

Crying Wolffish

David E. Frulla

June 1, 2009

The article discusses the recent petition to list Atlantic wolffish as an endangered species. If the Conservation Law Foundation succeeds in having this fish listed under the Endangered Species Act, it will mark the first such listing for an open-sea teleost (that is, a sub-class of bony, ray-finned fish). It will also signal a transition from management of marine fisheries under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to the no-take regime of endangered species.

The petition declares, without evidence, overfishing as the primary cause of the wolffish's demise, although it also allows that fishery-caused habitat destruction may be nearly as responsible. The article poses the pertinent question, which is, can a stock of fish inhabiting such a large range ever be fished to biological extinction? The cure offered, of course, is less fishing, more closed areas, and a widespread ban on trawl and other bottom-tending mobile fishing gear.