

# FishNet USA

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Providing another perspective on fisheries issues....

## Is it really about saving the fish?

At this point, thanks to a successful PR campaign by anti-fishing interests, anyone with a superficial knowledge of the New England groundfish fishery who lacks either the resources or the curiosity to find out what's really going on has been convinced that stringent cutbacks inflicted on commercial and recreational fishermen today will lead to an overabundance of fish tomorrow.

New England fishermen and fisheries managers rightly see the survival of the many New England fishing businesses as being as important as the survival of the fish. The standard litany of the groups and individuals – the so-called “conservationists” - aligned against them is that cutbacks in fishing effort today will yield tremendous returns to those same businesses, communities, fishermen and their families tomorrow. In the often repeated words of Pew Charitable Trusts funded Oceana lawyer Eric Bilsky, “The short-term squeeze is worth getting three times more catch in the long term,” (Every day you're open and there's no fish, you're hemorrhaging cash, Portsmouth Herald, 05/07/02). Of course, Mr. Bilsky's and the rest of the anti-fishing clique's position ignores the impact that the irrevocable damage to hundreds of New England businesses, dozens of New England communities, thousands of New Englanders, and a centuries-old way of life will have on the possible rebuilding of the New England fishing industry, but will it eventually return two or three times more fish to the fishermen that remain?

Their brand of fisheries management (or more accurately, of media manipulation) might sell in the Mary Poppins inspired world of foundation—funded NGOs where tens of millions of oil-generated dollars may be had, it appears, simply for the asking<sup>2</sup>. In the real world that the rest of us inhabit, confronted by realities like rampant coastal development, the onslaught of imported seafood products and the necessity of actually having to work productively for a paycheck, Mr. Bilsky's “spoonful of sugar” is more likely to choke the patient than to help him swallow the medicine. As can be made crystal clear by a quick examination of readily available government data, that “medicine” is more akin to a placebo than to anything that will improve the fisheries more significantly than less stringent measures. And, if adopted, those less stringent measures would allow much of the fabric of New England's fishing communities to remain intact.

Projected percentage change in groundfish landings relative to the “No Action” alternative

Year	F-Rebuild	Phased F	Adaptive
2004	-30%	-16%	-19%
2005	-31%	-23%	-20%
2006	-30%	-26%	-17%
2007	-28%	-26%	-14%
2008	-26%	-26%	-12%
2009	-22%	-20%	-15%
2010	6%	4%	-12%
2011	6%	5%	-7%
2012	5%	2%	-6%
2013	5%	2%	-3%
2014	5%	4%	-1%
2015	10%	6%	12%
2016	9%	6%	11%
2017	9%	5%	11%
2018	9%	5%	10%
2019	9%	6%	10%
2020	9%	4%	10%
2021	10%	3%	10%
2022	10%	4%	10%
2023	10%	5%	11%
2024	11%	7%	11%
2025	11%	7%	11%
2026	11%	8%	11%
Total	1%	-1%	2%

In the three alternatives the cutbacks in the first 6 to 11 years will force landings lower than they would be with the “no action” alternative. By year 2026 one alternative would yield a decrease of 1% in cumulative landings, the others increases of 1 or 2 percent.

<sup>1</sup> See the FishNet issue “Of Blood and Turnips” at <http://www.fishingnj.org/netusa20.htm> and visit Barbara Stevenson's website at <http://www.bdssr.com>.

<sup>2</sup> In 2000, 2001 and 2002 Oceana received \$4,032,000, \$5,035,000 and \$4,500,000 respectively from the Pew Charitable Trusts ( See [http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search\\_item.cfm?grant\\_id=4488](http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search_item.cfm?grant_id=4488), [http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search\\_item.cfm?grant\\_id=4854](http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search_item.cfm?grant_id=4854), and [http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search\\_item.cfm?grant\\_id=5159](http://www.pewtrusts.com/search/search_item.cfm?grant_id=5159))

By way of background . . .

