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Statement Regarding New Information Showing Continued Decline of Gulf of Maine Cod Stock

As part of our work to monitor conditions of fish stocks across the country, and to ensure we're managing our nation's fisheries in a sustainable fashion, NOAA Fisheries, working with our partners in industry and fishery councils, collects a variety of information to prepare stock assessments to evaluate the health of federally managed fish stocks.

We have prepared a stock assessment update for Gulf of Maine cod, a key fish stock for the Northeast groundfish fishery. Unfortunately the news is not good. The new analysis presents a grim picture for the potential recovery of this iconic fish stock.

The results indicate virtually every indicator of stock condition declined or worsened in 2013.

- Spawning biomass levels are estimated to be at 3 to 4 percent of the biomass target for maximum sustainable yield.
- Fishery resource survey indices and spawning stock biomass are at all-time lows.

Part of the rationale for developing this update was to move forward in our efforts to streamline the way in which we alert fisheries managers to changes in stock conditions or other data collected between full assessments. In addition, we examined the most recent survey data for Gulf of Maine cod, and all major indicators of stock health appear to have deteriorated since the 2012 assessment. Therefore, we generated an assessment. We hope this will be accepted as part of a standardized approach to providing these kinds of timely updates in the future that managers can use in decision-making.

The stock assessment update entailed adding new catch, survey, and age data to our peer-reviewed stock assessment models that were used to complete the 2011 and 2012 full assessments for this stock. The update reflects stock condition through 2013.

We realize that this news is difficult and NOAA Fisheries will work with our partners in the New England Fishery Management Council to discuss next steps, including peer review options of these preliminary results.