



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Groundfish Advisory Panel

Webinar

June 2, 2022

The Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP) met on June 2, 2022, via webinar to discuss: 1) Framework Adjustment 65/Specifications and Management Measures; 2) Atlantic Cod Management; 3) Amendment 23 Review Metrics; 4) Council Research Priorities; and 5) other businesses, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Ben Martens (Chair), Jackie Odell (Vice Chair), Bonnie Brady, Gib Brogan, David Goethel, Maggie Raymond, and Hank Soule; Dr. Jamie Cournane, Robin Frede, and Angela Forristall (NEFMC staff); Dan Caless, Claire Fitz-Gerald, Mark Grant, Kyle Molton, Spencer Talmage, and Liz Sullivan (NMFS GARFO staff); Glenn Chamberlain, Gabrielle Clardy, and Paul Nitschke (NEFSC); Rick Bellavance (Groundfish Committee Chair); Libby Etrie (Groundfish Committee Vice-Chair); Frank Blount (Recreational Advisory Panel Chair); Dan Salerno and Megan Ware (Groundfish Committee). In addition, approximately 4 members of the public attended.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION: Discussions were aided by the following documents and presentations: (1) Meeting overview memo from Groundfish Committee Chair and agenda; 2) Presentation, Council staff; 3a) Framework Adjustment 65 draft alternatives outline; 3b) Groundfish PDT memo to Committee re FW65, August 3, 2021; 3c) Groundfish PDT memo to committee re SNE/MA winter flounder and other fisheries, April 1, 2022; 4a) A23 Metrics Discussion Document outline; 4b) Groundfish PDT A23 Metrics discussion notes; 5a) Presentation: Council Research Priorities update process; 5b) 2021-2025 Council Research Priorities; 5c) Groundfish PDT to Groundfish Committee re Council Research Priorities 2022-2026, May 27, 2022, 6a) Meeting Summary: Recreational Advisory Panel, January 18, 2022; 6b) Meeting Summary: Groundfish Committee, January 20, 2022; 6c) Meeting Summary: Groundfish Plan Development Team, March 9, 2022; 6d) Meeting Summary: Groundfish Committee, March 16, 2022; 6e) Council Meeting Motions, April 12-14, 2022; 7) Correspondence; and 8) Draft Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large Mesh Gillnet Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries, May 26, 2022

The meeting began at 9:30 am.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- That the Groundfish Advisory Panel requests the Groundfish Committee task the Groundfish Plan Development Team with a full re-evaluation of how groundfish catch is assigned by fishery in other fisheries, focusing on Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder. That re-evaluation should look at all aspects of VTR assignments, observer data, and extrapolation methods.

- The GAP recommends that the Committee develop an alternative that would establish a sub-ACL and accountability measures including increased monitoring for the squid fishery.
- The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends that the Groundfish Committee task the Plan Development Team to analyze the effectiveness of the management uncertainty buffer for the recreational fishery with respect to the objective of rebuilding Gulf of Maine cod.
- The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends that the Groundfish Committee requests the Plan Development Team provide an analysis of the conservation benefits derived from restricting all components of the fishery, those that receive a sub-ACL of Gulf of Maine cod, in the time and area closures associated with the Groundfish closed areas in the Gulf of Maine.
- The Groundfish Advisory Panel seeks explanation from the Groundfish Committee as to why reallocation or reclassification of existing allocation should be considered in the management response to the new cod stock structure information.
- The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee that the White Paper on potential approaches to allocate “Georges Bank cod” to the recreational fishery consider the following:
 1. A future allocation should not reward high catches from one sector of the fishery that were unconstrained by the ABC / ACL while other components were constrained.
 2. Using a formula that consists of a straight proportional catch during the years when one component of the fishery was unconstrained while others were constrained should be flagged. Instead, different weighting should be considered for fair and equitable treatment.
 3. A future allocation should consider years before and after a catch target was approved.
 4. A future allocation should consider whether the catch target was directly linked to reduction in the ABC.
 5. A future allocation should not reward years when a target catch was exceeded.
 6. Management uncertainty buffer for recreational sub-ACL would be evaluated with the fact that the recreational fishery is not monitored.
 7. The recreational sub-ACL for GB cod should be after sub-components (i.e., the opposite of how it works for GOM cod).
- The Groundfish Advisory Panel reaffirms that aging white hake and redfish be added to the research priorities, as an urgent need.

