



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

ASMFC Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ASMFC Atlantic Herring Section Approves Draft Amendment 3 for Public Comment

Alexandria, VA – The Commission’s Atlantic Herring Section has approved Draft Amendment 3 to the Interstate Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for public comment. Draft Amendment 3 was initiated to strengthen spawning sea herring protections in Area 1A (inshore Gulf of Maine) and address concerns raised by the commercial Atlantic herring industry. The Draft Amendment proposes (1) changing the spawning monitoring program (default start dates, area boundaries, and length of the closure period); (2) removing the fixed gear set-aside rollover provision, and (3) requiring a vessel’s fish hold to be emptied before leaving on a fishing trip. The empty fish hold provision is also being addressed by the New England Fishery Management Council under Framework Adjustment 4 to the Federal Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Herring.

The Commission’s Plan Development Team conducted a review of the current spawning monitoring program and recommended new tools and adjustments to improve protection for spawning fish. The review revealed spawning events occur at different times each year and typically last six weeks. Therefore, a modification to the spawning protection program would be appropriate to protect the herring resource. The suite of options include a new forecast system to allow fisheries biologists to pool samples of herring from Maine and Massachusetts and project the date of peak spawning. A range of options for adjusting the default closure start dates are based on analysis of spawning data from the past decade, and provides flexibility in the proportion of spawning fish protected. The Draft Amendment proposes merging the Western Maine (WM) and Massachusetts-New Hampshire (MA-NH) spawning areas because there have been no significant differences in the starting dates of spawning events. Lastly, an option proposes to extend the closure period in MA-NH (or WM-MA-NH) to six weeks reflecting the current characteristics of the rebuilt herring population, which is characterized by a broader age class structure and longer overall spawning season since the current spawning program was developed.

At the request of the fishing industry, the Draft Amendment also includes options to remove the fixed gear set-aside provision and establish a requirement for empty fish holds. Currently, 295 mt is set-aside for the fixed gear fishery in Area 1A until November 1, after which the remaining set-aside is made available to all Area 1A gear types. Maine fixed gear fishermen have requested access to the set-aside until the overall total allowable landings limit has been harvested. Draft Amendment 3 also includes a proposal to establish a requirement for fish holds to be empty of fish prior to trip departures. Members of industry initiated the empty fish hold provision because it would prevent mixing of catch from multiple trips, which can improve accounting of catch and bycatch. In addition, the provision could encourage less wasteful fishing practices by creating an incentive to catch amounts of herring as demanded by markets.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, and possibly the states of Rhode Island through New Jersey, will be conducting public hearings on the Draft Amendment this spring and summer. Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the Draft Amendment either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. The Draft Amendment will be available on the Commission website, www.asmfc.org, on the Public Input page no later than May 15th. A subsequent press release will announce the details of the scheduled hearings as well as the deadline for the submission of public comment, which will be 14 days following the last public hearing. For more information, please contact, Toni Kerns, ISFMP Director, at tkerns@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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