

3.7.1.4 GOM cod Option 4

DAS: Status quo allocation of DAS. DAS usage during February –May in the Western Gulf of Maine Restricted Gear Area would be limited as described in the following section.

Western Gulf of Maine Restricted Fishery Program: During May, February, March and April of any fishing year a vessel fishing in the Western Gulf of Maine Restricted Gear Area (**Figure 4**) must enroll in the Western GOM Restricted Fishery Program. Enrollment is for a minimum of 30 days, and vessels enrolled in the program must have on board a letter of enrollment issued by the NMFS Regional Administrator to fish in the program area. While enrolled in the program, a vessel is limited to 25 DAS or 25 trips (call-in/call-out cycles), whichever is less, in any fishing year. Also, while enrolled in the program, all DAS and trips are counted against the allotment, regardless of where the vessel fishes. A vessel that has used its allotment of DAS or trips in the area may fish for multispecies outside of the program area under its remaining allocation of DAS.

Area Closures: In **Figure 4** Area I and Area III would be closed year round and Area II would be closed September 15 – November 15. In addition, the Cashes Ledge Closed Area would be extended from July through October to year round, and the one-month rolling closures in effect in the 1998 fishing year (under Framework 25) would be in effect. These are described below:

- One-month rolling closure of areas described in Table 3 below (GM1- March, GM2-April, GM3- May and GM4- June, block numbers reference Figure 1)
- One month closure, June, of block 129

The coordinates of the area closures are described in Option 3 above.

Party/charter vessels would be prohibited from fishing in GOM Closed Areas I and III during February through May.

This proposal will replace current groundfish GOM two-month rolling closures and the Western Gulf of Maine Closed Area closures.

Trip Limit: Status quo trip limit as contained in Framework 31: 400 lbs./day with a maximum possession limit equal to ten times the daily limit (i.e. 4,000 pounds).

Running clock and layover day: Except during February through May, a vessel may land overages of the per-day trip limit, not to exceed the 10-day limit. A vessel landing an overage must call the hail line and report the overage, and may not call out of the DAS program until sufficient time has elapsed to account for the overage. This is the “running clock” system that was in effect until August, 1999. In addition, a vessel that lands an overage, after calling out of the DAS program, must take two additional layover days (not on the DAS clock). The vessel may not start a trip for 48 hours after calling out of the DAS program and must remain in port. There is no running clock during February through May.

Discussion: As with Option 3, the analysis of this option indicates that it will not meet the fishing mortality objectives of the plan and constrain landings to below the TAC. Of the four GOM options, this option would provide the least protection harbor porpoise and endangered right whales. Although the year-round closure of two areas (Cashes Ledge and GOM Area III) currently closed only temporarily would improve the ability of these areas to recover from any adverse impacts on essential fish habitat, the overall reduction in area protected by year-round closures may present an adverse impact. The impact on the recovery of degraded habitat of this option cannot be quantified at this time.

The analysis of economic impacts of this option (and Option 3) is not comparable to that of Options 1 and 2. However, this option would result in more than twice the negative revenue impact compared to Option 3, not accounting for the impact of the cod minimum size increase (in Option 3), differences in the running clock proposals, and the Option 4 proposal to prohibit party/charter fishing in the GOM closed areas.

The following discussion is modified from that in Framework 31 where the Council considered an earlier version of this proposal. The fishermen who designed this proposal, intended it to reduce discards and to achieve the plan objectives by protecting cod spawning and habitat, reducing overall fishing power in the spring months and to provide equitable access to alternative species and fishing grounds. The PDT discussed the components of this option and noted that one of the primary distinguishing elements is the area closures. The size and configuration of the area closures precludes the use of the same analysis method that is used for Options 1 and 2 area closures that are based on quarter-degree squares. Since VTR data is not useful for precise location of fishing activity, and observer data is insufficient to determine the relative impacts of areas within the quarter-degree squares, an assumption must be made about the effect of these area closures. The PDT could not make a comparative analysis of this option with Options 1 and 2 because of the limitations on the area closure analysis.

