



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Committee And EBFM Plan Development Team

Via Conference Call
March 10, 2022

The EBFM Committee held a remote webinar meeting on March 10, 2022, beginning at 9:00 am. The meeting ended at approximately 2:30 pm.

This meeting focused on four issues:

- Outreach for EBFM public information workshops
- A draft plan for conducting a Prototype Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)
- Revising management research priorities for 2022-2026
- Discussion with NMFS about the consistency of the stock complex catch management strategy proposed in the example Fishery Ecosystem Plan and National Standard 1

Presentations and background documents are available on the Council's EBFM [web page](#).

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Committee: John Pappalardo (Chairman), Mr. Eric Reid, Mr. Peter Aarrestad, Dr. Michael Sissenwine, Mr. Mark Alexander, Mr. Michael Pierdinock, Mr. Geoff Smith, Mr. Alan Tracy, Melissa Smith (ME designee), Mrs. Michelle Duval (MAFMC), and Mr. Jerome Hermsen (GARFO).

Plan Development Team (PDT): Andrew Applegate (NEFMC staff, PDT chair), Cynthia Ferrio (GARFO), Dr. Scott Large (NEFSC), Dr. Gavin Fay (UMASS-Dartmouth), Dr. Rich Bell (The Nature Conservancy), Dr. Wendy Morrison (NOAA Fisheries), Brandon Muffley (MAFMC), and Dr. Naresh Pradhan (NEFMC).

Council and NOAA Fisheries staff: Mitch McDonald (GCNE), Dr. Andy Beet (NEFSC), Tom Nies, Chris Kellogg, Deidre Boelke, Woneta Cloutier, and Janice Plante (NEFMC staff), Mr. Tom Balf (contractor, Oceanvest)

Public: Kelly Whitmore (MA DMF), Drew Minkiewicz.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The committee provided feedback to Mr. Balf and Council staff about the initial outreach plans, including some structured interviews with owners of vessels fishing on Georges Bank and others. At the April 5 committee meeting, Mr. Balf will update the committee with additional progress on this outreach initiative.
- The committee reviewed and provided comments on a draft plan to conduct a prototype MSE for EBFM strategies applied to Georges Bank. The committee also commented on the following MSE plan characteristics. Council staff will provide a final draft of the committee recommendations for approval at the April 5 meeting.
 - Goals for the prototype MSE
 - Objectives for the prototype MSE
 - Types of participants as stakeholders
 - Timeline
 - Types of results
- The committee recommended that the chairs of each of the Council’s advisory panels should serve as stakeholders, including the recreational advisory panel chair. The AP chairs would represent the people and fisheries on the APs. In cases where the AP chair couldn’t participate due to time, an alternate AP member could be appointed.
- The committee agreed to a plan to develop recommendations for 2022-2026 management research priorities. Committee and PDT members will add comments to a document and finalize the recommendations at the April 5 meeting. The recommendations from all committees will be reviewed by the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee and approved at the June Council meeting.
- Update on National Standard 1 deliberation with the NMFS agency.

Motions:

The Committee made no motions during the meeting. Comments on the initial outreach and a Prototype MSE planning document will be considered at the April 5 committee meeting, after additional progress during March.

Introduction

Mr. Pappalardo summarized the purpose of the meeting and the agenda. He introduced Mr. Tom Balf, Oceanvest, as the Council’s facilitator for EBFM public information workshops.

AGENDA ITEM 1– PUBLIC INFORMATION WORKSHOP UPDATE

Presentation

Mr. Applegate explained how the facilitator contract was awarded, initially for outreach promotion and preparation for workshops. The purpose of this was to create a ‘buzz’ for up to six public information workshops to be held in various ports.

Mr. Balf gave a summary of the work he has been doing to prepare for initial outreach, including developing a database of stakeholders, with a sorted list of fishing frequency for vessels fishing

on Georges Bank. Work has also been initiated to make the EBFM communication page more accessible and develop a preliminary list of questions that could be asked during a structured interview.

Mr. Balf presented a summary of the Georges Bank stakeholder database developed to focus on Georges Bank stakeholders, which included 576 vessel owners (87 trawlers, 31 hand gear, and 14 gillnet boats), 546 dealer processors (not filtered for landings derived from Georges Bank). The list included about a dozen recreational fishing organizations, plus some NGOs and other fishing industry leaders. Mr. Balf shared a list of potential questions that could be asked during these outreach interviews and asked for feedback from the committee and PDT.

Discussion

Mr. Tracy asked initial outreach decisions had been made and who would be interviewed. Mr. Smith asked if the outreach and workshops would include stakeholders from other areas, interests in the Gulf of Maine, Southern New England, and the Mid-Atlantic.

The focus of this work was for the Georges Bank area, defined as an ecosystem production unit in the example Fishery Ecosystem Plan (eFEP) explained Mr. Applegate. While stakeholders with interests in other areas would not be excluded from participating in public information workshops, an ecosystem plan in other areas could have different features and management strategies to match the management objectives for that area. He added that consideration for workshops would be given for ports that have a high degree of landings from fishing activities on Georges Bank, including ports in Southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic, as well as north of Boston. Based on the database, these ports were Chatham/Harwich, New Bedford, Gloucester, and Boston in MA, plus Point Judith, RI and Portland, ME. Other ports that could be considered are Montauk, NY and Cape May/Point Pleasant, NJ.

