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### **NOAA's Fisheries Service Raises Butterfish Catch to Help Prevent Premature Closure of Squid Fishery**

A new emergency increase to the butterfish fishing limit will enable squid fishermen off the northeast, who often catch butterfish unintentionally while fishing for squid, to continue working, while still protecting the butterfish stock.

NOAA's Fisheries Service today put in place the emergency measures, which would increase the butterfish catch by 17 percent to almost 4 million pounds for the 2011 fishing year, an increase of about 686,000 pounds. The increase is effective immediately. The fishery is based off New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

The majority of butterfish are caught incidentally in the *Loligo* squid fishery during the first part of the fishing year from January to April, which played a part in NOAA's swift action. The entire increase will be allocated to squid fishermen to help prevent closing the fishery prematurely due to the unintended bycatch of butterfish before the squid allocation is caught. NOAA's Fisheries Service recently implemented a cap on the amount of butterfish that can be caught in the *Loligo* squid fishery.

"We're taking swift action to raise fishing limits and to address the economic challenges faced by fishermen," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Working with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the fishing industry we are taking advantage of the flexibility in the Magnuson-Stevens Act to allow more fishing while still continuing programs to rebuild fish stocks for the long-term benefits they provide."

The butterfish increase was recommended to NOAA by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee based on scientific surveys and catch information. NOAA used its emergency rule authority to take this action.

Commercial landings of butterfish are minimal; most are discarded, with the remainder sold in U.S. fish markets and exported to Japan and other countries. The *Loligo* squid fishery is an important fishery for the Atlantic coast, bringing in 20 million pounds in 2009 with a dockside value to fishermen of \$18.3 million. Squid is sold domestically and exported.

Butterfish catches in fishery survey data from 2002-2008 appear relatively stable. However, there has been a long-term decline in the abundance of the butterfish stock, resulting in some uncertainty about its overall condition. Based on the 2010 survey and recent landings data, the council recommended that a modest increase in the 2011 catch level was warranted.

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