



New England Fishery Management Council

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LISTENING SESSION SUMMARY

Recreational Groundfish Party/Charter Fishery - Limited Access Program

April 4, 2019

Seabrook Public Library

25 Liberty Lane

Seabrook, NH

The Council held a series of listening sessions to solicit public comment on whether it should develop a limited access program for the recreational party/charter boat fishery for the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan, under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Meeting Attendance: Paul McInnis, Nate Ribblet (For-hire crew), Mark Godfroy (Head boat owner/NEFMC), David Deimen, Les Eastman (Party boat owner), Doug Grout (NH Department of Fish and Game), George French (Charter permit owner), Pete Oldak, Earl Meredith (NMFS), Jon Sterritt (Recreational Angler/NEFMC Recreational Advisory Panel), Greg Ardini (NMFS), Cory Gauron (Charter boat owner), Chris Charos (Captain's Fishing Parties), Tracey Godfroy (Party boat owner), and Joshua Godfroy (For-hire crew). The following NEFMC members and staff were also in attendance: Terry Stockwell (Groundfish Committee Chair), Jamie Cournane, PhD (Council Staff), and Jessica Joyce (Contractor, Tidal Bay Consulting).

The listening session began at approximately 5:50 pm.

Terry Stockwell, Chair of the Groundfish Committee, began the meeting with a brief introduction, explaining the purpose of this listening session and options on how to provide comments. Dr. Jamie Cournane gave a brief presentation reviewing *why* the Council is taking action, *what* action has already been taken (control date of March 19, 2018), *what* comments should address, *how* to submit public comments, and next steps.

Comments:

Mr. Godfroy, a party boat owner and member of the Council, commented that he is in favor of limited entry due to the need to control new entrants and address fishing quotas that have been exceeded year after year. However, as to not exclude party or charter boat operators who bought a permit after the March 19, 2018, control date, refreshing the control date should be part of this management process.

Mr. Eastman, a party boat fleet owner, commented that he comes from a fishing family, and that party/charter boat operators in New Hampshire and Salisbury, Massachusetts have been struggling to make money under the current regulations, while covering operational costs like

fuel, bait, etc. He said it's unfair to those who have been working in the fishery for years, to allow new entrants to compete with those already struggling. He supports limited access if it helps the industry members who have been working over the long term.

Mr. Ribblet, works for Mr. Eastman, commented that he's against limited access. He feels that a limited access program will make it impossible for the next generation of fishermen to get into recreational fishing because the permits will be too expensive. Mr. Ribblet stated that private anglers are the issue with overfishing cod, and not the charter boats, which is what a limited access program would regulate.

Mr. Oldak, a recreational fisherman and charter boat customer from South Hampton, NH, commented about his concern that cod fishing [in federal waters] has been closed to sport fishermen for two years, but open [in state waters] around Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He recommends that the zero-possession federal limit should be increased to one- to three- cod fish as an incentive for sport fishermen, which only have haddock to target. Mr. Oldak commented that there are a lot of market cod out there because of research and regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and there is room to take a few cod.

Mr. French is unsure whether he's for or against limited access. He bought a permit last year and drummed up business; however, he wouldn't qualify for the March 19, 2018 control date. Mr. French would potentially support limited entry if he was able to maintain his permit, although doesn't have history before the control date and is unsure how this would affect him.

Mr. French commented further that if a choice is made to explore limited access, he suggests separating six-pack permits (keeping them open access) from head boat permits (limited access).

Mr. Gauron is neither for or against a limited access program, as he understands the pros and cons. He knows several people who bought permits for the 2019 season, and understands that more boats equate to less dockage. He sold a boat last year and bought a new one, which NMFS required purchasing a new permit for in June 2018 (after the control date). Mr. French inquired about how the existing control date would affect his situation.

Mr. Sterritt, a member of the Council's Recreational Advisory Panel, from Newburyport, NH, commented that one reason to not support limited access is consideration of all the situations that can affect your ability to fish and compromise your ability to remain in a limited entry program, including getting sick, injured, taking time off, or changing boats. He feels limited entry is about protecting businesses that are fishing today, and it isn't fair to the next generation who would be affected by this but aren't aware of this management process because they are in high school now. Mr. Sterritt stated there should be fair competition between the party/charter boat fleet [having access to buy affordable permits] and recreational anglers [open access].

Mr. Charos, Captain's Fishing Parties, Newburyport, NH asked a question on what specifications the limited access program would be based on, for example, vessel size and horsepower.

The listening session adjourned at approximately 6:20 pm.