



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

SMALL MESH MULTISPECIES COMMITTEE

October 13 2016

**Hilton Garden Inn
1 Thurber Street
Warwick, RI**

The Small-Mesh Multispecies (Whiting) Committee met on June 20, 2016 in Portland ME to

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Mark Gibson (Chairman), Vincent Balzano (Vice Chair), Mark Alexander, Peter Kendall, Eric Reid, Mike Ruccio, and Laurie Nolan (committee members); Andrew Applegate and Lou Goodreau (NEFMC staff); Peter Burns (NMFS GARFO staff); John Almeida (NOAA General Counsel), and Tom Testeverde and Dan Farnham (Whiting advisors). About 1 members of the public attended, including: Katie Almeida.

Meeting documents were posted at the following location: <http://www.nefmc.org/calendar/oct.-13-2016-ebfm-committee-meeting>.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The committee received and adopted by consensus the AP and PDT recommendations for Amendment 22 limited access qualification alternatives. These recommended alternatives included two two-tier alternatives with a high- and low-level qualification landings criterion during 2008-2012 (before the control date). One alternative would have 500,000 and 100,000 lbs. aggregate landings thresholds for the two limited access permits. The other alternative would have 1,000,000 and 20,000 lbs. thresholds, with the higher limited access permit qualifying fewer vessels than the first alternative, and the lower threshold qualifying more vessels. An incidental possession limit for whiting would be 2,000 lbs. in either alternative.

- The committee reviewed the planned 2017 priorities, which include development of a specifications package and further development of Amendment 22. The committee recommended considering adjustments to the whiting transfer-at-sea limit and the exemption area seasons in the specifications package and defer the Southern Fishery Management Area whiting possession limit adjustment to Amendment 22.
- The committee also agreed to informally raise the observed adverse effects of squid trimester quota management on the whiting fishery with the MAFMC. Staff would alert MAFMC staff to the issue which would also be raised by NEFMC members when they attend the Squid, Mackerel, and Butterfish Committee meetings.
- The committee reviewed the Whiting Advisory Panel applications and re-appointments for 2017-2019, agreeing to forward the committee recommendations to the Executive Director and Executive Committee for their approval.

AGENDA ITEM #1: AMENDMENT 22 LIMITED ACCESS DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

Presentation: Mr. Applegate reviewed the 2000-2012 fleet history analysis that had been presented to the committee during its last meeting. That analysis classified fleet history according to three qualification time periods (2000-2012, 2003-2012, and 2008-2012) and four trip categories (one or more trips above 7,500 lbs. of whiting, 3,500 to 7,500 lbs., 2,000-3,500 lbs. and no trips landing more than 2,000 lbs. of whiting). The new analysis, presented by Mr. Goodreau applied those results to 2014-2015 fishing activity, classified by the above trip categories, to determine the potential number of qualifying vessels at various aggregate landings (whiting and red hake) thresholds during the qualifying periods.

Mr. Applegate summarized the outcome and recommendations from the prior week's joint AP/PDT meeting. He said that the AP and PDT had agreed to recommend qualification criteria that use a single landings threshold for each of two limited access permit categories, but that the high- and low-level limited access permits could have different possession limits applied by management area to match the 'footprint' or recent fishing activity by qualifying vessels. These limits could then be adjusted as needed in response to changes in ACL specifications.

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After the summary, Mr. Applegate told the committee that Lou had re-worked the analyses using the recommended qualification thresholds. Mr. Goodreau and he then went on to present and

compare the number of qualifiers and their 2014-2015 whiting fishery activities using the recommended thresholds. Details about the analysis presented to the committee are available here: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/Document-1a-Example-qualification-criteria-options-based-on-whiting-fleet-history-analysis.pdf> and <http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/Document-1b-Addendum-Example-qualification-criteria-options-based-on-whiting-fleet-history-analysis.pdf>.

The first analysis presented by Mr. Goodreau summarized the number of vessels meeting the thresholds in 2008-2012 and characterized their 2014-2015 whiting fishery activity according to the number of vessels, trips, and landings in the four trip categories described above. The second analysis presented by Mr. Applegate characterized the whiting landings by trip for the qualifying high- and low-level criteria in the two recommended alternatives. The committee found that the recommended incidental and low-level limited access possession limits that the AP/PDT meeting had recommended would not be constraining, but would be effective at freezing the ‘footprint’ of the fishery.

Mr. Ruccio asked whether the staff or PDT had estimated or evaluated how much of the ACLs would be caught by vessels that qualify at both levels in each alternative. Mr. Applegate replied that the non-confidential landings for the categories were in the table, but that they had not been compared to the whiting and red hake ACLs, nor had an evaluation of bycatch by preliminary qualifying vessels been done yet. He thought that the analysis would be done as part of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

1. MOTION: Mrs. Nolan / Mr. Reid

To analyze the 1996-2012 (before the control date) using a 100,000 lbs. annual average (for a high-level criterion and 4,000 lbs. annual average) for a low-level qualification criteria, for at least five (consecutive? Calendar?) years during the qualification period.

