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**Negotiations with Canada Set Stage for Significant Increase
in U.S. Yellowtail Flounder Quota on Georges Bank**
More time to rebuild fish stock while still preventing overfishing

Legislation recently signed by President Obama has paved the way for NOAA to move ahead to increase the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder quota for U.S. commercial fishermen in 2011. The quota will be increased to 2.5 million pounds, an 18 percent increase over 2010 levels and a 44 percent increase over the quota that fishermen originally expected to receive for the 2011 fishing year.

“Rebuilding economically valuable fisheries goes hand-in-hand with protecting fishing jobs and supporting coastal communities,” Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke said. “So we made reaching this agreement a priority, because it will allow us to increase the catch limits for valuable groundfish stocks and help fishermen.”

The legislation that enabled today’s agreement was signed by President Obama on January 4 and initiated by U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine, U.S. Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts, and members of the New England congressional delegation. It allows NOAA to extend the rebuilding timeframe for the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder stock. This is one of several shared groundfish stocks that are jointly managed by the United States and Canada through an international understanding. With more time to rebuild, NOAA will be able to increase the amount of fish available to the fishing industry each year, and still prevent overfishing so that the stocks rebuild.

“This is another instance of our continuing effort to use whatever flexibility is available to us to protect fishing jobs and the long-term vitality of local fishing communities as we continue rebuilding the valuable groundfish stocks in the Northeast,” said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “We are making meaningful progress in this effort, due in large part to the continued hard work and sacrifice of groundfish fishermen.”

As a first step, NOAA and members of the New England Fishery Management Council, which includes representation from states, fishing organizations and non-governmental organizations, met with Canadian fishery managers today to revisit the 2011 Georges Bank yellowtail catch limit for U.S. and Canadian fishermen. With bilateral support for the increase in the U.S. catch level, NOAA can now work quickly to modify current U.S. regulations to adjust the catch limits, which were previously set for 2011.

“A lot of people worked hard to provide flexibility in the U.S. legislation, which made this meeting possible,” said Rip Cunningham, chair of the U.S. negotiating team, who was one of four fishermen involved in the discussions with Canada today. “This is good news for U.S. fishermen and will allow for increased catches of Georges Bank yellowtail and other species, like winter flounder and haddock which are caught in the same area.”

Separately, as part of the planned stock rebuilding effort, NOAA has also approved measures to increase catch limits for 11 other groundfish stocks when the new fishing year begins on May 1. The largest increases will be for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail

flounder, which will be over one million pounds, up from around 683 thousand pounds (69 percent increase); witch flounder, which will increase to more than 2.7 million pounds from about 1.9 million pounds (45 percent increase); and Southern New England winter flounder, which will increase to 1.6 million pounds from about 1.1 million pounds (40 percent increase). These three stocks, and some of the others, required lower catch limits in 2010 to ensure enough fish reproduced to continue rebuilding and meet requirements under the law.

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