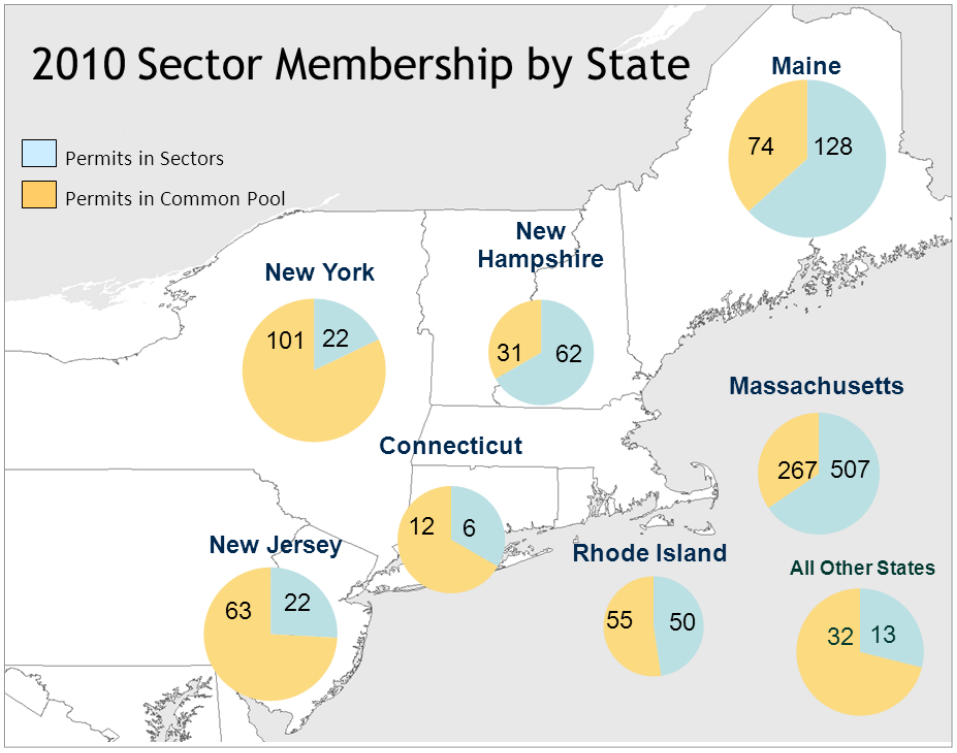
# Northeast Groundfish Sectors

*__Mark Grant__ is a sector policy analyst at the NMFS Northeast Regional Office in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He began working on Northeast multispecies (groundfish) sectors in 2006 when there were two small sectors allocated a single stock. From 2008 to 2010, Mark led the implementation effort for the expansion of groundfish sectors that became effective May 1, 2010. This two-year process involved direct collaboration with groundfish industry members, industry groups, and other support organizations to cooperatively map out how to practically implement the shift from a system of input controls (trip limits and days-at-sea) to a more flexible system based on allocating quotas to voluntary groups of fishermen in exchange for responsibility on the part of the fishermen. Since 2010 Mark has continued to collaborate with industry on problem-solving and improvements to the operation of the sector system.*

This overview of sectors focuses on the transition of the groundfish fishery to a catch share management system and does not reflect impacts to individual vessels or detail differences between vessel sizes, gear types, or regions. However, it is important to think about the differences within a fishery and incorporate those into the development of the fishery management plan and the implementation of that plan. There is an old hippie saying, "Get involved. The world is ruled by the people who show up." If a catch share program is being considered, make sure that everyone is involved from the start. Knowledge is power. Make sure stakeholders are empowered with information. At every stage of development and implementation information is needed. Start to think about, gather, and analyze data early in the process so that it shapes decisions.

The Northeast groundfish fishery ranges from the Canadian border south to North Carolina and east to Georges Bank and the 200 mile EEZ line. Fishing activity is primarily concentrated in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank, while ports in New England see the bulk of groundfish landings. The Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan includes 13 species, managed as 20 stocks. These are all bottom-dwelling species and are harvested using bottom trawls, sink gillnets, and benthic longlines.

