



New England Fishery Management Council - News Release

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Federal Fishery Council Acts on Skates Proposes New Limits for 2011

Portsmouth, NH Responding to testimony over the course of several meetings, the New England Fishery Management Council this week approved new measure for the region's skate fishery. The changes should better ensure the availability of skates to fishermen, and in particular processors, for a longer period of time this year. In 2010, the directed skate fishery closed on September 3rd, affecting employment in fisheries-related businesses.

By a near unanimous vote, the Council set in motion the process that could lead to the implementation of new skate rules beginning on May 1, 2011. The measures include a split season skate wing possession limit in which the current 500 pound incidental limit would be increased to 2,600 pounds from May 1 to August 31, and then to 4,100 pounds beginning on September 1. After that date and once a "trigger" of 85 percent of the total allowable landings is reached, the possession limit would decline to a 1,250 pound "incidental" limit on skate wings, instead of this year's 500 pound limit. The stepwise approach to the reductions is intended to promote continued fishing activities without exceeding the specified total allowable landings. They also are expected to promote a reduction in discards and postpone the most intense skate fishing until the time of year when skate prices historically peak.

The Council also voted to allow vessels that process skate wings at sea to also land skate carcasses for use in the lobster bait market. Although an infrequent practice in the skate wing fishery due to market constraints, this change would allow vessels to more fully utilize the fish and add value to the skate landings. The change is necessary to clarify that the additional carcass landings would not count against the annual skate wing landings limit, since the carcass landings would not contribute to added mortality.

The Council took no action on a much-discussed 20,000 pound skate possession limit that was initially supported by New Bedford. Subsequent comments and analyses from both industry and technical groups did not support this alternative because it could lead to derby-style fishing, a lengthier directed fishery closure and higher skate discarding than would occur under the Council-adopted measures. The National Marine Fisheries Service, acting on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, is responsible for final approval of federal fishery measures.

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