

NOAA FISHERIES EXPANDS USES FOR NORTHEAST GROUND FISH B-DAYS

Northeast groundfishing vessels will have new ways to use so-called “B” days-at-sea in three fishery programs approved today by NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries.) Currently, B days constitute roughly 40% of fishable groundfish days. These can only be used to target the six groundfish stocks that can sustain additional effort, in ways that do not undermine longer-term rebuilding efforts for other stocks in the fishery.

The number of days vessels can use to harvest groundfish are limited. About 60% of the days can currently be used at the owners discretion under the fishery management plan—these are called A days. The remaining 40% can only be used in programs like those announced today. Until today, there was only one such program where B days could be used.

“The New England Fishery Management Council has moved quickly to expand uses for B days-at-sea, and the new rules provide a way to test these ideas. The intense monitoring and reporting requirements, as well as the closure rules built into the programs are essential if we are to safeguard against harvest hikes that could threaten rebuilding,” said Patricia Kurkul, NOAA fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator. NOAA Fisheries is the federal agency charged with ensuring sustainable marine fisheries in U.S. waters.

The new rules create one new special access program (SAP), and two pilot programs. The new SAP is open to some hook fishermen on Georges Bank. One of the pilot programs is for trawlers using special gear in the Eastern U.S./Canada Area, and the other is for vessels operating outside of SAPs and closed areas. In all of these programs, there are requirements for frequent landings reports, taking observers if requested, and using an electronic vessel monitoring system during the trip.

The Closed Area I Hook Gear Haddock SAP will operate during October through December, and be open to members of the Georges Bank Hook Sector in a portion of Georges Bank Closed Area I, using either A, B Regular, or B Reserve days-at-sea. The fishery would close when 1,000 mt of haddock has been harvested. All catch of Georges Bank cod will count toward the Sector’s existing Georges Bank cod quota. The proposal to allow nonsector vessels to participate was disapproved.

The Eastern U.S./Canada Haddock SAP Pilot Program will occur during May through December for a two-year trial period. Vessels are allowed to fish with specially designed trawl gear in portions of the Eastern U.S./Canada Area and Georges Bank Closed Area II, using either A, B Regular, or B Reserve days-at-sea. Catch of haddock, cod, and yellowtail flounder counts toward the U.S./Canada quotas for these species, and

there is a 1,000 lb landing limit of cod. In addition, catch of Georges Bank cod counts toward a 27 mt quota for the SAP fishery. When the quota of cod is caught, use of B days-at-sea in the SAP is prohibited. A provision that would have allowed vessels to use flounder nets in this SAP was disapproved.

The B Regular Days-At-Sea Pilot Program will run through October of 2005, and allow vessels to use this category of day in the areas outside of the special access programs and closed areas. The fishery will proceed quarterly, with no more than 1,000 days to be used fleetwide per quarter. The program includes both individual stock quotas and daily trip limits for eight groundfish stocks of concern, and prohibits discards of legal-sized groundfish. If the vessel exceeds a trip limit during a trip, then the days used convert from B to A days-at-sea. When either a stock quota or 1,000 days are achieved in a quarter, the program will close until the next quarter.

The rules also makes changes in the existing Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder SAP, instituting a 1,000 lb per trip limit on cod, prohibiting discard of legal-sized cod, and requiring vessels on B day trips that exceed the cod trip limit to charge the trip to A days-at-sea.

For more details on this action, visit:

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/index.html>