



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 18, 2007

PRESS CONTACT: Daniel T. Furlong
(302) 674-2331 x19

Council Approves SBRM Amendment; Sets 2008 Specifications

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Hampton, Virginia last week and adopted a motion to submit to the NMFS Northeast Regional Administrator for review and implementation the preferred alternatives contained in the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Omnibus Amendment. The Council also took action to approve Amendment 1 to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for purposes of taking it to Public Hearings. In addition, the Council adopted recommendations regarding fishery management measures for the 2008 Atlantic mackerel, *Loligo* and *Illex* squid and butterfish fisheries; and, for the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries for 2008, 2009 and 2010.

By approving the SBRM Omnibus Amendment, the Council anticipates that all of its FMPs will satisfy the Magnuson-Stevens Act's requirement that an SBRM be included in those plans. This determination assumes that the New England Council will adopt the same preferred alternatives and the Secretary of Commerce will approve them. The purpose of the amendment is to: explain the methods and processes by which bycatch is currently monitored and assessed; determine whether these methods and processes need to be modified and/or supplemented; establish standards of precision for bycatch estimation for all Council fisheries. The operational intent of the SBRM program is to establish, maintain, and utilize biological sampling programs designed to minimize bias to the extent practicable. The SBRM program contemplated by this Amendment can be viewed as a combination of sampling design, data collection procedures, and analyses used to estimate bycatch in multiple fisheries and a means by which to document the recommended SBRM program.

Amendment 1 to the Tilefish FMP was approved for purposes of soliciting public comments on it and its supporting Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Amendment's principal management issue for consideration is the establishment (or not) of an Individual Fishery Quota (IFQ) system for the tilefish fishery. In addition to this overarching issue there are seventeen other management measures that will be addressed and considered for incorporation into the Tilefish FMP. Some of the non-IFQ related issues include: establishing a party/charter tilefish vessel permit, a party/charter tilefish operator permit, and a party/charter vessel reporting requirement; considering recreational bag-size limits; establishing a landing requirement that ensures that tilefish caught within the defined management unit are landed exclusively within that area; expanding the list of management measures that could be added or modified via the framework adjustment process; modifying the current Essential Fish Habitat designations for tilefish. All eighteen issues and their related alternatives can be viewed on the Council's web page (www.mafmc.org).

For the 2008 fishing year, the Council adopted the following specifications for Atlantic mackerel: allowable biological catch (ABC) = 156,000 metric tons (mt); initial optimum yield (IOY) and domestic annual harvest (DAH) = 115,000 mt; domestic annual processing (DAP) = 100,000 mt; joint venture processing (JVP) = 0 mt; and, total allowable level of foreign fishing (TALFF) = 0 mt. The DAH specification includes an allocation of 15,000 mt to the recreational mackerel fishery. The proposed 2008 specification for ABC represents a reduction of 30 mt compared to the 2007 level and reflects the results of the recently updated stock assessment for Atlantic mackerel which recommended significant reductions in the biological reference points for this stock. However, the Atlantic mackerel stock remains in good condition and the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. When 90% of the OY is landed or projected to be landed, the directed fishery for mackerel will close and a 20,000 pound trip limit will be implemented for the balance of the fishing year. The Council also recommended that up to 3% of the IOY and DAH for mackerel may be set aside for scientific research in 2008.

For *Loligo* squid, the Council voted to maintain the same quota specifications in 2008 as implemented for 2007. This means the maximum optimum yield (Max OY) would be 26,000 mt and ABC, IOY, DAH, and DAP would all be set at 17,000 mt. The Council supported the continued use of trimesters for 2008 and recommended the following quotas by trimester: Trimester I (January through April): 7,310 mt; Trimester II (May through August): 2,890 mt; and, Trimester III (September through December): 6,800 mt. Overages or underages from Trimesters I and II will be added to or deducted from Trimester III. During Trimesters I and II, when 90% of the allocation is landed or projected to be landed the fishery will be closed and a 2,500 pound trip limit will be implemented for the remainder of that Trimester period. When 95% of the total annual quota is harvested, the trip limit will be reduced to 2,500 pounds and will remain at that level until the end of the fishing year. To reduce the potential for regulatory discarding of *Loligo* in the *Illex* fishery (should the directed *Loligo* fishery be closed during the August through October time frame), the Council approved a measure to allow *Illex* moratorium vessels to possess up to 5,000 pounds of *Loligo* during such a *Loligo* closure provided such vessels are fishing beyond the 50-fathom contour and in possession of at least 10,000 pounds of *Illex*. The Council also recommended that up to 3% of the ABC, IOY, DAH and DAP for *Loligo* may be set aside for scientific research in 2008.

