



## New England Fishery Management Council

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# MEETING SUMMARY

## Whiting Oversight Committee

Hilton Garden Inn, Warwick, RI  
September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Whiting Oversight Committee met on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to consider SSC recommendations, AP recommendations and PDT advice to identify and recommend management adjustments to be considered in a 2015-2017 Specifications Document.

**MEETING ATTENDANCE:** Vincent Balzano (Chairman), Mark Gibson (Vice Chair), Mark Alexander, Frank Blount, Ellen Goethel, Peter Kendall, Lauri Nolan, Matt McKenzie and Michael Pentony (NMFS); and Andrew Applegate and David Thomas (NEFMC staff).

### **AGENDA ITEM: ADVISORY PANEL (AP) REPORT**

Mr. Balzano opened the meeting and asked Mr. Applegate to summarize the previous day's Advisory Panel meeting<sup>1</sup>. Mr. Applegate summarized the discussion at the AP meeting and presented a memo the AP had reviewed overnight. The memo gave advice about changing the northern red hake possession limit to reduce the incentive to target red hake, while inducing fishermen to target silver hake where red hake were less abundant. It also requested the Oversight Committee to ask the Whiting PDT to evaluate how counting the Cultivator Shoals Area small mesh fishery red hake would affect the ABC and ACL monitoring. The letter also voiced the AP's support for developing a limited access amendment to address concerns that new entrants to the fishery could make it harder to comply with sub-ACLs.

Since there was a risk that future northern red hake overfishing could occur, the Advisory Panel recommended that the possession limit be set at 3,000 lbs. at the beginning of the fishing year, with the possession limit being reduced to 1500 lbs. when the 45% trigger is reached, and then reducing again to 400 lbs. when landings reached 65% of the TAL or the TAL accountability measure trigger.

Ellen Goethel asked if the advisors had discussed the use of the raised footrope trawl in the exemption areas. Mr. Balzano responded that the advisors did discuss it, but that it might not work as well in this area as in others due to longer tow duration (and turn-around tows) and higher current. Ellen Goethel stated her belief that the use of that trawl could cut down bycatch.

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<sup>1</sup> The AP had no chair and no other AP member could attend the Oversight Committee meeting.

***AGENDA ITEM: WHITING PDT REPORT ON NORTHERN RED HAKE OVERFISHING***

Mr. Applegate presented the results of an analysis of the risk of future red hake overfishing, using a sensitivity analyses approach. Mr. Applegate stated that the estimated probability of overfishing with the revised ABC estimates ranged from <1% if the catch stays the same to 99% if the catch reached 669 tons (bracketing a realistic range of catch levels). Mr. Applegate then presented the results of the PDT's statistical analysis of the observed catch rates of red hake in the sea sampling data from 2008-present. Mr. Applegate explained that the only statistically significant factor with respect to red hake catch was the exemption area where the tows occurred. He added that the analyses was affected by the low sampling frequency and unbalanced design, and that real differences may occur but significant differences could not be detected by analyzing the sea sampling data. The catch rates of red hake were highest in the Cultivator Shoals area, Raised Footrope Trawl Area 1 and Small Mesh Area 1. Mr. Applegate also explained the model did not detect a significant difference in catch rates with various observed gears, including the raised footrope trawl.

Mr. Applegate explained that during the analysis, the PDT had discovered a 39 ton underestimate of the northern stock ABC and a 552 ton underestimate of the southern stock ABC for 2012-2014. The PDT had concluded that this correction only affected the northern red hake post-season accountability measure. The silver hake ABCs had been calculated correctly and the southern red hake catches did not exceed the ABC.

Mr. Balzano added that the Advisory Panel recognized this ABC adjustment, using it as a component for the tiered approach to adjust northern red hake trip limits. Ellen Goethel asked if the Advisory panel had discussed the red hake moving north and the catch rates of red hake in the southern area. Mr. Balzano stated that the Advisory Panel acknowledged shifting red hake patterns and requested that the PDT examine and advise on the implications of counting the Cultivator Shoals Area fishery red hake catches against the southern area ABC.

***AGENDA ITEM: REPORT ON SSC APPROVAL OF ABC SPECIFICATIONS***

Mr. Applegate summarized the specifications approved by the SSC and the issues they considered including stock structure and survey catchability. The SSC recommended that the Council forward a request to the NRCC to perform a future benchmark assessment for red hake when research results are available to address these issues. Ellen Goethel reiterated that the issue of considering red hake as a single or a multiple stock should be addressed.

