



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 17, 2017

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

Groundfish Monitoring: New England Council Seeks Initial Input on Amendment 23 at Six Scoping Hearings in March

The New England Fishery Management Council has scheduled a series of public scoping hearings from Maine to Connecticut to solicit ideas for potentially changing the region's groundfish monitoring and reporting system. The purpose of this initiative is to improve reliability and accountability of the monitoring program since successful management of the fishery depends on accurate and timely catch reporting.

The changes are being considered under Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. The Council is encouraging fishermen and other stakeholders to participate in this very early stage of the amendment development process.

"The Council, fishermen, and the public recognize the groundfish monitoring program needs improvement," said Council Executive Director Tom Nies. "This is the first and best opportunity for people to suggest ways to create a program that will give the accurate, reliable information needed to manage this fishery."

At present, two types of at-sea observers are used in the groundfish fishery:

- Federally funded Northeast Fishery Observer Program (NEFOP) observers who follow the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) and implement federal programs; and
- At-sea monitors who are responsible for groundfish sector monitoring. As of May 1, at-sea monitors will be fully funded by industry.

Amendment 23 will *not* impact NEFOP or SBRM coverage. However, the amendment could modify or even remove the at-sea monitoring program if an alternative holistic monitoring and reporting program is developed and implemented for the groundfish fishery.



– University of New England photo



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Here are the locations, dates, and start times for the five in-person scoping hearings:

- **Rockport, ME** – Friday, March 3, Samoset Resort, 220 Warrenton Street, 9 a.m.
- **Portsmouth, NH** – Tuesday, March 21, Portsmouth Library, 175 Parrot Avenue, 2 p.m.
- **Gloucester, MA** – Tuesday, March 21, NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, 6 p.m.
- **Plymouth, MA** – Wednesday, March 22, Hilton Garden Inn, 4 Home Depot Drive, 6 p.m.
- **Groton, CT** – Thursday, March 23, Hilton Garden Inn, 224 Gold Star Highway, 6 p.m.

Written Comments

The deadline for submitting written comments is Monday, April 3, 5 p.m. EST. Here are the options:

- Email to: comments@nefmc.org
- Mail to: Tom Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950
- Fax to: (978) 465-3116

Copies of the scoping document can be downloaded from the Council website at www.nefmc.org/library/amendment-23

As part of Amendment 23, the Council also may consider changes to the way landings information is provided by both dealers and vessel operators and how it is assigned to stock areas.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What alternatives should the Council consider in Amendment 23 to change the groundfish monitoring program?
- What specific issues are most important when evaluating the tradeoffs associated with monitoring discards at sea using at-sea monitors?
- Should the Council consider changes to the way landings information is provided?



Yellowtail (top) and winter (bottom) flounder caught on a research trip.
– University of New England photo

Webinar Option

Can't make an in-person hearing? Take part in the Council's Tuesday, **March 28** webinar (rescheduled from March 14 due to weather) beginning at 6 p.m.

- Register online at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4567763108442151939>
- Call in by dialing +1 (415) 930-5321 (regular phone charges apply) and plug in the following access code when prompted: 702-360-151

For more information, contact Groundfish Fishery Analyst Robin Frede at (978) 465-0492 ext. 124, rfrede@nefmc.org