

A15 NOI Draft
September 15, 2006

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D.]

New England Fishery Management Council; Northeast Multispecies;
Scoping Process

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare a supplemental environmental impact
statement (SEIS) and hold scoping meetings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) announces
its intent to prepare, in cooperation with NMFS, a supplemental
environmental impact statement (SEIS) to assess the potential effects
on the human environment of alternative measures for managing the
Northeast (NE) multispecies fishery pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens
Fishery Conservation and Management Act. This notice announces
a public process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed
and for identifying the significant issues relating to management of
the multispecies fishery. The Council will use the scoping
process and the SEIS to develop Amendment 15 to the NE
Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

DATES: The Council will discuss and take scoping comments at public
meetings in *October and November 2006 [Insert specific dates here]*.
Written scoping comments must be received on or before 5 p.m., local
time, November 30,
2006.

ADDRESSES: The Council will take scoping comments at public meetings in
October and November 2006{*Insert specific locations here*}. Written
comments and requests for copies of the scoping document and other
information should be directed to Paul J. Howard, Executive Director,
New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2,
Newburyport, MA 01950, telephone (978) 465-0492. Comments may also be
sent via facsimile (fax) to (978) 465-3116 or via e-mail to
MULA15-NOI@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following
identifier:

`MUL Amendment 15 Scoping Comments.' The scoping document is
accessible electronically via the Internet at <http://www.nefmc.org>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director,
New England Fishery Management Council, (978) 465-0492.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The NE multispecies fishery targets cod (Gadus morhua), haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus), white hake (Urophycis tenuis), pollock (Pollachius virens), Acadian redfish (Sebastes fasciatus), yellowtail flounder (Limanda ferrugineus), winter flounder (Psuedopleuronectes americanus), witch flounder (Glyptocephalus cynoglossus), American plaice (Hippoglossoides platessoides), windowpane flounder (Scopthalmus aquosus), Atlantic halibut (Hippoglossus hippoglossus), and ocean pout (Macrozoarces americanus). These species are managed as 19 individual stocks. The Council has managed these species as a unit under the FMP since 1985. Management measures include limited and open access permit categories, limits on fishing time through days-at-sea (DAS) allocations, gear requirements, closed areas, and retention limits. These measures have been adopted through a series of amendments and adjustments to the original FMP. The most recent amendment (Amendment 13, implemented on May 1, 2004) established formal rebuilding programs for 12 stocks. For most of these overfished stocks, the goal is to rebuild to a biomass that will support maximum sustainable yield by 2014.

Purpose of Action

Amendment 13 established a requirement and a process for a mid-point review of rebuilding progress and adjustments to management measures as necessary to continue rebuilding. As part of this process, each groundfish stock will be assessed in 2008. Stock size and fishing mortality rates will be estimated, and status determination criteria will be reviewed. This information will be used to determine adjustments to Amendment 13 measures that are necessary to continue rebuilding and achieve optimum yield from the fishery. Amendment 15 to the FMP is being considered to implement any revisions to management measures necessary to continue the rebuilding programs adopted by Amendment 13. Amendment 15 and its accompanying SEIS will be focused on the adjustments that are necessary to comply with the mid-term adjustment procedures of the FMP, to meet the fishing mortality rate objectives of the FMP, and to ensure that all groundfish stocks rebuild.

In addition to considering adjustments to the current effort control management system as modified by Amendment 13, the Council may consider other management systems that may replace or supplement the existing effort controls. Because of the limited time available for the development of this amendment, the Council may not consider alternative management schemes that are suggested outside of the scoping process. Members of the public are encouraged to submit developed proposals for alternative management schemes during the scoping process. The Council will evaluate proposals received and may develop them into alternatives that will be considered in Amendment 15.

Measures Under Consideration

The Council may consider several types of management measures to

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continue the multispecies rebuilding program including, but not limited to:

- o Changes to the current DAS management system, such as
 - Modifications to DAS allocation and use
 - Changes to gear requirements
 - Modified possession limits
 - Additions or changes to seasonal and year-round closed areas
 - Changes to special management programs
- o Recreational fishery measures such as seasons, bag limits, or area closures
- o Total allowable catch management systems
- o Area management systems
- o Individual quota systems, including individual transferable quota systems
- o Sector management systems

The types of measures under consideration are those described in Amendment 13. Information on each of these potential measures, including specific topics for which the Council is soliciting comment, are in the scoping document, available on the Council web site <http://www.nefmc.org>.

Scoping Process

It is the Council's and NMFS's intent to encourage all persons affected by or otherwise interested in the management of northeast multispecies to participate in the process to determine the scope and significance of issues to be analyzed in the SEIS and amendment. All such persons are encouraged to submit written comments (see ADDRESSES) or attend one of the scoping meetings. Persons submitting written comments may wish to address the specific measures introduced in the previous section. The scope of the SEIS consists of the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts to be considered. Alternatives may include the following: not amending the FMP (taking no action); developing an amendment that contains management measures such as those discussed in this notice; or other reasonable courses of action. Impacts may be direct, indirect, or cumulative.

This scoping process also will identify and eliminate from further detailed analysis issues that are not significant. After the scoping process is completed, the Council will proceed with the development of Amendment 15 and the Council will prepare an SEIS to analyze the impacts of the range of alternatives considered in the amendment.

To ensure that the fishery continues to meet the Amendment 13 rebuilding objectives, any revisions to management measures included in Amendment 15 need to be implemented by May 1, 2009. In order to incorporate the latest catch and survey data into the proposed adjustment, the assessment of groundfish stocks scheduled for 2008 (the Groundfish Assessment and Review Meeting, or GARM) cannot be conducted until August 2008. Therefore, because of the lengthy process involved with evaluating the impacts of any changes to FMP, the Council and NMFS

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propose to start the environmental review process as early as possible. As such, it will be necessary to develop and publish a draft SEIS for Amendment 15 using the best available data prior to the August 2008 GARM. The intent is to fully evaluate an adequate range of alternatives in the draft SEIS to project the full range of likely impacts resulting from any proposed adjustments to management measures. The Council will then hold public hearings to receive comments on the draft amendment and on the analysis of its impacts presented in the draft SEIS. Once the GARM has evaluated the status of groundfish stocks in August 2008, that information will be incorporated into the final SEIS to further refine the precision of the impact analysis presented in the draft SEIS.

Scoping Hearing Schedule

The Council will discuss and take scoping comments at the following public meetings:

{Fill in meeting schedule}

Special Accommodations

These meetings are accessible to people with physical disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Paul J. Howard (see ADDRESSES) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated:
