



Gulf of Maine Rolling Closure Areas and Rationale for Management Measures

This summary is not a substitute for the regulations; rather it provides a broad overview of restrictions and requirements. You are strongly encouraged to read the regulations in conjunction with this information.

The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) recently approved, for submission to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, which proposes, in part, several new measures regarding sector management, including a proposal to universally exempt sector participants from certain Gulf of Maine (GOM) Rolling Closure Areas without the need to apply for a specific exemption. This document describes current GOM Rolling Closure Areas and proposed GOM Rolling Closure Areas for which sector participants will be universally exempted. Although the proposed universal exemptions must first be approved and implemented by NMFS, this summary of the proposed exempted areas is being provided to help in drafting sector proposals based on the possible adoption of Amendment 16.

I. Current Regulations and Proposed Revisions

Gulf of Maine Rolling Closure Areas (based on 30' squares)

Rolling Closure	Current Closures	Proposed Amendment 16 Universal Exemption from Closures for Sector Vessels
Area I March 1 – 31	Blocks 121, 122, 123	All blocks open to sector participants
Area II April 1 – 30	Blocks 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133	Blocks 121, 122, 123, 129, 130, 131 open to sector participants (Specific exemption would still be needed for blocks 124, 125, 132, 133)
Area III May 1 – 31	Blocks 124, 125, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140	Blocks 124, 125, 129, 130, 131, 136, 137 open to sector participants (Specific exemption would still be needed for blocks 132, 133, 138, 139, 140)
Area IV June 1 – 30	Blocks 132, 133, 139, 140, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 152	Blocks 132, 133, 142, 143, 144 open to sector participants (Specific exemption would still be needed for blocks 139, 140, 145, 146, 147, 152)
Area V October 1 – November 30	Blocks 124, 125	All blocks open to sector participants

II. Exemptions

The Council specified that the blocks not proposed for universal exemption are being excluded to protect spawning cod. In addition, the GOM Rolling Closure Areas overlap with the Harbor Porpoise Gillnet Closure Areas in some locations. While sector gillnet vessels would not be exempt from gillnet closures and pinger requirements in these areas, pingers are not 100% effective at preventing takes. Therefore, exempting sectors from the remaining blocks could increase interactions with harbor porpoises and raise equity issues if an increase in take resulted in management actions for the entire fishery, including non-sector vessels. An exemption raises additional equity concerns in that it would give sectors access to fishing grounds not accessible to non-sector vessels. Furthermore, allowing sectors this exemption could pose enforceability concerns, because it would require enforcement personnel to differentiate exempt vessels from non-exempt vessels at sea.

For an exemption from the remaining GOM Rolling Closure Area blocks, sector operations plans and environmental assessments would need to provide justification that an exemption will not significantly disrupt cod spawning aggregations or increase the take of protected species. Sectors would also need to address equity and enforceability concerns in their justification.