MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Spiny Dogfish
Framework (FW)

2026-2027 Specifications and Accountability Measures (AMs)

December 2025 at NEFMC

Jason Didden, MAFMC staff, jdidden@mafmc.org

Abbreviations 1 of 2

- SSC = Scientific and Statistical Committee
- OFL = Overfishing Level (threshold catch)
- ABC = Acceptable Biological Catch
- FW = Framework adjustment action
- AM = Accountability Measure
- MT = Metric Ton = about 2,205 pounds
  - 500 MT = 1.1 million pounds
  - 1000 MT = 2.2 million pounds
  - 10,000 MT = 22 million pounds

Abbreviations 2 of 2

- MAFMC = Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
- NEFMC = New England Fishery Management Council
- P* = MAFMC risk policy https://www.mafmc.org/actions/risk-policy-framework

Agenda

- Specifications (“Set 6”)
- Other Framework Alternatives (“Sets 1-5”)

Agenda

- Specifications
  - 2025 Specifications
  - Assessment and data update
  - Recent fishery performance
  - MAFMC SSC ABC Recommendations
  - MAFMC adopted specifications

2025 Specifications

Table 1. Spiny Dogfish Specifications for 2025 Fishing Year

2025 Specification	Pounds	Metric Tons
Overfishing Limit (OFL)	16,812,432	7,626
Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)	16,812,432	7,626
Canadian Landings	8,818	4
Domestic ABC	16,803,614	7,622
Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	16,803,614	7,622
Management Uncertainty Buffer	0%	0%
Amount of buffer	0	0
Annual Catch Target (ACT)	16,803,614	7,622
U.S. Discards (commercial + recreational)	7,220,131	3,275
Total Allowable Landings (TAL)	9,583,483	4,347
U.S. Recreational Landings	244,713	111
Commercial Quota	9,338,770	4,236

Assessment Overview

- At the target in 2022, but lower annual productivity – mostly due to fewer of the biggest females
  - *Not none, but fewer than in past*
- Future is uncertain, but current productivity appears to support ABCs around 7,500 MT
  - Still in first round of projections after last assessment, which was a new model ("SS3") for Atlantic spiny dogfish

NEFSC Data Update

- 2022 was terminal year for assessment
- Data update is not an assessment
  - Next assessment was planned for 2027 (???)
- Updated projections just use new catch data – Not a new assessment
  - Not all the other data (lengths, survey, etc.)

NEFSC Data Update Highlights

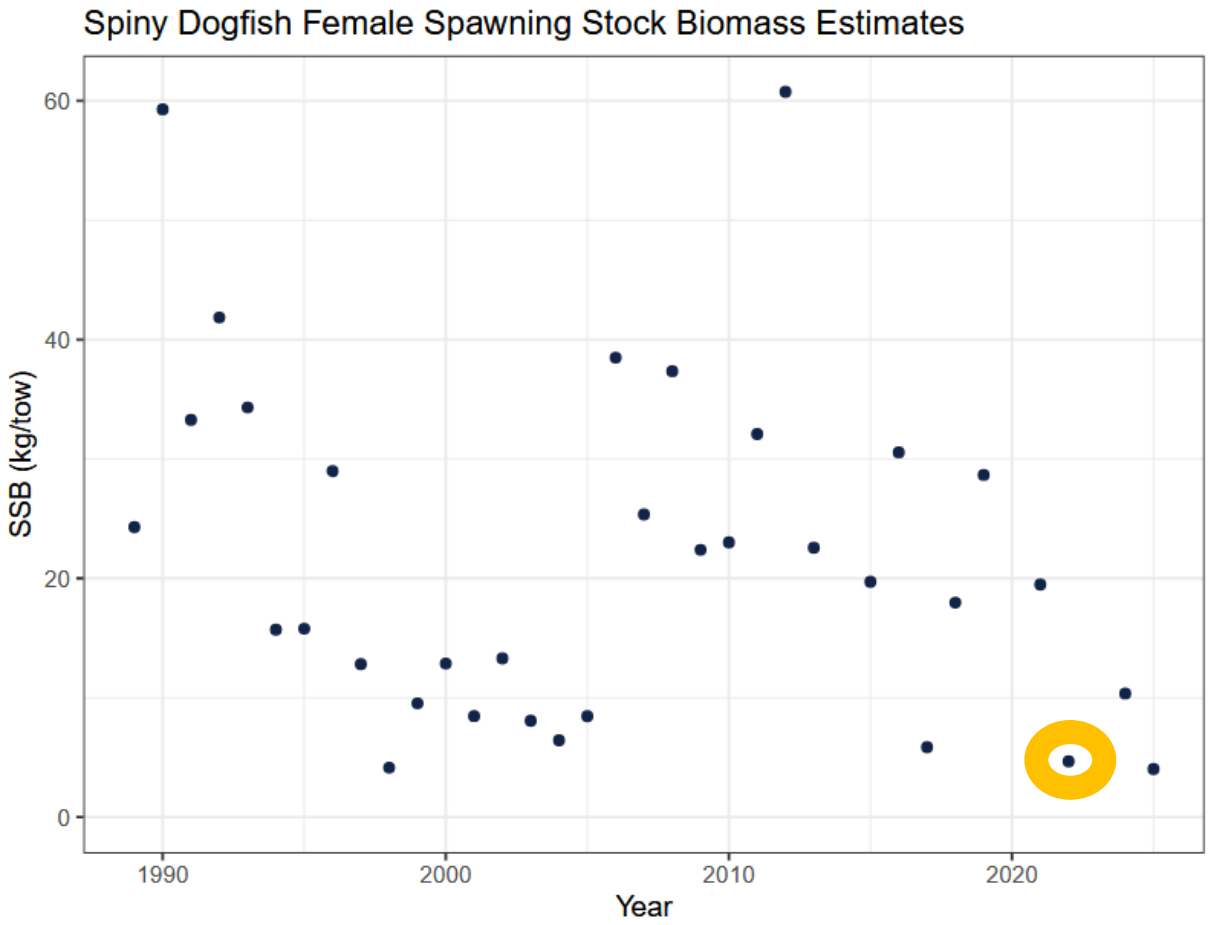
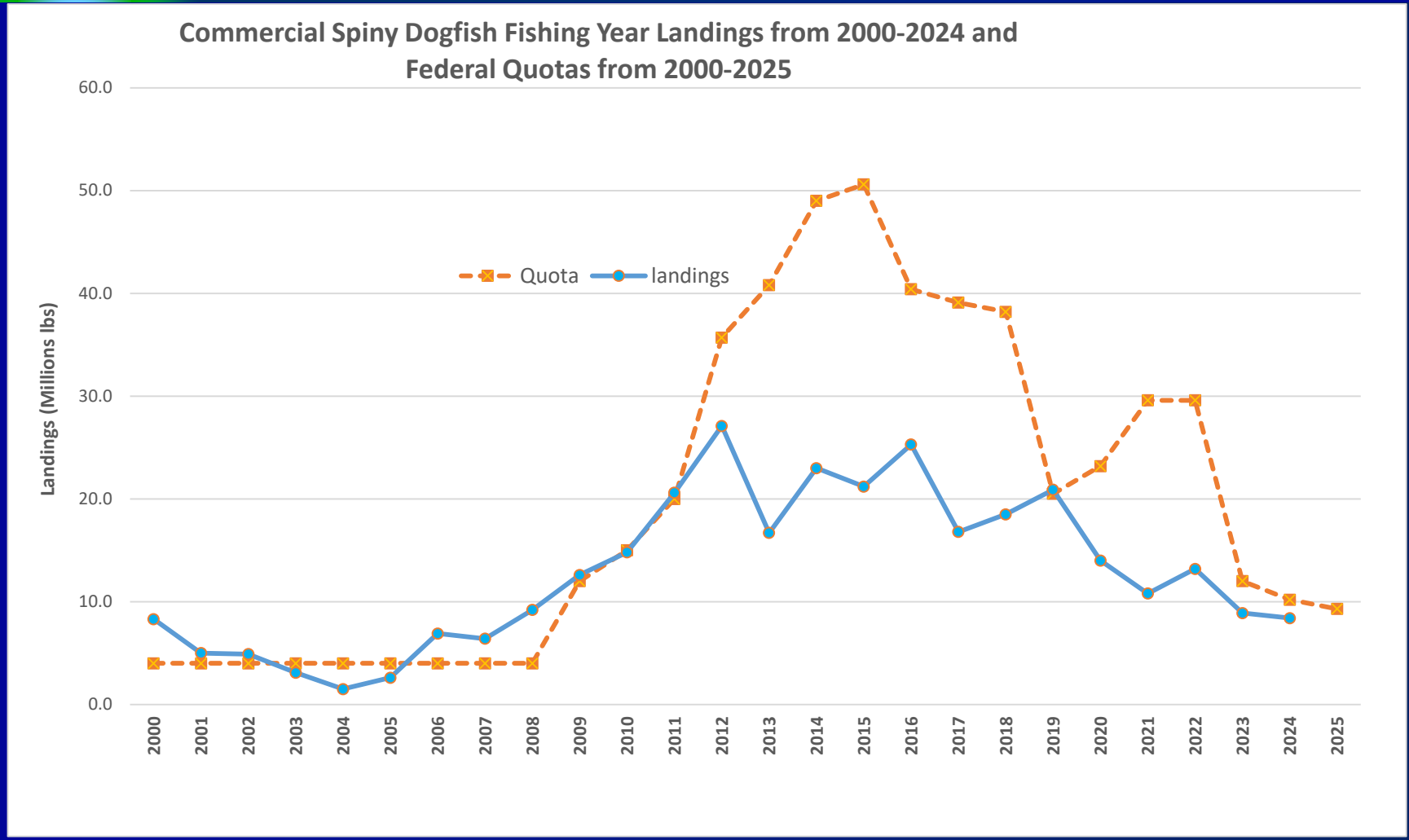


Figure 3: Spiny Dogfish Female Spawning Stock Biomass (kg/tow) from the NEFSC Spring Bottom Trawl Survey from 1989 through 2025. Survey was incomplete in 2014, 2020, and 2023; no estimates available.

