



# New England Fishery Management Council

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

## Council Approves 2020-2023 Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Specs

The New England Fishery Management Council today voted on new specifications for the Atlantic deep-sea red crab fishery that will increase total allowable landings (TAL) by 12.7% for the next four fishing years. The proposed TAL for 2020-2023 is 2,000 metric tons (mt), a 225-mt increase from the long-standing 1,775-mt landings cap that has guided this fishery for the past three specification cycles.

The Council supported the increase based on a recommendation from its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which used the best information available for this “data poor” stock. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) must review and approve the new specifications before the revised landing limit can be implemented. The red crab fishing year begins on March 1.

### Quick Facts

- Only male red crabs are landed. Recent market demand has been high.
- The fishery is conducted in deeper water on Georges Bank, off Southern New England, and in the Mid-Atlantic.

| Deep-Sea Red Crab Specifications  | Fishing Years 2020-2023 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)   | Undetermined            |
| Overfishing Limit (OFL)           | Undetermined            |
| Optimum Yield (OY)                | Undetermined            |
| Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) | 2,000 metric tons       |
| Annual Catch Limit (ACL)          | 2,000 metric tons       |
| Total Allowable Landings (TAL)    | 2,000 metric tons       |

The Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was established in 2002. Since 2011, the Council has identified the ABC, ACL, and TAL for this fishery and set specifications every three years.

This time, however, the Council set specifications for four years in response to the new stock assessment schedule recently adopted by the [Northeast Region Coordinating Council](#).

The Council’s Red Crab Plan Development Team (PDT) conducted the analyses for this action. The last peer-reviewed assessment for red crabs was conducted in 2008 by the Data Poor Stocks Working Group. The overfishing limit for the resource was unknown at that time and remains unknown, but the PDT concluded that, based on fishery-dependent data, which include landings, observer data, and port sampling, the stock is not exhibiting any signs of decline. This conclusion and supporting information was presented to the SSC.



Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab (*Chaceon quinque-dens*)  
– NOAA Fisheries graphic

The average inflation-adjusted price per pound for red crabs from 2009-2018 was 93 cents.



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The SSC reviewed the PDT analyses, the 2009 assessment, and all available information and determined that a “modest increase” in the ABC from 1,775 mt to 2,000 mt “was warranted” given that:

- The fishery under the 1,775-mt catch limit has been “routinely operating below the quota” and “has been steady with no negative signals in the population”;
- Available information indicates that economic performance “would not be negatively impacted”; and
- The increase should be accompanied by “precautionary monitoring for a negative response” that would trigger a review of the increased TAL.



Offloading. – Atlantic Red Crab Company photo

The Council’s 2020-2023 specifications package states:

*“While the proposed 12.7% increase in the TAL is likely to increase landings, a review of recent fishery information and long-term trends point to a stable fishery. Further, this is a small, cooperative fishery with four active vessels ... (that have) supported industry-funded research to improve data available for this fishery.*

*Achieving the TAL has historically been related to market demand ... bycatch is minimal ... the proposed TAL will not result in any gear changes or change in distribution of fishing effort.”*

## What’s This Fishery Like?

This is a small fishery comprised of four active limited access vessels. Most of the fleet docks in New Bedford, MA, where landed crab is processed for human consumption and primarily sold domestically. One smaller vessel lands in Virginia and largely services the “live” crab market.

In addition, 1,300 vessels hold open access permits to land up to 500 pounds of red crabs, but less than 10 vessels have done so in recent years.

Visit the New England Fishery Management Council’s Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab [Webpage](#) for More Information.



*Participating red crab vessels are highly dependent on the fishery. The market currently could support additional catch. – Atlantic Red Crab Company photo*