



December 2, 2014

John Bullard
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Re: Comments on the Proposed Rule for Groundfish Framework Adjustment 52

Dear John,

The following are brief comments submitted on behalf of the Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC) on the measures proposed under Framework 52.

This Framework action was initiated by the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) last February in direct response to the alarms expressed by industry following the news that both the Northern windowpane and Southern windowpane flounder accountability measures (AM) had been triggered. It was clear that catch data available to individual groundfish sectors was either not being reported at the sector level or was not being adequately monitored by the sectors for these unallocated stocks to facilitate proactive quota management by the industry. It was also apparent that with both windowpane flounder stocks being caught at high CPUE while they have no commercial value was indicative of stocks whose biomass levels were being underestimated.

Framework 47 projected the Northern windowpane flounder large AM area would result in nearly 15 million dollars in economic impacts with nearly 12 million to New Bedford alone. These figures resonated with the Agency and the Council and contributed to the need for an immediate response.

The Southern windowpane large AM area triggered alarm from our SNE membership who forecasted impacts unforeseen in the earlier analysis. Not only would this AM cost them access to the newly allocated and essential SNE winter flounder stock and SNE yellowtail flounder stock, but they testified that the AM would cause effort to shift to areas of low CPUE on allocated stocks and high CPUE on windowpane. Again such impacts were being driven by a stock with no commercial value as well as a stock in that is reportedly rebuilt.

Although NSC is appreciative of the very act of initiating Framework 52 and supportive of the measures that admittedly do offer improvements, we would be remiss not to mention that the improvements are modest for Southern windowpane flounder and near zero for Northern windowpane flounder.

No relief is in sight because Framework 53 was overcome by GOM cod hysteria and spawning protection initiatives yet Framework 53 was supposed to address the windowpane measures where this current action, Framework 52, had fallen short.

A core objective articulated by NSC for Framework 52 and Framework 53 has been to address the serious inequity that exists in the absence of a Northern windowpane flounder sub-ACL for the scallop fishery so that groundfish fishermen are accountable to their own ACL and minor subcomponents. A fishery that accounts for substantial sources of mortality needs to have a sub-ACL and AM otherwise

the system is not only inequitable but it instills a sense of futility. The Agency and the Council must deal with this issue straight on.

NSC recognizes the futility of implementing AMs that are triggered by ACLs that are the result of underestimated stock sizes. For this reason we support and encourage the Northeast Fishery Science Center's efforts to improve the methods for assessing low value, non-commercial stocks. We have to start there. Once the ACLs are based upon reality the NSC is confident that both the groundfish and scallop industries are capable of managing incidental catch quotas within our respective sub-ACLs.

In general we are supportive of the measures in Framework 52 that will serve to allow early removal of AMs, changes from large to small AM areas and index based improvements for the rebuilt Southern windowpane flounder stock that can contribute to widening the gap between catch and AM triggers.

NSC appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this action and we look forward to the continued pursuit of improvements through subsequent regulatory actions.

Sincerely,



Jackie Odell
Executive Director
Northeast Seafood Coalition

Cc: Elizabeth Etrie, Program Director, Northeast Sector Service Network
Christopher Brown, President, V Northeast Fishery Sector
Tom Williams Sr., President, XIII Northeast Fishery Sector
Carlos Rafael, President, IX Northeast Fishery Sector
William McCann, President, VII Northeast Fishery Sector
Felicio Lourenzo, President, VIII Northeast Fishery Sector