

BACKGROUNDER

Wild fisheries in United States territorial waters are governed by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, commonly referred to as the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). The MSA contains strict requirements for conservation and sustainability that essentially mandates no fish stock be subjected to overfishing. The overfishing limit is a strictly defined level of fishing that is not only precautionary, but it is a level that allows fish stocks to rebuild to the maximum sustainable yield level over time.

In 1996, federal lawmakers adopted the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) as a substantial amendment to the MSA, which is perhaps the most aggressive conservation law currently in place in the world. Essentially, the SFA requires all fish stocks be evaluated for their status relative to what is believed to be the fully rebuilt potential. If a stock is believed to be below 50 percent of the rebuilt goal, fishery managers are required to initiate a rebuilding plan that reduces fishing mortality to a level that will allow the stock to be fully rebuilt in 10 years or less.

Key stocks that this industry depends upon were on target to rebuild in 2014. The upcoming years were supposed to be a time of prosperity. Instead, we’ve seen reduction after reduction on critical groundfish stocks across the board. For Fishing year 2013, which will begin on May 1, 2013, the groundfish industry will see reductions of up to 78 percent. The following reductions are scheduled to come into play May 1 in order to meet rebuilding requirements and end “overfishing”:

Stock	2012 Sector ACL (mt)	2013 Sector ACL (mt)	Change, 2012 to 2013 Sector ACL (mt)
Georges Bank cod East	159	94	-41%
Georges Bank cod West	4,524	1,681	-63%
Gulf of Maine cod	3,619	814	-78%
Georges Bank haddock East	6,861	3,941	-43%
Georges Bank haddock West	27,363	22,183	-19%
Gulf of Maine haddock	648	279	-57%
Georges Bank yellowtail flounder	364	266	-27%
Southern New England yellowtail flounder	607	455	-25%
Gulf of Maine/Cape Cod yellowtail flounder	1021	467	-54%
American plaice (dabs)	3,223	1,396	-57%
Witch flounder (Gray Sole)	1,426	601	-58%

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The economic impacts of the annual catch limits being proposed for May 1 will be devastating. The reductions will have life-altering impacts for all small businesses dependent on the groundfish fishery—from fishing entities and shore-side businesses to restaurants and grocery stores that depend on fresh, local seafood products. American seafood consumers will feel the effects too. Every day, we hear from our fishing entity and shore-side business membership that they don't know if they're going to survive the cuts.

The small fishing businesses directly facing these reductions, who have managed to survive until today, have complied with an overwhelming array of stringent scientific and management requirements. Since rebuilding plans were implemented in 2004, these businesses have succeeded in fishing within exceedingly precautionary management total allowable catches for an array of interrelated stocks in a dynamic ecosystem. These businesses have also transitioned to a complex hard-TAC catch share system in an almost unthinkable timeframe needed to meet statutory deadlines. They've followed the rules.

Today, this industry is in turmoil. We're frustrated. Every day, the Northeast Seafood Coalition works on the front lines fighting for the future of all segments of this industry. Alongside us, we see first-hand a long list of House and Senate Members throughout the region stepping-up to take or make opportunities to press this agenda on many fronts.

We're calling upon fishermen, shore-side businesses, groundfish industry leaders, elected officials and friends of the industry to come together at the Boston Fish Pier and educate the general public and officials about the critical state of the groundfish fishery and our need for help, and to gain support from all stakeholders.

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