



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

5724 N. Route 9, New Gretna, NJ 08224

P: 888-564-6732 F: 609-294-3812

For Immediate Release
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

June 28, 2010
888 564-6732

NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL REAFFIRMS PARTY/CHARTER CONTROL DATE First Step Towards Limited Access Protections For Longtime Recreational Stakeholders

(6/25/2010) *Portland, ME:* In an unexpected action on June 23, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) voted 10-6-1 to reaffirm the control date for the region's party and charter boat fleet, originally set at March 30th, 2006. The control date, which was requested by the Council's Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) after lengthy discussion and public input beginning in 2005, was intended to be the first step towards the development of a limited entry program to protect historical participants in the Gulf of Maine's party and charter fleet who target groundfish, primarily cod.

"The regulations on cod and haddock at the time – as they are now -- were about the maximum the for-hire fleet could absorb and still stay in business," said Capt. Barry Gibson, New England Regional Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) and chairman of the RAP. "More and more people, especially ex-commercial fishermen who were getting squeezed out of their sector, were entering the party and charter businesses. The concern was that effort and catches would increase to the point where bag and size limits, along with other measures, would become so restrictive that customers would no longer see the benefit in going out for a day's fishing. The whole idea of the limited access program was to keep the party and charter fleet at a size where there would be enough fish to go around."

Due to other priorities, the NEFMC was unable to develop the limited access program, despite repeated requests from the RAP and individual for-hire operators. Finally, after a written request from the RAP in May of 2010, the Council agreed to put the subject on the agenda for its June meeting in Portland.

"The biggest issue was a perception by some Council members that the control date was 'stale' since it was over 4 years old, and that it should be re-set to 2010," explained Gibson. "Others, particularly commercial fishermen, felt it should simply be rescinded, as they are opposed to limited entry in the party/charter fleet altogether. Capt. Tom Depersia of the Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association and I testified strongly for the need to reaffirm the original date."

After an intense period of debate, the reaffirmation of March 30, 2006 as the control date was voted up. "This was a real victory for the historical participants in New England's party and charter groundfish sector," said RFA's Gibson. "They deserve a measure of protection against effort and catch increases that could result in regulations that put them – and everyone else -- out of business."

"The next step is for the RAP and the Council to develop a fair and equitable limited access program that will keep as many party and charter boats as possible on the water and viable," concluded Gibson. "We're hopeful that process will begin this fall."

#####

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.