



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Whiting Advisory Panel

Hilton Garden Inn, Warwick, RI
September 8th, 2014

The Whiting Advisory Panel (AP) met on September 8th, 2014 in Warwick, RI to discuss and develop recommendations for management measure adjustments to be included in a 2015-2017 Specifications Document.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Dan Farnham (Advisor), Hank Lankner (Advisor), Tom Testaverde (Advisor); Vincent Balzano (Whiting Oversight Committee chair); and Andrew Applegate and David Thomas (NEFMC staff). AP Chair Vito Calomo and AP member Joe Branin were absent and the AP operated without a chair.

Mr. Applegate opened the meeting by updating the Advisory Panel on the update assessments for red and silver hakes, on a Fishery Performance and SAFE Report, on the specifications approved by the Science and Statistical Committee. He also outlined the objective of this meeting to identify management measures that the Council should consider adjusting in the Specification Document or via a Framework Adjustment.

AGENDA ITEM: REPORT ON SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL OF ABC SPECIFICATIONS

Mr. Applegate presented the timeline for the specifications package and outlined the framework for the ABC/ACL adjustments. He also defined the specification adjustments made by the PDT and gave an overview of the Draft Whiting SAFE Report for Fishing Year 2013, followed by a summary of the catch composition of the northern and southern stocks. The advisors gave some feedback about reasons for the observed changes in the fishery, including declining catch in 2013. Mr. Farnham and Hank Lankner indicated that poor weather conditions and the overhaul of several vessels may have been the reason for the drop in effort in FY 2013 in the southern stock. Mr. Farnham also noted the decline in whiting discards in the southern stock from FY 2012-2013, explaining that discards in the squid fishery may have dropped due to the use of a larger mesh in a rope net or Rühle trawl.

AGENDA ITEM: WHITING PDT REPORT ON NORTHERN RED HAKE OVERFISHING

Mr. Applegate presented a summary of a sensitivity analysis on the probability of 2015 northern red hake overfishing at various projected catch and survey biomass levels. Mr. Farnham asked if

the PDT had looked at the timing of red hake landings within the exemption areas to evaluate the effectiveness of changing the possession limits. Mr. Applegate replied that that specific information was not in the SAFE Report but it could be added at a later date. Mr. Applegate gave the results of a statistical analysis of red hake and groundfish catch rates by small-mesh trawl trips in the exemption areas. He showed that only area had a significant effect on red hake catch rates and that season (month) was not significant. Mr. Applegate said that other factors, including season, might actually have an effect, but it was not statistically significant based on the 2008-2013 observer data. He attributed this result to the low sample size and unbalanced sea sampling, which made it difficult for the model to fit the data. He also showed an analysis of catch rates by gear and asked for feedback about the wide variety of net types reported to observers. The advisors recommended that the net types could be aggregated into four main types: raised footrope trawls, 2- and 4-seam groundfish nets, shrimp nets, and balloon trawls.

Mr. Applegate also reported that the PDT had discovered a discrepancy in the 2012-2014 red hake ABC calculations. Due to the use of preliminary data to calculate red hake specifications, the northern area ABC had been underestimated by 39 mt and the southern area by 552 mt. The primary effect of a correction would be on the post-season accountability measure, increasing the 400 lbs. trigger from 45% of the TAL to 62.5% of the TAL. He indicated that there was no effect on the southern management area since there was no overage and no effect on the silver hake ABCs, since they had been calculated correctly.

AGENDA ITEM: MANAGEMENT ADJUSTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The AP reached a consensus to modify the northern red hake possession limit to keep the fishery from exceeding the proposed ACL and causing overfishing to occur. **The AP decided to recommend that the Council consider reducing the initial possession limit from 5,000 lbs. to 3,000 lbs. which would decline again to 1,500 lbs. when the fishery landed 45% of the Total Allowable Landings (TAL), and then decrease to the 400 lbs. in-season accountability measure level when the fishery landed 65% of the TAL (or the legally mandated percentage, see above).**

The AP also recognized that catches of red hake in the fall Cultivator Shoals Area fishery were probably from the southern stock, a fact that had been recognized in the benchmark assessment as “mixing on Georges Bank”. **The AP recommended that the PDT should be asked to evaluate the effects of counting the catches of red hake from the July to October Cultivator Shoals Area fishery against the southern stock, rather than the northern stock.**

Concern was expressed that the Council might consider measures that would have significant economic consequences and preferred a solution to reduce the incentive to target red hake and induce fishermen to avoid areas with high red hake catches. Mr. Testaverde noted that the first month of the season provides for good whiting fishing, and suggested that the fishery should open 15 days earlier, on July 1st. Mr. Applegate provided clarification that the issue allowing the fishery to open early is groundfish bycatch, which was analyzed in the SAFE Report but more data from an experimental fishery would be available in a year or so.

Mr. Farnham asked about the percentage of discards outside of the small-mesh fishery. Mr. Applegate replied that the information was in the SAFE Report, which showed that the majority of red hake discards were attributable to the small-mesh fishery with “no market” as the most frequent reason for discarding.

Mr. Testaverde was concerned about the survey’s efficiency at catching hake, indicating that the data seemed inaccurate and suggesting that the timing of the survey is not ideal for representing hake population. Mr. Applegate showed the distribution of red hake catches in the spring, fall, and in state surveys, indicating that red hake catches were well represented on survey tows throughout the Gulf of Maine.

Mr. Farnham suggested the panel recommend that red hake seen during the Cultivator Shoals season be associated with the southern stock, in order to alleviate some of the pressure on the northern areas. Mr. Applegate noted that in doing so, the suggested ABCs would be inaccurate, as those red hake had already been counted as part of the northern stock, but that it could be something that the PDT could evaluate.

Mr. Farnham suggested a staggered a trip limit, stating that the red hake landings had to be brought down in order to avoid closures. He suggested that the trip limit be reduced to start at 3,000 lbs. and to keep the trigger at 45%. This approach was accepted by the AP as a recommendation to the Oversight Committee.

The Advisory Panel also re-iterated their support for a limited access amendment. Advisors were especially concerned that new fishery entrants would make it difficult to comply with red hake, yellowtail flounder, and other sub-ACLs that apply to the fishery. They also said that whiting prices were very sensitive to short duration spikes in landings because of a limited market. Mr. Balzano suggested that the Advisory Panel issue a consensus statement to address concerns over the directed whiting fishery being shut down, due to the sub-ACLs of other managed species. Mr. Farnham reiterated that point, stating that the rebuilt fishery is in jeopardy.

The Whiting Advisory Panel adjourned at approximately 2:15 PM