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Atlantic Herring Annual Catch Quotas Announced for 2010-2012

Today, NOAA announced final Atlantic herring annual harvest limits for 2010, 2011, and 2012. The annual harvest limit will be just over 200 million pounds, about 10 percent less than last year's catch. To catch the full limit, fishermen will have to take more fish from offshore areas than they have in recent years. The limits were developed and recommended to the agency by the New England Fishery Management Council.

"Historically, the inshore Gulf of Maine has been a key fishing area for vessels, and reducing fishing effort in these waters will be particularly tough for many fishing businesses," said Patricia Kurkul, northeast regional administrator, NOAA Fisheries Service. "If the industry can increase catch rates offshore, where the harvest limits have not been fully taken, some of the economic effects of the lower inshore harvest limit can be eased."

Atlantic herring is managed as a single stock with inshore and offshore components. There are four management areas for the stock, each with its own individual portion of the total allowable catch.

The stock as a whole is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. However, the inshore stock component, which represents about 18 percent of the herring population, has experienced most of the fishing effort. The council is concerned about the disproportionately high inshore fishing effort and what effect that could have on the long-term condition of the stock.

To account for these concerns and to ensure that the stock stays healthy, the council recommended that the harvest be reduced to the average catch levels by U.S. and Canadian fishing vessels from 2006-2008, the most recent three years for which data were available. It also recommended that no catch be set aside for research in 2010-2012, meaning the entire quota is available for commercial harvest. The Atlantic herring season matches the calendar year, with catch limits from the previous year in effect until they are replaced by newly devised limits.

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