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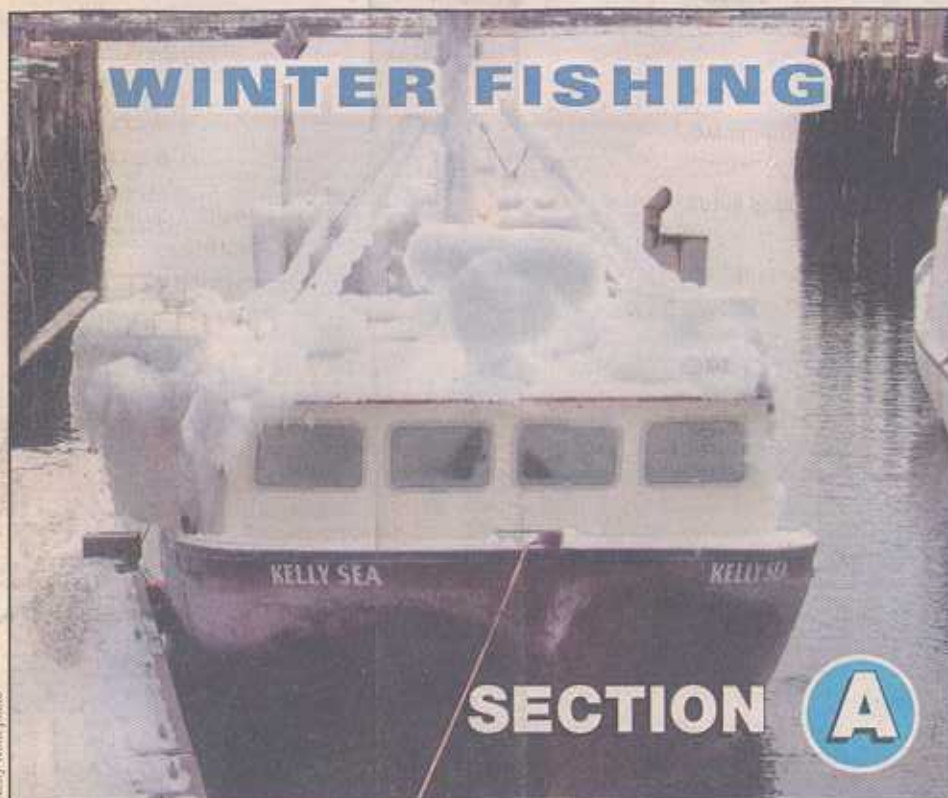
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Industry groundfish proposals move forward

by Janice M. Plante

PORTSMOUTH, NH – Proponents of area management and the strategy known as the “point system” let out a collective sigh of relief after the New England Fishery Management Council voted on Feb. 8 to forward both industry initiatives to the groundfish plan development team (PDT) and groundfish committee for

the recreational fishery.

Regarding the area management package, New Hampshire council member John Nelson said, “I’m comfortable with moving ahead with the second review of this proposal. I think we ought to give it a fair shake and see if the proponents can address its problems.”

About the point system program, Maine council member Dana Rice said

A lot of us told people to think outside the box and now we're trying to stick them back into the box.

—Rodney Avila

proposals in terms of whether or not they could be developed, scrutinized, and implemented by May 1, 2009.

To meet this timeframe, the council intends to pick final alternatives this June and have those options fully developed and ready for public hearings in June 2008. The council is

Bigelow's trawl survey gear impresses industry

PORTSMOUTH, NH – Industry members involved in designing and testing new trawl survey gear for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's soon-to-arrive fishery survey vessel Henry B. Bigelow say they are confident the new net-and-door combination will be far more effective for stock assessment surveys than the old Yankee 36 set-up (see box lower right for specs).

The center's Trawl Survey Advisory Panel – made up of fishermen, net makers, scientists, and gear specialists – spent over three years working on the project, and on Feb. 7, the New England Fishery Management Council voted to formally endorse the gear design.

The Mid-Atlantic council voted in December to give a thumbs-up to the gear design, which was field-tested in 2006 aboard the Darana R, owned by North Carolina fisherman Jimmy Ruhle.

"This gear is incredibly stable," said Ruhle, who chairs the Trawl Survey Advisory Panel and also sits on the Mid-Atlantic council. "I was so amazed at the response we got out of it. I've got a lot of confidence in this gear."

Advisory panel member Rodney Avila, who sits on the New England council, added, "Industry feels very comfortable with this net."

Although the net was specifically designed for the science center's trawl surveys, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) recently used the configuration to conduct a Mid-Atlantic inshore pilot survey under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's



NOAA photo

208' Henry B. Bigelow. The new fishery survey vessel, which was launched in Pascagoula, MS in 2005, was moved to Norfolk, VA in November 2006 for installations and electrical work. The Bigelow was expected to arrive in Newport, RI in late February, with three sea trials scheduled for February and March.

Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP).

VIMS was contracted to do the NEAMAP pilot survey, which covered ground from Montauk, NY to Cape Hatteras, NC as part of NEAMAP's ongoing effort to fill in inshore data gaps.

Sea trials

During a presentation to the New England council, VIMS project principal Jim Gartland said VIMS decided to go with the new Northeast Fisheries Science Center trawl survey design so that this

project's inshore survey gear would be compatible with the Bigelow's gear.

Also, since industry was involved in the new net design, VIMS knew the data had a much higher probability of being accepted by industry, said Gartland.

Initial NEAMAP field trials were conducted in May on the Darana R, and during the trip, door spread, wing spread, towing speed, and other parameters were varied. Monitors on the net and doors documented the gear's performance.

Ruhle said he was so impressed with the results that he insisted on having science center representatives onboard in June for further evaluations so they could see the gear in action first-hand.

Atlantic councils further voted to ask the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a formal training program for people using the Bigelow's new gear, including the vessel's crew, the "survey leadership," and shore-based support personnel, so they all have a proper understanding of how to handle, repair, and construct the gear.

Rhode Island fisherman and New England council member Phil Ruhle, who sits on the Trawl Survey Advisory Panel, said he thought the training program was absolutely essential.

"With as much work as went into this net, it would be ridiculous not to have training," he said. "In my mind, you can't have one without the other."

Panel a success

The impending arrival of the Henry B. Bigelow and use of the new survey gear mark an enormous leap forward from when industry first discovered back in September 2002 that the trawl warps on the Albatross IV were mismatch.

That finding led to the creation of the Trawl Survey Advisory Panel, a new gear design, and a better understanding among industry of bottom trawl surveys and how they're conducted.

Several people at the New England council meeting praised the advisory panel for its work.

"I have nothing but admiration and great respect for the people who were involved," said Massachusetts council member David Pierce.

Panel Chairman Jimmy Ruhle said the experience was one of

the most beneficial he'd had in his entire fishing career.

He was particularly pleased that three of the region's major net makers – Trawlworks Inc., Superior Trawl, and Reidar's Manufacturing Inc. – put aside

I've got a lot of confidence in this gear.

—Jimmy Ruhle

Industry feels very comfortable with this net.

—Rodney Avila



By K. Pryor photo