



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Monkfish Joint Committee and Advisory Panel

Webinar

January 23, 2023

The Monkfish Committee (Committee) and Advisory Panel (AP) met jointly via webinar on January 23, 2023 at 9:00 AM to 1) recommend final preferred alternatives for Framework Adjustment 13 (FW13) to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) which include Fishing Year 2023-2025 specifications and other management measures; 2) review Monkfish Research-Set-Aside research priorities set by the NEFMC in June 2022 and recommend any revisions; and 3) discuss other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Monkfish Committee: Ms. Elizabeth Etrie (Chair), Mr. Peter Hughes (Vice Chair), Mr. Pete Christopher (GARFO), Mr. Dan Farnham, Mr. Matt Gates, Mr. Eric Hansen, Mr. Dewey Hemilright, Mr. Scott Olszewski, Mr. John Pappalardo, Mr. Paul Risi, Mr. Alan Tracy, and Ms. Kelly Whitmore. Monkfish Advisory Panel (AP): Mr. Ted Platz (Chair), Mr. Greg Mataronas, Mr. Terry Alexander, Ms. Bonnie Brady, Mr. James Dopkin, Mr. Patrick Duckworth, Mr. Timothy Froelich, Mr. Sam Martin, Mr. Randall Morgan, Mr. Lucas Raymond, and Mr. Chris Rainone; Council staff: Dr. Rachel Feeney (Plan Development Team (PDT) Chair), Ms. Emily Bodell, Mr. Connor Buckley, Ms. Jenny Couture, Mr. Chris Kellogg, Ms. Janice Plante, Mr. Tom Nies; MAFMC staff: Mr. Jason Didden. Council: Chair Mr. Eric Reid and one other Council member. GARFO staff: Mr. Mitch McDonald, Mr. Spencer Talmage. About 15 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- On Framework Adjustment 13:
 - For Action 1 (Specifications), the AP and Committee recommended Alternative 3 (January SSC recommendation) for setting Acceptable Biological Catches for both the northern and southern management areas.
 - For Action 2 (Effort Controls), AP and Committee recommended 35 DAS in the north. In the south, the AP recommended 35 DAS while the Committee recommended 37 DAS. The Committee also recommended a 46 DAS cap across both management areas.
- The Committee also recommended that the Councils ask the NEFSC that prior to the next monkfish management track assessment, the current Ismooth assumptions be investigated, that the survey and recent catches be linked, and a detailed research plan created.
- On Monkfish Research-Set-Aside (RSA) priorities:
 - The AP made several comments on the priority list and did not make any motions.
 - The Committee recommended 1) prioritizing development of alternative stock assessment models and analyzing existing survey indices for potential use in the Ismooth model and/or another assessment and 2) developing a standardized CPUE index for the commercial direct monkfish gillnet fishery for potential use in the assessment. Other priorities recommended but not in priority order include: research on monkfish life history, trawl and gillnet gear studies focused on protected species bycatch reduction, research on pingers used for monkfish gillnet gear to reduce porpoise interactions,

research to improve the monkfish market, and research on discard mortality rates for gillnet and trawl gear.

AGENDA ITEM #1: INTRODUCTIONS, APPROVAL OF AGENDA, AND OTHER UPDATES

The Chair introduced the Committee and the Advisory Panel, welcomed attendees, and sought approval of the agenda. There were no agenda changes. Staff reviewed the NEFMC Advisory Panel policies given the new AP appointments were recently finalized for 2023-2025. The timeline for 2023 monkfish work and FY 2022 fishery performance based on monthly in-season quota monitoring were reviewed.

AGENDA ITEM #2: FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 13

Staff provided an update on the development of this action, focusing on updates since the December meetings of the Councils, with the goal for the AP and Committee to make recommendations on the final preferred alternatives for this action during this meeting. The NEFMC is scheduled to take final action on January 25 and the MAFMC on February 7.

