

Revising the ABC Control Rule for Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Stocks

Scientific and Statistical Committee

June 8, 2021



New England
Fishery Management Council

2021 Council Priority

In consultation with the SSC, revise acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rules for Northeast Multispecies stocks

Council's ABC Control Rule

These ABC control rules will be used in the absence of better information that may allow a more explicit determination of scientific uncertainty for a stock or stocks. If such information is available - that is, if scientific uncertainty can be characterized in a more accurate fashion -- it can be used by the SSC to determine ABCs, these ABC control rules can be modified in a future Council action (an amendment, framework, or specification package):

- a) ABC should be determined as the catch associated with 75% of F_{MSY} .
- b) If fishing at 75% of F_{MSY} does not achieve the mandated rebuilding requirements for overfished stocks, ABC should be determined as the catch associated with the fishing mortality that meets rebuilding requirements ($F_{rebuild}$).
- c) For stocks that cannot rebuild to B_{MSY} in the specified rebuilding period, even with no fishing, the ABC should be based on incidental bycatch, including a reduction in bycatch rate (i.e., the proportion of the stock caught as bycatch).
- d) Interim ABCs should be determined for stocks with unknown status according to case-by-case recommendations from the SSC.

Background Information – Staff Memo

- Current stock status and status determination criteria
- Rebuilding plan status
- SSC's past ABC recommendations

Current Stock Status

| Stock | <u>Status</u> | |
|---|---------------|-------------|
| | Overfishing? | Overfished? |
| Georges Bank Cod | Yes | Yes |
| Gulf of Maine Cod | Yes | Yes |
| Georges Bank Haddock | No | No |
| Gulf of Maine Haddock | No | No |
| Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder | Yes | Yes |
| Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder | No | Yes |
| Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder | No | No |
| American Plaice | No | No |
| Witch Flounder | Unknown | Yes |
| Georges Bank Winter Flounder | No | Yes |
| Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder | No | Unknown |
| Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder | No | Yes |
| Acadian Redfish | No | No |
| White Hake | No | Yes |
| Pollock | No | No |
| Northern Windowpane Flounder | No | Yes |
| Southern Windowpane Flounder | No | No |
| Ocean Pout | No | Yes |
| Atlantic Halibut | No | Yes |
| Atlantic Wolffish | No | Yes |

Discussion Questions

1. Which ABC control rules does the SSC recommend the Council consider for the Multispecies FMP?
 - a) Should the rule apply to all stocks, or should different rules be considered for stocks with various life histories?
 - b) Should the rule be proscriptive, or is flexibility needed?
 - c) Should the rule be different for stocks under a rebuilding plan, or for stocks experiencing overfishing?
 - d) Should the rule vary based on the level stock assessment uncertainty, i.e., retrospective patterns, uncertainty in fishery independent or dependent data, uncertainty caused by environmental trends or predation, uncertainty in estimating fishing mortality or spawning stock biomass?
 - e) Are there control rules that could better account for environmental trends and ecosystems considerations?
 - f) Are there control rules that could address the multispecies nature of this plan? Catch limits for some stocks are more constraining than others and this can be challenging.