

International Commission for



the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries

Serial No. 3861
(A.a.4)

ICNAF Comm.Doc. 76/VI/28

ANNUAL MEETING - JUNE 1976

Note by US Commissioners on fishing gear regulations in Subarea 5 and Statistical Area 6

The US Commissioners recognize and appreciate the steps taken to date by the Commission to halt the continuing decline of groundfish stocks, particularly haddock and yellowtail flounder off the US New England and Mid-Atlantic Coast. On numerous occasions the United States has expressed its concern that reliance only on quota regulations and incidental catch restrictions is not sufficient to adequately reduce fishing mortality on depleted groundfish stocks (see ICNAF Comm.Doc. 74/29, 74/38, 74/39, 75/30, and 75/IX/47). In light of continuing declines in these stocks, the Commission has responded with a series of regulations restricting areas of known groundfish concentrations to gear and fishing methods incapable of catching demersal species. At the Third Special Commission Meeting in October 1973 the Commission approved a gear regulatory area off Cape Cod as a supplement to the 3-year two-tiered quota system also approved at that time. In view of the particularly severe condition of groundfish stocks in the area south of this zone the Commission approved at its 1974 Annual Meeting some of the improvements in this regulation proposed by the United States, incorporating an extension of the area southward off the coast of New Jersey. At the Fifth Special Meeting in November 1974 it was agreed to extend the closure from 6 months to the entire year coupled, however, with a decision to reduce the southernmost portion of the area involved. Finally, in response to the need to minimize by-catches of severely depleted haddock and flounder stocks in the Georges Bank area, the Commission approved an identical year-round gear closure in this area at the Seventh Special Meeting in September 1975, though again smaller in size than that proposed on earlier occasions by the United States.

It is the view of the US Commissioners that the Commission must again examine these regulations and consider further adjustments in order to meet the continuing conservation needs of these stocks.

The US Commissioners continue to view with concern the declining trends observed by the Assessments Subcommittee in the Southern New England stocks of yellowtail and other flounders, and the drastic reductions observed in groundfish stocks in the Georges Bank area. In addition, surveillance reports have indicated substantial fishing with bottom-tending gear in close proximity to existing closure lines off the Cape Cod and New Jersey coasts and those approved for Georges Bank at the Special Montreal Meeting. Such a situation is viewed as particularly serious since these areas include those of high groundfish concentrations which the United States on several occasions sought to include in both gear areas. While some Contracting Governments have developed selective fishing gear and strategy as a means of minimizing incidental catches, others have not done so, and examinations of catches by US inspection officials conducted under the Scheme of Joint International Enforcement continue to confirm high by-catch rates in these areas. Such circumstances cast additional doubts on the likelihood of a timely return of demersal species productivity to former levels within these areas, and have prompted the United States to re-assess the adequacy of existing closure lines for both gear Areas I (Cape Cod-New Jersey) and II (Georges Bank).

Accordingly, the US Commissioners request that further consideration of gear regulations for Subarea 5 and Statistical Area 6 be placed on the Plenary Agenda for consideration and action by the Commission at the 1976 Annual Meeting. At that time, the United States will propose for approval by the Commission (1) modifications in Gear Area I as adopted by the Commission on 31 December 1974 in order to include additional areas of concentrations of demersal species to the east and south, and (2) modifications in Gear Area II as adopted by the Commission on 28 September 1975, in order to provide additional protection for groundfish stocks in the Georges Bank area.