Action 1 Specifications

An AP member asked for clarification on how total allowable landings (TAL) are determined. Staff showed the specifications flowchart and explained the change in discard deduction method done through FW13. Another AP member asked whether the discard mortality rate has been incorporated in calculating the total discards. Yes, the dredge discard mortality rate was adjusted from 100% to 64% based on research studies previously conducted. The AP member emphasized the importance of understanding who is active in the monkfish fishery and the need for more collaborative research to improve the data.

A few AP members thought the new SSC ABC recommendations were more in line with the monkfish abundance seen on the water but that using the Ismooth approach is not appropriate because landings are determined by market conditions and that a different approach should be used in the future. Reduced fishing effort should be seen as a conservation benefit and not result in reduction in TALs.

A Committee member asked how the SSC received the Council's remand of the ABCs and whether the SSC had any skepticism regarding the data inputs and Ismooth approach. Staff commented that during its October meeting, the SSC focused on the correct application of the trawl survey multiplier to recent catch, acknowledging economic concerns. The decision to use Ismooth has been made and peer reviewed during the last three assessments (in 2016, 2019, and 2022). The Committee member stated he was overwhelmed by the process, the science, and the Ismooth approach and thought other members from the Committee and AP were similarly frustrated. Staff and the Committee Chair recommended reaching out to scientists and Council staff to understand Ismooth and what is doable to be addressed with the next management track assessment in 2025.

- 1. AP Motion (Alexander/Raymond):** The AP recommends Alternative 3 for Action 1 (specifications), as the preferred alternative for the Northern area.

AP Motion as friendly amended: The AP recommends Alternative 3 for Action 1 (specifications), as the preferred alternative for both areas.

Rationale: This is the highest ABC that is within the SSC recommendations, and it would be least disruptive in the South. This alternative would cause the least economic harm to the fishery while the fishery transitions to using the Ismooth approach for catch setting. The fishermen are seeing a healthy monkfish resource on the water.

Discussion of the motion: An advisor asked if Alternative 1 (ACL = 0) means the fishery would be shut down. Staff clarified that any catch would be an overage triggering the accountability measure (ACL reduction in a future year). Advisors wanted to make sure their recommendations were specific to the area in which they fish and to not weigh in on the area they do not fish. Mid-Atlantic Council staff pointed out that variability in landings and discards over time and the possibility of exceeding the ABCs. He

reminded the AP and Committee of the accountability measures in place if there is an overage which includes a pound-for-pound payback two years after any overage.

Ted Platz, Chair		Linda Hunt	Absent
Greg Mataronas, Vice Chair	Yes	Timothy Froelich	Yes
Terry Alexander	Yes	Sam Martin	Listen-only
Bonnie Brady	Absent	Randall Morgan	Yes
James Dopkin	Yes	Lucas Raymond	Yes
Patrick Duckworth	Yes	Chris Rainone	Yes

Motion #1 carried 8/0/0.

- 2. Committee Motion (Hansen/Pappalardo):** The Committee recommends Alternative 3 for Action 1 (specifications), as the preferred alternative for both areas.

Rationale: This is consistent with the AP motion. The Committee supports the AP’s rationale. The Committee notes that other survey for indices contained within the 2022 management track assessment report noted differing outcomes from the NEFSC bottom trawl survey and should be considered now and in the next management track assessment.

Discussion of the motion: No other discussion on the motion.

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Yes	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Abstain	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #2 carried 10/0/1.

Action 2 Effort Controls

An AP member asked why FW13 does not include an alternative to reduce the incidental possession limits when not using a Monkfish DAS in the northern area given these are most of the monkfish landings. Staff noted that this alternative was considered but rejected in December given reducing incidental possession limits would likely turn landings into discards. An AP member emphasized that monkfish is an important part of the northern groundfish vessel trawl landings and that if fishermen catch more than the incidental limit then they switch to using a Monkfish DAS (to land a higher limit). Another AP member questioned why the monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) manages the directed and incidental fisheries together. Staff commented that the goals and objectives include both fisheries.

- 3. AP Motion (Alexander/Raymond):** The AP recommends Alternative 2, Option A (35 DAS) in the Northern Area.