knife-edge maturity at 80 cm for 1989-2011 and 74 cm for 2012+

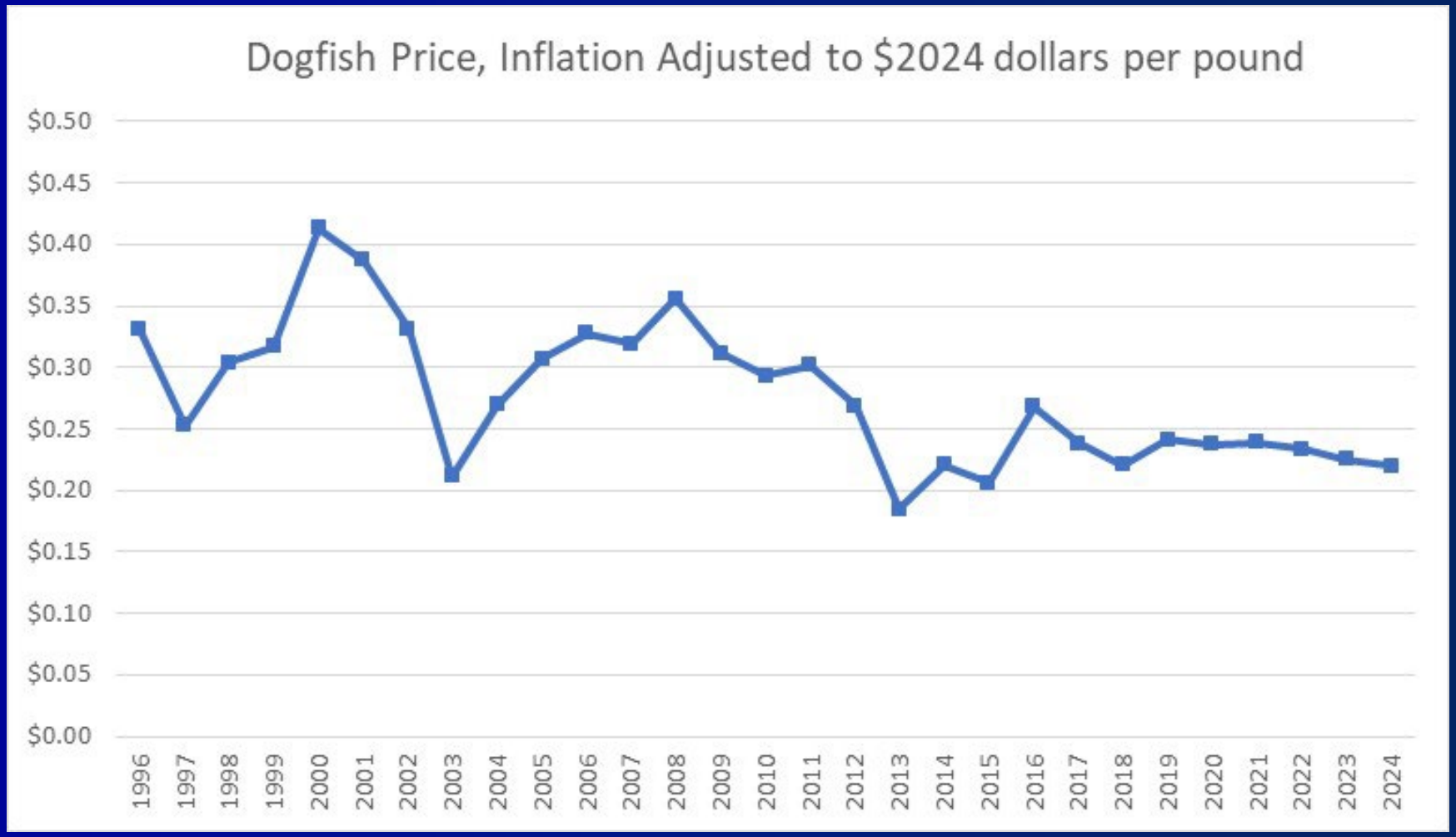
= Last data in assessment

Fishery Performance



Unpublished NMFS dealer weighout data

Fishery Performance: Price



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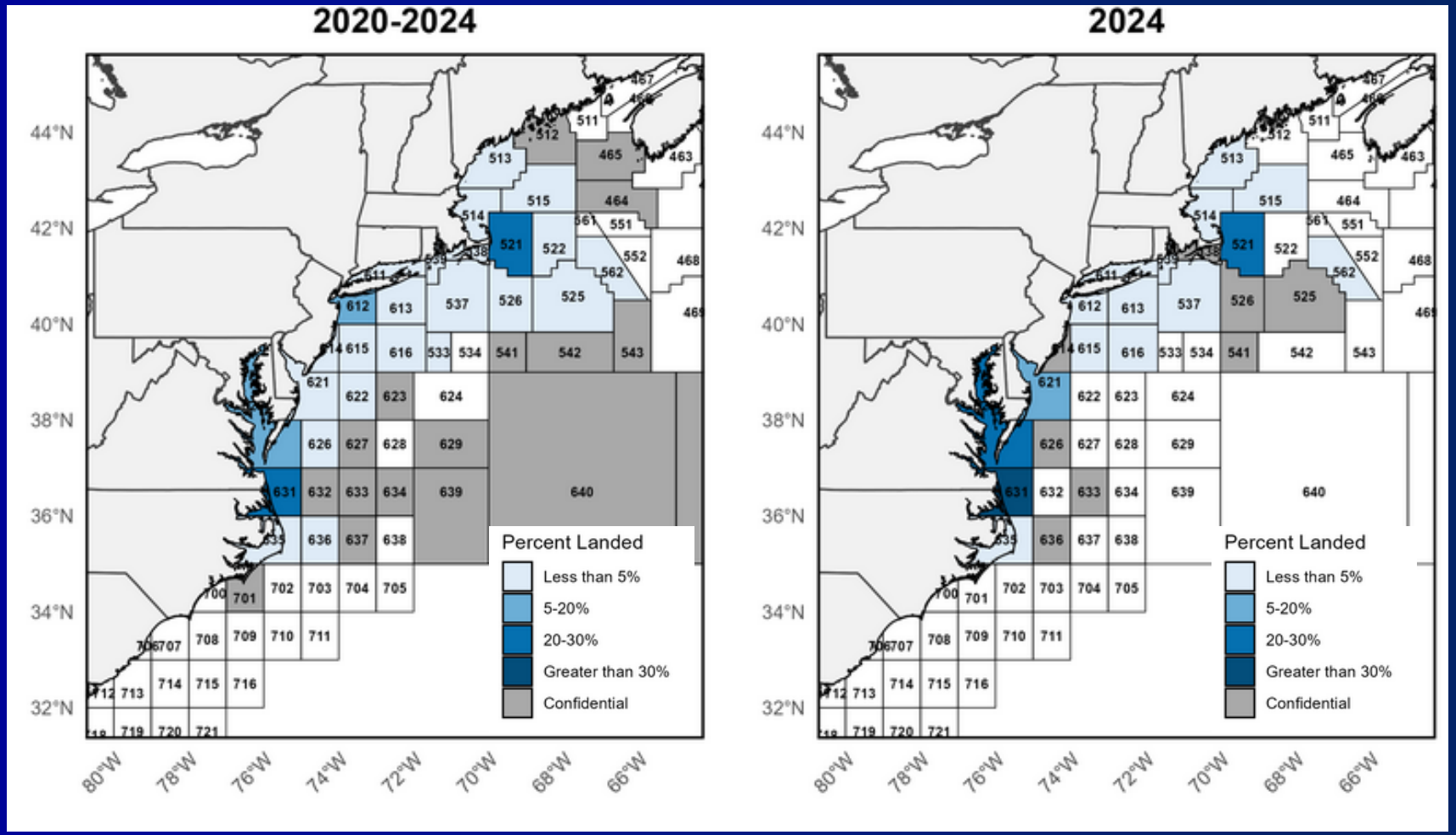
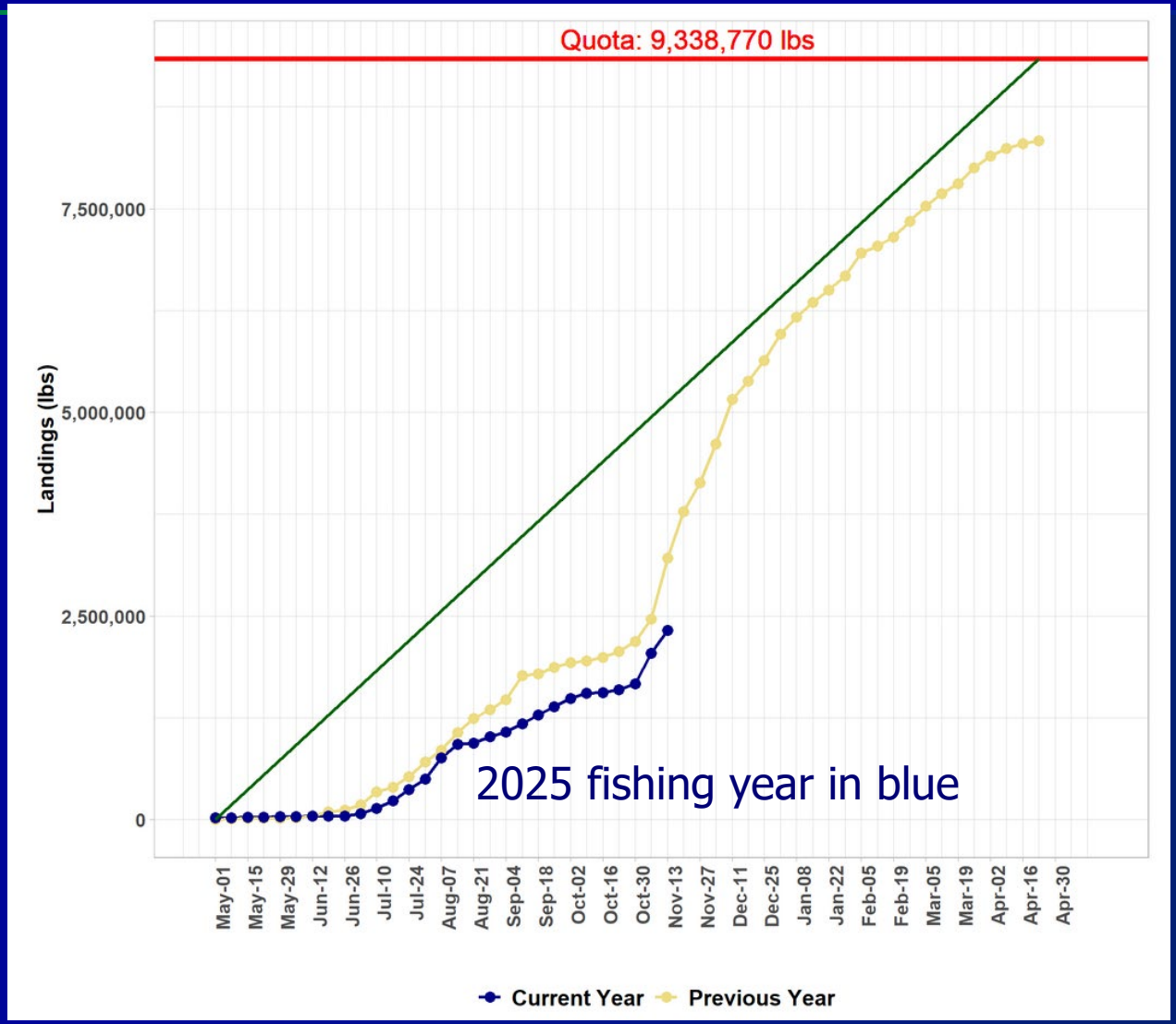
Fishery Performance: Area



MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Fishery Performance: 2024/2025



https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/commercial-fishing/quota-monitoring-greater-atlantic-region

(Through mid-November)

Fishery Performance Report

- Previous available at https://www.mafmc.org/dogfish

- Demand low but stable recently
  - Marketing challenges
- Processing and shipping challenges
  - Processor not maxed out
- Weather constrains Virginia landings

Fishery Performance Report

- Rollercoaster-style management destroys fisheries –> shoreside gentrification
  - Losing last processor will end the fishery
- Regulatory restrictions limit production
- Fishermen perceive spiny dogfish abundance differently than assessment
- Discard #s seem unreasonably high
- Suspending risk policy concerning given the inherent vulnerability of spiny dogfish

Fishery Performance Report

- Also provided some specific alternative recommendations – Advisory Panel input considered by Committee and MAFMC

SSC Report Summary

TOR 2. Set the ABC given the OFL CV and estimated biomass

- As a matter of principle, setting the ABC equal to OFL is risky. Simulation studies suggest lower long-term catches. Overall risk may exceed 50% given length of projection period.

Projection Scenario	Year	OFL	ABC
Time Varying	2026	8,084	7,254
	2027	8,222	7,410
Constant	2026	8,084	7,332
	2027	8,221	7,332
ABC= OFL	2026	8,084	8,084
	2027	8,202	8,202

General Comments from SSC (2 of 2)

- An option the SSC suggests to limit risk is to set the 2027 OFL = 2026 OFL = 2025 OFL = 7,626. This strategy buffers the increased unreliability of projections the further out we move from the last accepted assessment.

- "The SSC wishes to enter into a direct dialog with the Council that will help both groups understand how these increased uncertainties affect management decisions and catch specifications made by Council." *p. 8 of SSC report.*

Note on ABCs

- Suggested simplified alternatives:

Three constant ABCs for 2026-2027

Average P*	2026 OFL	2025 OFL
7,332 MT	8,084 MT	7,626 MT
46%	50%	48%

(last row = approximate chance overfishing)

Post SSC Process Summary

- Monitoring Committee
  - …measures needed to ensure that the specifications will not be exceeded
- Joint Committee
  - Recommendations to Councils
- MAFMC Action: October Meeting
  - NEFMC Meeting
  - MAFMC December Meeting (?)

What did the MAFMC Adopt for Specifications?

MAFMC Specifications

- Constant 2026-2027 specifications with ABCs same as 2025

- Set aside slightly more discards versus 2025
  - 9.2 million-pound quotas (2025 = 9.3 million pounds)

- Somewhat less set aside for discards than Committee-recommended approach
  - would have led to 8.8 million-pound 2026-2027 quotas

MAFMC Specifications

Specifications	2026-27 (pounds)	2026-27 (mt)	**Basis**
OFL (from SSC)	17,822,148	8,084	SSC
ABC (from SSC)	16,812,432	7,626	SSC suggestion
Canadian Landings	8,818	4	= 2020-2023 average
Domestic ABC	16,803,614	7,622	= ABC – Canadian Landings
ACL	16,803,614	7,622	= Domestic ABC
Mgmt Uncert Buffer	0.0%	0.0%	Higher risk of ACL overages but minimizes immediate disruption to industry
Amount of buffer	0	0	
ACT	16,803,614	7,622	= ACL - mgmt uncert buffer
U.S. Discards	7,359,022	3,338	Assessment Projection Percentage (43.8%) applied to ABC
TAL	9,444,592	4,284	ACT – Discards
U.S. Rec Landings	246,917	112	= 2020-2024 average
Comm Quota	9,197,675	4,172	TAL – Rec Landings

Questions, discussion, potential motions for 2026-2027 specifications

Other Framework Alternatives

- Stock currently near target biomass
- 100% payback of any Annual Catch Limits (ACL) overages – likely reduces quotas
- Avoid disruption from AM paybacks that aren't necessary to keep stock near target
  - 1.1 million pound payback in 2024 due to 2023
    - Wasn't binding but impacts could have been around $242,000 in ex-vessel revenues

ASMFC Note

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) staff noted that there could be disconnects between the federal approach and the ASMFC, resulting in double paybacks

Will have to monitor, ASMFC can consider ways to ensure alignment

What did the MAFMC Adopt for AM modifications?

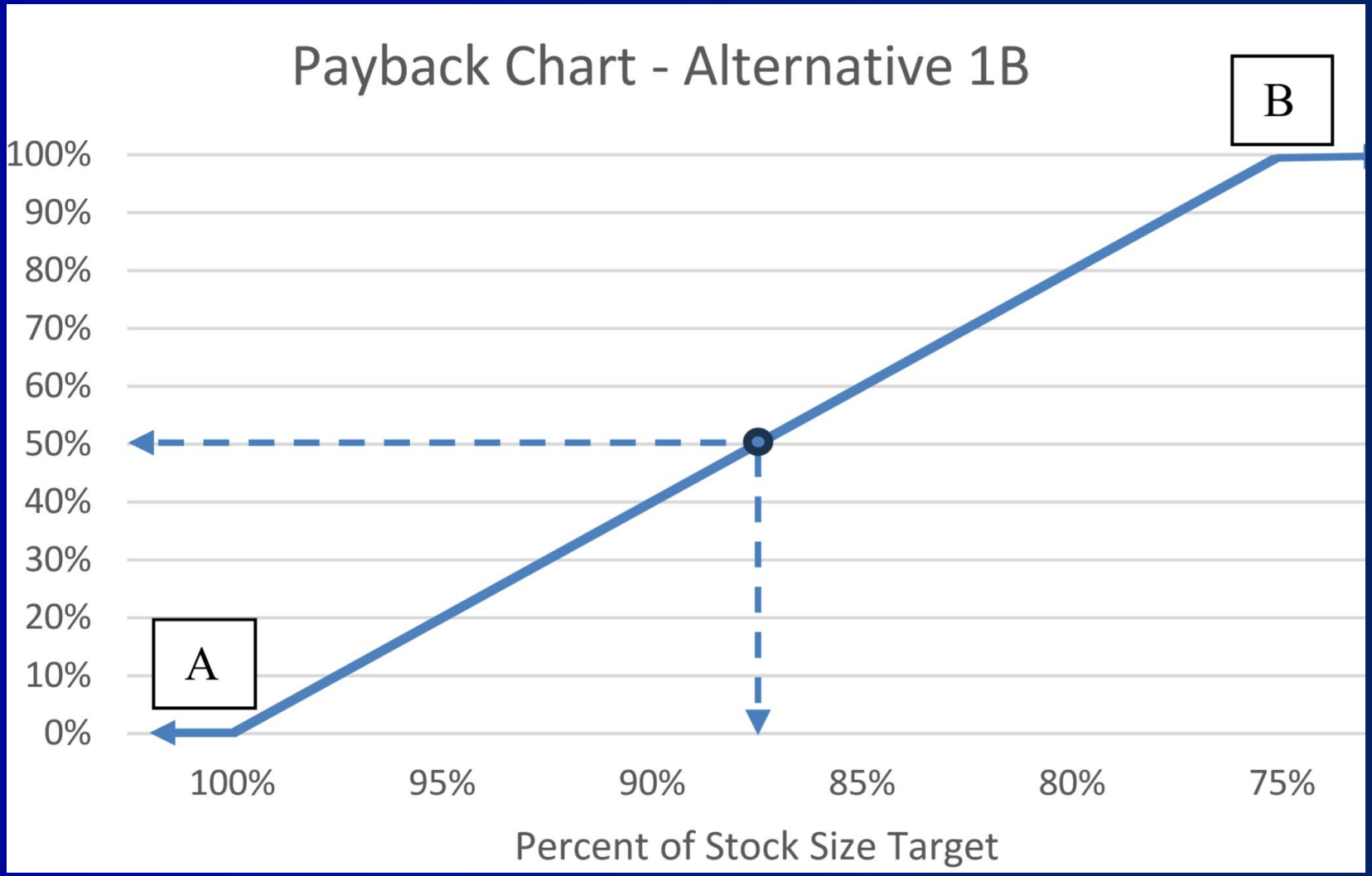
Set 1-Biomass and paybacks: 1B

At or above target biomass: No payback would be required for ACL overages.

At or below 75% of target biomass: 100% paybacks would be required - from the next applicable year

Between 75% and 100% of target biomass: The payback amount would be calculated on a sliding scale based on biomass level

Set 1-Biomass and paybacks: 1B



Set 2-Overage Sources: no action

All catch sources treated the same

A 100MT discard overage has the same probable stock effect as a 100 MT landings overage

Yes, discards might be lower in reality, but also might be higher!

Set 3-When Rebuilding: 3A

Always pay back ACL overages fully if stock is in a rebuilding plan

Alt Set 4-Averaging: 4B

Use 3-year averages to calculate ACL overages

(and most recent projected biomass in the 3-year average if scaling)

Alt Set 5-105% closure: 5A

Closing at 105% designed to ensure access across all states

5A: Specs can set closure up to 105%

-If biomass greater than 50% of target

-Do this in 2026/2027

What would this look like?

Specs: About 7,600 MT Annual Catch Limit (ACL)

Catch in a year comes in at 8,100 MT, +500 MT
100 MT from landings,
400 MT from discards

Let's say catch was right at same ACL the previous year, 100 MT below a 7,000 MT ACL the year before that…
Avg Catch-Avg ACL = 133 MT (too much)

Scenarios

1: In rebuilding, pay back 133 MT
2: 74% of target biomass, pay back 133MT
3: 101% of target biomass, no payback
4: 87.5% of target biomass, pay back 66.5 MT

Paybacks go against ACL, then set-asides occur, so all paybacks from any sources are going to reduce the next applicable year's quota

If landings overages always trigger full payback

Catch comes in at 133 MT avg over, from discards, at 99% biomass, pay back 5 MT

Catch comes in at 133 MT avg over, from landings, at 99% biomass, pay back 133 MT

???