***AGENDA ITEM: MANAGEMENT ADJUSTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS***

The Committee discussed the idea of attributing red hake catch in the Cultivator Shoals area to the southern stock. Matt McKenzie stated his concern over that issue, that while it could alleviate some of the sub-ACLs, the available scientific information does not cover issues such as potential mixing of stocks. Mr. Balzano suggested that the Committee develop a consensus statement for the NRCC to perform a benchmark assessment for northern red hake. Mark Pentony clarified that the Committee would not just be requesting an updated benchmark

assessment, but one on a very specific stock issue. Mr. Applegate was concerned that a benchmark assessment would have more information on these issues. The previous benchmark assessment considered these issues very thoroughly, although there is some additional research being conducted that would be crucial to this evaluation. Mr. Balzano stated concern over waiting to request an updated benchmark assessment, as it could get buried under other priorities.

**1. Consensus statement developed by Mr. McKenzie**

Request the NRCC to consider scheduling a red hake benchmark assessment to address stock structure (mixing and stock separation) and the effect of fixed gear and fishing activity interference on survey catchability

**Discussion on the Motion:** Ellen Goethel said that the issue is not only within fixed gear, as the research activity had also interfered with conducting surveys. Mr. Balzano noted that there is not much small-mesh fishing occurring during the spring survey time. The spring survey is used as the basis for setting red hake specifications, while the fall survey is used for silver hake specifications.

**2. MOTION: Mr. Kendall/Mr. Gibson**

To include in the specifications document for analysis an adjustment to measures with a tiered northern red hake possession limit starting the fishing year at 3,000 lbs. (instead of 5000 lbs status quo) declining to 1,500 lbs. at 45% of the TAL and then decline to 400 lbs when landings reach 65% of the TAL (or when required by the corrected post-season AM).

**Discussion on the Motion:** Mr. Balzano clarified that this motion would be a correction to the AM through the specifications package. Mike Pentony noted that it should be clear that the 65% trigger could be change due to future overages, but agreed with the motion's intent.

**MOTION #2 CARRIED 8-0**

**3. MOTION: Mr. McKenzie/Mr. Kendall**

To include a northern red hake possession limit alternative alternative starting out at 5,000 lbs. reduced to 400 lbs. when landings reach 65% of the TAL (or when required by the corrected post-season AM).

**Discussion on the Motion:** This alternative would apply the status quo red hake possession limit to a corrected AM (in-season TAL trigger). Mr. Applegate suggested that the Committee make a motion to correct the AM trigger in the specifications document. Mike Pentony said that this motion would be the status quo process to correct the trigger, and that the Advisory Panel's suggestion would be moving away from the status quo. Mr. Applegate added that the specifications document would also include TAL specifications based on the approved ABC specifications.

**MOTION #3 CARRIED 8-0**

#### **4. MOTION: Mr. Pentony/Mr. Kendall**

That the Committee accept the SSC's recommendations for proposed 2015-2017 specifications, as described in Table 1 of the Executive Summary of the Whiting SAFE Report for Fishing Year 2013, and direct the PDT to calculate the appropriate TALs following the method specified in the FMP.

**Discussion on the Motion:** E During this discussion, it was revealed that state landings were a small fraction of the 3% set aside provided in Amendment 19, often less than 1%. Ellen Goethel agreed with Mr. Balzano that the Committee should include a way to take the underage from the state set-aside and place it in the Federal fishery allocation. Mr. Balzano asked if the 3% set-aside helps prevent the trigger from activating. Mr. Applegate clarified that the state landings are counted against the ABC with the federal commercial landings and catch, but that only Federal landings were considered when determining when the TAL trigger is met. So in essence the only affect that the state apportionment has is to determine the TAL trigger and that the Federal permits could catch whatever portion of the 3% set aside was not taken by state vessels.

#### **MOTION #4 CARRIED 8-0**

##### *AGENDA ITEM: MANAGEMENT ADJUSTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS*

Mr. Applegate reminded the Committee about the upcoming timeline and due dates for mailings. Mr. Kendall raised concerns over the survey's supposed inability in catching king whiting, which could be misrepresenting whiting survey data. Mr. Applegate pointed out that some of the advisors noted that these king whiting catches appeared to be a recent event. He said it would be interesting to see if these fish also showed up in the fall 2014 survey data. Mr. Balzano acknowledged the Advisory Panel's support for developing a limited-access program in the whiting fishery.

#### **5. MOTION: Mark Alexander**

The Committee recommends that the Council include in the 2015 priorities an amendment to establish limited entry in the small-mesh multispecies fishery.

#### **MOTION #5 CARRIED 8-0**

The Whiting Oversight Committee adjourned at 12:27 PM.