

Cod cuts in New England/ Newfoundland Redux??

Written by Administrator

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There has been extensive media coverage recently of the decisions taken by the New England Regional Council to cut the allowable cod catches in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank. The National Post likened it to the cod moratorium imposed in Newfoundland in 1992. That comparison is spurious. The New England Council voted to cut the catch limit for cod in the Gulf of Maine by 77% and on Georges Bank by 66%. John Bullard, the senior NOAA administrator for the area, described it as a slide towards oblivion: "It's midnight and getting darker when it comes to how many cod there are," he said. "There isn't enough cod for people to make a decent living." Fishermen decried the decisions, indicating that it would spell the end of the inshore fishery in that region.

At one time cod was vital to the economy of New England. In the 1700s, a "sacred cod" was bestowed on the State House in Massachusetts, where it hangs to this day as a symbol of the importance of cod fishing to the region. But that is no longer the case. The recent allowable catches have been low compared to the heyday and fishermen have not been catching their limits, a sure sign that the cod stocks were in decline. Some fishermen and environmentalists have said that overfishing was not the only reason for the paucity of cod, with some putting part of the blame on climate change. This aspect of the debate reminds one of the Newfoundland collapse. It is clear that biological productivity is changing as warming Atlantic waters in the south lead to an incursion of species from the south and a change in species assemblages. Normally overfished stocks off New England would rebound more quickly than in the less productive areas to the north. Will that happen again? Time will tell.

TAGS: sustainable, fisheries, fishing, sustain, cod, New England cod cuts, Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, Newfoundland cod, New England Council