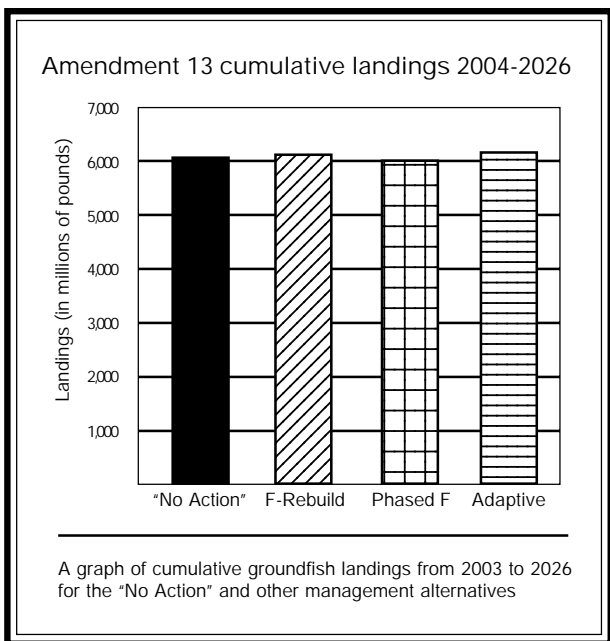
Thanks to a series of amendments to the fishery management plan that controls recreational and commercial fishing of New England's groundfish (actually the Northeast Multispecies [Groundfish] Fishery Management Plan) most of those stocks are and have been on their way to recovery for several years.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this recovery wasn't rapid enough nor apparently the damage to New England's fishing communities severe enough for the "conservation" community. So some of its members filed suit in federal court to help things along. Oceana, a new group self-described as "a nonprofit international advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the world's oceans" and established with at least \$13 million from the "charitable" trusts established by the family of the founder of Sun Oil,<sup>3</sup> joined in.

In April of 2002 U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler held that an amendment to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan had to be promulgated by August 22, 2003 that "complies with the overfishing, rebuilding and bycatch provisions of the SFA (Sustainable Fishing Act)."

The various alternative amendments to the FMP now under consideration are a result of Judge Kessler's decision. The "benefits" from the Court mandated rigid imposition of the SFA provision

In the materials prepared by the staff of the New England Fishery Management Council in support of Amendment 13 we find:

The difference in present value between the No Action Alternative and rebuilding (any strategy) is less than \$300 million over 23 years. Mean total landings for the regulated groundfish species, projected to be about 127 million lbs in 2003, were projected to be 289 million lb. in 2026 (when all stocks are rebuilt) for the "No Action" alternative as compared to 327 and 310 million lb. for the constant mortality and phased reduction rebuilding strategies, respectively. Nominal revenues under no action are expect to increase to \$344 million in 2026, but will increase to \$355 million under the phased reduction strategy and \$375 million under the constant mortality or adaptive strategies. Net benefits would increase to \$280 million under no action, but would increase to between \$310 and \$327 million under any rebuilding strategy<sup>3</sup>. (Note that the "No Action Alternative" is actually the continuation of the stringent management measures that have been in place and working in the groundfish fishery for several years.)



Each of the alternative groundfish management regimes will result in a "return" of less than \$300 million over 23 years above and beyond what would be realized by just maintaining the management program that is now in place. That's an average benefit of only \$13 million a year for each of the next 23 years.

Of the three alternative strategies, two are expected to "yield positive economic benefits" by 2018 and one by 2021.

Total groundfish landings by 2026 will be a maximum of 13% - certainly not the 300% projected by Mr. Bilsky - greater with the most stringent management measures being forced by Judge Kessler's decision than they would be with the continuation of the existing management program (the alternative somewhat misleadingly labeled "No Action" in the proposed amendment and supporting materials). The rigorous requirements of the management program that is now in place have already demonstrated they will rebuild the groundfish stocks while allowing New England's fishing communities to remain at least somewhat intact

and fishing and support businesses - at least some of them - to remain economically viable. They just won't rebuild them as rapidly as Mr. Bilsky et al have decided they should be rebuilt<sup>4</sup>.

### And the costs

And what do the New England economy, New England's fishing businesses and New England's fishing communities pay for this accelerated increase? The various alternative regimes would cost fishing and related/dependent busi-

<sup>3</sup> Northeast Multispecies Draft Amendment 13, I-xvi

nesses in the New England states from \$94 million to \$217 million in lost sales, \$38 million to \$88 million in lost personal income and from 1300 to 3000 lost jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, the cutbacks proposed in any of the alternatives would force additional numbers of waterfront businesses into bankruptcy. These businesses, including those providing vessel and crew support and fish processing, handling and marketing services, are all necessary to viable commercial fishing communities. The idea that those businesses will reappear after eight or ten or more years, when stocks have “rebuilt” to adequate levels, represents wishful thinking (or purposeful misdirection) of the most egregious sort. Considering waterfront development pressures in virtually every coastal community from New Jersey to Maine, what was a packing house or a chandlery today will be another tee shirt shop or condominium development next week. And that’s a development trend that’s only going in one direction.