OPENING REMARKS

Liz Sullivan (GARFO) provided an update on the timeline for the implementation of Framework 63 (FW63). One advisor asked how the delay in implementation would impact changes in the Annual Biological Catch (ABC) for Georges Bank (GB) cod and revised recreational measures. Ms. Sullivan stated commercial catch is being tracked in season and sector managers are aware of a potential reduction to ABC. She stated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data for each wave of fishing becomes available a few weeks after the end of the wave and recreational data is aggregated and averaged over three years to account for uncertainty. Ms. Sullivan clarified for advisors that FW63 provides the Regional Administrator the authority to change recreational measures for fishing year 2023 and 2024, but not the authority to make adjustments for fishing year 2022. The advisors expressed concern that without FW63 in place as of the start of the fishing year (May 1st), the recreational fishery could exceed their new target TAC based upon the newly adopted 2022 ABC for Georges Bank cod under FW63. FW63 didn't consider how a delay of implementation of the FW63 might impact fisheries in subsequent years. Based on current regulations, if there is an overage the commercial fishery would bear the pound for pound payback a subsequent year.

AGENDA ITEM #1: FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 65/SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES, DR. COURNANE (NEFMC)

Dr. Cournane shared the scope and objectives for Framework 65 (FW65). By request from the Groundfish Committee, the Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) conducted a preliminary analysis of other federal fisheries' catches of Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder and found that the scallop and squid fisheries have caught more than five percent of the SNE/MA winter flounder total catch in recent years. Dr. Cournane explained that Amendment 16 included a provision that if any non-groundfish federal fishery's catch raises above five percent, accountability measures (AMs) can be developed to prevent the overall Annual Catch Limit (ACL) from being exceeded. Staff asked the GAP for input on any management measures that should be examined for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and SNE/MA winter flounder to promote stock rebuilding.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

An advisor expressed concern about the metric tons of winter flounder attributed to the squid fishery. One advisor noted that changes to loligo squid management in 2016 reduced the trigger to classify a trip as a squid trip and that the trends in catch might be reflecting this. Staff noted that the PDT had a very preliminary discussion of differences in the loligo and illex squid fisheries and could be looked at further if requested by the Groundfish Committee. Staff noted the PDT report was preliminary and there is no further direction from the Council or Committee on this topic at this time.

The advisors also expressed concern that the numbers might be coming from extrapolated data – where one squid trip encountered a high amount of winter flounder and that value was extrapolated to the rest of the fleet. Staff explained that the values were taken from the GARFO annual catch reports and the 'other fisheries' column is based on GARFO's catch binning rules for other fisheries. Staff noted this is the information Amendment 16 (A16) references when determining if a fishery is catching five percent or more of the total ACL. Staff clarified to an advisor that even if the catch attributed to squid catch was reduced by half, squid catch of SNE/MA flounder would still be over five percent of the total catch in recent years. One advisor noted the decline of SNE/MA winter flounder by the groundfish fishery starting in 2017 was likely a result of the sale of Carlos Rafael's assets since those boats harvested a large portion of the total SNE/MA winter flounder groundfish catch.

1. MOTION: BRADY/GOETHEL

That the Groundfish Advisory Panel requests the Groundfish Committee task the Groundfish Plan Development Team with a full re-evaluation of how groundfish catch is assigned by fishery in other fisheries, focusing on Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder. That re-evaluation should look at all aspects of VTR assignments, observer data, and extrapolation methods.

Rationale: VTR assignments of trips is not perfect, and before further analysis is done there should be a close look at how trip classifications are made because the catch of SNE/MA winter flounder currently attributed to the squid fishery does not match the activities of the squid fishery or the health of the SNE/MA winter flounder fishery.

