

2018 FALL NRCC MEETING SUMMARY (NOVEMBER 14-15)

Portland Regency Hotel – 20 Milk Street, Portland, ME

Attendees

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)

Bob Beal, Executive Director

Toni Kerns, Interstate Fishery Management Program Director (Day 2)

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)

G. Warren Elliott, Vice-Chairman

Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director

Brandon Muffley, Staff

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC)

Dr. John Quinn, Chairman

Terry Stockwell, Vice-chairman

Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director

Dr. Jason McNamee, Chair, SSC

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Jon Hare, Science and Research Director

Dr. Jim Weinberg, Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) Chairman

Dr. Michael Simpkins, Chief, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division

Dr. Russ Brown, Chief, Population Dynamics Branch

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

Mike Pentony, Regional Administrator

Moira Kelly, performing the duties of the Acting Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries

Emily Gilbert, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

Kyle Molton, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

Guest Presenters

Dr. Dan Linden, APSD (Day 2)

Public Attendees

Drew Minkiewicz (Day 1)

Chris Weiner (Day 1)

Note: NRCC decisions and action items that resulted from this meeting are in bold for ease of reference.

– Day 1 –

1. NRCC Charter

The NRCC reviewed the draft of the NRCC charter. The group requested and agreed upon a few adjustments to the draft and ultimately approved the charter. The group agreed that rotating chairs will also be responsible for hosting the meetings. Formal members of the ASMFC will be the chairs for 2019 and GARFO support staff will reach out to coordinate meeting logistics in the coming months. The charter is a living document and adjustments will be included in future appendices. The NRCC agreed to host this document on the NEFMC's website. GARFO support staff will make the agreed upon adjustments to the charter and Mr. Mike Pentony will have all formal members sign the document during the next round of Commission and Council meetings (**Action Item #1**).

2. Long-term Stock Assessment Schedule Discussion

Approval of the Stock Assessment Scheduling Process

Dr. Mike Simpkins reviewed the latest updates to the stock assessment scheduling process document. NRCC members had already been updated on this information prior to the NRCC meeting. The following is a summary of the clarifications discussed at the meeting:

- The NRCC agreed that although the ability to utilize external reviews through a management track is not explicitly spelled out in the document, it is something that can be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- When Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) meetings are being scheduled, the NEFSC will ensure that GARFO, the Councils, and the Commission staff are informed early on so they can participate. Their attendance is not a requirement.
- Dr. Jason McNamee requested that the SSC chairs have an orientation over the AOP process so they understand their roles prior to the implementation of this new process.
- The working group that came up with the initial strawman schedules for the research and management track will be disbanded; future scheduling will be accomplished by the NRCC.
- The NEFSC is working on creating automated data updates, where possible. Until these are automated, data updates must be requested and scheduled by the NRCC.

Following the presentation and discussion, **the NRCC approved the assessment process document by consensus.**

Approval of the Management Track Schedule

The NRCC reviewed and discussed the drafted management track schedule. Peer review levels will be determined later once assessment leads begin to develop initial assessment plans. There were a few adjustments to the drafted schedule, summarized below:

- The herring management track was moved from 2022 to 2020 and switched to a 2-year cycle (i.e., 2021-2022).
- To accommodate the adjustment in the herring cycle, the ocean pout, white hake, and wolfish management tracks were switched to a 3-year cycle beginning in 2021.
- Mr. Bob Beal noted that the ASMFC-only stocks are not getting assessed as much, noting that most are on a 5-year schedule. After discussion, the NRCC agreed that if/as capacity increases in the future, first consideration would be given to ASMFC assessments (**Action Item #2**).
- Some of the adjustments made to the specification cycles will require adjustments to the regulations. Eventually management actions for affected FMPs will need to be initiated to adjust the current allowable specification cycles (**Action Item #3**).
- Chub mackerel will need a data update or exploration of data for 2020 and will eventually need to be on the management track cycle. It was included as a placeholder with dates to be determined in the future.
- For blueline tilefish, Dr. Chris Moore mentioned that the NEFSC will likely need to help a bit even though most of the work will be coming out of the SEFSC. Coordination between SERO, SEFSC, MAFMC, SAFMC, GARFO, and NEFSC will be needed in the future.

Approval of the Research Track Schedule

The NRCC reviewed and discussed the drafted 5-year research track schedule. The NRCC discussed the need to consider how out-year schedules should be developed (i.e., Year 6 and beyond). The NRCC decided that each year it will develop a Year 6 list, will firm up the Year 3 list (Years 1 and 2 will be considered final), and will consider Years 4 and 5 to have some level of flexibility for adjustments.

