



# ***New England Fishery Management Council***

## ***News Release***

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### **Council Approves Groundfish Draft Amendment 13 *Asks for Delay to Address Scientific Uncertainties***

*Gloucester, MA* The New England Fishery Management Council yesterday took the first in a series of formal steps necessary to approve Amendment 13 to its Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan. Following testimony by fishermen and Council members alike expressing a serious lack of confidence in the scientific underpinnings of the plan, the Council also asked for a delay of at least one year to fully address these problems before taking further action on Amendment 13.

The Council will send a letter to U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler to request a delay of at least a year in the Amendment 13 timetable to allow for a complete and independent peer review of the much-publicized problems associated with the sampling gear used aboard the National Marine Fisheries Service's research vessel *Albatross IV*. The step is viewed as essential to determine the impact of information obtained through NMFS surveys on estimates of the condition and health of the region's groundfish stocks, particularly in view of the proposed regulations that are projected to have severe economic impacts on area fishermen.

The groundfish fishery is currently operating under restrictions called for in a federal district court order, the result of a successful lawsuit brought by a number of conservation organizations. Last December the Council's Groundfish Plan was found to be out of compliance with the fish stock rebuilding timeframes and bycatch requirements mandated by the federal Sustainable Fisheries Act. Consequently, the court required the Council to approve draft management measures and a draft Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 13 at its November meeting and implementation of a new plan to meet all requirements of the Act by August 2003. Inaction on the part of the Council would have resulted in direct management of the fishery by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

**The New England Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils established by federal legislation in 1976, is charged with conserving and managing fishery resources from three to 200 miles off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.**