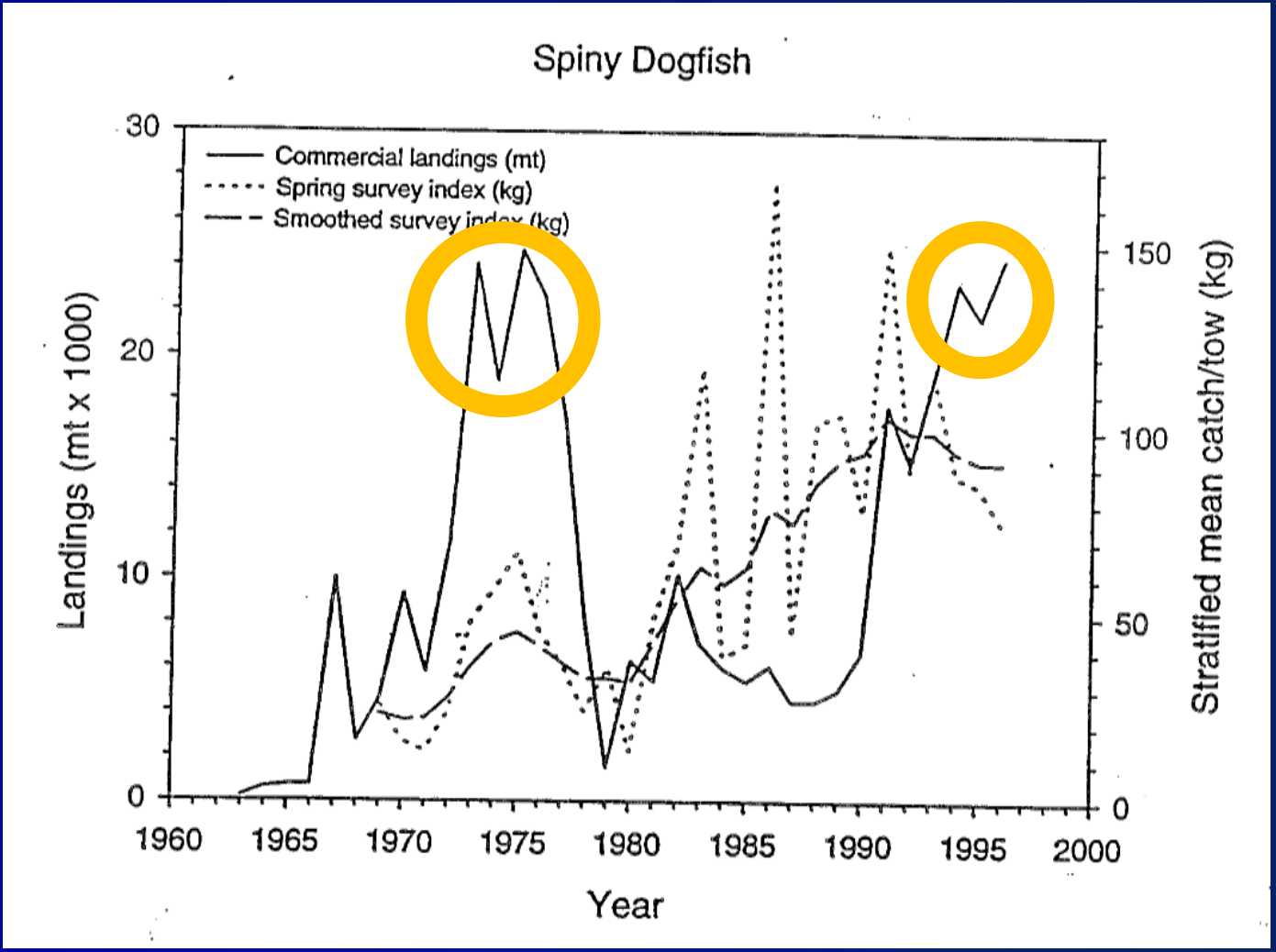
Questions, discussion, potential motions for AM modifications

Backup Slides

2025 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)

- 2025 ABC = 7,626 MT = OFL, set in 2024
  - The Council suspended the risk policy for 2025 due to concerns about impacts on fishing communities
    - 50-50 chance of overfishing: ABC=OFL
  - Risk policy would have targeted 54% of not overfishing
    - ABC would have been about 600 MT less than OFL
  - SSC confirmed calculation, but reservations

Historic Fishery 1963-1996



Original FMP – 1999/2000

Historic Action

With the decline of more traditional groundfish resources in recent years, an increase in directed fishing for dogfish has resulted in a nearly ten-fold increase in landings from 1987-1996. The lack of any regulations pertaining to the harvest of spiny dogfish in the US EEZ combined with the recent rapid expansion of the domestic fishery lead the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils (Councils) to develop a management plan for the species.

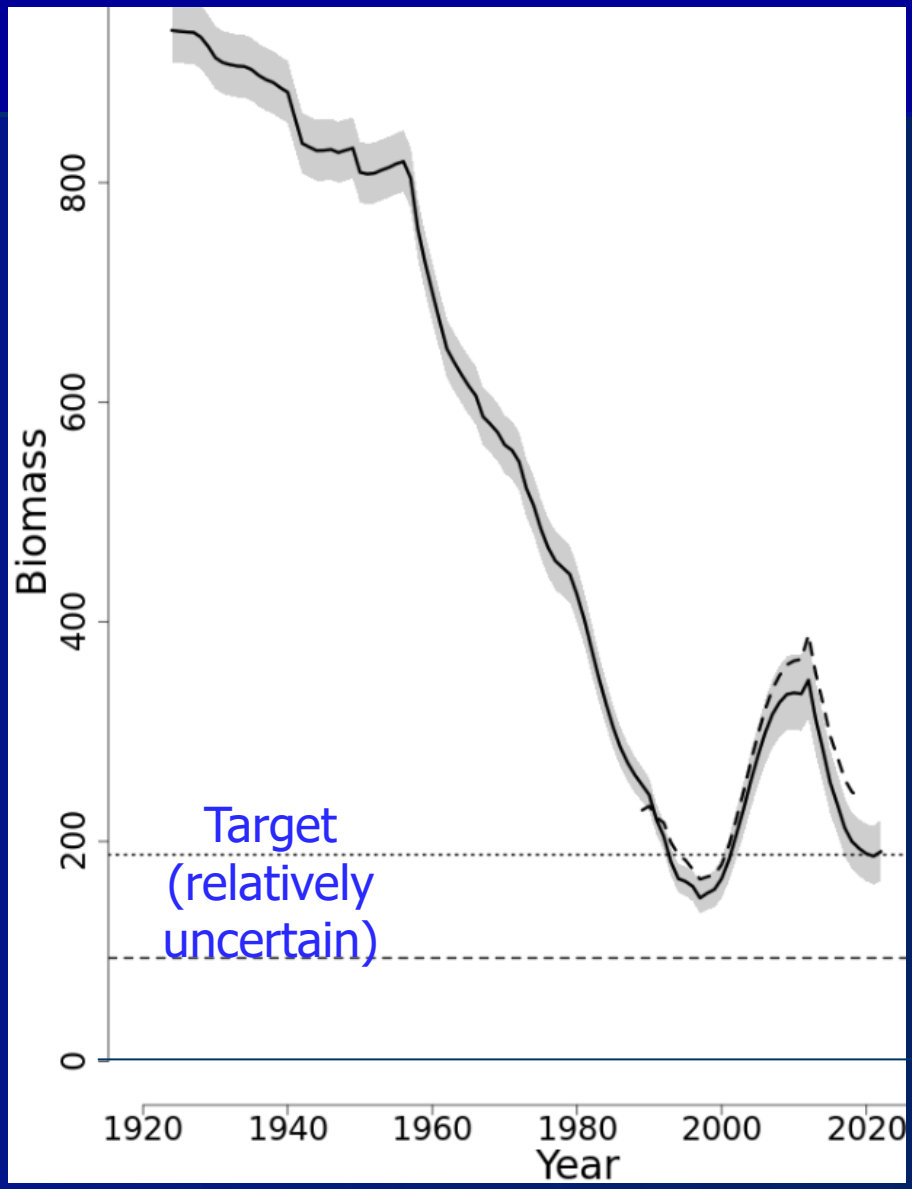
In addition, data and analyses in the most recent stock assessment indicate that the spiny dogfish stock in the Northwest Atlantic has declined as a result of the recent increase in exploitation (NEFSC 1998).

Original FMP – 1999/2000

Spiny dogfish assessment overview

- Spawning Output in 2022 was estimated to be:

- 191 million pups



From assessment, avail at: https://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/october-30-2023

