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Experts propose new Atlantic cod stock structure to inform fisheries management

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

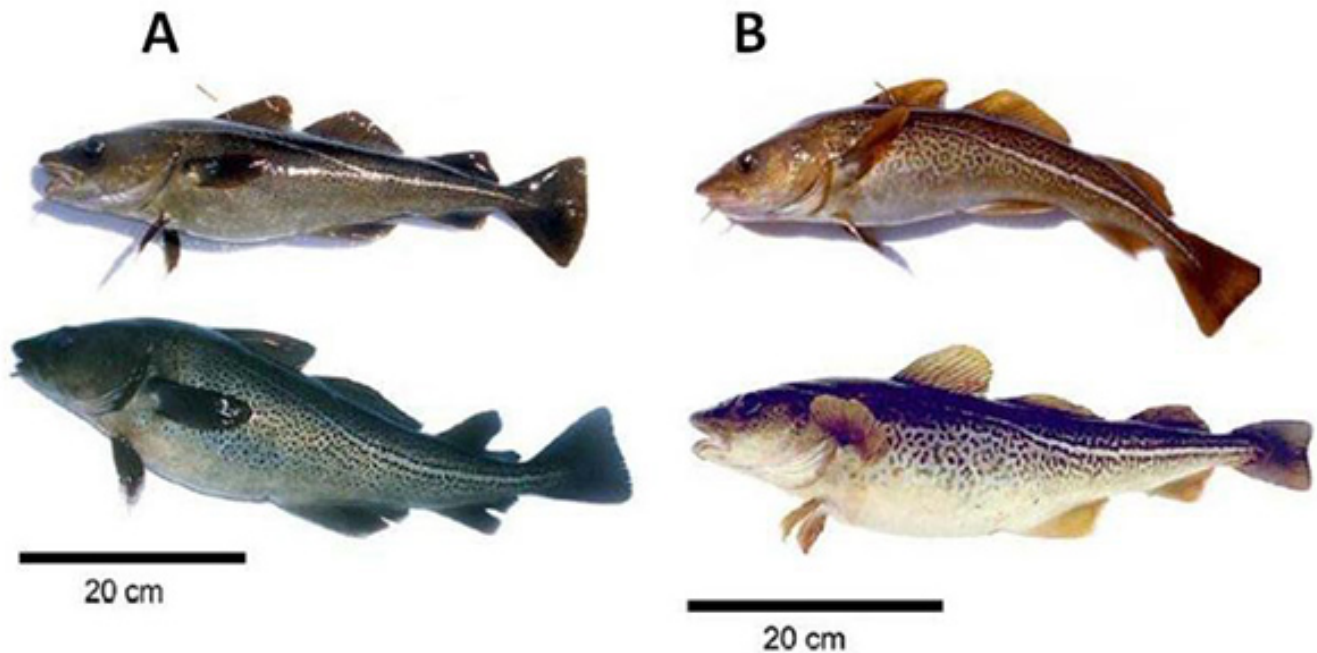
New Atlantic cod stock structure to be incorporated into fisheries management

An international group of researchers has inventoried, summarized and analyzed all relevant peer-reviewed information about the Atlantic cod stock structure off New England. The researchers, which form the Atlantic Cod Stock Structure Working Group (ACSSWG), have determined that cod found off New England occurs in five distinct populations.

They have further identified these as an offshore Georges Bank population and four inshore populations. They include a mixed stock composed of spring and winter spawners in the southern Gulf of Maine.

Since 2021, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and the New England Fishery Management Council have considered both the management and stock assessment of these newly proposed biological cod stocks.

“The assessment is currently moving from the old two-stock structure to a new stock structure that will



An expert review has found that the U.S. Northwest Atlantic is home to five distinct populations of Atlantic cod and has proposed a new stock structure to incorporate into fisheries management. Photo courtesy of NOAA.

better match our new understanding of the biological stocks,” said Charles Perretti, NOAA Fisheries stock assessment scientist and one of the leads for the assessment. “This work is ongoing and is scheduled for peer review this year. After that, fishery managers will decide how to incorporate the new stock structure into management.”



(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

The Atlantic cod stocks have declined significantly since the 1990s. Despite efforts to reduce fishery catch and support the species’ ability to thrive, these stocks have not had much success in rebuilding. There are many complexities to understanding and improving the condition of cod stocks, but the researchers hope that improved recognition of population structure may help.

Stock assessment scientists and fishery managers hope this work will help prevent further loss of Atlantic cod spawning components, as well as better guide adjustments of allowable catch to balance fishing mortality across populations. It could also help facilitate the recovery of currently declined stocks and strengthen the resiliency of the populations that exist within fishing areas.

“New methods and funding are needed to sort out the data for two separate stocks in the mixed area, as well as to improve the data quantity in the data-poor areas, but these issues have been clearly identified for the future,” said Rich McBride, a co-chair of the working group.

[Read the full study here \(https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/study-sharpens-atlantic-cod-stock-delineation\)](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/study-sharpens-atlantic-cod-stock-delineation).

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