



## New England Fishery Management Council

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### **DRAFT** MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** July **XX**, 2017  
**TO:** Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)  
**FROM:** Tom Nies, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** **Terms of Reference – Overfishing levels (OFLs) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder for fishing years 2018 and 2019**

#### **Terms of Reference**

Taking into account the Council's Risk Policy Statement, provide the OFL and an ABC for each year for fishing years 2018 and 2019 that will prevent overfishing and meet the management objective to rebuild the stock, and is consistent with the Council's ABC control rule for groundfish stocks.

The Council requests that the SSC provide a final report by noon on August 14, 2017 so that it can be considered in developing recommendations for the US/Canada Transboundary Management Guidance Committee meeting.

(See list of documents for the assessment summary and Groundfish Plan Development (PDT) report under Information below).

#### **Background**

Georges Bank (GB) yellowtail flounder was recently assessed by the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) in July, 2017. This stock is assessed annually by the TRAC and the Council needs the SSC to recommend an OFL and ABC for each year to enable it to set annual catch limits for FY 2018- FY 2019.

ABC recommendations are to be based on the fishing mortality strategies approved by the Council in Amendments 13 and 16 and related management actions. Status determination criteria should be used that are specified in Amendment 16 or subsequent actions. The general control rule for groundfish stocks that has been adopted is:

*"These ABC control rules will be used in the absence of better information that may allow a more explicit determination of scientific uncertainty for a stock or stocks. If such information is available - that is, if scientific uncertainty can be characterized in a more accurate fashion -- it can be used by the SSC to determine ABCs, these ABC control rules can be modified in a future Council action (an amendment, framework, or specification package):*

- a. *ABC should be determined as the catch associated with 75% of  $F_{MSY}$ .*

- b. *If fishing at 75% of  $F_{MSY}$  does not achieve the mandated rebuilding requirements for overfished stocks, ABC should be determined as the catch associated with the fishing mortality that meets rebuilding requirements (Frebuild).*
- c. *For stocks that cannot rebuild to  $B_{MSY}$  in the specified rebuilding period, even with no fishing, the ABC should be based on incidental bycatch, including a reduction in bycatch rate (i.e., the proportion of the stock caught as bycatch).*
- d. *Interim ABCs should be determined for stocks with unknown status according to case-by-case recommendations from the SSC."*

During the 2014 GB yellowtail flounder assessment, the TRAC agreed to no longer use the VPA assessment model, and instead, to use an empirical approach based on resource survey catches as the basis of catch advice. Because a stock assessment model framework is lacking for this stock, no historical estimates of biomass, fishing mortality rates or recruitment can be calculated although past estimates from earlier approved models are available. As well, status determination relative to reference points is not possible because reference points cannot be defined. These are now considered unknown. Therefore, the SSC will have to recommend an interim ABC for this stock under the provision in paragraph "d" above. See information item A.9 for SSC ABC and OFL recommendations and discussion for fishing year 2107.

In 2016, The SSC recommended the formation of an SSC sub-group to develop alternatives for quantitative metrics that would trigger an upward or downward adjustment of the ABC. The sub-group met twice in 2017 by conference call. The work of SSC sub-group will be presented. See information item A.10.

## **Information**

- A.1 The Council's Risk Policy Road Map (2016), that includes the Risk Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, see pp. 4-5 and 10-12.
- A.2 Presentation: Overview of the 2017 TRAC assessment of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (NEFSC staff)
- A.3 Presentation: Groundfish Plan Development Team Report (NEFMC staff)
- A.4 DRAFT TRAC Stock Assessment Report for GB yellowtail flounder for 2017 (July 2017), *the final version may be distributed if available*
- A.5 Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) Status Report for GB yellowtail flounder (August 2017)
- A.6 Memo from PDT to SSC re GB yellowtail flounder ABCs, including a memo from the Scallop PDT (August 4, 2017)
- A.7 Risk policy matrix for GB yellowtail flounder (August 4, 2017)
- A.8 Background: Memo from Groundfish PDT to SSC re GB yellowtail flounder ABCs, including a Memo from the Scallop PDT (August 4, 2016)
- A.9 Background: 2017-2018 SSC ABC and OFL recommendations for GB yellowtail flounder (August 22, 2016 Memo from SSC to Tom Nies)
- A.10 Report from the SSC Sub-Group on Quantifying Substantial Change in the GB yellowtail flounder empirical assessment (August 4, 2017)
- A.11 Research Steering Committee meeting summary, March 23, 2017 (see pp. 8-10)
- A.12 Final Project Report: Northeast Multispecies Fishery Flatfish Bycatch and Market Analysis (Cadrin et al., 2016).