Discussion on the Motion:

One advisor acknowledged that this investigation might take a lot of time and expressed concerns about the reclassification that would need to occur to bring the catch down below five percent. They stated outliers in trip data should be examined, and when they look at their own sets of trip reports errors clearly jump out. The maker of the motion expressed they were unsure of what other approach to take, and a sub-ACL on the squid fishery would close the fishery down for a species that is struggling primarily due to warming water temperatures. Staff reminded the advisors the Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) program currently under development will hopefully address some of the concerns with catch estimation, but the PDT is not necessarily the group to examine how catch estimates are made. Instead, the PDT could investigate details on the management factors for squid and where and when the fishery is active.

MOTION CARRIED 7/0/0

2. MOTION: RAYMOND/MARTENS

The GAP recommends that the Committee develop an alternative that would establish a sub-ACL and accountability measures including increased monitoring for the squid fishery.

Rationale: Catch of SNE/MA winter flounder has increased steadily since 2017 and exceeds the 5% catch trigger for establishing a sub-ACL. This would bring the squid fishery in line with the other fishery with a significant bycatch of SNE/MA winter flounder (scallop fishery). Increased monitoring would improve the understanding of the catch.

Discussion on the Motion:

Staff noted they will make sure the Groundfish Plan can include measures that will increase monitoring in another fishery before the Committee meeting.

MOTION CARRIED 6/1/0

Mr. Kyle Molton (GARFO) responded to a question from an advisor about what activity is allowed in the three groundfish spawning closed areas¹: 1) Winter Massachusetts Bay Spawning Protection Area; 2) Spring Massachusetts Bay Spawning Protection Area; and 3) GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area (Whaleback). Mr. Molton stated the Winter Protection Area only applies to federal waters and fishing may still be allowed in state waters. Recreational pelagic hook and line gear are allowed in the Winter Protection Area but there is a prohibition on retaining groundfish. The Spring Protection Area allows recreational vessels, but the recreational cod fishery is closed during that time so recreational vessels would be prohibited from retaining cod throughout the GOM². The Whaleback closure specifically states for hire and private recreational vessels are not allowed in the area during the time of the closure.

An advisor noted any stock boundary changes that might occur because of the Atlantic cod Research Track need to be included in the discussion. The advisor noted there are other cod spawning areas outside of the Gulf of Maine that have not been identified. The advisor stated that cod do a dance-like mating

¹ Closed area regulations summary here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/commercial-fishing/northeast-multispecies-closed-area-regulations-gulf>

² Recreational regulations summary here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/recreational-fishing/recreational-fishing-regulations-species>

ritual that any amount of fishing can disturb and felt that no fishing should be allowed in spawning areas during times of spawning. The advisor said there is also no clear evidence that spawning protections have made things better, and even if there are protections to protect spawning that does not ensure recruitment occurs.

An advisor stated the GOM Cod Protection Closures overlap with specific spawning areas under the habitat amendment and asked if there is any information on cod caught in Protection Closures. Mr. Molton outlined what recreational fishing can and cannot occur in the five GOM Cod Protection Closures, noting no possession of GOM cod is allowed in the federal waters of Closure I, II, and III because the recreational regulations do not allow the possession of GOM cod during those times and that states have parallel regulations. He noted MRIP data is not refined enough to identify where exactly recreational harvest is occurring but there are methods of estimation utilized based on where landings occur. The advisor asked if fishing in the Western GOM Groundfish Closure and Cashes Ledge Groundfish Closure is tracked. Mr. Molton stated party/charter vessels need a letter of authorization (LOA) to fish in these areas so he could use the number of LOAs to estimate how many vessels have been granted access. Very few private recreational vessels transit all the way out to Cashes Ledge.

Staff clarified to another advisor that the current recreational management uncertainty buffer is seven percent.

3. MOTION: RAYMOND/SOULE

The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends that the Groundfish Committee task the Plan Development Team to analyze the effectiveness of the management uncertainty buffer for the recreational fishery with respect to the objective of rebuilding Gulf of Maine cod.

Rationale: Currently the PDT estimates management uncertainty buffers using (among other criteria) the adequacy of catch monitoring. The recreational fishery catch accounts for nearly 40% of the ACL and is not monitored.

