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Inspector General Finds NOAA Provides Best Available Science for New England Groundfish, but Recommends Improving Communication with Fishing Industry

NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Mass. advises fishery managers with the best available science to set catch limits in the groundfish fishery, according to a recently released report by the Department of Commerce Office of the Inspector General.

While calling the science sound, the report also recommends NOAA take specific steps to improve communication of its research results and to strengthen its relationship with members of the New England commercial fishing industry.

"We are pleased the Inspector General found the overall quality of our science is sound and we welcome the recommendations to improve our communication with the fishing industry," said Dr. Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The New England fishing industry and NOAA's Fisheries Service share common ground in wanting economically healthy fishing communities and a sustainable ecosystem."

Sens. Edward M. Kennedy, John Kerry, Olympia Snowe, and Susan Collins requested that the Department of Commerce Office of the Inspector General investigate the quality of the science used to determine catch limits for New England commercial fisheries.

In the report, the Inspector General said that NOAA should increase the participation of the groundfish industry in management; clarify the mixed-stock exception, which allows overfishing of one stock under certain circumstances to optimize the harvest of another stock caught at the same time; aggressively pursue ecosystem approaches to managing fisheries, and meet all statutory deadlines for Freedom of Information requests.

"NOAA has already taken many of the actions suggested by the Inspector General," said Balsiger, "and we will continue to broaden that effort to develop sustainable and profitable fisheries and fishing communities. We will work to improve communication to build the trust needed to reach this common goal."

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.