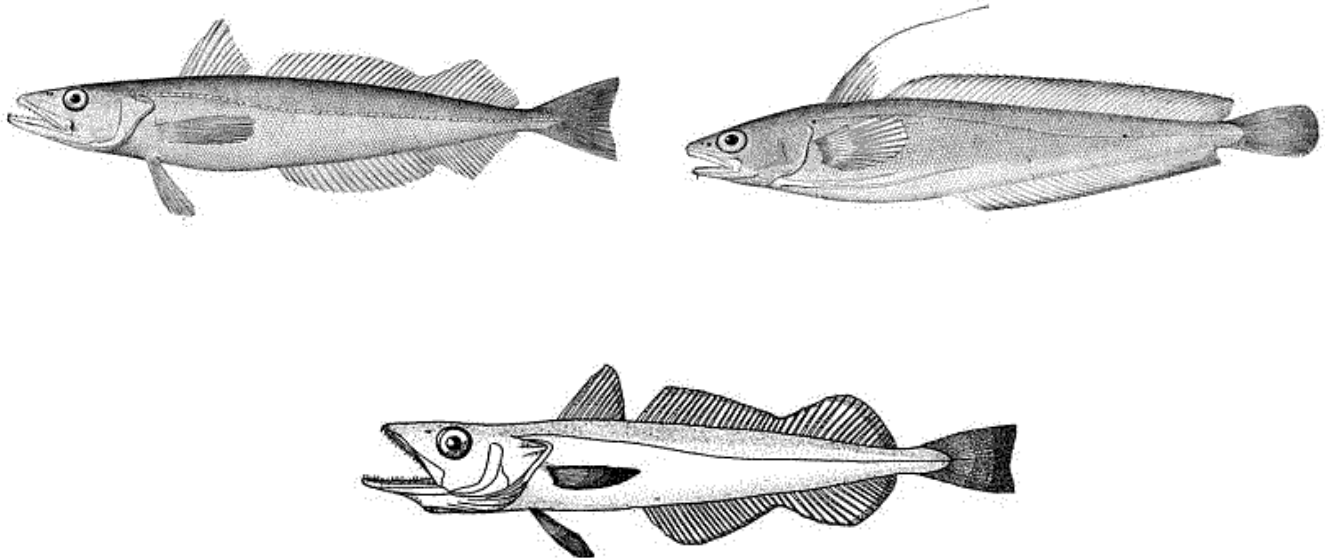


FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 35
to the
NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN
(for Whiting, Red Hake, & Offshore Hake)

To Establish a Seasonal Whiting Raised Footrope Trawl Fishery in Upper Cape Cod Bay



Prepared by the New England Fishery Management Council

in consultation with

National Marine Fisheries Service
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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Executive Summary

The New England Fishery Management Council is seeking to modify existing multispecies regulations specified in §648.80(a) to allow for a seasonal whiting raised footrope trawl fishery in upper Cape Cod Bay and the southern Gulf of Maine. This action will allow for a transition from a successful experimental fishery for whiting and red hake focused on minimizing regulated species bycatch to a more permanent fishery that provides a seasonal small mesh fishing opportunity for vessels fishing in and around the Gulf of Maine.

The proposed season for the raised footrope trawl fishery is September 1 – November 20. The proposed area is a subset of Areas 2B and 4 from the experimental fishery and encompasses the area that was most heavily fished and most heavily sampled by observers during the annual experimental fisheries from 1996-1999. Bycatch restrictions for the fishery are proposed to be the same as they were in the experimental fishery, which are more restrictive than those for *Multispecies Exempted Fisheries* and are intended to discourage vessels from rigging their gear improperly. Net specifications include a requirement for participating vessels to use a minimum 2.5-inch mesh and a prohibition on the use of net strengtheners when participating in this fishery. This framework document also proposes some specifications for properly “rigging” the raised footrope trawl gear; these specifications are intended to apply to Small Mesh Areas 1 and 2 in addition to the raised footrope trawl fishery established by this framework adjustment.

Participants in the raised footrope trawl fishery will be allowed to fish within the area specified for this raised footrope trawl fishery during the months of October and November when Blocks 124 and 125 are scheduled to be “closed” to gear capable of catching groundfish. Vessels will be required to obtain a letter of authorization to fish in the raised footrope trawl for the entire season (similar to the Cultivator Shoal Whiting Fishery) and will be limited to fishing only for small mesh multispecies in the raised footrope trawl area during the October/November closure.

Analyses presented in this framework document indicate that establishing a seasonal whiting raised footrope trawl fishery in upper Cape Cod Bay will not significantly impact fishing mortality reduction or rebuilding schedules for any small mesh multispecies or large mesh regulated groundfish stocks. The low absolute catches of large mesh regulated species projected for the fishery and the fact that the exempted fishery is more restricted in area and season than the experimental fishery in 1999 suggests that the raised footrope trawl fishery is unlikely to exert any additional mortality on large mesh regulated species.

The data presented in this framework document indicate that the raised footrope trawl significantly reduces the bycatch of most regulated groundfish species while not compromising the catch of target small mesh species, an accomplishment for which the Council commends the fishing industry and the Massachusetts DMF. The Council believes that the development of the raised footrope trawl demonstrates the creativity and innovation that will keep the small mesh fishing fleet in the Gulf of Maine viable now and in the future. In turn, the Council wants to provide these vessels with an opportunity to catch whiting in the Gulf of Maine during the fall and winter. The Provincetown dayboats in particular are critically dependent on nearshore access to whiting fishing grounds.

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