Discussion on the Motion:

An advisor asked about using a licensing or tagging system to better monitor the recreational fishery. The maker of the motion stated their intent was to have the current management uncertainty buffer analyzed and if it is not adequate it should be increased. Another noted there is now extremely high monitoring of the commercial fishery and the robust weight-based methods for measuring removals results in a clear understanding of the biomass removed by the commercial fishery. They felt the lack of spatial and weight reporting by the recreational fishery supports a higher uncertainty buffer.

MOTION CARRIED 6/0/0

4. MOTION: ODELL/RAYMOND

The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends that the Groundfish Committee requests the Plan Development Team provide an analysis of the conservation benefits derived from restricting all components of the fishery, those that receive a sub-ACL of Gulf of Maine cod, in the time and area closures associated with the Groundfish closed areas in the Gulf of Maine.

Rationale: Spatial and temporal time/areas have been identified as important for Gulf of Maine cod rebuilding. An analysis related to the conservation benefits derived by applying regulatory consistency among all sub-components, notable those that receive a sub-ACL, is essential to the future development of alternatives being considered under Framework 65.

Discussion on the Motion:

One advisor asked if there is already a Council process in place to evaluate the efficacy of closed areas. The maker of the motion stated there has not been one yet and the poor performance of stocks since the implementation of the closed areas indicates the areas are not helping. They said they hope the analysis would be completed to inform FW65 since the closures do not help the groundfish fishery achieve optimum yield and that is a listed objective of the framework. Staff noted Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2/NE Multispecies Amendment 14³ implemented a review process of spatial management areas every ten years and a provision that spatial management areas can be created through a framework.

An advisor expressed support for the motion and reiterated spawning protection areas should be closed to all fishing because release mortality is still occurring from the recreational catch. The maker of the motion expressed the analysis should take into consideration the possibility of a cod stock structure change. They stated the first step would be to map out and explain when and where closures are and then look at the supposed benefits to cod and summarize them. The analysis should look at whether restricting only one component of the fishery provides conservation benefits, and there should be consistency in how the different components of the fishery are restricted before new closures are put into place.

A supporter of the motion stated the motion establishes two clear directives: 1) ensuring the current closures are effective and 2) identifying if restricting the recreational fishery in the same way the commercial fishery is restricted would increase the benefits of the closed areas. Another advisor noted that at some point it would be beneficial to have an analysis of the catch of cod in the lobster fishery.

MOTION CARRIED 4/0/1

AGENDA ITEM #2: ATLANTIC COD MANAGEMENT, DR. COURNANE (NEFMC)

Dr. Cournane provided an update of the ongoing Atlantic cod management work. The Atlantic Cod Research Track Working Group presented new research on Atlantic cod stock structure to the Council in February 2022 and proposed a new management paradigm of four management units. In April 2022, the Council made a motion to change the 2022 priorities to add a transition plan for Atlantic cod management from two management units to up to five management units. The motion included a white paper on potential approaches to allocate “Georges Bank” cod to the recreational fishery as part of the transition plan. In the motion, Georges Bank cod is surrounded by parenthesis to indicate cod currently considered to be in the Georges Bank management unit might be considered Southern New England or Gulf of Maine cod in a future management system. Dr. Cournane asked the GAP for input on what information the PDT should investigate in the white paper.

Questions and Discussion on the Presentation

³ See Omnibus Amendment 2/Habitat – Vol III – starting pp. 118: https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/OA2-FEIS_Vol_3_FINAL_161208.pdf

Staff clarified to an advisor management boundaries do not have to align with biological units. Another advisor stated they do not understand the ongoing conversations about reallocating the fishery after a stock structure change since the sector system already has a provision that allows fish to be transferred among regions. Another advisor suggested that instead of a reallocation occurring there could be revised reporting requirements that would better track where commercial and recreational fishing is occurring.

5. MOTION: RAYMOND/ODELL

The Groundfish Advisory Panel seeks explanation from the Groundfish Committee as to why reallocation should be considered in the management response to the new cod stock structure information.

Rationale: Reallocation is always extremely controversial and should be avoided if possible. Since the very beginning of the cod stock structure work reallocation has been on the table and the advisor has yet to hear an explanation to why it would be necessary. The advisor is hoping that before much work is done that would explain the need for it.