Mr. Applegate indicated that the outreach plan was included in the Oceanvest application and included in the statement of work. Mr. Applegate went on to explain that in this initial outreach phase, initial outreach to fishers in the lobster and scallop fishery was de-emphasized because it is unlikely that those fisheries would be directly managed by an ecosystem plan. Lobsters and scallops are not closely related trophically to most managed finfish. He added that there are however some indirect effects or considerations, provision of skates and herring for bait in the lobster fishery and finfish bycatch in the scallop fishery. He said that during the workshops, scallop and lobster fishermen could participate.

In response to Mr. Tracy, Mr. Applegate confirmed that the draft list included vessels from other areas if they fished on Georges Bank. He also admitted that the list drawn from FY2021 trips may be affected somewhat by the covid circumstances. The frequency of trips could have been affected, but it might not have had a large effect on who fished on Georges Bank for at least one trip.

Mrs. Smith suggested that the list include state regulators. These people were not included on the outreach list because they are mostly attuned to the Council activities and would participate in the workshops anyway.

The committee had considerable discussion about reaching out to different types of recreational fishers, including charter boats, private anglers, and pelagic fishers. Mr. Balf said that we intend to include all types of stakeholders that fish Georges Bank and that he was open to receiving additional suggestions.

The committee also thought that many interviewees would be somewhat unfamiliar with the Council EBFM strategy. They suggested mailing out some material ahead of the interview and avoid using acronyms. Mr. Applegate said that the initial outreach would use some of the communication tools that the Council recently developed, which is why making these documents more accessible online was important. He thought that the infographics, such as “What is EBFM?” and the stakeholder profiles, as well as the glossary infographic could be made available via links in the initial email contact. The committee thought that the open-ended questions were useful, but they would need clarification during an interview. It was suggested that we ask what is working for Georges Bank fisheries and what is not. Mr. Applegate cautioned that it could lead to current implementation or regulatory issues, but we should focus on what is in the eFEP and what EBFM is capable of addressing.

Some committee members saw the initial outreach as a formal survey, but Mr. Applegate reported that the initial outreach was being developed as an interview script to create ‘buzz’ and interest to participate in the forthcoming workshops, while understanding the stakeholders that are likely to participate and their concerns. This would help the facilitator to design and conduct the workshops.

Mr. McDonald cautioned that the Council is unable to conduct surveys of more than 9 people. Since the plan was to interview 50 people, this could become a concern because of Paperwork Reduction Act restrictions. Mr. McDonald said that he would look into what we are trying to accomplish and provide his advice at the April Council meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 2– PROTOTYPE EBFM MSE DRAFT PLANNING OUTLINE AND TIMELINE

Presentation

Mr. Applegate presented a draft planning document that focused on the why and how the Council should conduct a Prototype MSE for Georges Bank EBFM, plus a list of potential people to serve as stakeholders. He said that an approved planning document would be used to advertise for and hire a contractor to conduct the MSE and present results to the Council. He emphasized that the committee should not focus on the management objectives and management procedures to be evaluated – something that we would do while the MSE is being conducted. Instead, the focus was on what the Council hopes to achieve with the prototype – developing the process, the modeling science, learning from the process, and using the example to engage the public during the deep-dive public information workshops. A full MSE to identify viable EBFM management alternatives would follow, a process to include a greater range of stakeholders.

Mr. Applegate asked the Committee and PDT to focus and provide feedback on five elements in the draft planning document:

- Purpose

- Objectives for doing the MSE
- Participants and roles
- Presentation of results, and
- Proposed timeline

To understand how the MSE related to other elements that the Council developed to consider EBFM, Mr. Applegate also reviewed some relevant characteristics of the example Fishery Ecosystem Plan (eFEP) and the worked example. He referred to a document developed by Dr. Fay that contrasted the characteristics of the worked example, with a prototype MSE and a full MSE. He pointed out that the worked example was independently peer-reviewed, then some example scenarios were added as a communication tool, but the worked example had not met everyone's expectations of what it should entail. He said that the prototype MSE is not intended to result in management procedures that could be implemented, but it should be used and thought of as a demonstration tool, developing the modeling science and using the results to engage the public. He thought that it could also be used to demonstrate that the ceilings and floors stock complex strategy would be a viable approach to protect vulnerable stocks, rebuild overfished stocks, and thus in practice satisfactorily address National Standard 1 requirements.

Mr. Applegate also pointed out that the concept in the eFEP is that biological reference points for higher levels of organization, i.e. stock complexes of trophically similar species, would be more stable than single stock reference points. Effects from climate change can be expected but grouped appropriately, total biomass and catch should be more stable than for individual stocks.