A second distinguishing element of this option is the 25-day/trip limitation for the February – May period in the Western Gulf of Maine Restricted Fishery Program. This component is a modification of an earlier proposal that would have applied the limitation throughout the Gulf of Maine. Analysis results of the initial proposal indicated that annual landings of GOM cod would be reduced by about five to seven percent, not considering effort shifts to other times in the year. The PDT applied one half of that savings to the analysis of the current proposal that applies only to the western Gulf of Maine.

The PDT analyzed the combined effect of the measures in this option (see Section 4.1.1.3). The analysis provided a range of outcomes reflecting possible effort displacement of between 25 percent and 75 percent. The PDT did not indicate what the most likely effort displacement level would be. The analysis also provided results for both the July – October and year-round closure of Cashes Ledge. All of the analysis results exceeded the F_{\max} cod TAC of 1,918 metric tons. Based on this analysis, this option is expected to result in cod landings between 2,808 and 3,221 metric tons.

Furthermore, as the PDT commented on earlier versions of this proposal, it does not support opening areas that provide protection to other stocks that are now known to need significant conservation restrictions to meet SFA standards. While this framework is not intended to achieve any specific management goal for those other stocks, it also should not allow for a relaxation of indirect conservation benefits of existing measures. The rationale for changing the area closures under this option is to allow fishing effort to redirect on other stocks, many of which are severely overfished.

3.7.2 Party/charter access to GOM closed areas

Under this proposal, party and charter vessels would be required to obtain an exemption certificate from NMFS to fish in any of the Gulf of Maine closed areas. A limited access vessel in the exemption program would be prohibited from fishing on a DAS while in possession of the certificate. The Council considered three options for the duration of the exemption certificate, and adopted the three-month program. The other two options are discussed below:

3.7.2.1 Option 1 – one year certificate

A vessel would obtain a certificate on an annual basis at the start of the fishing year and remain enrolled in the program for the entire year.

3.7.2.2 Option 2 – six month certificate

A vessel would obtain a certificate and remain enrolled in the exemption program for a minimum of six months.

Discussion: The Council did not adopt these options because of their potential impact on vessels that fish both commercially and as party/charter vessels, in terms of reduced revenues and flexibility. The benefits, in terms of improved closed-area catch information and enforceability of party/charter rules, would still be realized under the proposed three-month certificate, with less cost to the industry.

Under each of the various scenarios analyzed, the expected number of recreational passengers in the Gulf of Maine is close to the 1998 baseline. Option 1 is the only alternative that is likely to produce results significantly different than the baseline. Recreational party/charter groundfish effort in the Gulf of Maine may be reduced under Option 1, as the analysis projects a 2.5% decrease in the number of passengers and a 6.3% decrease in the number of cod kept. However, this option negatively affects more vessels in terms of potential loss of revenue than any other option.

Five three-month alternatives that were analyzed produce results (in terms of anglers and expected cod catch) that are all very similar to the baseline. The analysis projects very little difference between the baseline and any of the three-month alternative in terms of expected numbers of passengers and numbers of cod kept. The three-month alternatives can be assumed to have no biological impact on the stocks.

The most significant benefit of this provision will likely result in the form of better recreational party/charter fishing information for the Gulf of Maine. The Council wants to

improve its understanding of what kind and how much recreational fishing activity occurs in the Gulf of Maine closed areas. The exemption certification program should allow NMFS and the Council to document how many and which party/charter vessels fish in the closed areas and when. It will also provide an enforcement tool, as vessels that violate the party/charter regulations (particularly, sell their catch) could have their certificate revoked or be denied a certificate in the future.

3.7.3 Exemption for raised footrope trawl in the Gulf of Maine

The Council considered two options to enable a fall whiting fishery with a raised footrope trawl in areas that would be closed under GOM Options 1 and 2 above. (This issue would not arise if the Council had adopted Options 3 or 4, as the area of the whiting fishery would not be affected by the area closures in those options.)

