

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Winter Flounder

Species Range

Northern shore of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to New Jersey

Management Unit

Maine through New Jersey



Stock Status

There are two management units for winter flounder: Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA). Both stock units were assessed as a part of the 2020 Management Track Stock Assessments conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Gulf of Maine

As of the 2020 assessment, the GOM stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring. Estimated area swept biomass from non-overlapping strata from three different fall surveys (Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Maine-New Hampshire, and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) was used to determine the exploitation rate and overfishing status. However, biomass reference points remain unknown and overfished status cannot be determined.

Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic

As of the 2020 assessment, the SNE/MA stock is overfished but overfishing is not occurring. SSB in 2019 was estimated to be 3,959 metric tons, which is 32% of the SSB target and 64% of the SSB threshold. The 2019 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.071 which is 25% of the overfishing threshold.

Involved States and Jurisdictions

ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, NMFS, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees

Winter Flounder Management Board, Technical Committee, Plan Review Team, Advisory Panel

Chairs

Board, Chair – David Borden (10/2019); Vice-Chair – William Hyatt

Technical Committee, Chair – Paul Nitschke (7/2015)

Advisory Panel, Chair – Bud Brown (8/2003)

Staff Lead

Tracey Bauer, tbauer@asmfc.org

Management Plan History

[Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder \(May 1992\)](#) & [Addendum I \(May 1992\)](#)

The Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder and Addendum I contain specific fishery management and habitat protection/enhancement measures designed to achieve the following goals: maintain winter flounder stocks in sufficient abundance to support stable, productive commercial and recreational fisheries; preserve, maintain, and enhance habitat and environmental quality necessary for optimal growth and reproduction; to the extent possible, minimize incompatibility in management practices between this and other northwest Atlantic management plans, recognizing that winter flounder stocks vary biologically and may justify differing strategies; and to the extent possible, minimize conflicts between competing uses of the winter flounder resource.

The original FMP and Addendum I called for reductions in fishing mortality on winter flounder to be achieved by August 1, 1998, and allowed states the flexibility to achieve those reductions based on the life history characteristics of the individual stocks inhabiting each region. Implementation of the plan required the interaction and cooperation of state fishery management agencies, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Commission.

[Addendum II \(February 1998\)](#)

Addendum II extended the implementation schedule for fishing mortality rate reductions required by the FMP and Addendum I from August 1, 1998 until January 1, 1999.

[Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder \(November 2005\)](#)

Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder completely replaced all previous Commission management plans for inshore stocks of winter flounder. This amendment focuses on joint management between the Commission and the Council. It was designed to rebuild and maintain spawning stock biomass at or near target biomass levels and prioritize restoration and maintenance of essential winter flounder habitat.

Amendment 1 revised the biological reference points for each stock unit setting to (target SSB) $B_{MSY} = 66.4$ million pounds (30,100 mt) and (threshold SSB) $\frac{1}{2} SSB_{MSY} = 33.2$ million pounds (15,050 mt) with a fishing mortality threshold of $F_{MSY} = 0.32$ and target of 75% of $F_{MSY} = 0.24$ for the SNE/MA stock. Revised biological reference and fishing mortality numbers for the GOM stock were set to (target SSB) $B_{MSY} = 9$ million pounds (4,100 mt) and (threshold SSB) $\frac{1}{2} SSB_{MSY} = 4.5$ million pounds (2,050 mt) with a fishing mortality threshold of $F_{MSY} = 0.43$ and target of 75% of $F_{MSY} = 0.32$.

To rebuild and maintain the biomass and fishing mortality rate targets, Amendment 1 established the following recreational and commercial management measures:

Gulf of Maine Stock

Recreational

States within the GOM stock must maintain the existing 12" minimum size and adopt an 8-fish creel limit. There are no required recreational closed seasons in the GOM stock area.

Commercial

States within the Gulf of Maine stock area must maintain the existing 12" minimum size limit and remain consistent with the adjacent EEZ mesh size regulations. The current mesh size in the EEZ adjacent to the states in the GOM stock area is a 6.5" square or diamond mesh in the cod-end.

States must maintain existing season closures, including any Federal rolling closures that affect state waters in the GOM stock area.

Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stock

Recreational

States in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock area must implement a 12" minimum size limit, a 2-fish creel limit, and a recreational closed season of January 1 – February 28.

Commercial

States within the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock area must implement a 12" minimum size limit, a minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in the cod-end, and maintain any existing seasonal closures.

The mesh size regulation includes a 100 lb. trip limit for winter flounder if smaller mesh is being used. This 100 lb. "mesh trigger" provides for the landing of a small amount of winter flounder as bycatch in smaller-mesh fisheries.

[Addendum I \(May 2009\)](#)

Addendum I to Amendment 1 was developed in response to findings of GARM III and aims to achieve F_{MSY} for the GOM stock and rebuild the overfished SNE/MA stock. Addendum I requires an 11% reduction (from 2006-2007 levels) in recreational fishing mortality and establishes a 250 pound commercial possession limit in the GOM. Measures for the SNE/MA stock include a 2 fish recreational bag limit and 50 pound commercial possession limit. The SNE/MA measures are designed to reduce F as low as possible while still allowing fishermen to keep their winter flounder bycatch.

[Addendum II \(October 2012\)](#)

The Addendum modifies the commercial and recreational management requirements for the Gulf of Maine (GOM) stock in response to updated stock status information and recent federal action to increase the GOM winter flounder state waters' estimated harvest level. Specifically, the commercial trip limit was increased to 500 pounds per trip and the recreational season was expanded to year round. These measures apply only to GOM state waters' fisheries until June 1, 2013.

Addendum III (May 2013)

The Addendum establishes an annual specification process to set commercial and recreational management measures for the GOM and SNE/MA fisheries. Each year, with advice from the Winter Flounder Technical Committee and Advisory Panel, the Board can adjust trip limits, size limits, and seasons for the commercial fishery; and size limits, bag limits, and seasons for the recreational fishery. The Addendum will enable the Commission to respond more quickly to federal actions and changes in the winter flounder fishery.

Current Management Measures for Winter Flounder

Stock	Sector	Trip Limit/ Possession Limit	Size Limit	Season	Gear
GOM	Commerical	500 lbs per trip per day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end
	Recreational	8 fish	12"	NA	
SNE/MA	Commerical	50 lbs/ 38 fish per trip per day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end. 100-lb mesh trigger.
	Recreational	2 fish	12"	March 1 – December 31	

Implemented in Amendment 1 in 2005

Implemented in Addendum I in 2009

Implemented in Addendum II in 2012; GOM trip limit increased from 250 lbs (via Addendum I) to 500 lbs.

Varying closure dates were in place via Amendment 1, the new dates became effective through Board Action on February 2014

Council Management

The Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council jointly manage winter flounder with complementary management plans that regulate state and federal waters based on fisheries and the biology of winter flounder. The Council includes winter flounder as part of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP), which includes several highly valuable commercial species such as cod and yellowtail flounder. Federal management focuses on the commercial fishery because the bulk of harvest in federal waters is from that sector.

Annual Events

- Compliance Reports are due by November 1
- Fisheries Management Plan Review
- Specifications are reviewed and set in February by the Board