



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 11, 2021

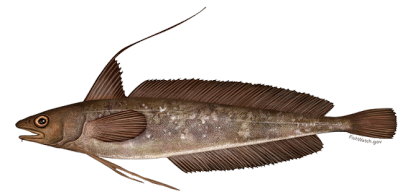
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## Whiting: Council Approves Small-Mesh Multispecies Specifications for Fishing Years 2021-2023

During its [late-January meeting](#), the New England Fishery Management Council approved new specifications for the small-mesh multispecies fishery for fishing years 2021-2023. These limits apply to whiting and red hake stocks and are based on recent [stock assessment information](#) and other data. The package contains:

- Annual catch specifications for small-mesh stocks that follow overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) – except for southern red hake, where the Council went with a more conservative approach and selected an ABC that is 75% of the SSC's recommendation in order to enhance stock rebuilding;
- A provision to reset the total allowable landing (TAL) trigger for northern red hake from the current 38% to the original value of 90% so that in-season accountability measures don't unnecessarily restrict the fishery at a very low level of landings; and
- An adjustment to the whiting possession limit on trips using less than 3-inch mesh codend trawls so that fishermen can land up to 15,000 pounds of northern silver hake and southern whiting.

*Northern silver hake and southern whiting, which includes both southern silver hake and offshore hake, are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The status of red hake stocks is unknown, but fishing activity is minimal and likely not a driver of changes in stock biomass.*



Red hake. – NOAA Fisheries graphic

### Northeast Multispecies Small-Mesh Fishery Specifications for Fishing Years 2021-2023

Stock	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)	ACL (mt)	TAL (mt)	TAL trigger (mt)	TAL trigger (%)
Northern silver hake	39,930	20,410	19,387	17,457	15,711	90%
Southern whiting <sup>1</sup>	72,160	40,990	38,941	28,742	25,868	90%
Northern red hake	N/A	3,452	3,278	1,405	1,265	90%
Southern red hake	N/A	1,505	1,429	422	173	41%

OFL = overfishing limit | ABC = acceptable biological catch | ACL = annual catch limit | TAL = total allowable catch  
N/A = not available | <sup>1</sup> Includes southern silver hake and offshore hake | mt = metric tons



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The Council's 2021-2023 specifications package must be reviewed and implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) before becoming effective. The target implementation date is May 1, 2021, which is the start of the new fishing year.

## Questions and Answers

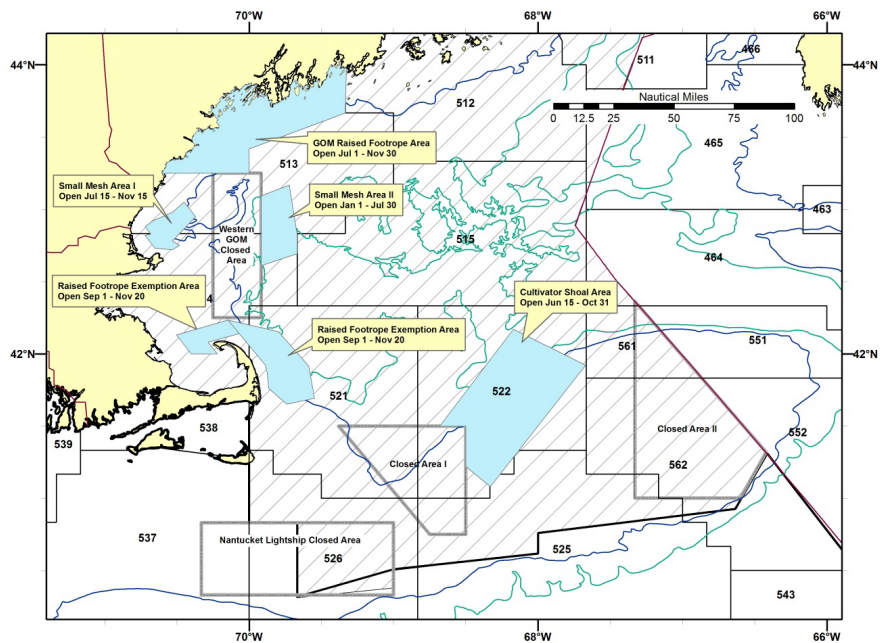
**Q:** Why is the Council raising the whiting possession limit to 15,000 pounds? That's a large increase from the current levels of 3,500 pounds for trawls with less than 2.5-inch mesh codends and 7,500 pounds for codends with 2.5-inch to 3-inch mesh.

**A:** The increase is expected to reduce discards by fishermen using less than 3-inch codend mesh trawls. This mesh size is often used to target other species such as herring and squid, and whiting bycatch in the squid fishery has increased in recent years. The 15,000-pound limit will allow fishermen to land more of their whiting catch while targeting the other species, thereby increasing revenue without compromising stock status.

**Q:** Why is the Council going back to a 90% TAL trigger for northern red hake when 38% is in place this fishing year?

**A:** Catches of northern red hake have been well below allowable limits after the large 2014 year class entered the fishery. Since 2016, the very low 38% TAL trigger has been unnecessary to prevent overfishing. The 90% trigger is intended to reduce northern red hake discarding and allow the fishery to land more of its northern red hake catch, resulting in increased revenue. Once the annual trigger is reached, the possession limit is reduced to 400 pounds for the remainder of the season.

## Whiting and Red Hake Small-Mesh Exemption Areas in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank



*Small-mesh fishermen must work inside exemption areas within defined seasons to fish for whiting and red hake.*

## More Information

- All materials used during the Council's January 27<sup>th</sup> whiting discussion are posted [HERE](#).
- Learn more about the Council's rebuilding program for southern red hake in [Framework 62](#).
- The Council's small-mesh multispecies webpage can be found [HERE](#).



*Silver hake. – NOAA Fisheries graphic*

**QUESTIONS?** Contact the Council's Small-Mesh Multispecies Coordinator, Andrew Applegate, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 114, [applegate@nefmc.org](mailto:applegate@nefmc.org).