One advisor stated their understanding of a “reallocation” resulting from a new stock structure was more akin to a “reclassification” – that catch would be identified by the statistical area it is caught in and then reclassified under the new stock structure. Advisors discussed what is meant by “reallocation” needs to be clearly defined to ensure there is a common understanding of if fish are being taken away from one individual and given to another or simply given a new name.

5A. MOTION TO AMEND: GOETHEL/SOULE

The Groundfish Advisory Panel seeks explanation from the Groundfish Committee as to why reallocation or reclassification of existing allocation should be considered in the management response to the new cod stock structure information.

MOTION 5A TO AMEND CARRIED 4/1/0

MAIN MOTION, AS AMENDED, CARRIED 5/0/0

An advisor stated for recreational GOM cod and GOM haddock the ABC is first divided between the commercial and recreational components and then is further divided into subcomponents. Staff explained typically a fixed percentage comes off the US ABC for non-commercial groundfish fishery sub-ACLs.

6. MOTION: ODELL/RAYMOND

The Groundfish Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee that the White Paper on potential approaches to allocate “Georges Bank cod” to the recreational fishery consider the following:

1. A future allocation should not reward high catches from one sector of the fishery that were unconstrained by the ABC / ACL while other components were constrained.

2. Using a formula that consists of a straight proportional catch during the years when one component of the fishery was unconstrained while others were constrained should be flagged. Instead, different weighting should be considered for fair and equitable treatment.
3. A future allocation should consider years before and after a catch target was approved.
4. A future allocation should consider whether the catch target was directly linked to reduction in the ABC.
5. A future allocation should not reward years when a target catch was exceeded.
6. Management uncertainty buffer for recreational sub-ACL would be evaluated with the fact that the recreational fishery is not monitored.
7. The recreational sub-ACL for GB cod should be after sub-components (i.e., the opposite of how it works for GOM cod).

Rationale: The catch of groundfish was under 5% for many fisheries during the development and implementation of Amendment 16. GB cod has gone through a lot since A16 implementation, with changes from MRFFs to MRIP and various formulas used to calculate a catch target. The implementation of different management regimes between fisheries has affected catch and the development of a sub-ACL must recognize this. Since Magnuson was reauthorized and the sector system was established, sector sub-ACLs follow the OFLs and ABCs that come out of the stock assessment. Future allocation formulas must be mindful of the differences between fisheries and management.

Discussion on the Motion:

Advisors discussed the desire to have the commercial and recreational allocation split for GB cod to be done opposite the current method utilized for the GOM cod. One advisor asked if the motion intends to ensure the commercial fishery will not suffer a pound-for-pound payback if the recreational fishery exceeds its target. Another advisor stated the intent of doing a GB recreational allocation would be to also have AMs so that if the recreational allocation is exceeded the recreational fishery would be accountable.

MOTION CARRIED 5/0/1

AGENDA ITEM #3: AMENDMENT 23 REVIEW METRICS, MS. FREDE (NEFMC)

Ms. Frede provided an update on the Groundfish PDT's work developing metrics and indicators for evaluating the increased sector monitoring coverage rates implemented by Amendment 23 (A23). The PDT will be developing a discussion document that outlines the possible review metrics. Ms. Frede noted the PDT has had preliminary discussions on the need for different metrics under higher (100 percent) or lower coverage rates since A23 set a minimum default coverage rate of 40 percent. Exclusions to higher levels of coverage will also need to be considered when developing metrics and indicators. Ms. Frede shared the current list of possible metrics with the GAP.

Mr. Mark Grant (GARFO) informed the GAP that A23 was approved in its entirety by NMFS and the final rule is currently under development. Implementation is anticipated early in the summer.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

One advisor asked why observer information from fishing year (FY) 2021 is not being analyzed. The advisor stated their trips had a high level of coverage in 2021. Mr. Grant clarified there was insufficient coverage during to calculating a coverage target with a 30 percent CV due to observer waivers issued

during the COVID-19 pandemic but that doesn't mean the observer information won't be used in future analysis.⁴ Mr. Grant stated they can provide advisors with the coverage rates for 2021 at another time.