For *Illex* squid, the Council adopted the following quota specifications in 2008: Max OY, ABC, IOY, DAH, and DAP would all be set at 24,000 mt. The directed fishery for *Illex* will remain open until 95% of ABC is taken or is projected to be taken (i.e., 22,800 mt). When 95% of ABC is taken or projected to be taken, the directed fishery will be closed and a 10,000 pound trip limit will remain in effect for the remainder of the fishing year. Trip limits for non-moratorium vessels will be set at 10,000 lbs for 2008 during the open season. The Council also recommended that up to 3% of the ABC, IOY, DAH and DAP for *Illex* may be set aside for scientific research for 2008.

For butterfish, the Council adopted the following quota specifications for 2007: Max OY would be set at 12,175 mt, ABC would be set at 1,500 mt and IOY, DAH, DAP would all be set at 500 mt. If approved, trip limits for 2008 will be 5,000 pounds, and the threshold level for triggering the required use of a minimum mesh size (i.e., 3 inches) will take effect at 1,000 pounds in lieu of the 2007 threshold level of 5,000 pounds. When 80% of the DAH is reached or is projected to be reached, a variable trip limit will be implemented. If 80% is reached before October 1, then the trip limit will be reduced to 250 pounds for the balance of the fishing year. If the 80% is reached on or after October 1 then the trip limit will be reduced to 600 pounds for the balance of the fishing year. The Council also recommended that up to 3% of the IOY, DAH and DAP for butterfish may be set aside for scientific research in 2008.

The Council also took action to address Amendments 9 and 10 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP. So as to expedite both Amendments it was decided to sever issues 6 (*Loligo* minimum mesh size requirement), 7 (*Illex* exemption from *Loligo* minimum mesh size requirement), and 10 (seasonal gear restricted areas to reduce incidental take of butterfish) from the Amendment 9 document and incorporate them into Amendment 10. This action should allow Amendment 9 to be voted upon at the next Council meeting for Secretarial submission, and also allow Amendment 10 to be voted upon to take it to the public for comments and related Public Hearings. In effect, the Council has consolidated all the finfish bycatch and discard issues associated with this FMP into a single amendment document.

The Council recommended that the current regulations for surfclams and ocean quahogs be continued. The current regulations provide for a quota of 3.4 million bushels for the surfclam fishery, 5.333 million bushels for the ocean quahog fishery, and 100,000 bushels for the Maine ocean quahog fishery. These quota recommendations if approved by NMFS should be in effect for the 2008, 2009, and 2010 fishing years. It was also recommended by the Council that the current exemption from the minimum size requirement for surfclams (i.e., at least 4 ¾ inches) be perpetuated for the next three fishing years.

In addition to the above actions, the Council also reviewed actions taken by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) regarding Amendment 15 to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP. When Amendment 15 was initiated, 28 management issues were considered for inclusion. Since then, the Council has reduced the number of management issues to be addressed in Amendment 15 to six. Over the same period of time, the ASMFC has reduced the number of management issues to be addressed to 18. The Council and ASMFC will meet in August to address, and to the extent practicable, reconcile the difference in number of issues to be addressed by Amendment 15.

The Council received a presentation by Dr. John Boreman, Director, NMFS Office of Science and Technology, regarding the NMFS' initiative to augment its marine recreational data programs by improving the collection, analysis, and use of recreational data. The Council also received a presentation by Shannon Simpson of NOAA's National Ocean Service regarding reauthorization of the Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Act of 2000. The meeting also served as a forum for the Council's Research Set-Aside Committee; Ecosystem Committee; Law Enforcement Committee; Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish Committee; Bycatch / Limited Access Privilege Program Committee; and, Executive Committee, all of which met and conducted committee business during this Council meeting.



Figure 1 Gordon Colvin (center) receiving Council honors from Pete Jensen (L) and Dan Furlong (R). In a separate event Dan Furlong presented Rick Hoopes with similar Council honors.

The June meeting also served as the final Council meeting for two members in their roles as the principal State officials responsible for marine fishery management. Both Gordon Colvin (Director, New York Bureau of Marine Resources) and Rick Hoopes (Director, Pennsylvania Bureau of Fisheries) have retired from their state positions. The Council took time at a dinner in their honor to recognize and thank both of them for their commitment and contribution to the Council's programs and activities. We wish both gentlemen well in their future retirement years.