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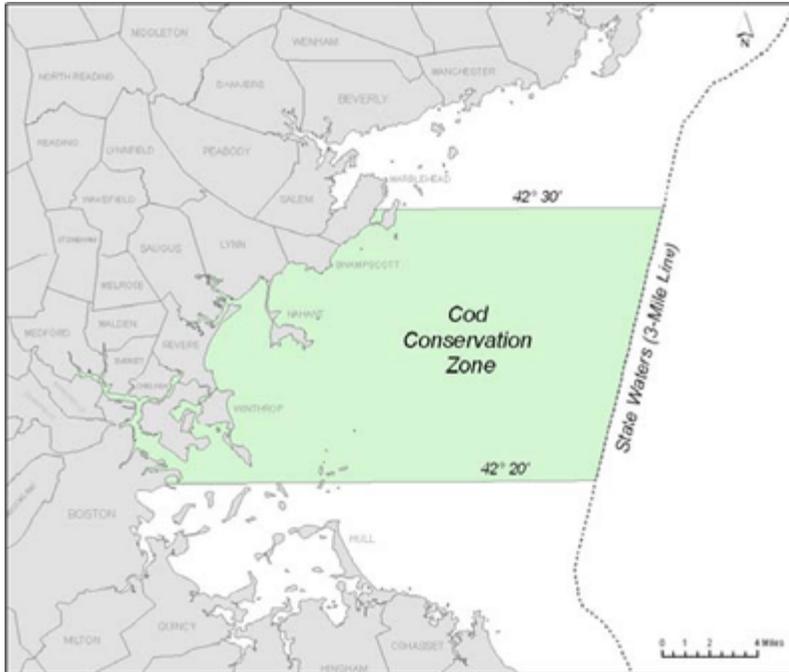
Marine Fisheries Advisory

**MFC APPROVES CONTINUED CCZ CLOSURE & RIVER HERRING
MORATORIUM AS WELL AS BLUE CRAB POSSESSION LIMIT**

On October 2, 2008 the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFC) approved continuation of the 1) Cod Conservation Zone closure and 2) moratorium on directed fishery for river herring. The Commission also acted 3) to implement a 50-blue crab daily possession limit for recreational and commercial harvesters.

1. Cod Conservation Zone (CCZ)

The MFC approved the Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) recommendation to continue for an additional three years prohibitions on cod fishing in the CCZ during December & January (322 CMR 8.15, thereby lifting prior restrictions in place during the month of February).



During the closure period no person shall harvest cod from waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth north of latitude 42° 20' and south of 42° 30' (See map) . It is unlawful for any person to fish, set, or abandon any gear capable of harvesting cod in this CCZ during the restricted season. This prohibition applies to all gillnets, otter trawls, mid-water trawls, seines, and all hook-and-line gears including longlines, rod-and-reel, and handlines, however exempted gears include lobster traps, and drags used for scallops and urchins.

Figure 1. Cod Conservation Zone

2.

3. River Herring Moratorium

The MFC also approved continuing the current moratorium on directed harvest of river herring for another three years, through 2011. The allowed tolerance for bait fisheries (5% by count of any batch) was unchanged.

The proposal and subsequent action to continue the direct fishery moratorium was necessitated by a lack of recovery of river herring runs in the region. There have been some modest increases in annual river herring counts in certain runs. However most runs remain at depressed levels. An additional three years of closure will protect another generation of river herring.

Marine Fisheries stock assessment specialists are studying the status of river herring and the reasons for the past declines. Focus is on predation, by-catch in open water fisheries, poaching, and spawning habitat degradation.

As for the 5% tolerance for bait fisheries, this allowance was intended to ensure that end-users of bait fish (e.g., lobstermen and striped bass fishermen using fresh sea herring) would not be cited should small amounts of river herring be present in their bait supply. Herring trawlers provide much of the bait supply in the state and normally do not sort and cull fish at sea, and instead pump unsorted fish into shoreside plants.

Marine Fisheries is committed to addressing the larger issue of river herring bycatch in other fisheries, working through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and with the New England Fishery Management Council.

4. Blue Crab Possession Limit

MFC approved a new 50-blue crab possession limit for recreational and commercial harvesters. The Commonwealth's southern embayments are the northern end of the blue crab's reproductive range and there is no known commercial fishery due to low and fluctuating abundance and lack of local markets. The traditional harvest has been almost exclusively by non-commercial users using dipnets to catch crabs for personal consumption. This limit seeks to ensure sustainability of the blue crab resource and fisheries and minimize future commercial harvest.

For further information please visit our webpage at: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.