



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 31, 2022
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee
FROM: Tom Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference – Overfishing Limits and Acceptable Biological Catches for Four Groundfish Stocks**

Terms of Reference

- A. Review information provided by the Council’s Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) and the results of recent 2022 management track stock assessments for Georges Bank (GB) haddock, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder, Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine (CC/GOM) yellowtail flounder and white hake.
- B. Recommend overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for GB haddock, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder and white hake for fishing years 2023, 2024, and 2025 that will prevent overfishing, meet the management objective to rebuild, are consistent with the Council’s ABC control rules and rebuilding plans, and in consideration of the Council’s Risk Policy Statement.

Background

Stock Assessments

The most recent stock assessments of GB haddock, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder and white hake were management track assessments in the fall of 2022. The peer review for three of these stocks occurred in September of this year. The CC/GOM yellowtail flounder assessment was provided by direct delivery to the PDT and SSC as recommended by the Assessment Oversight Panel (i.e., Level 1 assessment). As such, this stock did not undergo a peer review in September. Based on the 2022 stock assessment report, the results indicate that CC/GOM yellowtail flounder is now considered rebuilt.

The Council’s Groundfish ABC Control Rules

Acceptable biological catches (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):

- 1. ABC should be determined as the catch associated with 75% of FMSY.*
- 2. If fishing at 75% of FMSY 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).*
- 3. For stocks that cannot rebuild to BMSY 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).*
- 4. Interim ABCs should be determined for stocks with unknown status according to case-by-case recommendations from the SSC."*

Information

1. Presentation: Overview of Stock Assessments and PDT Report (NEFMC & NEFSC staff)
2. Assessment supporting materials available at:
https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi_report_options.php
3. 2022 Fall Management Track Assessment Report for GB Haddock
4. 2022 Fall Management Track Assessment Report for SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder
5. 2022 Fall Management Track Assessment Report for CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder
6. 2022 Fall Management Track Assessment Report for White Hake
7. 2022 Fall Management Track Peer Review Panel Report
8. Memo from PDT to SSC re possible OFLs and ABCs for seven groundfish stocks, version 2 (see for GB haddock)
9. Memo from PDT to SSC re possible OFLs and ABCs for three groundfish stocks
10. 2020-2022 SSC OFL and ABC recommendations for groundfish stocks (includes GB haddock, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, and white hake)
11. 2020-2022 SSC OFL and ABC recommendations for four groundfish stocks (see final recommendation for GB haddock)
12. The Council's Risk Policy Road Map (2016), that includes the Risk Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, see pp. 4-5 and 10-12.
13. Risk policy matrix for GB Haddock
14. Risk policy matrix for SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder
15. Risk policy matrix for CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder
16. Risk policy matrix for White Hake
17. Affected Environment, Excerpt from Framework Adjustment 63
18. FY2021 Year-End Multispecies (Groundfish) Catch Report, GARFO
19. State of the Ecosystem and Current Conditions. NOAA/NEFSC. Available at :
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/ecosystems/state-ecosystem-reports-northeast-us-shelf>
20. 2022 TRAC Status Report for Eastern Georges Bank haddock