



Hook Limit Restrictions 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.

Under current regulations and proposed Amendment 16 measures, sectors may apply for an exemption from Northeast multispecies regulations regarding hook limits by requesting the exemption in their operations plans and providing a justification and analysis in their environmental assessments. This document provides a description of hook limit regulations from which a sector may seek an exemption and explains the need to justify such an exemption.

I. Current Regulations

Hook Limit Restrictions by Regulated Mesh Area

	Regulated Mesh Area			
	GOM 50 CFR 648.80(a)(3)	GB § 648.80(a)(4)	SNE § 648.80(b)	Mid-Atlantic § 648.80(c)
Limited access NE multispecies vessels*	2,000 hooks	3,600 hooks	2,000 hooks	4,500 hooks (Hook gear permits only)
*When fishing under a NE multispecies DAS or when fishing under the Small Vessel permit				

II. Exemptions

Hook limits have been used with other management measures to reduce overall mortality on groundfish stocks. Due to the proposed allocation of annual catch entitlements (ACEs) to sectors, hook limit restrictions may no longer be necessary to control mortality resulting from sector operations. However, an exemption from hook limits for sectors may have other impacts, such as increased interactions with protected species. Unlimited amounts of hook gear may give sector vessels an unfair advantage over non-sector vessels by providing sector vessels with the ability to hold an extensive area of fishing ground. Furthermore, a hook limit exemption would raise equity issues if increased protected species interactions or other impacts triggered management actions for the entire fishery, including non-sector vessels.

A sector's ACE and the fact that hook gear catches very few flatfish, which are among the stocks of greatest concern, provide conservation benefits equivalent to the mortality control function of the hook limit restriction, but not to the other functions of this measure. Therefore, for an exemption from hook limit restrictions, sector operations plans and environmental assessments would need to provide justification that an exemption will not increase protected species interactions. Sectors would also need to address equity concerns raised by an exemption.

The Georges Bank Cod Fixed Gear and Cod Hook Sectors have been authorized an exemption from the hook limit restrictions. They have justified this exemption in their environment assessments by arguing that it allows for greater efficiency and less fishing effort overall and that the habitat impacts associated with longline gear is minimal when compared to the impacts resulting from the range of gears used in the common pool fishery (i.e., gillnets and trawls). The existing sectors have further argued that any additional impacts to habitat, non-target, and protected species would be limited to the Hook Sector Area and would be controlled by other effort restrictions governing sector operations (i.e., DAS). However, since sectors are proposed to be exempt from DAS and their effort may not be confined to a small geographic area under Amendment 16, the potential impact of an exemption from hook limit restrictions for sectors would be more widespread and may require additional justification.