Total Biomass

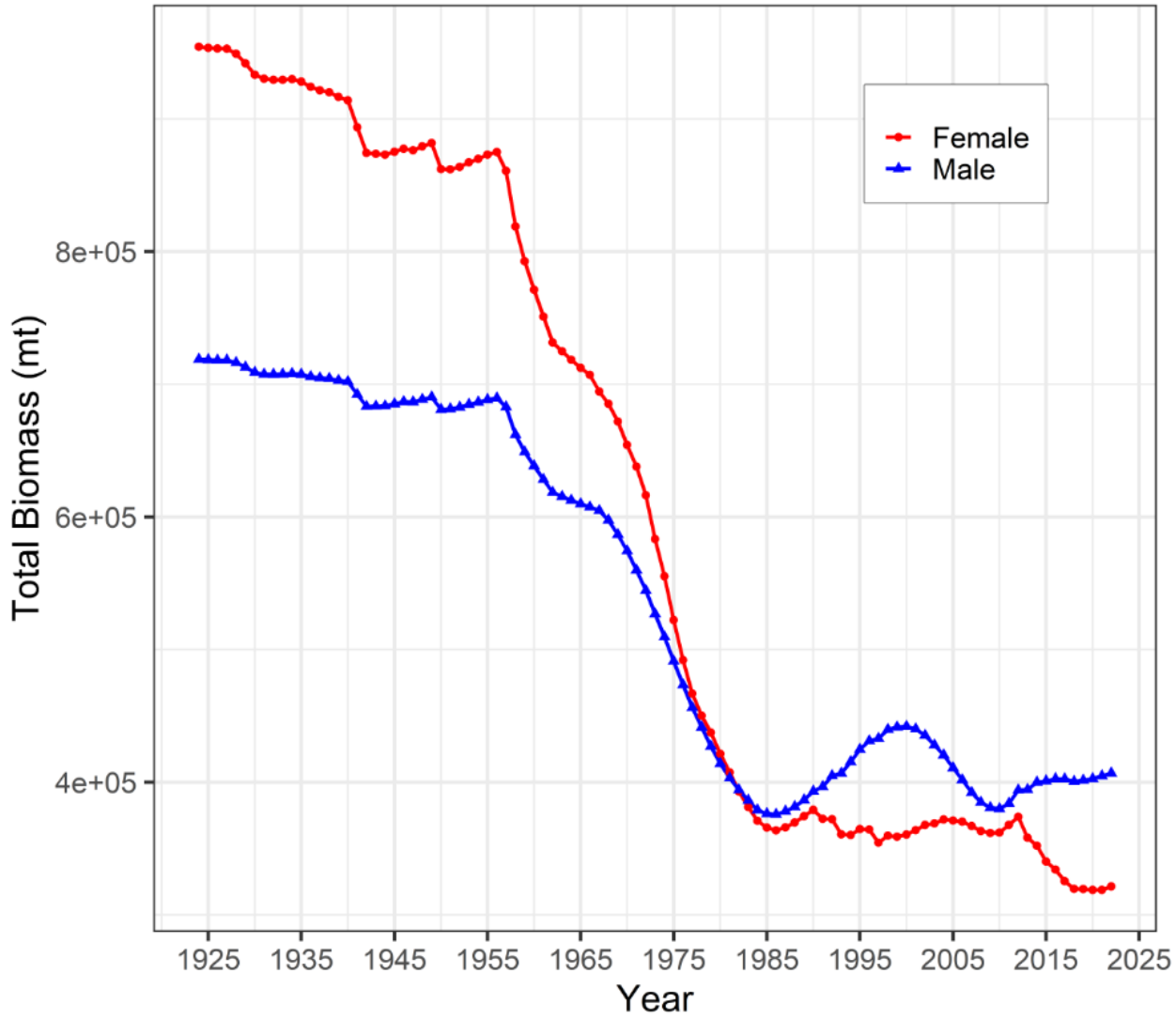
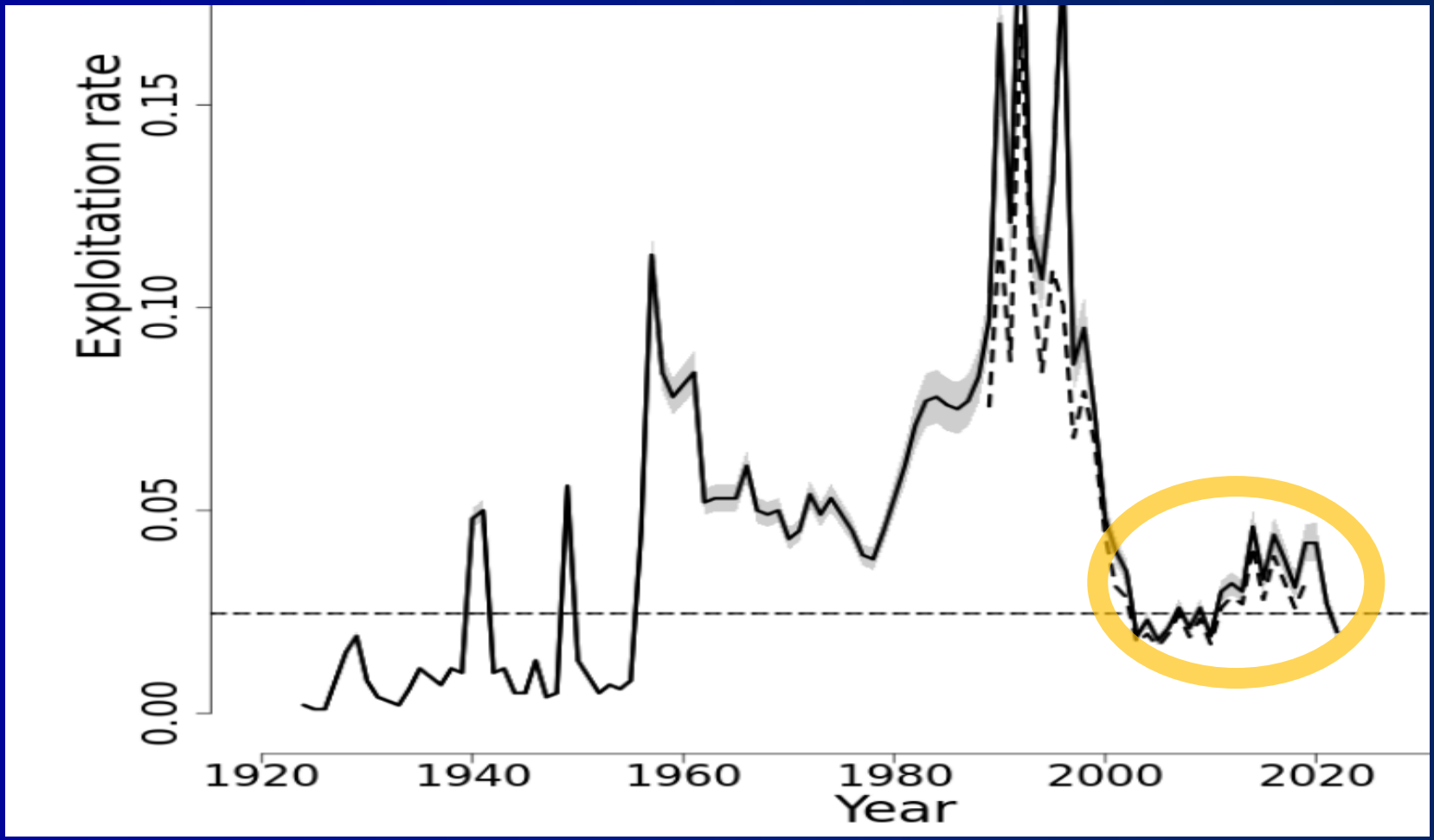


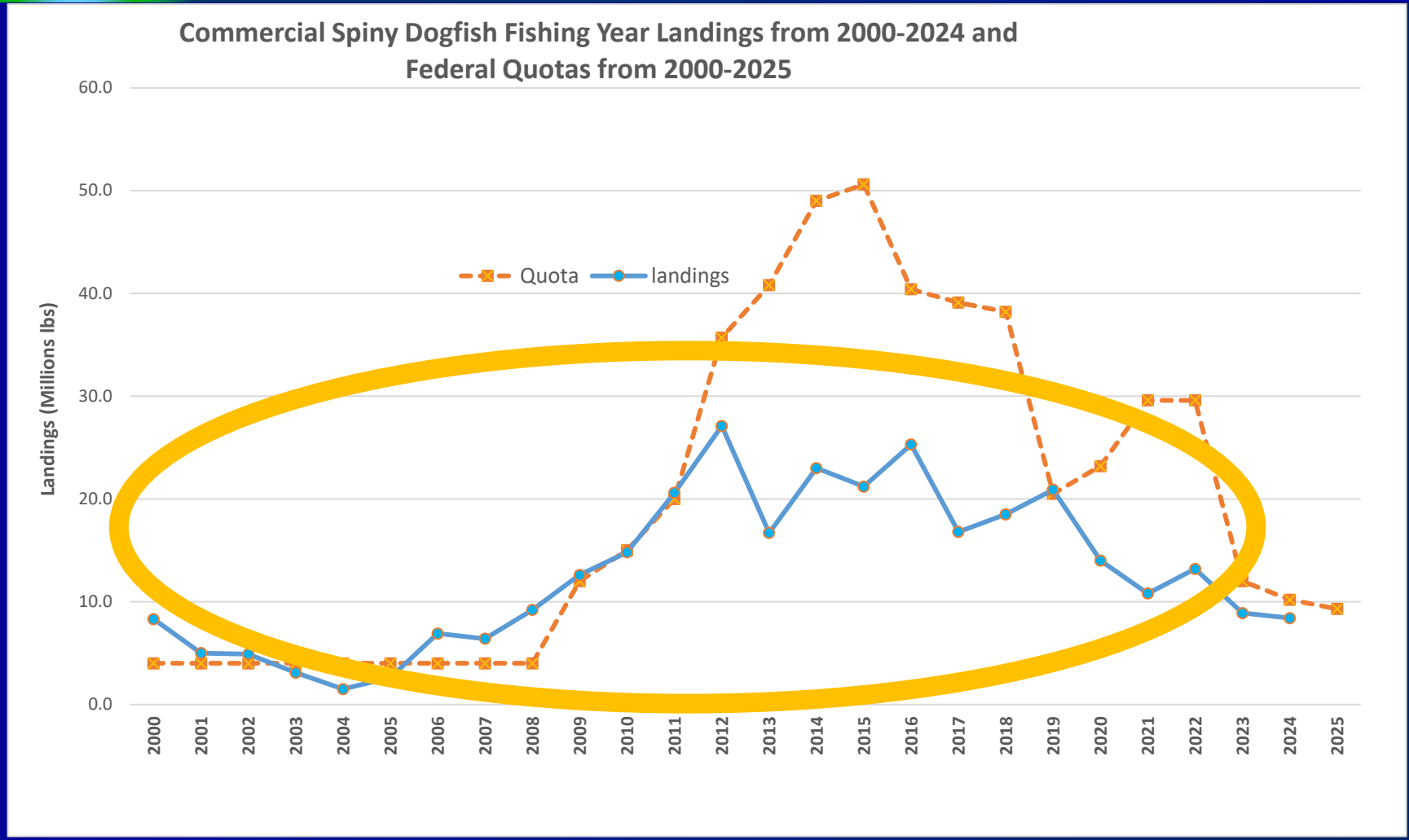
Figure 33: Estimated total biomass (mt) by sex from 1924 to 2022 for Atlantic spiny dogfish.