3.7.3.1 Option 1

This option would exempt the raised footrope trawl fishery from the Gulf of Maine closed areas on a seasonal basis (mostly autumn, Blocks 124 and 125).

3.7.3.2 Option 2

This option would move the boundary of the autumn (October-November) closed areas in Blocks 124 and 125 so as to not include the raised footrope trawl fishing area. If the

Discussion: The Council considered these options while NMFS was considering a MA DMF proposal for an exempted fishery in the area that would have required Council action for access to the portion of the closed areas that overlapped. Prior to a final decision on these framework provisions, NMFS announced that it had disapproved the exempted fishery proposal. The Council decided to consider the overall exempted fishery proposal, as well as the closed area exemption options above, in a separate framework action.

3.7.4 GB cod area closures

The Council is considering five area closure options for Georges Bank cod. Options 1-4 were originally developed for consideration in Framework 30. Options 1 and 2 were originally designed for implementation without a trip limit. Option 5 is based on an industry proposal during the development of Framework 30, but because of the timing of that framework, the Council proposed the same area for closure for 30 days following implementation (anticipated for June or July, 1999). Block numbers reference Figure 1.

3.7.4.1 Closed Area Option 1

This option would close the following block/month combinations (Figure 5):

Block	Month(s)
98	June – September
111	April, May
109	May
110	May
113	June, July, September
114	May, June

Discussion: This option is based on incrementally picking the block/month combinations with the highest landings, using the two-bin effort displacement analysis model, until the projected landings do not exceed the TAC. This option was developed in Framework 30 to be implemented without a trip limit. The analysis indicates that with this area closure, the trip limit could be between 3,000 and 3,500 pounds per day. Of the five options under consideration, only Option 4 has a lower revenue loss per metric ton of cod saved under the full effort displacement scenario, but this option is third in total revenue loss and percent change in revenues.

3.7.4.2 Closed Area Option 2

This option would close Blocks 98, 99 and 113 year round, and block 114 during May and June (Figure 6).

Discussion: This option was also developed in Framework 30 to be implemented without a trip limit. This option differs from Option 1 in that it is based on incrementally selecting contiguous block/month combinations with the highest landings, using the two-bin effort displacement model, to stay below the TAC without a trip limit. Selecting contiguous blocks reduces enforcement problems and costs. The analysis indicates that the trip limit could be as high as 4,000 pounds per day under this closure regime. This option also has the highest total revenue loss, percentage change in revenue and revenue loss per metric ton of cod saved under the full effort displacement scenario of the five options.

3.7.4.3 Closed Area Option 3

This option would close blocks 109-114 year round (Figure 7).

Discussion: This option was originally developed in Framework 30 to close these specific blocks for sufficient time to keep projected landings below the TAC without a trip limit. The analysis shows that even if these blocks were to be closed year round, a trip limit of 2,000 pounds per day would be necessary to keep projected landings below the TAC. This option has the second highest revenue impact and revenue loss per metric ton of cod saved of the five options under the full effort displacement scenario.

3.7.4.4 Closed Area Option 4

This option would close the following block/month combinations, in addition to a 2,000 pound per day trip limit (Figure 8):

Block	Month
98	July, August
110	May
111	April, May
113	July
114	June

Discussion: This option, also developed for Framework 30, is similar to Option 1, except that the analysis started with the application of a 2,000 pound per day trip limit. The model incrementally selected the block/month combinations of highest cod landings until

the projected landings were below the TAC with a 2,000 pound per day trip limit. By definition, this option would keep landings below the TAC with a 2,000 pound per day trip limit. This option also has the lowest revenue lost per metric ton of cod saved of the five options under the full effort displacement scenario, however, this analysis does not consider the enforcement, administrative and compliance costs of a series of openings and closings of individual blocks spanning a five-month period.