AP Motion as friendly amended: The AP recommends Alternative 2, Option A (35 DAS) in the Northern Area and Southern Areas.

Rationale: This would reduce TAL to be conservative in the North. Option A is about an 11% reduction in DAS which would help keep within the specifications. In the South, 35 DAS is a reduction (from 37). The southern fishery wasn’t meeting the TAL, but this provides a little buffer to account for the reduced specifications. The AP reiterates its view that the stock is in a healthy condition.

Discussion of the motion: The AP Chair asked about the Monkfish RSA program for 2023-2024; staff indicated that NOAA Fisheries will proceed with a solicitation this year, but it is unlikely to be ready for

May 1. Another advisor asked if modifying the DAS overage provision (preloading the clock) is being considered in FW13. Staff answered that this was previously considered but rejected last September given this could increase fishing effort considering declining specifications. A Committee member asked if landing overages and accountability measures are area specific; staff clarified that they are.

Public Comment:

- **James Fletcher:** Why doesn't this discussion tie into ecosystem-based fishery management? We are pushing harvesting of monkfish with dredges and nets and there are ongoing problems with whales. Why?

Staff answered that this is out of FW13 scope.

- **Liam Sullivan:** For the southern area, would 36 or 37 DAS exceed the TAL? 35 DAS is a 5% decrease from current allocation.

Staff answered that 37 DAS is not expected to exceed the TAL, though emphasized the analysis does not include RSA landings, which may increase if RSA proposals are funded in 2023.

Ted Platz, Chair		Linda Hunt	Absent
Greg Mataronas, Vice Chair	Yes	Timothy Froelich	Yes
Terry Alexander	Yes	Sam Martin	Listen-only
Bonnie Brady	Absent	Randall Morgan	Yes
James Dopkin	Yes	Lucas Raymond	Yes
Patrick Duckworth	Yes	Chris Rainone	Yes

Motion #3 carried 8/0/0.

4. **Committee Motion (Hemilright/Pappalardo):** The Committee recommends adding an option to Action 2 Alternative 2 for 37 DAS for the Southern Area and selecting it as the preferred alternative.

Rationale: The impact analysis shows that 35 DAS projects 68% of the recommended TAL being landed. Thus, there is no need to reduce the DAS from the current 37 DAS in the south to remain within the TAL being recommended.

Discussion of the motion: An advisor thought 37 DAS (current DAS allocation) would be the best option if the TALs are not likely to be exceeded.

Elizabeth "Libby" Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Yes	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Abstain	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #4 carried 10/0/1.

5. **Committee Motion (Farnham/Hughes):** The Committee recommends Alternative 2, Option A (35 DAS) in the Northern Area and selecting it as the preferred alternative.

Rationale: The Committee supports the AP's rationale. This would reduce TAL to be conservative in the North. Option A is about an 11% reduction in DAS which would help keep within the specifications. The Committee reiterates its view that the stock is in a healthy condition.

Discussion of the motion: No other discussion on the motion.

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Yes	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Abstain	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #5 carried 10/0/1.

- 6. Committee Motion (Farnham/Olszewski):** The Committee accepts the PDT recommendation for a DAS use cap of 46 across both areas.

Rationale: This would help overall effort to not increase by shifting management to have a distinct allocation in the north and south for each permit. Should the prior motions be accepted, each permit would have 72 (35 + 37) DAS allocated, but a use cap of 46. This would allow continued flexibility to fish in both areas.

Discussion of the motion: An advisor asked why the cap is set to 46 instead of 37, the lower of the two DAS allocations in both areas. He was concerned that effort would increase and would shift boats from the north to the south if vessels fish 35 DAS in the north and want to fish additional days (up to 11 DAS in this example). Other advisors expressed concern over northern boats moving into the south. Another advisor did not think vessels would spend the time and money to fish in the southern area to fish up to the DAS cap. Another advisor asked whether the cap should be adjusted to account for RSA deduction.

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Yes	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Abstain	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #6 carried 10/0/1.