2023 Assessment

Fishing Mortality



Historic Quota (2000+)



Unpublished NMFS dealer weighout data

Proportion 90cm+ females

- Most of the data telling a similar story…

From assessment, avail at: https://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/october-30-2023

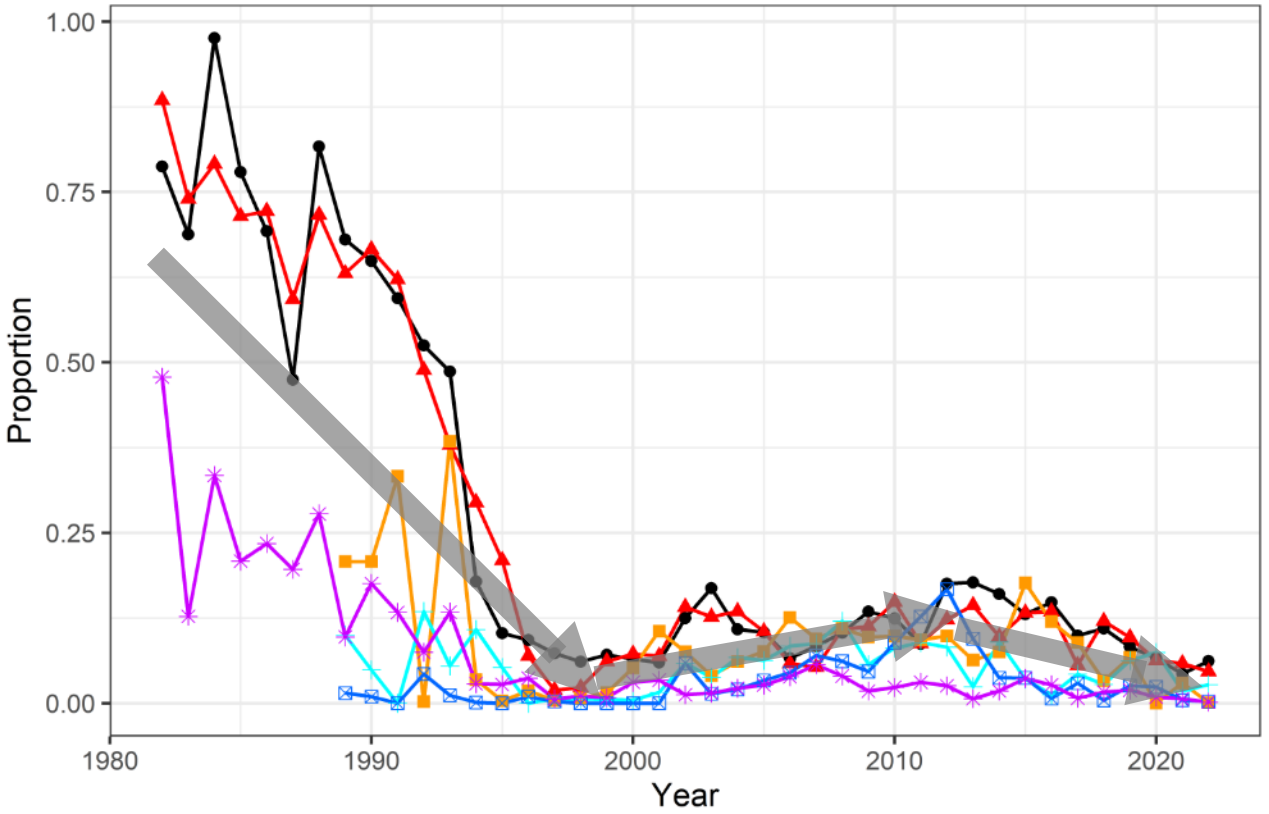


Figure 3: Proportions of 90+ cm females by fleet from 1982 to 2022.

Proportion 90cm+ females

- Seatrade 2025 Pictures:

- Assessment:
  - 3/4 of fish like this in the 1980s…
  - 1/15 in 2022…

Proportion 90cm+ females

- Seatrade 2025 Pictures:

- Sampling has seen fish like these in 2025 too, but most sampled landings 70cm-85cm (both portside and observer data)

NEFSC Data Update Highlights

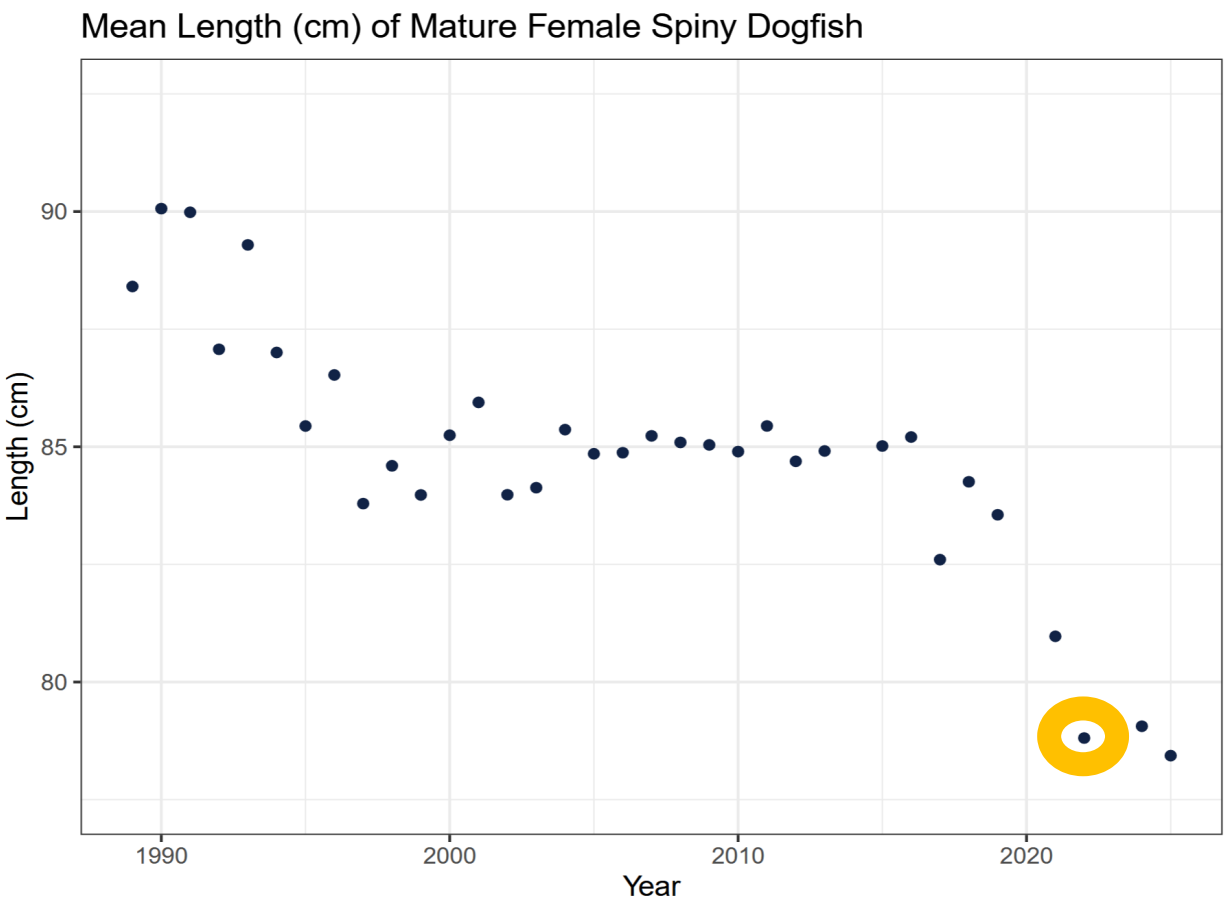


Figure 4: Mean length (cm) of mature female spiny dogfish from the NEFSC Spring Bottom Trawl Survey from 1989 through 2025. Survey was incomplete in 2014, 2020, and 2023; no estimates available.

NEFSC Data Update Highlights

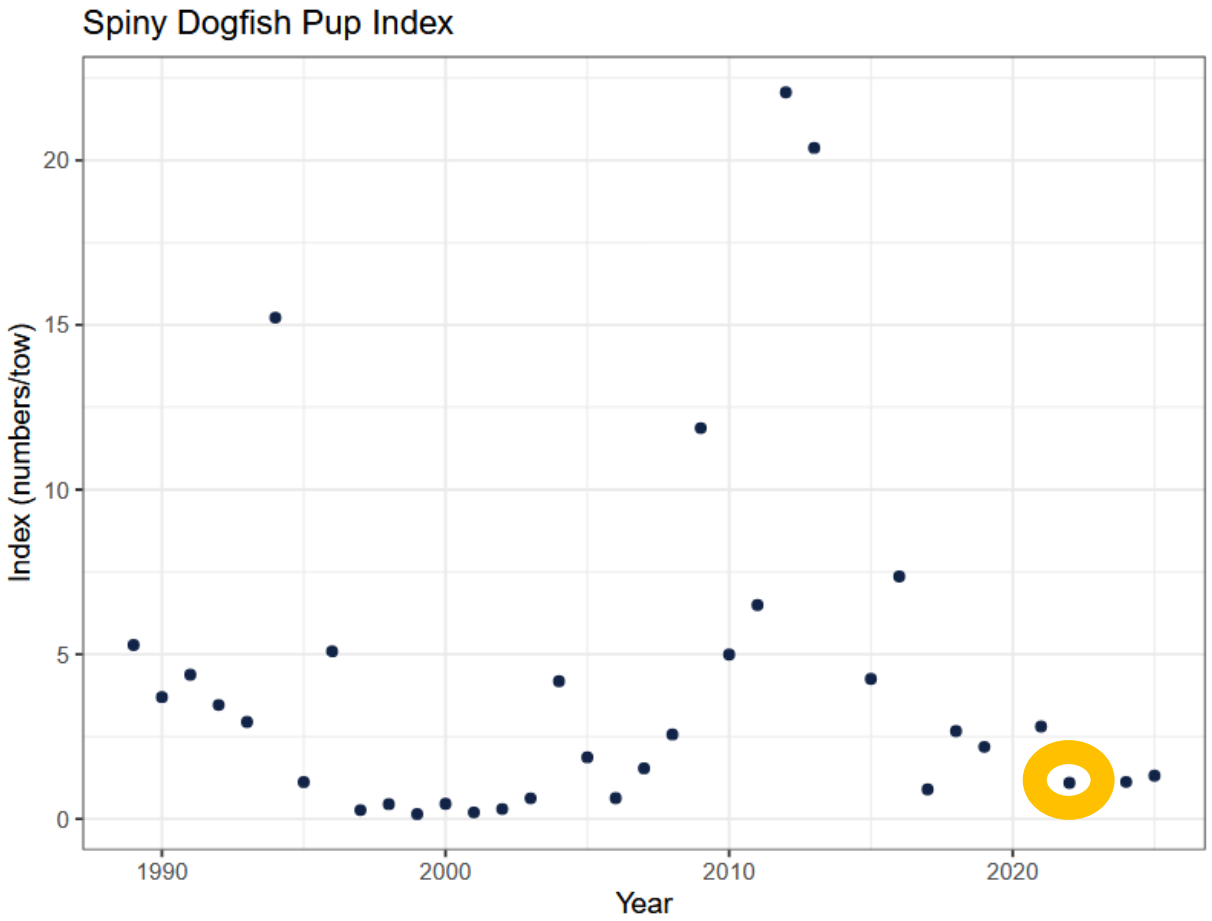


Figure 7: Spiny Dogfish Pup (<=35 cm) Index from the NEFSC Spring Bottom Trawl Survey from 1989 through 2025. Survey was incomplete in 2014, 2020, and 2023; no estimates available.

