



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 17, 2019

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## Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23: Council Approves Wide Range of Alternatives for Further Development

During its mid-April meeting in Mystic, CT, the New England Fishery Management Council approved a wide range of alternatives that will be further developed for consideration in Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23. This step paves the way for the Groundfish Committee, Plan Development Team, and Groundfish Advisory Panel to continue working on these alternatives and advance the amendment to the next level of analyses.

The Council also dealt with three other groundfish-related issues. In short, the Council:

- Modified its policy on gear standards in order to facilitate the use of new gear when accountability measures (AMs) are triggered;
- Received an [update](#) on its Groundfish Catch Share Review, which covers fishing years 2010-2015; and
- Received a quick overview of the ongoing [listening sessions](#) being conducted to solicit public comment on whether the Council should develop a limited access program for the recreational party/charter boat fishery under the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (groundfish plan).

### Monitoring Amendment 23

Amendment 23 is being developed to improve the reliability and accountability of groundfish catch reporting. It also is expected to:

- Help ensure a precise and accurate representation of catch, both discards and landings;
- Improve the accuracy of collected catch date;
- Create fair and equitable catch reporting requirements for all commercial groundfish fishermen; and



*Pollock on the auction floor, Buyers and Sellers Exchange (BASE), New Bedford.  
– Jonathon Peros/NEFMC photo*



# New England Fishery Management Council

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- Maximize the value of collected catch data and minimize costs for the fishing industry and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The amendment contains several broad categories, including, among others: (1) fishery program administration measures to address issues such as sector reporting requirements, advance notice of total monitoring coverage, and program funding; (2) commercial fishery measures, including groundfish sector and common pool revisions that consider dockside monitoring; (3) sector monitoring tools that explore options for human at-sea monitors, electronic monitoring, dockside monitoring, and maximized retention of catch; and (4) potential exemptions for certain vessels based on fishing location.

The Council approved several additions and modifications to the initial range of alternatives and specifically directed the Groundfish Committee to develop options within the dockside monitoring alternative that address concerns identified in the former 2010-2011 dockside monitoring program. The Council also asked the Groundfish Committee to expand the number of options to determine monitoring coverage levels based on catch and to add an additional alternative for vessel exemptions based on fishing location.

A number of steps are lined up between now and the Council's [June 11-13, 2019](#) meeting to continue development of the amendment. Here are the next two events:

- A sub-panel of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet [April 24 and April 25](#) to review the scientific validity of information and analyses concerning groundfish monitoring issues.
- The Council's Groundfish Committee, Advisory Panel, and Plan Development Team will meet jointly [May 20 and May 21](#) to discuss the SSC sub-panel's review recommendations.

Visit the Council's  
Amendment 23  
[Webpage](#)

The Council will hold public hearings on Amendment 23 later this year after it approves a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that will contain detailed analyses of all the alternatives under consideration to improve monitoring.



*Winter flounder (blackbacks) in Gloucester.  
– Jonathon Peros/NEFMC photo*



# New England Fishery Management Council

## Gear Standards Policy Update

In other groundfish business, the Council agreed to update the Gear Standards Policy within its Operations Handbook by adding a sentence that should make it easier for NOAA Fisheries to approve new gear types to address accountability measures for regulated stocks.

**CURRENT POLICY:** “The standards require that new gear either reduce the catch of each regulated stock of species of concern or other non-groundfish stocks that are overfished or subject to overfishing, by at least 50% (by weight on a trip-by-trip basis); or that its catch of each regulated stock of species of concern, or other non-groundfish stocks that are overfished or subject to overfishing, be less than 5% of the total catch of regulated groundfish (also by weight on a trip-by-trip basis).”

**ADDITION TO CURRENT POLICY:** “In the case of a gear required for an accountability measure (AM), the gear need only meet this standard for the stock that triggers the AM.”

The Council will forward this language to the Regional Administrator of the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office for addition to the regulations.

## Groundfish Party/Charter Limited Access Listening Sessions

The Council held two of eight scheduled listening sessions in early April to gather feedback from recreational fishermen and other stakeholders about whether the Council should pursue a limited access program for the party/charter fishery. The Council is interested in gathering input on questions such as:

- Is a limited access program for the party/charter fishery warranted and/or desirable?
- What should the goals and objectives of the program be?

Four more in-person sessions will take place on: April 18 in Wells, ME; April 23 in Narragansett, RI; May 7 in Chatham, MA; and May 8 in Plymouth, MA. The series will conclude with a May 10 [webinar](#).

**NOTE:** The meeting location for the Rhode Island session has been moved to the Coastal Institute Auditorium at 218 Ferry Road on the University of Rhode Island campus.

More Information on the Listening Sessions is Available in the [Background Document](#) and [News Release](#)



*Recreational fishing in the Gulf of Maine aboard the Lady Tracey Ann, which sails from Eastman's Docks in Seabrook, NH. – Mark Godfroy photo*

For more information on the Council's groundfish actions, contact Dr. Jamie Cournane at (978) 465-0492, ext. 103, [jcournane@nefmc.org](mailto:jcournane@nefmc.org)