

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[I.D. 082898C]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Hearings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a series of public hearings to solicit comments on proposals to be included in Amendment 11 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This amendment contains measures that address the management of silver hake (whiting), offshore hake, and red hake.

DATES: Written comments on the proposals will be accepted through October 25, 1998. The public hearings are scheduled to be held September 21 through October 2, 1998. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: To obtain copies of the public hearing document or to submit comments, contact Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 5 Broadway, Saugus, MA 01906-1097. Identify correspondence as "Comments on Whiting Management."

The hearings will be held in Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for locations of the hearings. Requests for special accommodations should be addressed to the New England Fishery Management Council, 5 Broadway, Saugus, MA 01906-1097; telephone: (781) 231-0422.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, (781) 231-0422.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council proposes to take action to address overfishing of silver hake and red hake, and to provide basic protection for offshore hake, all of which address the new and revised requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996. The Council will consider comments from fishermen, interested parties, and the general public on the proposals and alternatives described in the public hearing document for Amendment 11 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. Once it has considered public comments, the Council will approve final management measures and prepare a submission package for NMFS. There will be an additional opportunity for public comment when the proposed rule for this action is published in the **Federal Register**.

Major elements of the proposals in this public hearing document include: (1) Management options containing minimum mesh requirements and whiting/offshore hake possession limits; (2) the inclusion of offshore hake in the multispecies management unit; (3) new or revised overfishing definitions for two stocks of silver hake, two stocks of red hake, and offshore hake; (4) specification of optimum yield (OY) for the fishery; (5) whiting stock definitions for management purposes; (6) a moratorium on commercial permits to fish for whiting, offshore hake, and red hake; (7) an open access bycatch allowance permit; (8) modifications to the Cultivator Shoal Whiting Fishery season and restrictions; (9) delineation of eastern and western zones in the southern management area; (10) restrictions on the transfer of whiting, offshore hake, and red hake at sea; (11) specification of essential fish habitat for offshore hake; (12) additional framework adjustment specifications; (13) development of a monitoring and adjustment mechanism for this plan; and (14) additional measures which the Council may consider implementing at a future date. The Council will consider

all comments received on these proposals until the end of the comment period on October 25, 1998.

Public Hearings

The dates, times, locations, and telephone numbers of the hearings are as follows:

1. Monday, September 21, 1998, 6 p.m.—Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland, ME 04101. telephone (207) 775-2311;
2. Tuesday, September 22, 1998, 6 p.m.—Provincetown Town Hall, 260 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657, telephone (508) 487-7013;
3. Wednesday, September 23, 1998, 6 p.m. (following adjournment of the Council meeting)—Tavern on the Harbor, 30 Western Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930, telephone (978) 283-4200;
4. Monday, September 28, 1998, 7:30 p.m.—Holiday Inn, 290 State Highway 37 East, Tom's River, NJ 08753, telephone (732) 244-4000;
5. Tuesday, September 29, 1998, 7:30 p.m.—Ramada Inn, 1830 Route 25, Riverhead, NY 11901, telephone (516) 369-2200;
6. Wednesday, September 30, 1998, 4 p.m.—Narragansett Town Hall, Fifth Avenue, Narragansett, RI 02882, telephone (401) 789-1044; and
7. Friday, October 2, 1998, 5 p.m.—Virginia Marine Resources Commission, 2600 Washington Avenue, Fourth Floor, Newport News, Virginia 23607, telephone (757) 247-2200.

Special Accommodations

These hearings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Paul J. Howard (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 days prior to the meeting dates.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: September 2, 1998.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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