Possible metrics listed by advisors included:

- A rerun of the assessments that had severe retrospective patterns once more data is available under 100% monitoring coverage to check if the retrospective issues remain.
- A comparison of observer companies and documentation of why trips selected were not observed (not enough observers, the observer being late or not showing up, etc.).
- Understanding of whether there are delays in getting additional data from higher coverage to the sector managers (potentially a suggestion for GARFO vs. the Council review process).
- Analysis of the cost of monitoring before and after A23 broken down to what it costs to cover the trip, travel costs, training costs, etc.
- A cost-benefit analysis. This could look at the cost of monitoring a discarded pound of fish pre- and post-A23 by comparing the cost per trip, the overall cost to the fleet, fleet revenue, etc.
- Tracking the costs associated with the program overall (whether EM or human observer) compared to what is being discarded to understand the value of the program and cost of tracking discards.
- Consider the expansion of the *Do Not Deploy* list during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on achieved coverage rates.
- Consider potential changes in how the fishery is operating this fishing year with the proposed significant cut in the GB cod ABC and what that means for where fishing occurs, costs, etc.

AGENDA ITEM #4: COUNCIL RESEARCH PRIORITIES, DR. Cournane (NEFMC)

Dr. Cournane explained the process for setting Council research priorities and explained priorities are reviewed each year. She shared the Groundfish PDTs recommendations to the Groundfish Committee on priorities that should be deleted and additions to be made. She asked the GAP if there were any other research priorities the Groundfish Committee should add or remove.

Questions and Discussion on the Presentation

Staff clarified for advisors that the Council submitted a letter to the NEFSC last March to request white hake and redfish samples be aged. At the most recent AOP meeting staff was informed aging will be completed for samples of white hake from one of the surveys but there will not be any aging of commercial samples ready soon. Staff reminded the GAP of a previous motion made in November 2020: *For groundfish stocks where the assessment has identified catch at age information as an important source of uncertainty (e.g. white hake, and redfish), the Groundfish Advisory Panel requests that the*

⁴ The analysis to determine the coverage level for FY 2022 would have been based on data from FY 2020, because the analysis was conducted 5 months before the end of FY 2021. However, because of the COVID-19 health emergency, gaps in the available observer and monitoring data for FY 2020 prevented NMFS from completing a CV analysis to inform the 2022 target coverage level. The realized ASM coverage level for FY 2020 was 11.6 percent (the target was 40 percent). NMFS set the 2022 ASM coverage level target of 99 percent, the highest level allowed under existing regulations. The target was selected to help address bias, support the collection of information and data that will help make future determinations of appropriate ASM coverage levels, and provide the additional benefit of preparing our ASM infrastructure for higher required coverage, in the case Amendment 23 was approved.

Groundfish Committee recommend that the Council ask that the Science Center prioritize the processing of age samples prior to the next update/assessment (7/0/0).

Consensus Statement: The Groundfish Advisory Panel reaffirms that aging white hake and redfish be added to the research priorities, as an urgent need.

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS

Spencer Talmage (GARFO) provided an update on the NOAA Fisheries *Draft Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large Mesh Gillnet Fisheries*. Mr. Talmage explained that a working group with members from GARFO, NEFSC, and state agencies was created to fulfill the requirements of a Biological Opinion (BiOp) published in May 2021. The BiOp required the report include information on Atlantic sturgeon bycatch in gillnet fisheries with a mesh size greater than or equal to seven inches, post-release mortality, and a plan for filling information gaps. Mr. Talmage reiterated this is not a prescriptive document but a starting point for NMFS and the Councils to identify methods to reduce sturgeon bycatch by 2024. GARFO is welcoming input on the draft document over the summer.

An advisor asked if there had been any coordination with the work underway to reduce gear entanglement with North Atlantic right whales. Mr. Talmage stated there is overlap between the members of the two working groups on these issues and is aware there may potentially be changes to the gillnet fishery because of the right whale work. Another advisor noted that many interactions with Atlantic sturgeon are close to shore. Mr. Talmage explained GARFO is working with ASMFC and hopes parallel measures will be put in place but cannot say for certain they will. He acknowledged bycatch also occurs in trawl and state water fisheries but reiterated the objective of this work was to reduce bycatch in federal large mesh gillnet fisheries.

The GAP meeting adjourned at approximately 2:50 p.m.