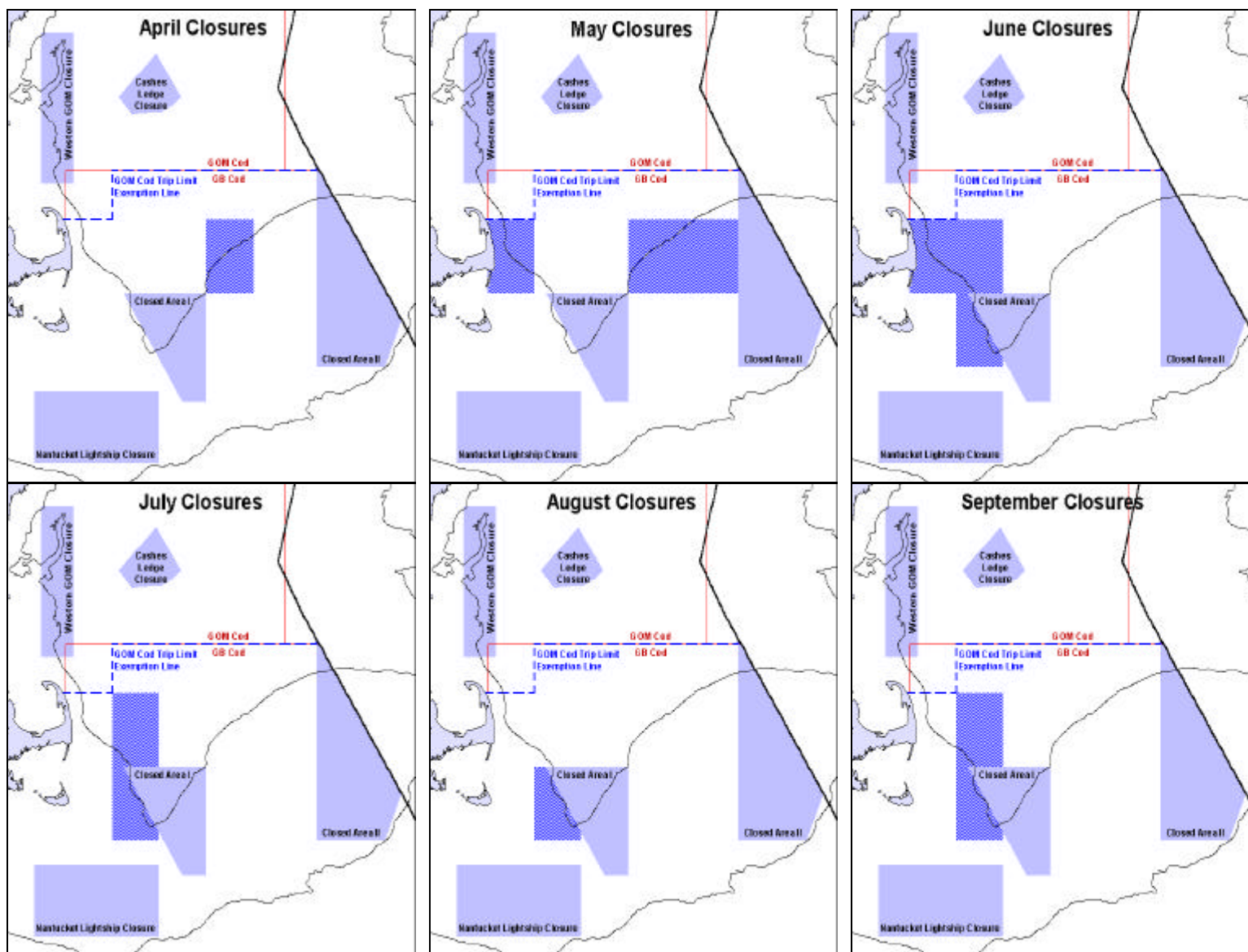


Figure 5 GB cod Closed Area Option 1