TOR 1. Level of catch for OFL and appropriate Coefficient of Variation

- Projections were not based on updated model. Instead, recent catches were used to update projection from 2022.
- OFL for 2026=8,084.
- Uncertainty increases with length of projections.
- For these projections only, the SSC increased CV from 100% to 150%.
- Additional concerns—several indices near all time lows.
- If longer periods between assessments become more likely, then risks to stock and fisheries dependent on them will increase.

TOR 2. Set the ABC given the OFL CV and estimated biomass

- Three scenarios considered.
- 2026 projected stock size =113% Bmsy ➔ P*=46%

Projection Scenario	Year	OFL	ABC
Time Varying	2026	8,084	7,254
	2027	8,222	7,410
Constant	2026	8,084	7,332
	2027	8,221	7,332
ABC= OFL	2026	8,084	8,084
	2027	8,202	8,202

TOR 3: Sources of Uncertainty (1 of 2)

- In view of recent projection performance, use of 4 and 5 year projections increases uncertainty since new information on population response to exploitation is not included.
- Effects of environmental factors on distribution, both inshore vs offshore, and in water column.
- Heavy reliance on NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey.
- Research Track assessment suggest low productivity: slower growth, lower natural mortality, earlier maturation, smaller pups.
- These have changed selectivity patterns of fishery and lowered Fmsy proxy.

TOR 3: Sources of Uncertainty (2 of 2)

- Divergence between projected OFLs and fishery-independent indices.
- Changes in size distribution of females is result of slower growth, and effects of earlier period of higher recruitment (i.e., ~2010-15)

Public Comments

- Trawl survey is missing Spiny Dogfish present in the water column and not accounting for day-night differences.
- Reductions in gillnet mesh size to 5” in Mid Atlantic is responsible for smaller average size of female dogfish.
- Increased reporting from harvesters (as is done with squid) would be helpful for fine-scale movements and size composition.
- Stock has responded quickly when fishing mortality was reduced in early 2000’s.

General Comment from SSC (1 of 2)

- Council's request to suspend Risk Policy for 2026 and 2027 stimulated discussions.
- The absence of any consideration of scientific uncertainty was disconcerting…not recommended as a general policy.
- The estimates OFL=ABC in the previous table affirm the correctness of the computation, but are not an SSC endorsement of suspending the Council's risk policy.

Monitoring Committee Summary

Table 1. Spiny Dogfish Specifications for 2025 Fishing Year

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Commercial Quota	9,338,770	4,236

Monitoring Committee Summary

- What about there being multiple potential ABCs?
  - That's between the Council and SSC
- Can still address everything else…

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Canadian Deduction – Getting to the U.S. ABC = Annual Catch Limit (ACL)
  - Canadian landings dwindled from a few thousand metric tons (MT) in the early 2000s to just a few MT in the early 2020s
  - Averaged 4 MT over 2020-2023 – reasonable deduction

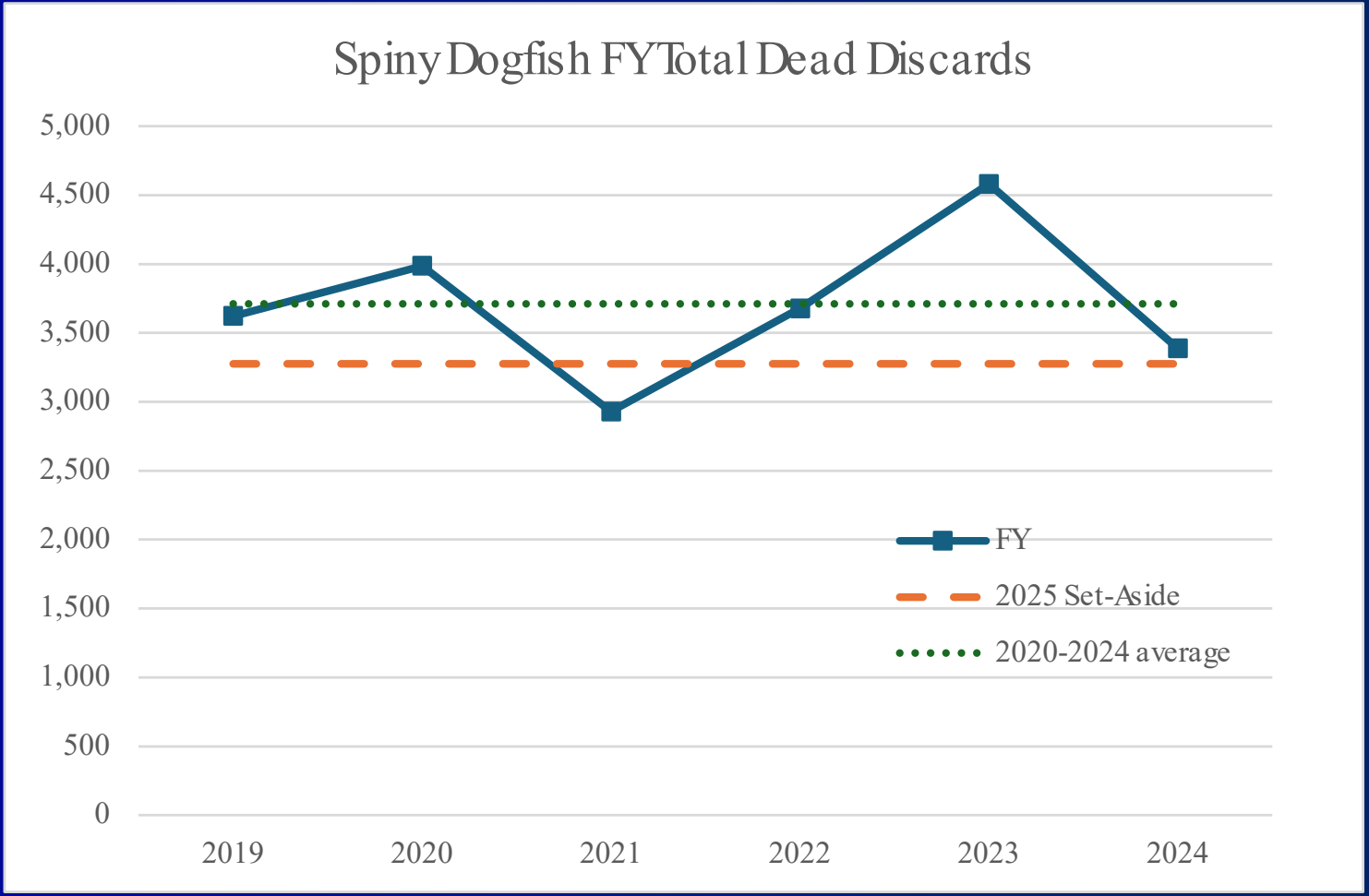
Monitoring Committee Summary

- Management Uncertainty Buffer – Getting to the Annual Catch Target (ACT)
  - Given the recent history of the fishery, substantial overages are not necessarily expected, so there is no particular buffer recommended
  - A larger buffer and smaller ACT will reduce the chance of ACL overages (and overfishing and paybacks), but also reduce quota

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Dead Discard Set-Aside – Getting to Landings
  - Three approaches currently seem reasonable
    - 1. Use 2020-2024 average: 3,712 MT.
    - 2. Use percent utilized in the projections: 43.8% (the average of the percents observed in the 2022-2024 calendar years) applied to any given ABC.
    - 3. Use the Midpoint (average) of the preceding two approaches

Monitoring Committee Summary



Monitoring Committee Summary

- More on Discards…
  - Since 2019, around 1,000 MT per year recreational after a 20% discard mortality rate
  - Most dead commercial discards are in the trawl fishery, reason mostly: "no market"
    - 50% mortality applied to trawl discards
  - Substantial concern from industry on the reasonableness of the scale of discards
    - Both for totals and dead

Discard Plausibility (FW Table 15)

Fishing Year	REGION	GEAR CAT	MESH CAT	ALL Spiny Dogfish Discards (lbs)	Dead Spiny Dogfish Discards (lbs) (50%)	# Trips	Avg discarded per trip (ALL divided by # Trips)
2023	GOM	TRAWL	LM	5,576,395	2,788,198	2,756	2,023 ✓
2023	GOM	TRAWL	SM	237,416	118,708	226	1,051 ✓
2023	SNE	TRAWL	LM	2,533,266	1,266,633	2,758	919 ✓
2023	SNE	TRAWL	SM	743,089	371,545	2,162	344 ✓
2023	MA	TRAWL	LM	5,194,587	2,597,294	3,451	1,505 ✓
2023	MA	TRAWL	SM	664,038	332,019	2,393	277 ✓
		Primary Trawl Totals		14,948,790	7,474,395	13,746	

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Dead Discard Set-Aside – Getting to Landings (currently 3,275 MT)

	1	2	3
US ABCs	5-yr AVG	ABC*0.438	Midpoint
7,250	3,712	3,176	3,444
7,328	3,712	3,210	3,461
7,406	3,712	3,244	3,478
7,622	3,712	3,338	3,525
8,080	3,712	3,539	3,626
8,198	3,712	3,591	3,652

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Dead Discard Set-Aside – Getting to Landings
  - Voting members generally preferred the Midpoint approach
    - account for both the historical trends and recent fishery performance,
    - dampen the effect of a single year estimate, and
    - mitigate the chances of substantially exceeding an ACL.

