



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Whiting Limited Access Options Advance; Council Approves Amendment 22 Range of Alternatives for Further Analysis

The New England Fishery Management Council today approved a wide range of alternatives for further analysis in Whiting Amendment 22, which is being developed to potentially limit access to the small-mesh multispecies fishery. Five stocks are part of this fishery. The first three – northern silver hake, southern silver hake, and offshore hake – are collectively referred to as “whiting,” and the other two stocks are northern red hake and southern red hake.

The amendment contains three major components:

- Limited access qualification criteria (see table at right);
- Possession limits by permit type; and
- Permit “characteristics and conditions” that could apply if limited access is adopted.

The public will have several opportunities to comment on the alternatives. At its June or September meeting – depending on how long it takes to complete the necessary analyses – the Council will select “preferred alternatives” from the analyzed range. Then, the amendment will go out to public hearing in the summer or fall. The Council is not expected to take final action on Amendment 22 until fall or early winter.

### Limited Access Qualification Criteria

\* November 28, 2012 control date

Alternative	Qualifying period	Qualification Criteria (Pounds of small-mesh multispecies & number of qualifiers)	
		Category I	Category II
1	2008-2012* (5 years)	500,000 lbs. 48 vessels	100,000 lbs. 88 vessels
2	2008-2012* (5 years)	1,000,000 lbs. 25 vessels	20,000 lbs. 237 vessels
3	2008-2016 (9 years)	500,000 lbs. 58 vessels	100,000 lbs. 113 vessels
4	2000-2016 (17 years)	500,000 lbs. 115 vessels	100,000 lbs. 201 vessels
5	1996-2012* (17 years)	1,000,000 lbs. 97 vessels	200,000 lbs. 180 vessels

*The draft “Whiting Amendment,” officially called Amendment 22 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, contains five wide-ranging alternatives under which fishermen could qualify for permits if the Council decides to adopt a limited access program. Each alternative contains two permit categories covering different levels of historical landings: (1) a higher-poundage Category I permit; and (2) a lower-poundage Category II permit. Some alternatives use the November 28, 2012 control date as a cutoff point for landings, while others do not. A preliminary estimate of the number of qualifying vessels is listed under each category in the table above. The number of qualifying vessels is expected to change slightly and will be updated during the analysis.*



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## Whiting Possession Limits by Permit Type

Amendment 22 proposes to: (1) retain or adjust whiting possession limits for vessels that qualify for a limited access permit; and (2) create an “incidental” possession limit for non-qualifiers. If the Council decides **against** establishing a limited access program, it still could adjust possession limits through this amendment. The new limits then would apply to any vessel with an open access Category K permit that operates in a small-mesh exemption program.

**NOTE:** No adjustments to the red hake possession limit are proposed. The possession limits would apply to silver and offshore hakes under the following options:

- **Category I limited access permit**
  - Alternative 1 – Maintain the existing whiting possession limits (see table below)
  - Alternative 2 – Raise the limit from 40,000 pounds to 50,000 pounds from December 1 to April 30 in the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic exemption areas
  - Alternative 3 – Lower the limit from 40,000 pounds to 30,000 pounds from May 1 to November 30 in the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic exemption areas
- **Category II limited access permit**
  - Alternative 1 – Maintain the existing whiting multispecies possession limits
  - Alternative 2 – Apply a 30,000-pound limit in the northern exemption areas (Gulf of Maine Grate Raised Footrope, Small-Mesh Areas I and II, Cape Cod Raised Footrope Areas, and Cultivator Shoals Area) and 15,000 pounds in the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic exemption areas where more vessels are expected to qualify and often land lower volume
- **Incidental possession limits for vessels that do not qualify for a limited access permit**
  - Alternative 1 – Maintain the existing small-mesh multispecies possession limits
  - Alternative 2 – Apply a 2,000-pound possession limit