PERFECTED MOTION:

To analyze the 1996-2012 (before the control date) using a 1,000,000 lbs. aggregate total (58,823 lbs. annual average for a high-level criterion and 200,000 lbs. aggregate total (11,764 lbs. annual average) for a low-level qualification criteria.

Discussion on the Motion:

Mr. Balzano asked why the Council and Committee had chosen not to examine qualification using landings before 2000, whether it had been a data quality issue or there were other reasons. He favored having all data since 1996 to be analyzed. Mr. Applegate explained that the committee had voted to restrict the analysis to three periods, all since 2000. DMIS data was used as one of the available sources from 2007 to 2012. Data before 2006 were not available from the catch monitoring data. VTRs began in 1996 and data quality was much more of an issue in the first year, but improved with time. He also pointed out that dealer data went as far back as 1950, but even in the early 2000’s, state-provided landings data from NJ, NY, and CT were aggregated and individual vessel landings were less certain in the dealer data base before 2005 (approximately). Mr. Testaverde suggested that the document should include an alternative

using a landings threshold applicable to any length time period, as had been done for squid and tilefish limited access. Mr. Ruccio was in favor of including the longer period for purpose of analysis, but saw the rationale for limiting the qualification period to more recent history before the 2012 control date.

The committee discussed various ways to apply qualification criteria, either as an aggregate for an entire time period, or over the best consecutive or non-consecutive five-year period. After some discussion the committee decided that a single aggregate limit for any length of time during a qualification period was the simplest, straight-forward, equitable approach. The committee then perfected the motion to comport with the outcome of this discussion.

MOTION #1 The motion carried 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM #2: CORRESPONDENCE AND PRIORITIES

Presentation:

Mr. Applegate summarized the correspondence submitted by Mr. David Goethel, an advisor who was not at the committee meeting. The four points in Mr. Goethel's letter were his perception about faulty red hake stock structure assumptions in the benchmark assessment and application of specifications, the adverse effect of squid tri-mester quota management on the exemption area whiting fisheries, improving marketability of whiting by raising the transfer at sea limit from 500 to 3,000 lbs., and promoting marketing efforts for whiting in government purchasing. In terms of priorities, Mr. Applegate reminded the committee that the committee had two priority items identified for work in 2017: a 2018-2020 specifications package and continued development of draft and final Amendment 22 alternatives. He said that issues such as changing the whiting exemption area dates and increasing the southern whiting possession limit to 50,000 lbs. had been discussed for the specifications package. The latter issue had been recommended by advisors for consideration before the new annual monitoring report, which showed stock biomass indices for whiting and red hake had been declining in the Southern Fishery Management Area. He thought that the current catches would be a much higher proportion of the new ACLs when they were analyzed in the specifications package.

Mr. Testeverde was totally opposed to increasing the southern whiting possession limit, recognizing that the stock biomass had been decreasing and the effects it could have on whiting markets and price. He said that the increase from 30,000 to 40,000 lbs. was originally done to help offset the cost of increasing fuel prices, but that was no longer an issue with current prices. Mr. Farnham reminded the committee that the 30,000 lbs. possession limit had been approved by the Council as part of a stock rebuilding plan, but the stock was rebuilt and the fishery has been landing a small fraction of the ACL. He thought that applied as a five-month window (Nov to May¹) with a higher possession limit, it would have limited effects on whiting markets when the exemption areas were open to fishing in July to September. It has also been brought up during the Amendment 22 scoping hearings as a limit to apply to vessels with limited access permits, as a control on capacity.

2. MOTION: Mr. Alexander /Mr. Ruccio

To recommend that the Council consider a change in the silver hake transfer at sea limit in the specifications document, or potentially upgraded to a framework adjustment if needed.

Discussion on the Motion:

The committee decided by consensus that deferring the southern whiting possession limit issue to the amendment was a preferred approach, rather than taking it up as part of the specifications package. The committee pointed out that there might be other marketing and enforcement concerns with raising the whiting transfer-at-sea limit. It was also pointed out that nothing prevented vessel owners from obtaining a dealer permit to land and market whiting to their bait markets.

MOTION #2 The motion failed 3-3.

AGENDA ITEM #4: ADVISORY PANEL APPLICATIONS

The committee held a closed session to discuss Whiting Advisory Panel applicants and re-appointments. The committee recommendations will be forwarded to the Executive Director and Executive Committee for approval.

The Small-Mesh Multispecies Committee meeting worked through lunch and adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m.

¹ Five to seven months, depending on actual dates adopted?