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Dead Discard Set-Aside – Getting to Landings
  - Non-Voting industry members preferred status quo deduction (3,275 MT)
    - recent performance of the fishery,
    - implausibility of the discard numbers, and
    - the potential impacts on industry

Monitoring Committee Summary

- Recreational Landings Set-Aside – Getting to the Commercial Quota
  - Setting aside the 2020-2024 average (updating one year) appears reasonable
  - 112 MT (currently 111 MT)

Staff Recommendation

- Use the current 2025 OFL as the 2026/2027 ABC = 7,626 MT.
- Canadian deduction the same (4 MT), slight change for recreational landings (112 MT)
- Use last year's MidPoint approach with updated data for discards – this would increase the discard set aside from 3,275 MT to 3,525 MT.
  - **Reduces quota** (by about 0.55 mil lbs)

AP Recommendation

- One member recommended returning to risk policy (lower ABC options)
- Several members recommended re-suspending the risk policy i.e. go with a 50% chance of overfishing (highest ABC option)
- Much concern voiced about plausibility of discard estimates scale (too high)

Staff Recommendation

Specifications	2026-27 (pounds)	2026-27 (mt)	**Basis**
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Comm Quota	8,785,411	3,985	TAL – Rec Landings

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt the staff recommendation per the following table: Grist/Meserve 10/0/1

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Motion Rationales at Committee

- ABC Balances a) the SSC's long term risk concern with b) impacts on the industry now
- Zero uncertainty buffer reasonable given immediate disruptive impacts
- The Mid-Point discards approach maintains continuity with 2025 method, not unreasonably low versus recent estimates
  - Might expect higher spiny dogfish discards with an increasing summer flounder quota

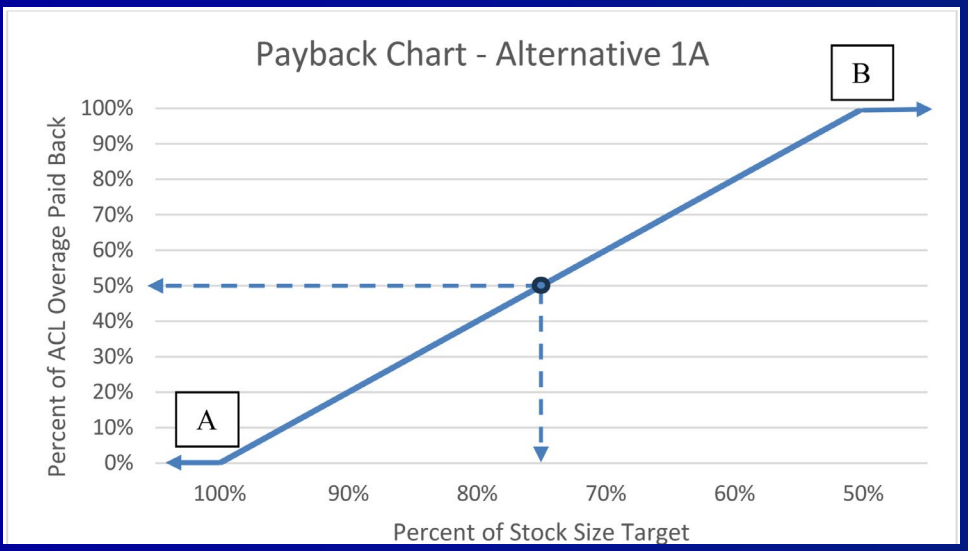
Alt Set 1: Paybacks and Biomass

Action Alternative	No payback at/above this biomass	Full payback at/below this biomass	Half payback at this biomass
1A	100% Target	50% Target	75% Target
1B	100% Target	75% Target	87.5% Target
1C	125% Target	75% Target	100% Target

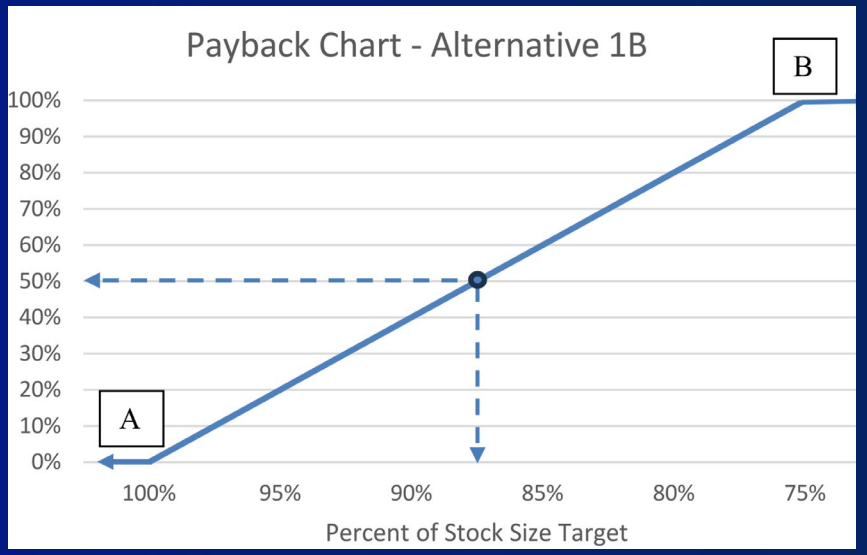
Or, same info in another format → →

Alt Set 1: Paybacks and Biomass

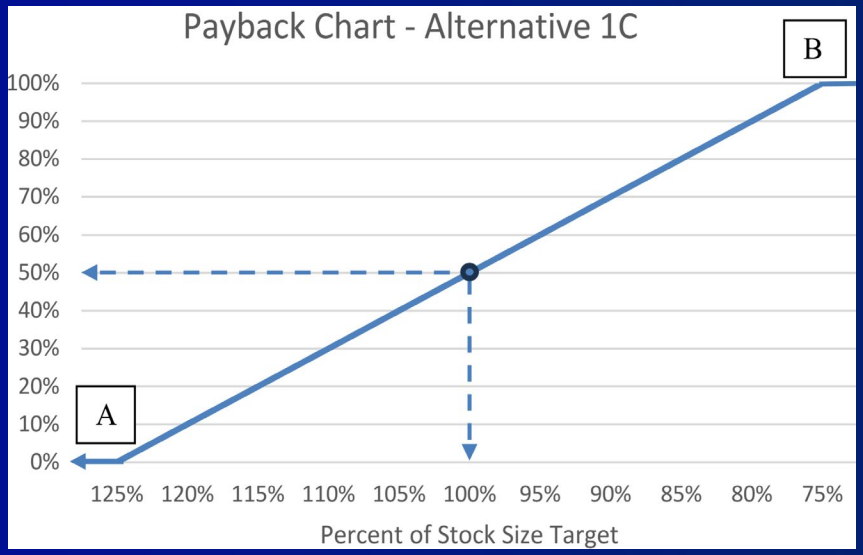
1A



1B



1C



Alt Set 1: AP

- One member advised caution given stock vulnerability – no relaxation if not above 100%
- Several members supported 1A
  - Have left a lot of fish in the water over the years
  - Don't pay back if at/over 100%

Alt Set 1: Staff

- Staff recommend Action Alternative 1B: Middle cautionary modified payback scaling
  - Maintaining full paybacks at 75% or less of the target ensures that attenuating paybacks does not affect the sustainability of the resource.
  - No paybacks at current stock size (over 100%)

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt the staff recommendation 1B. Beckwith/Grist - Motion passes by consensus.

Motion Rationales at Committee

- We only catch 1% of total biomass. I support precaution but this would avoid unnecessary paybacks, achieving a happy medium.

- Shifting to 100% paybacks once the stock is only 75% of the target (1B's approach) should ensure negligible stock impacts.

Alt Set 2: AP

- One member advised caution given stock vulnerability – no relaxation if not fully rebuilt.
- Several members supported no action
  - Why punish the directed commercial fishery for having good landings data?
  - Instead we need better recreational data and better discard data – those are artificially lowering the directed quota.

Alt Set 2: Staff

- Staff recommend no action for Set 2:
  - Staff sees no biological (or other) benefits to treating more certain landings data more precautionarily (i.e. always paying back landings overages) versus less certain catch estimates like discards.
  - Less certain estimates may be lower, but they may be higher!

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt status quo/no action for Alternative Set 2. Beckwith/Meserve - 9/1/1 Motion passes

Motion Rationales at Committee

- Doesn’t seem to be a reason to treat more precise catches (landings) more harshly.

Alt Set 3: AP

- One member advised caution given stock vulnerability – no relaxation if not fully rebuilt.
- Several members supported no action
  - just go with stock size and don't have a special case where you don't use scaling provisions to mitigate paybacks if you are in a rebuilding plan.

Alt Set 3: Staff

- Staff recommend 3A: Always pay back ACL overages fully if stock is in a rebuilding plan.
  - Based on National Standard 1 guidelines, not fully paying back catch overages during rebuilding would likely involve developing complicated analyses…delay
  - Reconsider if spiny dogfish ever needs a rebuilding plan - not relevant enough now to delay this action…

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt alternative 3A.
- Luisi/Hermsen

- Motion passes by consensus.

Motion Rationales at Committee

- National Standard 1 advises that full paybacks would generally be expected during rebuilding

- Not currently pertinent so simplest to align with the basic National Standards guidance
  - revisit later if needed

Alt Set 4: AP

- Several members supported 4B
  - Use 3-year average for paybacks but just use most recent year to determine how you scale paybacks based on biomass.

Alt Set 4: Staff

- Staff recommend 4B
  - Spiny dogfish has a large overall biomass and long lifespan so smoothing ACL-to-catch comparisons over three years should add stability for industry without compromising the stock
  - Averaging biomass also OK, but not using the most recent projected biomass (e.g. 4A), would raise complicated National Standard 2 (best available science) issues

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt 4B for the averaging alternative.
- Meserve/Grist

- Motion passes by consensus.

Motion Rationales at Committee

- There are trade-offs in terms of uncertainty using the most recent and potentially more uncertain terminal estimate versus a recent average.

- For a stock like spiny dogfish (long lived), it shouldn't matter too much either way, and 4B would be simplest and could be more responsive to the most recent trends.

Alt Set 5: AP

- Several members supported 5A
  - Allow up to 105% closure as long as over 50% of biomass target
  - Most flexible

Alt Set 5: Staff

- Staff recommend 5B
  - Clarify that specifications can set closures of federal waters (the EEZ) at up to 105% of the landings quota when biomass is projected to be at least 75% of the biomass target in the relevant fishing year.
  - Minor quota overages could contribute to ACL overages, and like Alternative Set 1, risk seems more appropriate when a stock is at a good stock status.

Committee Motion

- I move that the Committee recommend that the Councils adopt 5A and set a 5% buffer for the 2026-2027 specifications.
- Meserve/Beckwith

- 10/1/0 motion passes

Motion Rationales at Committee

- Helps avoid a situation where one state's overage disadvantages other states within a year

- There was discussion if the biomass trigger could be removed, but given it has been part of the discussion to date, staff recommended and NMFS supported not making such a change at this time