During circulation of an initial draft with the Committee and PDT, the application of dynamic reference points to account for trends should be explored and evaluated. Mr. Applegate pointed out that this may be less important when managing stock complexes because the species composition of a stock complex can change but the role of the stock complex as an ecosystem functional group should be more stable. Application of dynamic reference points also raises issues about shifting baselines, partially caused by fishing. He suggested that approaches to examining the utility of using dynamic reference points could be to build in uncertain knowledge of biological reference points in the operating model, investigate dynamic reference points as a single species research assessment topic, or ask NMFS to consider a dynamic reference point working group to lead and evaluate such a strategy.

The presentation ended in a discussion about the purpose of the prototype MSE, as a demonstration tool about how MSE can be used to evaluate EBFM strategies, developing the modeling science to conduct a full MSE, and as a walk-through that demonstrates the viability of the concept.

Discussion

Mr. Tracy thought that the description of the MSE purpose could use an overarching major statement, i.e. to show what is going to be achieved by the work being done or to demonstrate what the upside of EBFM is. Asked about the Hydra model, Drs. Bell and Large recommended that the RFP does not need to specify the type of model that should be used. The choice of tool will depend on the type of questions being asked. Mr. Applegate added that it was however

important that it include ecosystem productivity to derive an ecosystem catch cap. Dr. Sissenwine thought that it would not be necessary to develop an operating model based on system energetics to evaluate ecosystem catch caps. He felt that considerably more scientific research would be needed for that.

Dr. Bell thought that an important value of a prototype MSE would be to identify the decision points in the EBFM strategy. Similar comments were made regarding how biological reference points are associated with social and economic ecosystem objectives, not just an arbitrary fixed value, like 20% of unfished biomass. Dr. Bell thought that in theory dynamic reference points are included in an EBFM strategy because the limits and targets account for trophic interactions which depend on relative productivity and the number of predators and prey in the system. Dr. Sissenwine said that the MSE needs to evaluate how a management procedure performs with dynamic reference points compared to the status quo, i.e. single species management with fixed reference points. Mr. Applegate pointed out that even in the current system of single-species management, biological reference points are often re-estimated, particularly for research track and level 3 assessments, so they are not really static.

Dr. Bell thought that the objectives should emphasize the decision points needed to evaluate whether and how EBFM would be a better system compared to current management. Dr. Sissenwine recommended that we look at the issue as an optimizing problem while specifying biological reference point objectives and that dynamic reference points should be examined. Dr. Fay suggested that biological reference points are an outcome of specifying economic and social objectives, part of the management procedure.

Generally, the committee was satisfied with the draft purpose and objectives of the MSE plan. There was additional discussion about who would participate as stakeholders. The committee agreed that committee members should serve as stakeholders for the prototype MSE and that additional participants should be a small, effective group, including a mix of commercial and recreational fishers as well as an NGO representative. The committee agreed that PDT members should function as scientific advisors, not stakeholders. Acting as stakeholders would be inconsistent with Council policy.

Initially, the committee thought that each fishery type should have a stakeholder representative, but then the list started getting too long to be a small, effective group. After some debate, the committee decided to recommend that the chairs of each of the Council's advisory panels, including the recreational advisory panel. The AP chairs would represent the people and fisheries on the APs. In cases where the AP chair couldn't participate due to multiple commitments, the AP could nominate an alternative.

Discussing how to summarize and present results, the committee felt that a variety of types of summaries would be needed. Some felt that the radar plots showing comparing the relative performance of several management procedures to meet multiple objectives were difficult to interpret. They thought that a contractor should be encouraged to develop more effective summaries that are easier to understand.

Asked about the timing of when a Prototype MSE would be conducted, Mr. Applegate thought that the MSE could commence around July or August; after an RFP was advertised, applications evaluated, and a statement of work and contract had been negotiated. The committee pointed out that July and August are important times for fishing, so participation by AP chairs could be compromised. They thought that commencing the MSE in the fall would be better.

AGENDA ITEM 3– 2022-2026 MANAGEMENT RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Presentation

Mr. Applegate reported that a list of 2021-2025 research priorities was circulated to the committee and PDT. He said that members of both groups should add comments or add new research priorities to the document, which the committee would review and approve at the April 5 meeting. This list of EBFM research priorities would be combined with lists from other committees, reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee, and approved by the Council in June.

Discussion

The committee agreed to make comments in the document and review a draft final list at the April 5 committee meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4– NATIONAL STANDARD 1 EVALUATION

Presentation

Mr. Applegate reported that NMFS had submitted questions about the EBFM stock complex strategy, which largely focused on protecting vulnerable stocks from becoming overfished. He said that it was an important objective to be evaluated during an MSE. He reported that staff had drafted responses to NMFS questions and those were being reviewed by an NEFMC subgroup, who would meet before meeting with NMFS representatives again. Neither type of meeting had yet been scheduled.

Discussion

The committee thought that it was important to keep those discussions going with the agency and use the Prototype MSE to demonstrate the validity and viability of the EBFM stock complex strategy. Dr. Morrison agreed that it would be very helpful to demonstrate this through an MSE process. Dr. Sissenwine felt that consideration of dynamic reference points is necessary to make a legitimate comparison to evaluate and compare how stock complex limits compared to the existing single-species management strategy.