There were a few adjustments to the drafted schedule, summarized below:

- The Spring 2020 research topic was refined to include red and silver hake stock structure, rather than just red hake.
- The NRCC agreed that haddock is a priority for a research track assessment, so that was moved to Spring 2021. The winter flounder stocks that were scheduled for that time were moved to Year 6 consideration.
- American plaice and dogfish research track assessments were moved from Fall 2021 to Spring 2022.
- The butterfish and longfin squid research track assessments were moved from Spring 2022 to Fall 2021.
- Windowpane flounder was removed from the Spring 2024 research list and included as a potential consideration for Year 6.

- In the place of windowpane, a scallop research track assessment was included for Spring 2024.
- The current list of Year 6 topics includes monkfish, winter flounders, windowpane flounders, Jonah crab, chub mackerel, blueline tilefish, scup, and herring. The NRCC agreed that the NEFSC's assessment branch should review this list and provide input (**Agenda Item #4**).

By consensus, the NRCC approved the current research track assessment schedule.

The research assessments for 2020-2022 will not be adjusted. The 2023 schedule will be finalized over the next one or two NRCC meetings, and the 2024 schedule will be finalized in the next 3 to 4 NRCC meetings.

3. Update on Operational Stock Assessments for Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish

Dr. Russ Brown reviewed the current schedule for the operational stock assessments for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. There is an AOP meeting tentatively scheduled for January 22, 2019. The agenda will be available the week before the meeting. The peer review is currently scheduled for April 2019, with final results available the first week of May. Dr. Simpkins suggested adopting some of the new assessment process in this assessment (i.e., invite GARFO and Commission and Council staff to AOP meeting). **The NRCC agreed.**

The NRCC had a longer discussion about the utility of having these assessments in April 2019, rather than later in the year, particularly for black sea bass. There was concern from the ASMFC and MAFMC regarding how to incorporate 2018 catch and landings information. Dr. Moore and Mr. Beal requested that the assessment be moved to June 2019 to incorporate that data. The NEFSC noted that if the assessment were moved to later in the year, the peer review would likely occur in August or September, rather than June. Mr. Pentony pointed out that this would mean final action for black sea bass specifications would occur in October at the earliest, which would mean that the black sea bass fishery would operate under no specifications at the January 1 start of the 2020 fishing year. In the case that the assessment remains on its current April schedule and does not include 2018 data, Dr. Moore asked if the NEFSC could provide an assessment or data update later in the year to inform management. Dr. Simpkins noted that the NEFSC does not want to do an assessment update, but that a data update would be possible. However, a data update would not include updated projections. The NRCC agreed that at the MAFMC's December meeting there will be a discussion clarifying milestones and when they would occur based on the current April 2019 schedule versus a later schedule. The NEFSC and GARFO will work on refining this schedule (**Action Item #5**). The NRCC scheduled an intercessional call for December 17 to discuss whatever recommendation comes out of the ASMFC and MAFMC's joint December meeting.

UPDATE: Following the NRCC meeting, the ASMFC, MAFMC, GARFO, and NEFSC resolved the timing of these assessments. All parties agreed to push back the operational assessment to early July 2019 (rather than April) in order to incorporate 2018 data. The peer review would occur in late July, with final reports available in mid- to late August. Because this information will not be available to get specifications in place at the start of the 2020 fishing year, we will come up with a plan to set interim measures for the start of the year (i.e.

2020). Following final results of the operational assessment, the SSC will meet in September 2019 to make acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for the 2020-2021 fishing years. The Council and Board will meet (jointly or separately - TBD) in October 2019 to make final recommendations for 2020-2021 and GARFO will work to implement those measures as quickly as possible. All parties will continue to work on fine-tuning those timelines, but have a joint plan moving forward. Based on these discussions, the intercession call on December 17 was cancelled.

4. Workshop on Changing Climate Conditions and Science on the East Coast (NEFSC-SEFSC)

Dr. John Hare provided a status update on the workshop being developed by the NEFSC and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The purpose of the workshop is to improve climate science coordination across the eastern U.S. coast. This is a step towards more coastwide interactions. Dr. Hare was interested to know if other NRCC organizations would want to attend and if so, at what level of participation. **The NRCC generally agreed they would be interested in sending staff to observe.** This workshop is focused on science. Future workshops can address management issues.

