



PORTLAND FISH EXCHANGE

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FACTS ABOUT BOTTOM TRAWLING IN NEW ENGLAND

- Bottom trawling has been used as a method of harvesting fish in New England for a century.
- Approximately 80% of New England's groundfish is harvested by trawlers.
- New England groundfish trawlers rarely exceed 100' in length. Most are 50' or less. There are no "factory trawlers" in the fleet.
- Foreign trawlers are prohibited from harvesting within 200 miles of the coast of the United States.
- 9,000 square miles of waters off the New England coast – an area larger than Massachusetts – is permanently closed to trawling.
- Up to 40,000 square miles – an area larger than Maine and Massachusetts combined – is closed on a seasonal basis.
- In 2002, the National Research Council published a report of the effect of bottom trawling on the marine seafloor. It recommended habitat studies, fishing gear modifications, effort reductions, and establishment of marine protected areas for particularly vulnerable habitats. All of those recommendations have been incorporated into New England's fishery management plans.
- It is generally recognized that trawling should be limited in ecologically sensitive areas such as coral habitat. For example, the New England Fishery Management Council closed two deepwater canyons containing coral beds to fishing in 2005.
- However, trawling seafloors comprised largely of mud or sand may have a minimal impact. For example, in 2006 University of Maine researcher Les Watling published a study in the *ICES Journal of Marine Science* which found habitat structure on New England's mud-bottom shrimp fishing grounds did not differ significantly from that in similar un-trawled areas.
- It is generally recognized that slow growing species of fish require protection from over-harvesting by all types of fishing gears, not just trawling.
- The majority of New England's groundfish populations are fast growing, reaching sexual maturity and reproducing in just a few years.
- It is virtually impossible to simultaneously attain both productive, sustainable fisheries and an ecologically unmodified ecosystem. Similarly, on land it is impossible to attain productive crop harvests without some modification of farmland soil habitat. Fisheries that produce sustainable yields of seafood over time don't destroy, but make rational use of the grounds in a controlled manner.
- Because of strong, effective fishery management policies including limits on trawling, populations of New England groundfish have tripled over the last decade.