



Figure 8 GB cod Closed Area Option 4

3.7.5 Increase cod minimum size

Under GOM cod Option 3 above, the Council proposed to increase the minimum size of cod from 19 inches to 21 inches. If this GOM cod option were adopted, the minimum size increase would apply throughout the range of cod (all stock areas).

Discussion: This proposal was only under consideration under GOM Option 3 above, which the Council did not adopt because it failed to meet the biological objectives of the plan. If the Council had proposed GOM Option 3 as the final action for this framework, the cod minimum size increase would have applied throughout the range of the species. The Council considered, but did not adopt the same proposal in Framework 30. The Council did not want any further delay in the implementation of other measures in that framework while it addressed some of the issues identified with this proposal. The purpose of this measure is to increase the spawning stock biomass per recruit and the yield per recruit. However, these benefits are only realized when the size corresponds to the selectivity characteristics of the gear used to catch that species. Without commensurate gear selectivity changes, increasing the minimum size will cause discarding to increase.

Three primary gear types catch Georges Bank cod. In 1997 otter trawls caught 60 percent, gillnets 18 percent, and hooks 13 percent. Selectivity data for the different gears is limited, but based on comments from fishermen and landings data, 6-inch mesh gillnets reportedly catch the smallest proportion of 19-21 inch fish and hooks catch the greatest. In Framework 27, the Council increased the minimum mesh size of square mesh on trawl vessels to 6.5 inches, although vessels targeting roundfish, such as cod, generally use diamond mesh rather than square, so the square mesh size increase is not likely to significantly reduce the catch of small cod.

The PDT discussed the potential impact of an increase in the minimum size of cod from 19 inches to 21 inches. It agreed that the minimum fish size alone would not achieve any conservation benefit over current regulations without gear changes to increase selectivity or escapement (hook size and mesh size increases). Current rates of discarding across all gear sectors are relatively low, but that probably is the result of a relative scarcity of small fish, given the very low recruitment in recent years. The impact of discards on fishing mortality depends on the survivability of discarded fish. The survival rates of discarded cod under the diversity of gears and circumstances in the commercial fishery cannot be ascertained, however, the Council expects that, as it is in the industry's best interest to minimize discard mortality, fishermen will take all reasonable steps to do so, especially since this proposal was made by several industry groups.

3.7.6 Counting of first DAS of a trip

The Council considered in GOM Option 1 or 2 above counting the first day of a multispecies DAS trip, for all vessels (not only those in the Gulf of Maine), under one of the following three options:

1. Status quo, DAS counted as actual time between call in and call out