– Day 2 –

5. Update on NEFSC-GARFO Coordination to Reconcile and Explain Differences in Discard and Landing Estimates

Dr. Dan Linden provided an update on the Data Matching and Identification System (DMIS) documentation and ongoing comparisons with Area Allocation (AA) tables. DMIS is used for quota monitoring and the AA tables are used in stock assessments. DMIS is a process used to integrate all fishery dependent data from a single commercial fishing trip. It is a general process and has recently been revised to apply to all FMPs. APSD has drafted DMIS documentation and the NEFSC has already provided comments. Dr. Linden provided the NRCC with the drafted documentation and noted that if the NRCC would like to comment, it would be helpful to submit comments by January or February 2019. Dr. Linden also mentioned that NEFSC and GARFO are committed to coordinating to the extent possible in reconciling differences in discard and landings estimates that are developed through DMIS and the AA tables. These systems were developed to achieve different objectives, so it will not always be possible to have identical estimates. GARFO and NEFSC will have a workshop in the future to continue discussions and build consensus for continued Fishery Dependent Data Initiative (FDDI) project development.

The NRCC had a brief discussion about interest in attending the workshop. Mr. Pentony suggested that there be an internal workshop first, followed by a larger discussion with external partners. APSD will discuss this suggestion. There will be a follow-up on the status of this workshop at the next NRCC (**Action Item #6**).

6. Coordination of Atlantic Herring Management in the EEZ

The NRCC discussed the ASMFC's recent decision to consider development of herring spawning protection in the offshore area of Georges Bank, which is solely in Federal waters. It was noted that this request must go to the NEFMC and be considered against its other priorities for 2019. Mr. Pentony clarified that GARFO only has the ability to develop complimentary regulations under Secretarial action when the fishery is not currently management in Federal waters by a Council. Mr. Pentony offered support to the Board and Council to work collaboratively. The NEFMC will discuss 2019 priorities at its December 2018 meeting. Mr. Beal recognized that more research into the issue of spawning protection must happen before action can be taken.

7. Priorities Discussions

The NEFSC, MAFMC, NEFMC, ASMFC, and GARFO presented their list of priorities to-date for 2019. Mr. Pentony noted that the approved assessment process requires adjustments to a number of specification cycles, which will need to be addressed through future actions.

The NRCC had a long conversation about wind energy. There was general concern over the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) process for approving offshore wind projects and the level of NMFS's support for such projects. Mr. Pentony discussed our requirements under NEPA to review these wind projects, often on an extremely tight timeline. Dr. Hare noted the difficulty of determining the cumulative impacts of wind energy projects, particularly on fisheries resources. Dr. Hare also noted that when these wind projects are developed, there will be an impact on our surveys and assessments because research vessels will no longer be able to access those areas. Recognizing that wind energy is something that will continue to be an important issue, the NRCC agreed to have regular updates at future meetings. GARFO will coordinate with relevant staff to provide a formal presentation and discussion on wind energy at the next NRCC meeting (**Action Item #7**).

8. Update on Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel

Mr. Terry Stockwell discussed general updates from the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP). The working group of the NTAP will meet next week. The purpose of this working group meeting is to: 1) Review the status of the wingspread performance analyses and gear performance (door) evaluations; 2) discuss the twin trawl survey design and door testing with considerations given to species of interest, timing, experimental design and analyses; and 3) discuss other business and next steps for the NTAP. There will be a full NTAP meeting in December to review the work of the working group. Mr. Stockwell noted that many working group members were concerned about the most recent *R/V Bigelow* breakdown and the NEFSC's decision to cut down to four surveys. Dr. Hare emphasized that maintenance of the *R/V Bigelow* is a top priority.

Mr. Stockwell also noted that the Councils and Commission should reevaluate NTAP membership. Some of the current members have not attended a meeting and it would be beneficial to have active membership.

9. Other Business

New Assessment Process Outreach

The NEFSC will consider the outreach approach for the new assessment process (**Action Item #8**). The Councils and Commission will report out on the new assessment process and long-term schedules at their next meetings. The SSCs will also discuss at future meetings. The NEFSC will post a short web story announcing that the NRCC approved this stock assessment process.

Next Meetings

The NRCC scheduled an intercessional call from 1-2pm on December 17, 2018, which was later cancelled.

The Spring 2019 NRCC meeting is scheduled for May 29-30th. ASMFC is chairing and hosting.