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NOAA Removes Exemption that Allowed for Discarding of Small Amounts of Fish in Atlantic Herring Fishery to Protect Groundfish

Today, NOAA announced that it will no longer allow Atlantic herring vessels to discard small amounts of fish, unobserved, when they are fishing in an area on Georges Bank closed to protect groundfish. Previously, a herring vessel was permitted to legally release fish from its net, if the amount of fish remaining in the net was too small for its fish pump to effectively operate.

“Atlantic herring fishermen will now be required to bring all fish onboard their vessel,” said Patricia Kurkul, northeast regional administrator, NOAA Fisheries Service. “This will allow us to more closely monitor how much groundfish and other species are being inadvertently captured in this fishery.”

Exemptions remain in place that enable a fishing vessel to release fish from its net, if there is a safety concern or mechanical failure that prohibits bringing the fish onboard. However, the vessel is then required to move its fishing operations outside of the closed area for the remainder of that trip.

In order to provide more time for the herring industry to safely modify their fishing practices to accommodate this new requirement, this regulatory change will not be effective for 60 days.

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