(It’s important to note here what appears to be a significant fault in the economic analyses of the proposed alternatives. In each the assumption is made that the “complexion” of the groundfish industry will remain the same; that is, a fleet of vessels of various sizes will continue to supply primarily fresh products to a large number of New England ports and command a fairly high price per pound. When, however, the cutbacks force many vessels out of business, there is going to be a significant level of consolidation, both in harvesting and in on-shore activities. This could lead to a fleet composed of a much smaller number of larger vessels, some or all of which would be doing on-board processing and freezing. Were that the case, the overall revenues generated per pound of fish landed could be reduced significantly below that for equivalent production levels supplying the fresh market. It doesn’t appear as if this scenario was considered in the economic impact analyses.)

And all of this for some predicted economic benefits that won’t begin to accrue until 2018 or 2021 and will have a probably negligible -and statistically insignificant - impact on annual and cumulative landings once the “break even” point is reached.

Given a careful examination of the statistics underlying the alternative management measures offered in Amendment 13, it’s impossible to see how such minor potential benefits so far in the future can offset what everyone agrees will be immediate and significant pain spread throughout New England’s coastal communities and beyond. Yet the anti-fishing groups, still standing behind claims of immense future benefits, continue, and continue to expand, their well-financed campaign to punish the commercial fishing industry. The data provided in support of Amendment 13 shows that they’re not going to be helping the fish and they’re definitely not going to be helping the fishermen. That being the case, the questions need to be asked: who are they doing it for and why are they doing it?

Annual groundfish landings (in pounds) for “No Action” and other Amendment 13 Alternatives

	No Action	F-Rebuild	Phased F	Adaptive
2003	127,804,289	136,122,934	136,016,419	136,107,358
2004	171,357,040	120,783,934	143,581,433	139,108,546
2005	194,340,342	133,286,969	149,266,262	156,083,764
2006	212,107,481	147,960,545	157,666,202	175,898,965
2007	225,025,685	162,081,824	167,207,764	193,457,853
2008	237,947,702	175,725,247	175,911,042	209,612,463
2009	242,300,813	188,742,778	194,337,866	205,554,960
2010	249,212,086	264,344,897	259,349,802	219,187,800
2011	247,846,760	261,562,918	260,401,626	231,487,370
2012	258,184,021	269,992,449	262,465,170	243,009,582
2013	262,057,974	273,992,704	267,879,269	253,552,639
2014	265,465,591	279,174,949	275,964,679	263,118,177
2015	268,850,613	294,926,671	286,244,837	301,954,127
2016	272,056,805	297,310,203	288,700,132	302,574,913
2017	274,974,226	300,109,840	288,368,560	303,878,564
2018	277,409,640	302,725,153	291,908,857	305,696,991
2019	280,043,836	305,663,323	295,498,105	307,932,161
2020	281,677,263	308,349,134	294,143,640	310,146,927
2021	283,731,290	310,989,626	293,186,731	312,482,020
2022	285,073,016	313,182,799	297,000,077	314,647,981
2023	286,248,624	315,356,458	300,552,886	316,739,394
2024	287,450,500	319,393,177	306,227,377	318,575,116
2025	288,361,400	320,743,054	308,998,417	320,237,697
2026	289,315,950	321,848,493	311,309,289	321,652,892
Total	6,068,842,947	6,124,370,079	6,012,186,442	6,162,698,260
Difference		+55,527,132	(-56,656,505)	+93,855,314

Note that in the 3 alternative measures being projected total landings will not exceed those of the “no action” alternative until 2010 at the earliest. Also note that there is at best less than a 2% difference in the cumulative landings between the “no action” alternative and the others.

<sup>4</sup> While the so-called “conservationists” will argue that they have only intervened in groundfish management because the Secretary of Commerce wasn’t effectively implementing the provisions of the Sustainable Fisheries Act, they were in fact responsible (with the concurrence of a very few token fishing organizations) for those rigid provisions.

<sup>5</sup> Northeast Multispecies Draft Amendment 13, I-666

More information on this and other fisheries issues is available on the NJ Fishing website at <http://www.fishingnj.org>.

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