



New England Fishery Management Council

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Whiting: Council Agrees to Reopen Comment Period on Amendment 22; Receives Annual Monitoring Report

The New England Fishery Management Council has decided to reopen the public comment period for Whiting Amendment 22, which is being developed to potentially limit access to the small-mesh multispecies fishery. The amendment contains several alternatives related to: (1) limited access qualification criteria; (2) possession limits by permit type; and (3) permit conditions.

The Council held five public hearings on the amendment in July but then discovered a discrepancy between the number of estimated qualifying vessels cited in the amendment’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) versus the public hearing document itself. The DEIS contains the correct number of estimated qualifiers. Those numbers are lower than those listed in the original public hearing document.

In order to prevent any potential misunderstanding, the Council agreed to hold an additional hearing via webinar – details will be forthcoming – to explain the discrepancy to fishermen and solicit additional comments from all interested stakeholders.

The table at right contains the correct number of estimated qualifying vessels under each alternative.

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. 40 vessels	100,000 lbs. 74 vessels
2	2008-2012* 5 years	1,000,000 lbs. 20 vessels	20,000 lbs. 203 vessels
3	2008-2016 9 years	500,000 lbs. 51 vessels	100,000 lbs. 90 vessels
4	2000-2016 17 years	500,000 lbs. 55 vessels	100,000 lbs. 124 vessels
5	1996-2012* 17 years	1,000,000 lbs. 84 vessels	200,000 lbs. 159 vessels

The Council will take final action on Amendment 22 during its December 4-6, 2018 meeting in Newport, RI.

Summaries of testimony collected during the previous public hearings are available at [July 2018 hearings](#) and [written comments](#).

Once available, information about the upcoming webinar will be posted on the Council’s website at [whiting meetings and documents](#).

NOTE: The number of qualifying vessels, especially for Alternatives 4 and 5, is lower in the corrected table above than in the estimates listed in the original public hearing document. 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.



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The “Whiting Amendment” falls under the groundfish plan, which is why it’s officially called Amendment 22 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. The amendment covers five stocks of small-mesh multispecies: northern silver hake, southern silver hake, and offshore hake, which collectively are referred to as “whiting”, plus northern red hake and southern red hake.

Annual Monitoring Report for Fishing Year 2017

The Council also received a presentation on the Annual Monitoring Report for Fishing Year 2017, which was prepared by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. The report was reviewed by the Council’s Whiting Plan Development Team, which added conclusions and recommendations.

This is the first monitoring report since the Council approved 2018-2020 specifications for small-mesh multispecies. The new report covers the 2015-2017 specification cycle and includes: (1) a fishery performance report; (2) a description of trends in effort and economics; and (3) an update in survey biomass trends, which can alert the Council to any rapid changes in stock condition that could require proactive action. Here are some of the highlights.

- Landings, catch, and effort generally declined across the board by about 10% to 20%. This decline *potentially* was related to vessels switching to squid fishing in 2017 due to increased availability of squid.
- Small-mesh multispecies catches remained well below the annual catch limits (ACLs) and did not trigger any post-season accountability measures.
- The low total allowable landing (TAL) limit for northern red hake may be hindering landings of red hake and could be keeping catch well below the ACL.

Biomass by Area

- Northern Management Area: the biomass of northern red hake and northern silver hake remain high and stable.
- Southern Management Area: the trend for southern silver hake could not be updated for 2017 due to incomplete survey coverage.

Fishing Year 2018-2020 Specifications in Metric Tons (mt)

Stock	OFL Overfishing Limit	ABC Acceptable Biological Catch	ACL Annual Catch Limit	Change from 2016- 2017	TAL Total Allowable Landings
Northern Silver Hake	58,350	31,030	29,475	+27%	26,604
Northern Red Hake	840	721	685	+45%	274
Southern Whiting	31,180	19,395	18,425	-35%	14,465
Southern Red Hake	1,150	1,060	1,007	-38%	305

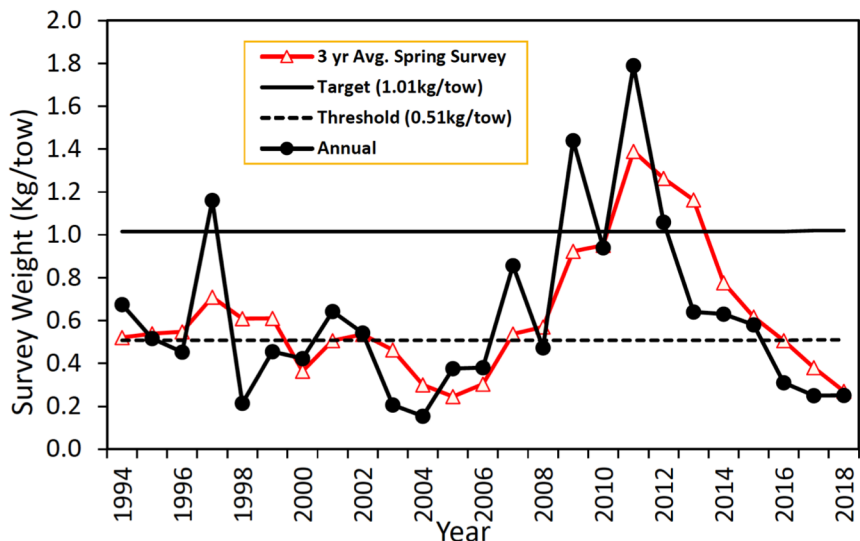


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- Using the southern silver hake index through 2016, stock biomass declined recently to below its target level, but it remains above the overfished threshold. Commercial southern whiting catch per trip, however, declined by 37% in 2017.
- Southern red hake** continues to be a problem. The biomass index for this stock uses spring survey data, which allowed for an update through 2018. Values since the 2016 survey have been below the threshold level and, thus, the southern red hake stock is considered to be in an “overfished” condition.
- In January 2018, the Council was notified by GARFO that it must develop a **rebuilding plan** for southern red hake within two years.

A copy of the complete annual monitoring report is available [HERE](#)

Southern Red Hake Survey Biomass



Above is the updated survey biomass trend in stratified mean weight per tow (in Fishing Survey Vessel Albatross units) for southern red hake compared to biological reference points. The horizontal dashed line represents the biomass threshold and the solid horizontal line is the biomass target.



Silver Hake (*Merluccius bilinearis*). – NOAA Fisheries graphic

The Council also voted to approve a list of items intended to streamline small-mesh multispecies regulations. The Council recognized that some issues identified in the list could be addressed through NOAA Fisheries action, while others might be addressed through a future Council action, including one regulation that prohibits transiting in Closed Area II with small-mesh trawl gear aboard. View the complete list of as discussed by the Council at [Regulatory Streamlining](#).

For more information, contact Andrew Applegate, the Council’s small-mesh multispecies coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 114, aapplegate@nefmc.org.

Also, visit the Council’s whiting webpage at <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/small-mesh-multispecies>.