- 7. Committee Motion #5 (Farnham/Hemilright):** The Committee recommends that the Councils ask the NEFSC that prior to the next monkfish management track assessment, the current Ismooth assumptions be investigated and to be sure that the survey is tracking more than survey noise and that recent catches and survey trends are linked. Also, a detailed research plan is needed as soon as possible to increase the likelihood of the next research track assessment being successful.

Rationale: By successful, the Committee would like an assessment that we have more confidence in as being accurate and consistent with what the industry is seeing on the water.

Discussion of the motion: Several Committee members and an advisor questioned the data and the Ismooth approach and the importance of using science based on collaborative research to inform future stock assessments. The Committee Chair reiterated to the Committee to consider and think strategically on the Ismooth approach and what can be done in time for the next management track assessment to avoid a similar situation in three years.

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Yes	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Abstain	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #7 carried 10/0/1.

AGENDA ITEM #3: 2023-2024 MONKFISH RESEARCH-SET-ASIDE PROGRAM RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Staff reviewed RSA research priorities set by the NEFMC in June 2022 with PDT recommendations given there has been interest relayed by scientists and fishermen in participating in Monkfish RSA research this year. Once the NEFMC and MAFMC make updates to and approve the research priorities at their upcoming meetings, NOAA Fisheries is then expected to proceed with issuing a Request for Proposals.

The advisors made several comments on the RSA priorities including: prioritizing CPUE given there are few people targeting monkfish in the north so it would be good to understand fishing effort versus how much people are actually catching; other ways to assess stock size including use of observer data; life history research, though, prior projects should first be evaluated given there have been several projects on this topic already; collaborative research studies using gillnet gear; market research given the overseas market crumbled, though it was mentioned that perhaps it makes sense to see the results of the current Cornell University research project on this topic first.

8. Committee Motion (Farnham/Gates): The Committee developed revisions to the Monkfish RSA Priorities approved in June 2022. The revised list is, not in priority order:

1. Development of alternative stock assessment models.
2. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction and (d) natural mortality
3. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on (a) bycatch reduction, including reducing interactions, and injury/mortality associated with these interactions, with sea turtles, Atlantic sturgeon, right and humpback whales, and other protected species and (b) size and/or species selectivity;
4. Research on the pingers used for monkfish gillnet gear to reduce porpoises, so that interaction with seals is reduced; and
5. Research to improve the monkfish market (e.g., increasing domestic demand, making new markets).
6. Research on discard mortality rates for gillnet and trawl gear (scallop dredge discard mortality rate was adjusted down in the 2022 assessment based on research. Need research for other gears).
7. Develop a standardized CPUE index for the commercial gillnet fishery.

Discussion of the motion: A Committee member asked if dredge gear was excluded for a particular reason on priority #3. Staff noted that the dredge discard mortality rate was updated from 100% to 64% in the 2022 stock assessment based on prior published research. Another Committee suggested incorporating CPUE into future assessments like what is done for golden tilefish. The AP Chair questioned what happened with the prior work done on life history and wanted future research to focus on collaborative research surveys.

8A. Committee Motion to amend (Hemilright/Hansen): The Committee developed revisions to the Monkfish RSA Priorities approved in June 2022. The revised list is:

Highest Priority

1. Development of alternative stock assessment models, and analyze existing survey indices (e.g., dredge survey) for potential use in the Ismooth model and/or alternative assessment.
2. Develop a standardized CPUE index for the commercial gillnet fishery for potential use in the assessment.

Other Priorities (not in priority order):

3. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction and (d) natural mortality.
4. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on (a) bycatch reduction, including reducing interactions, and injury/mortality associated with these interactions, with sea turtles, Atlantic sturgeon, right and humpback whales, and other protected species and (b) size and/or species selectivity.
5. Research on the pingers used for monkfish gillnet gear to reduce porpoises, so that interaction with seals is reduced.
6. Research to improve the monkfish market (e.g., increasing domestic demand, making new markets).
7. Research on discard mortality rates for gillnet and trawl gear (scallop dredge discard mortality rate was adjusted down in the 2022 assessment based on research. Need research for other gears).

