank Cod: The Council has been using a Georges Bank cod recreational catch target since the 2018 fishing year. As part of Framework 65, the Council revised the formula for setting the catch target for fishing years 2023 and 2024. The revised method bases the target on a reduction from recent catches and: (1) utilizes data from the Marine Recreational

Information Program (MRIP) that was incorporated into the 2021 management track stock assessment for Georges Bank cod; and (2) includes updated 2021 catch information. Under the revised formula, the 2023 recreational catch target is proposed to be 113 metric tons.

The Council also adopted a temporary modification to the accountability measures (AMs) for Georges Bank cod for instances when the overall annual catch limit (ACL) is exceeded due to fishing activity by non-commercial vessels. The commercial fishery includes vessels in the groundfish sector program and common

Groundfish Sub-Annual Catch Limits (sub-ACLs) for Other Fisheries in Metric Tons with Percentage Change for Fishing Year 2022 vs. Proposed Fishing Year 2023

| Fishery | Stock | FY2022 sub-ACL (mt) | Council's Proposal FW65 FY2023 sub-ACL (mt) | % Change |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---|----------|
| Recreational Groundfish | GOM Cod | 192 | 192 | 0% |
| | GOM Haddock | 3,634 | 610 | -83% |
| Sea Scallop | GB Yellowtail Flounder | 19 | 16.5 | -13% |
| | SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder | 2 | 2.7 | 35% |
| | GOM/GB Windowpane Flounder | 31 | 31 | 0% |
| | SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder | 129 | 129 | 0% |
| Midwater Trawl | GB Haddock | 1,514 | 221 | -85% |
| | GOM Haddock | 107 | 18 | -83% |
| Small-Mesh | GB Yellowtail Flounder | 2.3 | 2 | -13% |
| Other Sub-component ¹ | SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder | 177 | 184 | 4% |

¹ The other sub-component for SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder is used to evaluate AMs for large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries).

Proposed Fishing Year 2023 U.S./Canada TACs in Metric Tons (mt)

| Total Allowable Catches (TACs) | Eastern Georges Bank Cod | Eastern Georges Bank Haddock | Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Total Shared Catch | 520 mt | No agreement | 200 mt |
| U.S. TAC and Percentage Share | 135 mt 26% of total | 1,520 mt | 106 mt 53% of total |
| Canada TAC and Percentage Share | 385 mt 74% of total | TAC to be determined by Canada | 94 mt 47% of total |

Percentage shares for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder and for the management units of Eastern Georges Bank cod and Eastern Georges Bank haddock are determined as follows: historical catches are weighted 10% and resource distribution based on trawl surveys is weighted 90%. TAC = total allowable catch.



New England Fishery Management Council

pool fishery. Under the existing accountability measures, a pound-for-pound payback is applied to the commercial fishery when overages occur – even if commercial vessels are not the cause of the overage.

If approved by NOAA Fisheries, the temporary modification would be in place if accountability measures are applied to 2023-2025 annual catch limits, after which the AMs would revert to the current approach. The modification includes a mechanism for the commercial fishery's pound-for-pound payback to be reduced if all catch from U.S. fisheries is below the total ACL during the year following the overage.

Specifications: The Council approved revised specifications for fishing years 2023 through 2025 for all groundfish stocks as outlined in the [Draft Framework Adjustment 65 alternatives](#), but it discussed three stocks separately – Gulf of Maine haddock, Georges Bank cod, and white hake.

Gulf of Maine Haddock: The Council agreed by consensus to set the acceptable biological catch for this stock at 75% of the fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield, which results in ABCs of:

- 1,936 mt for fishing year 2023;
- 2,038 mt for fishing year 2024;
- 2,017 mt for fishing year 2025.

Georges Bank Cod: The Council voted to set the ABC at 904 metric tons for fishing years 2023 and 2024 as recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) during its [August 2022 meeting](#). The Council noted that 904 metric tons would continue to support stock rebuilding by maintaining low catches relative to historic levels. It also viewed the 904 mt ABC as supporting consistency and stability in the fishery until the [Atlantic Cod Research Track Stock Assessment](#) is completed.



Field biologist Jack Wilson holds a large white hake during the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's [2022 Gulf of Maine Cooperative Bottom Longline Survey](#). – NOAA Fisheries/Dave McElroy photo

White Hake: The Council endorsed an ABC of 1,897 mt for fishing year 2023 as recommended by the SSC. However, the Council agreed to ask the SSC to evaluate a modification to the rebuilding plan for white hake under a higher fishing mortality rate and, if warranted, revise the ABCs for fishing years 2024 and 2025 given the [latest stock assessment results](#). If revisions occur, they would be included in a future Council action, not Framework Adjustment 65. The Council added this item to its 2023 groundfish priorities.

Also related to white hake, the Council agreed to request that the [Northeast Region Coordinating Council](#)



New England Fishery Management Council

modify the [stock assessment schedule](#) to accommodate a white hake management track stock assessment at a [Level 3](#) enhanced review in 2023 to accommodate recent assessment and SSC information.

White hake is under a [rebuilding program](#), but the most recent management track stock assessment concluded that the stock is [not overfished and overfishing is not occurring](#). The Council will continue to work with the SSC and Groundfish Committee on possible revisions to the rebuilding program.



Uncertainty Buffer: The Council voted to remove the management uncertainty buffer for Gulf of Maine haddock and white hake if the at-sea monitoring target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater for fishing year 2023 for groundfish sector vessels. Removing the buffer would increase the catch limit allowed for both of these stocks. Under Amendment 23 to the groundfish plan, which will be [implemented January 9, 2023](#), the management uncertainty buffer for all groundfish stocks will default to zero when the target at-sea monitoring coverage rate is set at 100%.

ABC Control Rules: Establishing new acceptable biological catch control rules for groundfish initially was part of Framework Adjustment 65. However, the Council collectively agreed that the revisions needed more work. During its 2023 work priorities discussion, the Council determined that its highest groundfish priority for the year ahead will be to complete its work on revising the ABC control rules. The Council intends to use a facilitated process involving the Scientific and Statistical Committee, Groundfish Plan Development Team, and Groundfish Committee.

Recent Groundfish Stock Assessments

During its December 2022 meeting, the Council received a [presentation](#) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center on the peer-reviewed results of 13 groundfish management track stock assessments.

The [stocks covered](#) were: Georges Bank haddock; Gulf of Maine haddock; pollock; white hake; Georges Bank winter flounder; Gulf of Maine winter flounder; American plaice; Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder; Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder; witch flounder; Atlantic halibut; ocean pout; and wolffish.



Yellowtail flounder from a research trip in Closed Area II on Georges Bank. – SMAST photo

QUESTIONS and MORE INFO?

- Contact Dr. Jamie Cournane, the Council's groundfish plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 103, jcournane@nefmc.org.
- Groundfish materials used during this meeting are posted [HERE](#).
- Visit the Council's [groundfish webpage](#).