



## New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116

E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

# MEETING SUMMARY

## Whiting Committee

Holiday Inn, Portsmouth, NH

October 30th, 2014

The Whiting Oversight Committee met on October 30th, 2014 to review a draft 2015-2017 Specifications Document, impact analyses of alternatives in the document, and Whiting PDT advice to recommend final measures to the Council. Council priorities were also discussed and identified.

**MEETING ATTENDANCE:** Mr. Balzano (Chairman), Mark Alexander, Frank Blount, Ellen Goethel, Peter Kendall, Lauri Nolan, Matt McKenzie and Michael Pentony (Committee members); Andrew Applegate and David Thomas (NEFMC staff); Moira Kelly (GARFO); and Dan Farnham (Advisor).

### ***AGENDA ITEM: REVIEW 2015-2017 SPECIFICATIONS OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES; PRESENTATION OF IMPACT ANALYSES***

Mr. Balzano opened the meeting and asked Mr. Applegate to summarize the Specifications Package, the purpose and need of the action, the description of alternatives, estimated impacts of the alternatives, as well as the components of the affected environment section. The specifications package included the PDT's analysis on the potential effects of the proposed red hake possession limits and AM triggers. Mr. Applegate explained that the red hake discard rate had a large influence on the expected catch, especially since a very large proportion of total catch is discarded. He showed the trend in discarding rates and explained that the 2012 and 2013 rates were higher than a long-term rate of about 60%. He explained that the discard rate declined from 2012 to 2013, but the estimated catch was 11% higher than the proposed ACL. Mr. Kendall explained that the discard rate could be biased or imprecise, depending on when and how frequently the observations occur. Mr. Balzano pointed out that the previous AM trigger adjustments (from 2013-2014) have worked well, and indicate how the Committee should weigh this uncertainty in their management decisions.

The Committee discussed how the tiered approach proposed by the Advisory panel could allow time to react to future red hake discards. Mrs. Goethel reminded the Committee that the fishery has not had a benchmark assessment and re-stated her belief that the stock is moving north. The Committee discussed how the red hake discard rate highlights a need to re-examine access to the whiting stocks, and Mr. Applegate said it would be helpful if the advisors and committee could

improve the rationale and justification already in the document about how the proposed possession limit alternatives would be more effective than predicted by the model results.

***AGENDA ITEM: APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES***

Mr. Applegate proceeded with the summary of the red hake possession limit alternatives. Mr. Pentony stated that the Council needs to present a specs package that provides a reasonable approach and justification for restraining catch of red hake under the ACL. Mrs. Goethel stated her belief that the tiered approach will constrain catch better than the no action alternative, and the document should explain the potential uncertainties in model assumptions. As a further sensitivity analysis using a mean discard rate of 60.6% (the value used to set the proposed TAL), Mr. Applegate made six additional models runs for the three fishing years and the tiered approach to compare to the same output using No Action regulations. He noted that raising the discard rate would increase the catch to 114, 89, and 90% of the proposed ACL, when applying the 2011-2013 fishery data, respectively. Mr. Balzano suggested the Committee make a motion to recommend the preferred alternative for ACL specifications.

**1. MOTION: Mrs. Goethel/Mr. McKenzie**

Recommend that the Council adopt the updated specifications (Section 5.1.1) as the preferred alternative.

**Discussion on the Motion:** Responding to a committee question Mr. Applegate noted that the SSC-accepted northern red hake ABC of 287 mt carries a 6% chance of causing overfishing, i.e. the exploitation rate above the threshold.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0.**

**2. MOTION: Mr. Kendall/Mrs. Goethel**

Recommend that the Council adopt the alternative described in Section 5.2.1, a tiered approach northern red hake possession limit (3,000/1,500) with the corrected AM trigger (62.5%).

**Discussion on the Motion:** Mrs. Goethel explained the rationale for the alternative is that it has a low chance of exceeding the ACL and it will allow for a larger percentage of catch to be landed. Mr. Applegate noted that the estimated catch under this alternative is still below the OFL, suggested that any overage could be taken into account by management and scientific uncertainty.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0**

**3. MOTION: Mrs. Goethel/Mr. Kendall**

That the Council considers a benchmark assessment to occur as soon as possible for red hake, examining recent potential changes in stock structure.

**Discussion on the Motion:** Mr. Applegate added that the NRCC discussed setting benchmark assessment priorities recently. Red hake was considered for a future assessment, but an issue was whether and when there would be new research to justify a benchmark assessment. Due to

the number of species being assessed, and this issue it would be more likely to get a benchmark assessment done in 2017. He noted that the benchmark assessment would need to be completed in the spring of 2017 to be used in the next specifications document.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0.**

***AGENDA ITEM: 2015 COUNCIL PRIORITIES***

**4. MOTION: Mr. Kendall/Mr. Mckenzie**

That the Council includes on the list of priorities the development of a small-mesh multispecies limited access amendment.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0.**

**Discussion on the Motion:** The Committee debated whether the stock assessment would be more important than the limited access amendment. Mr. Applegate reminded the Committee that both priorities would require staff resources, both at the Council, at the Regional Office, and at the Center. Mrs. Goethel said that the Committee needs to protect the stocks themselves and the fishermen depending on them. Mr. Farnham agreed, stating that the trip limit exists for economic reasons and that the existing whiting fleet has the potential to catch most, if not all, of the TAL. An influx of new participants in the fishery could catch too much of the choke species, so a benchmark assessment might keep this from happening. The Committee discussed the NRCC's agenda and determined that they are recommending that the NRCC reconsider their agenda and move with the red hake stock assessment earlier.

**5. MOTION: Mr. Alexander/Mrs. Goethel**

That the Council recommends to NMFS that research related to red hake stock structure be identified as a high priority for the NE cooperative research programs or other appropriate research venues.

**Discussion on the Motion:** Mr. Applegate noted that the research required for a stock assessment would include DNA/RNA research, tagging studies, growth rate analyses, recruitment histories, etc. and that very little of that type of research has occurred since the previous benchmark assessment, which thoroughly evaluated the existing science including differences in meristics, differences in growth rates, differences in recruitment trends, and published tagging data.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 6-0-1.**

**6. MOTION: Frank Blount/Mr. Mckenzie**

The Committee reconsiders Motion #3.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0.**

**7. MOTION: Mr. Pentony/Mr. Kendall**

Move to substitute to recommend that the Science Center conduct an update assessment for northern red hake in 2015 to incorporate recent survey data, to prioritize a benchmark assessment for red hake in 2017, and to prioritize any research necessary to support such a benchmark, with particular attention to research needed to address stock structure.

**Discussion on the Motion:** Mrs. Goethel expressed concern that this motion could end up being low on the Council's priorities, in which case the Committee may want to move to split the different priorities into individual motions.

**The motion carried on a show of hands, 7-0.**

**MAIN MOTION CARRIED**

The Whiting Oversight Committee adjourned at 12:42 PM.