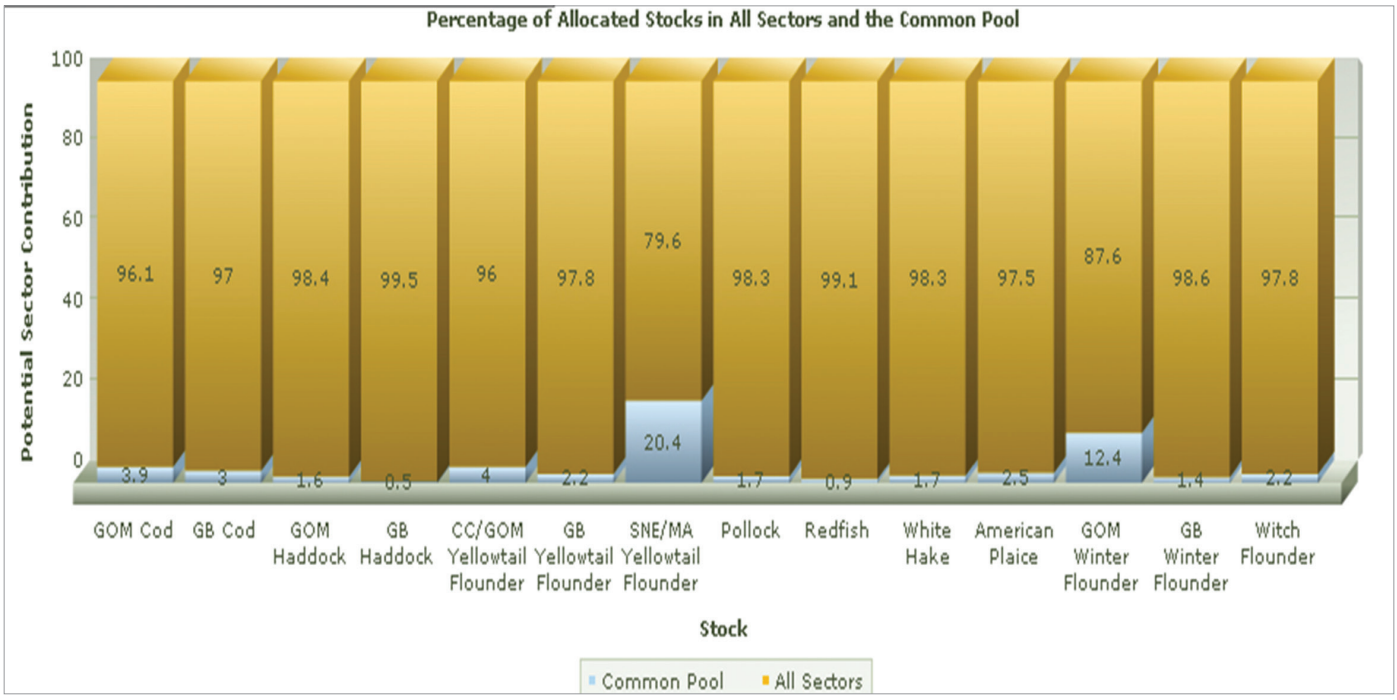
Vessel sizes range from skiffs up to about 110 feet in length. Generally, the groundfish fleet can be divided into day boats and offshore trip vessels, but all vessels are legally permitted to fish all open areas. The day boat fleet is generally owner-operator, but many may own one or more additional vessels. The offshore fleet includes owner-operators, but also has larger entities owning multiple active vessels.




Northeast groundfish fishery permits separated by participation in the sector program or common pool.

Sectors are different from most catch share programs. First and foremost, the New England Fishery Management Council did not decide to manage the entire fishery through catch shares. The pre-existing management system (i.e., use of input controls such as trip limits and days-at-sea controls) was retained with vessels having the choice each year to fish either under the input control system or as part of the sector catch share system. The goal of expanding the sector catch share was to provide vessels with options to mitigate the economic impacts of reductions in allowable catches. A key fact to note is that this sector system became effective at the same time as the requirements for annual catch limits and accountability measures under the reauthorized MSA. In the Northeast, this was compounded by a new stock assessment requiring harvest reductions for some key stocks. Sectors provide a mechanism for capacity reduction, and provide incentives to self-govern, by allowing vessels to pool harvesting resources and consolidate operations in fewer vessels. This is not an individual fishing quota program because allocations are made to the sectors annually and not to individual vessels. Only vessels with a limited access multispecies permit are eligible to join a multispecies sector.

Sectors succeeded in achieving the goal of mitigating the impact of quota cuts. Nearly all active vessels, and many inactive permits, elected to join sectors. However, that still is only about half of the eligible permits because many vessels that initially qualified for a groundfish permit were not truly active groundfish vessels. The result has been that more than 98 percent of groundfish is allocated to sectors. In the first year of sectors, the number of groundfish trips and the amount of time spent fishing for groundfish declined substantially, while the number of non-groundfish trips and the amount of time spent fishing for non-groundfish species stayed nearly constant. Catch of groundfish only declined 18 percent while catch of non-groundfish declined about six percent. While catches were down, there was an increase in the efficiency of catching groundfish. Revenues for groundfish declined very little (i.e., in comparison to quota cuts) while revenues for non-groundfish increased. This does not account for changes in costs—to set up sectors, to operate sectors, and for monitoring (i.e., currently paid by the government)—and the social impact of a change from independent to cooperative work.




**Percentage of Northeast groundfish fishery stocks allocated to the sector program versus the common pool.**