

New England Fishery Management Council

SUMMARY

Monkfish Amendment 6 Scoping Hearing

Hilton Garden Inn, Warwick, RI

January 11, 2011

Hearing Chair: Terry Stockwell

Staff: Phil Haring

Attendance: approx. 20

The first person asked how landings history would be used to set allocations.

The next commenter was concerned about how catch shares management will affect state-only vessels. He said that monkfish landings were controlled by the state, so vessels have no history applicable to an allocation system. He said, "catch shares leave a bad taste in my mouth."

The next individual started by saying that catch shares are an economic tool, not a conservation mechanism. They are a poor economic tool at that because they put people out of work. The Councils should not be putting people out of work. As for promoting safety, the only way they promote safety is by getting boats off the water. She said that uncertainty in the science is a major problem. She said that while the claim is made that catch shares are not property rights, in effect they are. She pointed out that in Alaska, three processors own crab shares, and many of the boats still fishing for crab do not own their own quota. She believes groundfish catch shares are a disaster. She also stated that in the current budget climate, NOAA will not be able to fund the costs of catch shares, and the industry will be forced to pay.

The next commenter reiterated the sentiment that groundfish catch shares are a disaster, and that many businesses are failing. He said he just spoke with one fisherman who paid \$0.80 for quota, \$0.05 for dockside monitoring, \$0.15 to ship the fish, and he got paid \$0.80 a pound for his landings. He feels that privatizing the resource and giving it to a few people is just not the right thing to do. He also feels that the larger boats will be put out of business because of the trip limits currently in place.

Another commenter asserted that the catch share program does not improve the economic performance of the fishery, and does not reduce the regulatory burden. Nor, he said, do catch shares promote safety. He suggested that if an absentee owner of the quota directs the boat to go fishing, the boat will have to go out of financial necessity. He is totally opposed to catch shares, and also feels that any program, including a sector program, be subject to a referendum.

The next commenter said he is intrigued by ITQs as a catch share alternative. He thinks that the ITQ allocations should be based on the vessels' original permit qualification history, and that the TAC be divided by shareholders based on their permit category. He would like to do away with DAS and trip limits. With respect to cooperative research programs, he thinks that research DAS should be sold at auction, and that no more than one-third of the DAS be used in each fishery area (Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and the Mid-Atlantic). He proposed that there be a net limit,

and if a vessel stacks permits, each additional permit would be subject to a 50% reduction in allowable nets. For example, if the net limit is set at 80 per vessel, and a vessel is fishing under two permits, the number of allowable nets would be 120 (80+40). He feels that quota transfers should be subject to NMFS approval, and that the seller of quota be required to transfer all the net tags to the buyer. He also feels that current observer levels are adequate, and that dockside monitoring and observer costs are too high.

A fisherman who had commented earlier in the day at the New Bedford hearing said he has had some additional thoughts. He does not support catch shares as he understands them. He thinks that the goals outlined in the scoping document, why the Councils are considering catch shares, can be achieved by making adjustments to the current DAS program. He thinks the catch share initiative will pit fishermen against each other. He believes there are already too few boats chasing too many fish. If the Councils do continue with development of catch shares, however, vessel size should be a consideration in the allocation process.

Another fisherman said that monkfish catch shares should be put on the back burner until the full impacts of groundfish catch shares can be assessed. He thinks the Councils should find ways to improve the current system. He also thinks the biggest problem ahead will be dividing up the quotas, and that it will create a divide among fishermen.

One commenter, who had previously spoken, returned to say that the landings data is not accurate enough to make the allocations, and that some vessels have ended up with only a fraction of what they historically caught.

Another prior commenter said he does not like sectors. He thinks that he should just be given an allocation based on his DAS times his trip limit. He does not believe in stacking permits. He said he does not support ITQs, and thinks that if a vessel has a quota but does not land it, the fish should be left in the water, rather than transferring the quota to another vessel.

A third previous commenter returned to say that when it comes to using history as the basis for allocation, there may be any number of factors affecting individual vessels, such as a captain's illness. It would be unfair to use fishing history for allocating quota. He thinks that the allocation should be based on permit category.

The next commenter does not support ITQs, but feels that if the industry is forced to go that route, the allocation should be made equal among active permits and based on permit category. He also believes that even under an ITQ system there needs to be a reasonable net limit, and suggests it be about half of the current limit. He also feels that the cooperative research program is now run like a quota system, with trip limit exemptions routinely given. This change has impacted all the fishermen because of the increased amount of gear being deployed on RSA trips and the concentration of RSA effort in southern New England. He also thinks there should be a referendum for any catch share program, including sectors. He thinks the current system is working well for the gillnet fishery, especially considering the Amendment 5 provision to allow landing of trip limit overages.

The next commenter, who also spoke earlier, disagreed with the previous speaker that the decline in inshore monkfish fishing is due to the RSA effort. He says it is due to the large influx of skates. He also thinks that there should be inshore and offshore zones with different net limits, because the offshore fishery needs more nets to be viable.

The hearing started at 4:00 p.m. and adjourned at about 5:30.