New England Fishery Management Council
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MEETING SUMMARY

Skate Plan Development Team

The PDT met on August 1, 2017 at the Mariner's House in Boston, MA. A follow-up webinar was held on August 29, 2017. This document summarizes the PDT discussions from both meetings.

Framework Adjustment 5

1. The PDT reviewed the updated NEFSC trawl survey indices and discard information used to calculate the ABC (Allowable Biological Catch) for FY2018 and FY2019. The ABC is calculated using the three year moving average of the survey biomass indices and catch/biomass medians. Winter skate survey indices increased but little skate indices declined. Winter and little skate are the largest contributors to skate biomass.
2. The PDT reviewed new discard mortality research on winter skate in sink gillnet gear and recommended incorporating the new estimate. The study provided sex specific discard mortality rate estimates of 11% and 17% for females and males, respectively. The PDT agreed that it was not possible to apply sex specific estimates at this time since the sex ratio of winter skate in the management area is unknown. The principal investigators recommended using an average discard mortality rate estimate of 14% and the PDT used this approach.
3. The FY2016 ACL accounting report that includes state catch estimates has not been finalized. The PDT used the three year moving average of 2013-2015 to estimate state landings. The report is expected before the September 2017 NEFMC meeting and the PDT intends to update state landings to include the most recent estimate.
4. The PDT discussed the best approach to projecting dead discards after the prohibition on landing barndoor skate is removed. Projected dead discards are based on a moving average of the previous three years. A PDT member informed the group that it is unnecessary, and currently impossible, to adjust discards for barndoor skate because of how they are calculated. Discard estimation methodology for the skate complex was established by the Northeast Data Poor Stocks Working Group (NEFSC, 2009). Landings and discards have not been generally reported by species and therefore must be estimated using length composition of the survey applied to the length composition of each portion of the catch. This method allows for landings of prohibited species and there is currently no way to change this.
5. The PDT proposed analyzing three alternatives that would allow barndoor skate to be landed. These included a 500 lb possession limit, a proportional possession limit using

observer data, and a mixed possession limit. The proportional approach proved to be the most challenging. The PDT agreed that a maximum proportion of observed barndoor skate interactions in relation to observed skate interactions would provide a high end limit to the possession limit. Given the distribution of that proportion, determining what constituted an appropriate maximum was difficult (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The PDT initially discussed using the trawl survey to estimate the maximum proportion of barndoor skate in relation to the other skate species. However, the group decided observer data was more appropriate.

6. The PDT recommended status quo possession limits for the wing and bait fisheries. The ABC and TALs have not changed much since last specified in Framework Adjustment 3. Preliminary estimates of FY2016 landings indicate that the wing fishery achieved 98% of its TAL and the bait fishery reached 101%. There were cuts to the TALs in FY2016 for both fisheries and the incidental possession limit was in place for six weeks between January and February for the wing fishery; the bait fishery's incidental limit remained in place for the remainder of the fishing year but it was tied to the wing possession limit at that time. The bait possession limits were modified under Framework Adjustment 4, which has yet to be implemented, in order to reduce the likelihood that the incidental possession limit would be implemented again in FY2017. Considering the recent changes to the bait possession limits and the high achievement of the TALs in both fisheries, the PDT recommended status quo possession limits and accordingly to not include an analysis of the overall possession limits in the Framework document.

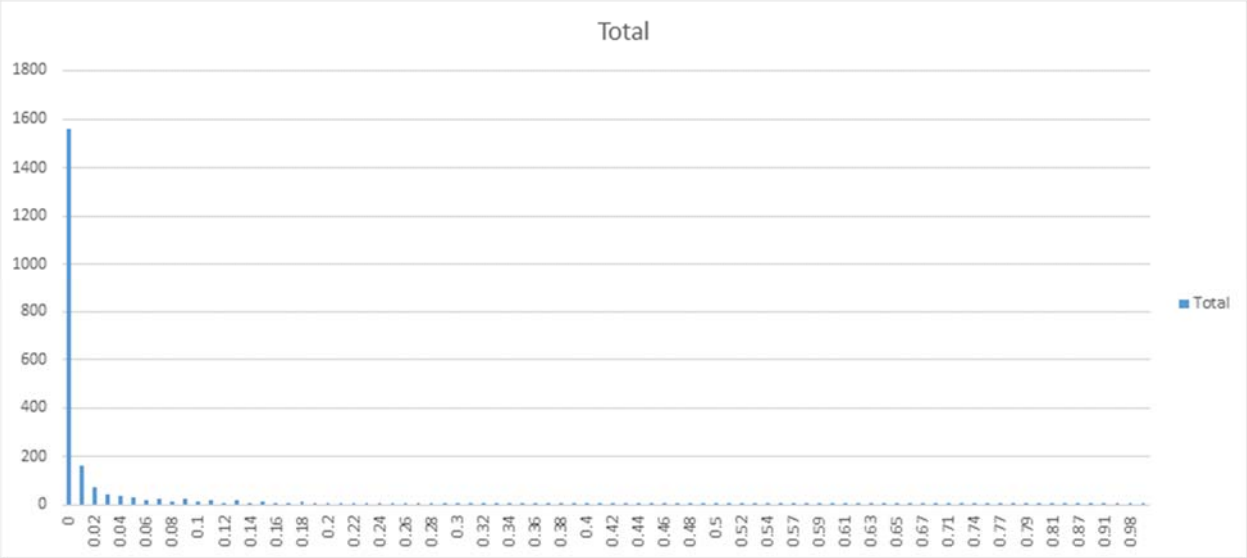

Figure 1 - Proportion of barndoor skate on observed trips with 200 lb skate or more