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Absent	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Yes	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #8A as amended carried 10/0/1.

8B. Committee Motion main motion (Farnham/Gates): The Committee developed revisions to the Monkfish RSA Priorities approved in June 2022. The revised list is:

Highest Priority

1. Development of alternative stock assessment models, and analyze existing survey indices (e.g., dredge survey) for potential use in the Ismooth model and/or alternative assessment.
2. Develop a standardized CPUE index for the commercial gillnet fishery for potential use in the assessment.

Other Priorities (not in priority order):

3. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction and (d) natural mortality.
4. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on (a) bycatch reduction, including reducing interactions, and injury/mortality associated with these interactions, with sea turtles, Atlantic sturgeon, right and humpback whales, and other protected species and (b) size and/or species selectivity.
5. Research on the pingers used for monkfish gillnet gear to reduce porpoise interactions, so that interaction with seals is reduced.
6. Research to improve the monkfish market (e.g., increasing domestic demand, making new markets).
7. Research on discard mortality rates for gillnet and trawl gear (scallop dredge discard mortality rate was adjusted down in the 2022 assessment based on research. Need research for other gears).

8C. Committee Motion #6 as amended and perfected (Farnham/Gates): The Committee developed revisions to the Monkfish RSA Priorities approved in June 2022. The revised list is:

Highest Priority

1. Development of alternative stock assessment models, and analyze existing survey indices (e.g., dredge survey) for potential use in the Ismooth model and/or alternative assessment.
2. Develop a standardized CPUE index for the commercial directed monkfish gillnet fishery for potential use in the assessment.

Other Priorities (not in priority order):

3. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction and (d) natural mortality.
4. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on (a) bycatch reduction, including reducing interactions, and injury/mortality associated with these interactions, with sea turtles, Atlantic sturgeon, right and humpback whales, and other protected species and (b) size and/or species selectivity.
5. Research on the pingers used for monkfish gillnet gear to reduce porpoise interactions, so that interaction with seals is reduced.
6. Research to improve the monkfish market (e.g., increasing domestic demand, making new markets).
7. Research on discard mortality rates for gillnet and trawl gear (scallop dredge discard mortality rate was adjusted down in the 2022 assessment based on research. Need research for other gears).

Elizabeth “Libby” Etrie, Chair		Dewey Hemilright	Yes
Peter Hughes, Vice Chair	Absent	Scott Olszewski	Yes
Pete Christopher	Yes	John Pappalardo	Yes
Dan Farnham	Yes	Paul Risi	Yes
Matt Gates	Yes	Alan Tracy	Yes
Eric Hansen	Yes	Kelly Whitmore	Yes

Motion #8C as amended and perfected carried 10/0/1.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OTHER BUSINESS

In addition to finishing Framework Adjustment 13, these are the monkfish work priorities for 2023:

- *Develop measures to reduce gillnet interactions with protected species (sturgeon, large whales), responding to the Sturgeon Action Plan. (Document 5a)*
- *Review recommendations from the RSA program review and develop measures to improve the Monkfish RSA program’s effectiveness. Revisit use of RSA DAS and ability to flip to a directed RSA DAS while at sea. Form a work group of fishermen, NOAA and Council staff, Monkfish Committee members, etc. to discuss the Monkfish RSA program and identify potential improvements.*

The AP and Committee had a preliminary discussion about these two priorities, receiving updates on how the protected species priority may be accomplished in collaboration jointly with the MAFMC (NEFMC to discuss at its January meeting). Regarding the RSA priority, the AP and Committee should prepare for a future meeting that identifies the scope and objectives of a work group to develop recommendations. An AP member asked if this protected resource priority is part of the Take Reduction Team’s work on right whales and whether this work would be somewhat duplicative. A Committee member asked how the protected species measures differ between right whales and sturgeon. GARFO staff answered that the work is not necessarily redundant with the Take Reduction Team and that measures proposed in reducing whale entanglement will be accounted for in reducing sturgeon bycatch and vice versa.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.