## Current Mesh Size-Dependent Possession Limits

Cod-end Mesh Size	Silver and offshore hake, combined, possession limit	Red hake south	Red hake north*
Smaller than 2.5"	3,500 lbs.	5,000 lbs.	3,000/1,500 lbs.
Larger than 2.5", but smaller than 3.0"	7,500 lbs.	5,000 lbs.	3,000/1,500 lbs.
Equal to or greater than 3.0"	30,000 lbs. (40,000 lbs. in Southern Area)	5,000 lbs.	3,000/1,500 lbs.
Accountability measure, in-season	2,000 lbs.	400 lbs.	400 lbs.

\* Northern red hake possession limit is 3,000 lbs. at the beginning of the fishing year and decreases to 1,500 lbs. when landings reach 45% of Total Allowable Landings.



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Third, Amendment 22 contains a long list of **conditions** that potentially could apply to limited access small-mesh multispecies permits to make them consistent with permits for other limited access programs in the region. The conditions cover issues such as: eligibility; appeals for permit denials; ownership; extensions for vessels under construction; changes in ownership; replacement vessels; vessel upgrades; and more.

## Questions & Answers

**Q:** Is action necessary? Aren't catches in this fishery low?

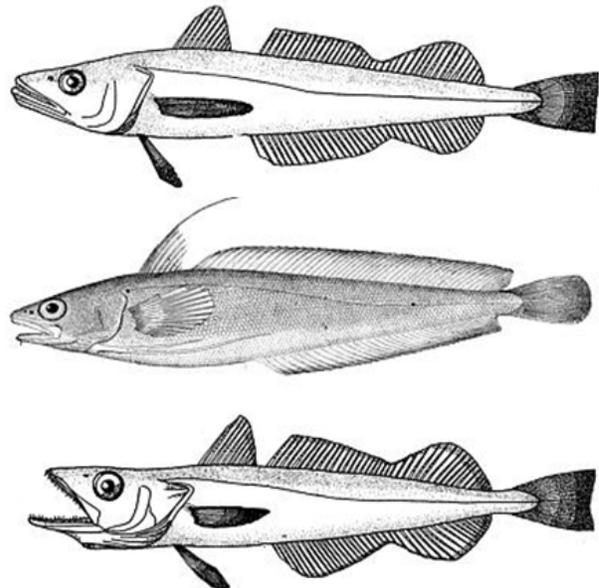
**A:** Although small-mesh multispecies fishing effort has remained historically low and the fishery has taken a fraction of the northern whiting, southern whiting, and southern red hake annual catch limits (ACLs) since 2012, the directed fishery is completely open to new entrants, which could result in effort increases. Furthermore, northern red hake catches have exceeded their ACLs in past years and triggered accountability measures, which has caused concern. The fishery's yellowtail flounder sub-ACL also has been exceeded in the past.

**Q:** Why would whiting catches increase?

**A:** Catches and fishing effort could increase if: (1) the availability of whiting and red hake increase; (2) whiting and red hake prices increase; or (3) regulations in other fisheries become more restrictive, leading more fishermen to shift effort onto whiting. On the other hand, if biomass decreases and catch specifications are lowered, ACLs could be harvested more quickly.

*"The Council is considering limiting access to the small-mesh multispecies fishery to prevent unrestrained increases in fishing effort by new entrants to the fishery. The amendment will help ensure that catches of small-mesh multispecies and other non-target species will be at or below specifications, reducing the potential for accountability measures to be triggered and resulting in a closure of the directed fishery."*

– Amendment 22



- Whiting-related documents used during the New England Council's April 18-20 meeting are available at: <http://www.nefmc.org/library/april-2017-whiting-committee-report>
- Visit the Council's small-mesh multispecies webpage at: <http://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/small-mesh-multispecies>
- Questions? Contact Andrew Applegate, the Council's small-mesh multispecies coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 114, [aapplegate@nefmc.org](mailto:aapplegate@nefmc.org).