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NOAA proposes 17 million pound increase in skate quota for fishermen based on updated science

NOAA is proposing a 56-percent, or 17 million pound, increase in the amount of Northeast skate fishermen can land this year, based on updated scientific information. With this emergency action, fishermen would see the quota increase from 31 million pounds to 48 million pounds for the season that began in May and ends on April 30, 2012.

"We made a commitment to respond as quickly as possible when new scientific information affects management decisions," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The proposed quota increase will result in considerable increases in revenues for fishermen and positive economic effects to the businesses that support the fishery, while maintaining important conservation objectives."

The New England Fishery Management Council reviewed updated scientific information on skates showing recent increases to the skate population and asked NOAA to implement emergency measures to increase the skate quota.

The bulk of the skate catch occurs incidentally in the groundfish, monkfish and scallop fisheries. Skate wings are typically kept and sold as food. Skates are also harvested for bait for the American lobster fishery.

The skate wing fishery, which receives 66.5 percent of the annual allocation, would see its quota increased from 20 million pounds to 32 million pounds in 2011. The skate bait fishery, which is allocated 33.5 percent, would retain 16 million pounds, 6 million pounds more than it was originally allocated when the fishing year began on May 1. The current possession limits on the amount of skates that can be kept per fishing trip would be maintained.

"Increasing the quota, while maintaining skate possession limits at current levels, will lengthen the fishing season, preserve fishing opportunities throughout the 2011 fishing year and allow fishermen to retain more skates when both price and demand for skate wings are better later in the season," said Patricia Kurkul, northeast regional administrator, NOAA's Fisheries Service.

Seven species of skate are managed as part of the skate complex including barndoor, thorny, smooth, winter, little, clearnose and rosette. Possession of barndoor, thorny, and smooth skates remains prohibited.

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