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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
November 6, 2009

### **NOAA Will Not List Atlantic Wolffish as Endangered or Threatened**

NOAA's Fisheries Service today announced that Atlantic wolffish are not currently in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. This is the final decision on a petition received in October 2008 requesting that the species be listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Atlantic wolffish will continue to be classified as a species of concern. Although this does not extend special protections to the fish, NOAA devotes resources to a variety of conservation efforts intended to ensure that species of concern do not become listed under the ESA.

Today's decision is consistent with the findings of both the Atlantic wolffish status review team convened in June, and the 2009 wolffish population assessment completed in July.

The biological review team concluded that Atlantic wolffish in U.S. waters form the southernmost component of a larger population centered off Western Canada. The population is found in a variety of habitats over a large area in which there are few barriers to migration. The team determined that these conditions mitigate risks to Atlantic wolffish existence posed by habitat changes, fishing, predation, disease and other man-made or natural influences.

The team also found that the species faced a moderate risk from overuse and a lack of regulation specifically intended to discourage capture of wolffish.

There is no directed U.S. fishery for Atlantic wolffish. The majority are landed on commercial Northeast groundfishing trips. The New England Fishery Management Council has recently proposed to include Atlantic wolffish in the northeast groundfish management plan and to prohibit possession of them in federally managed commercial or recreational fisheries. Recent studies show that these fish have a relatively high survival rate when released alive after capture.

The 2009 population assessment noted concerns about the number and declining average weights of adult fish. It also showed that unless Atlantic wolffish catches greatly increase and wolffish reproduction fails considerably, the population does not require the protections offered by a listing under the Endangered Species Act in order to persist.

Atlantic wolffish are large, solitary, marine fish that live on the bottom, grow slowly and mature relatively late. They are found throughout continental shelf waters of the North Atlantic from Cape Cod to northern France.

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