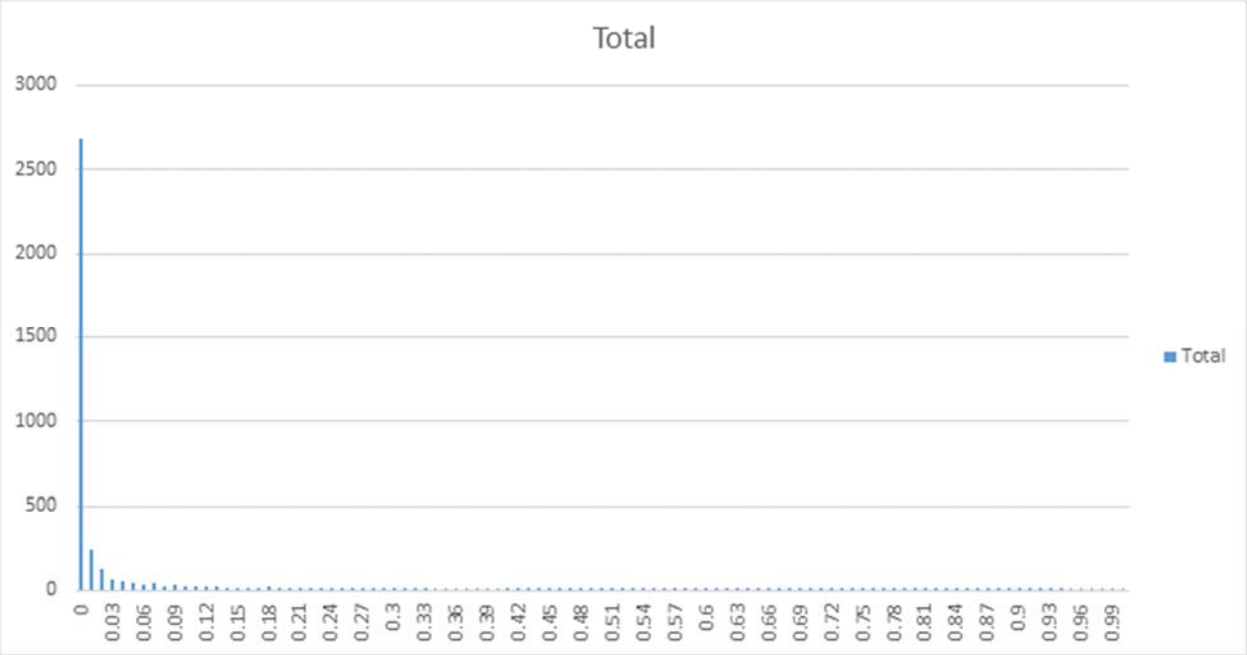

Figure 2 - Proportion of barndoor skate on observed trips with 1 lb skate or more

Limited Access Preliminary Analysis

7. The Committee tasked the PDT to complete some preliminary analysis regarding limited access in the skate wing and bait fisheries. This included estimating the number of participants in the fishery between 2003 and 2016, how many unique people have been in the fishery, how many people would be affected if control dates were modified, any evidence of increased or decreased participation, how many permits could transition into this fishery, and what would a newer business owner likely do with the permit. The PDT did not have time to fully complete the requested analyses in time for the September Committee meeting. However, some progress was made.
8. The PDT reviewed the number of distinct skate permits in existence between 2003 and 2017 (Table 1). The number of distinct skate permits had declined since a peak in 2007.

Table 1 - Number of distinct skate permits between 2003 and 2017

YEAR	Number of distinct skate permits
2003	1968
2004	2391
2005	2632
2006	2675
2007	2685
2008	2633
2009	2574
2010	2503

2011	2326
2012	2265
2013	2202
2014	2148
2015	2084
2016	2074
2017	1919

9. The PDT also looked at the number of active skate permits and their associated landings and revenues (Table 2). The number of active (defined as landing 1 lb or more of skate) is lower than the number of skate permits issued. Although a similar decreasing trend in active permits is occurring.

Table 2 - Active skate permits and associated landings and revenues between FYs 2000 and 2016

FYEAR	Number of permits	SUM(SPPLIVLB)	SUM(SPPLNDLB)	SUM(SPPVALUE)
2000	807	28,687,769	17,396,346	3,732,998
2001	747	27,574,209	17,308,245	2,988,346
2002	757	27,044,193	16,792,103	3,455,023
2003	708	35,642,997	20,441,768	4,525,488
2004	574	33,841,051	19,263,776	5,172,408
2005	584	31,618,607	18,724,101	5,522,563
2006	594	32,768,904	19,675,523	7,112,309
2007	586	42,636,697	25,161,377	8,262,164
2008	549	39,368,647	23,695,298	6,752,855
2009	572	40,395,958	24,123,535	7,257,965
2010	550	31,751,580	20,180,770	6,051,191
2011	567	40,003,340	24,470,657	8,874,093
2012	527	31,881,532	20,274,739	6,727,504
2013	455	30,065,547	19,834,644	7,125,863
2014	452	33,672,850	20,842,305	9,024,569
2015	440	31,426,230	20,206,843	5,590,823
2016	415	29,322,293	19,588,405	5,113,614
Total		567,702,404	347,980,435	103,289,776