

Hagfish Information Collection

The Sustainable Fisheries Division and the Fisheries Statistics Office (FSO) have researched the permitting and reporting requirements that would be necessary to enable the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) to begin developing a Hagfish Fishery Management Plan¹. The specific information needs were derived, in part, based on a working group report that was prepared in 2003 (37th SAW consensus summary²). In addition, FSO staff provided extensive and detailed information on the current status of the hagfish fishery based on information already available (intelligence report attached). Our recommendations regarding the need for the collection of information, as well as ways to effectively implement the program, are as follows:

- Require dealer/processor permitting and reporting³.
 - The collection of purchase reports through the dealer permit requirement would allow NMFS to verify landings reported on Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) for those vessels that have VTR requirements and, for those that do not, dealers would be required to report vessel identifiers.
 - The dealer permit requirement would enable NMFS to track any new developments in this fishery (new vessel and/or dealer entrants).
- Require participation in the annual processor survey by dealer/processors.
 - NMFS and Council economists could use data on volume and value to estimate processing capacity and to forecast and subsequently measure the potential economic impact of fishery management regulations on fish supplies. Employment data collected through the survey could also be used to analyze the seasonality of the fishery.
- Require NMFS-funded observer coverage⁴ on board vessels that participate in the hagfish fishery, if selected.
 - Observer coverage is necessary because of the high discard rates (culling) that have been reported to occur in the hagfish fishery due to rejection of hagfish by dealers and because the proportion of the catch that is rejected by dealers and later discarded at sea is not currently measured.

A small working group met to consider whether a vessel permit could be issued as an additional mechanism to collect information on the hagfish fishery. FSO staff presented information regarding the current operations in the fishery; i.e., there are five vessel owner/operators participating in the hagfish fishery and each has a suite of other Federal fisheries permits that

¹ The Council's original control date for entry into the hagfish fishery (August 28, 2002) was reaffirmed in the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that published on July 28, 2006 (71 FR 42794).

² Northeast Fisheries Science Center Reference Document 03-16. 37th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (37th SAW) Stock Assessment Review Committee Consensus Summary of Assessments: A report by the Atlantic Hagfish Working Group for the New England Fishery Management Council May 30, 2003, 88 p. <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/publications/crd/crd0316/index.htm>

³ It is estimated that there are currently two dealers participating in the hagfish fishery.

⁴ The Northeast Regional Office submitted an observer funding proposal through the National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT) and the results of the review are pending. Other mechanisms for providing observer coverage will be considered if NOPAT funds are unavailable; e.g., observer coverage under the MMPA for Category II fisheries.

require all their vessel landings be reported through VTRs. Therefore, the group concluded that a vessel permitting requirement would be unnecessary as part of the information collection program. Additional information collection requirements could be considered by the Council during the development of the Hagfish FMP.