

# Fish Regulators Put Off Vote On Cuts In NE

JAY LINDSAY, Associated Press

WAKEFIELD, Mass. (AP) — Fishing regulators on Thursday delayed voting on huge cuts to the catch of New England fishermen after repeated and emotional warnings that the reductions would finish off the flailing industry.

The New England Fishery Management Council voted 15-2 to put off deciding on new catch limits for various bottom-dwelling groundfish species until their next meeting, scheduled for the end of January.

Fishery scientists say some species are recovering far too slowly, meaning drastic cuts in catch are needed to meet the law's mandates to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks.

The possible cuts in catch included 74 percent for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder and up to 90 percent for Gulf of Maine cod, compared to what fishermen landed in 2011.

Before the vote, fishermen criticized fishery science they say vastly underestimated the health of fish stocks and repeatedly told the council the possible cuts would obliterate the remnants of the centuries-old industry. Scituate fishermen Frank Mirarchi, a 50-year veteran, told the council they might be looking at "the end of an era" when cuts go into effect at the May 1 start of the fishing year.

"Fishermen have fished from the ports represented by our sectors for 350-plus years continuously," he said. "These are all family-owned and operated businesses that basically, once out of the fishery, will never return."

Gloucester fisherman Mark Carroll said he'd nearly lost everything struggling under onerous fishery penalties and restrictions.

"I say if you're going to take 1 damn percent (more), shut the whole damn thing down!" he yelled, shortly before storming away from the microphone to applause and shouts of support. "I'm dead here, you're kicking my ... teeth out!"

The decision to delay voting on the cuts came after the head of the council, Rip Cunningham, killed a measure that could have eased them, saying it wouldn't meet federal requirements to stop overfishing and rebuild stocks. That proposal set 2013 catch limits for each of the troubled species at 10 percent below their projected 2012 catch.

Council member John Quinn argued a delay made sense with so much uncertainty about the science.

"Some may call it avoiding a tough decision," he said. "I call it making sure we have

## **Fish Regulators Put Off Vote On Cuts In NE**

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

---

every last piece of data and every last opportunity to make this decision that's going to potentially have some cataclysmic impacts on families and regions."

After the vote, Peter Shelley of the Conservation Law Foundation said the council had blown a chance to set catch limits to protect the fishery's long term health

"Instead, the council kicked the can down the road," he said.

New Bedford fisherman Mark Phillips said the industry is so distrustful of fishery science, it's unlikely to support whatever measures are proposed in a month. "It just prolongs the agony," he said.

But Carlos Rafael, who owns a fleet of groundfish boats in New Bedford, said he's "100 percent" behind the delay because so much is at stake. "You've got to make sure you did everything you could in your powers to make sure the right decision is coming down," he said.

Also Thursday, the council agreed to let groundfishermen ask federal regulators for permission to work inside parts of five areas off the New England coast that have long been closed to them.

The areas were closed starting in the 1990s to protect fish spawning and nursery grounds. Some argued they should remain off limits to protect what could be the final refuges for some species. But fishermen said their access would be limited and the struggling industry badly needs it, so it can better catch the healthy stocks believed to be inside, such as pollock and redfish.

The Northeast's top federal regulator, John Bullard, has expressed strong support for allowing the access, though he says there needs to be protection for weak fish stocks and fish habitat.

**Source URL (retrieved on 01/25/2015 - 9:20am):**

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2012/12/fish-regulators-put-vote-cuts-ne>