



New England Fishery Management Council

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Council Recommends 2021 Recreational Measures for Gulf of Maine Cod/Haddock for GARFO's Consideration

Recognizing that COVID-19 will continue to impact angler and party/charter boat fishing in the year ahead, the New England Fishery Management Council voted during its [late-January 2021 webinar meeting](#) to recommend that NOAA Fisheries, through its Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), implement status quo recreational fishing measures for Gulf of Maine cod and Gulf of Maine haddock for the 2021 fishing year.

These are the same measures that GARFO implemented on [August 13, 2020](#) during the pandemic to provide [additional fishing opportunities](#) for cod and more access to the abundant haddock resource at a time when the recreational fishing community, especially the for-hire fleet, was greatly impacted by the pandemic. In selecting those measures, GARFO considered the Council's [June 2020 request](#) to expand the fall fishing window to help recreational fishermen make up for lost access to the springtime fishery.

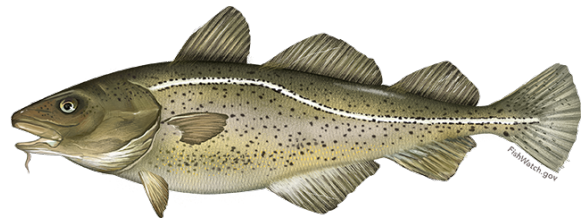
The Council received input from both its Recreational Advisory Panel and Groundfish Committee before voting. GARFO will consider the Council's recommendation, but NOAA Fisheries will make the final decision. The new fishing year begins on May 1, 2021. Here is the Council's status quo request:

- **Gulf of Maine Cod:**

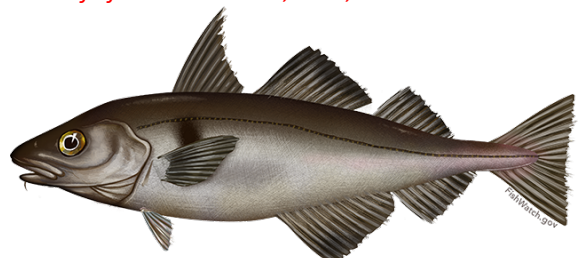
- Private Mode Open Season: September 15-30, 2021 and April 1-14, 2022
- Party/Charter For-Hire Mode Open Season: September 8-October 7, 2021 and April 1-14, 2022
- Bag Limit: one fish per day
- Minimum Size: 21 inches

- **Gulf of Maine Haddock:**

- Open Season: May 1, 2021 through February 28, 2022 and April 1-30, 2022, leaving only March 2022 closed to recreational fishing for this stock
- Bag Limit: 15 fish per day
- Minimum Size 17 inches



Recreational fishing measures – bag limits, minimum sizes, and seasons – are determined annually by NOAA Fisheries in consultation with the Council in order for catch to achieve but not exceed each stock's sub-annual catch limit (sub-ACL). The proposed 2021 recreational sub-ACL for Gulf of Maine cod is 193 metric tons (mt). For Gulf of Maine haddock, it's 5,295 mt.





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The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP), which met on [January 20, 2021](#), supported status quo measures for Gulf of Maine cod. However, the RAP endorsed an increase in the Gulf of Maine haddock bag limit from 15 fish to 20 fish, as well as a decrease in the minimum size from 17" to 15". The RAP noted that the 15" minimum size would help convert discards of 15" and 16" inch fish into landings. The RAP added that, while the majority of recreational fishermen on party/charter trips don't catch the current 15-fish bag limit, the allure of 20 haddock might help boost bookings on for-hire trips, which have sagged considerably since the pandemic began. The RAP said bookings so far for 2021 trips, especially on party boats, remain low.

The Groundfish Committee – and subsequently the full Council – considered this input on [January 26, 2021](#). The Council noted that coronavirus issues would continue to impact recreational fishing, but it did not support the RAP's requested changes and instead took a more balanced approach for several reasons.

- Catch data collected in 2020 through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) was limited due to state public health restrictions, resulting in data uncertainties that contributed to the Council's support for a precautionary status quo recommendation.
- Size at maturity information indicates that smaller 15" Gulf of Maine haddock do not have a chance to contribute to the spawning stock biomass to the same extent as 17" fish. And,
- Recreational fishermen may have more cod interactions if they continue to fish harder to catch 20 Gulf of Maine haddock versus 15.

Georges Bank Cod – Current Measures

- Open Season: year round
- Bag Limit: 10 fish per day
- Minimum Size: 21 inches
- 2020-2022 Recreational Catch Target: 138 metric tons

Party/Charter Limited Entry Strawman

The Council received a [presentation](#) on a Party/Charter Limited Entry [Strawman Proposal](#) that was prepared for the Council by [Tidal Bay Consulting](#). The initiative addressed a 2020 priority to solicit feedback on whether the Council should pursue developing a limited entry program for the recreational groundfish party/charter fishery.

The recreational fishing community remains divided about limited entry. The Council agreed to solicit additional public comment about whether to pursue a limited entry amendment before making a final decision at its [April 2021](#) meeting.

The Council will release more information shortly about how to provide comments in advance of the April meeting.



A happy charter boat client who caught this cod on Coxes Ledge in February 2020. – Rick Bellavance photo

Questions? Contact Dr. Jamie Cournane at (978) 465-0492 ext. 103, jcournane@nefmc.org.