



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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New England Fishery Management Council Delays Whiting Amendment

NEWBURYPORT, MA The New England Fishery Management Council will delay further work on an amendment to address the management of small mesh multispecies (silver hake/whiting, red hake, and offshore hake) for several months. At issue is the significant uncertainty concerning stock-specific whiting landings.

Particularly in recent years, it has been unclear whether whiting landings maintained in the federal database originate from the northern or southern stock areas. The stocks north of Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod are governed by a very different management program than stocks south of that area. In the Gulf of Maine, whiting fishing is restricted to relatively small and mostly inshore areas because of concerns about groundfish bycatch in the small mesh nets used in the fishery.

Lack of certainty about the origin of the landings makes it very difficult to develop stock-specific optimum yield specifications and accountability measures like total allowable catches (TACs, quotas) for consideration and analysis in the amendment. Any quotas considered for upcoming fishing years are related, in part, to the landings from the stock in the most recent years.

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, MA is currently analyzing and revising the landings data from 1994 forward. A revised time series of stock-specific landings for this fishery is anticipated near the end of 2007. This information will have implications for the alternatives that will specify optimum yield for the fishery, and more importantly, annual catch limits for each of the small mesh multispecies stocks. It is therefore critical that the Council wait until the corrected figures are available before completing further work on the amendment.

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.

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