



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team

webinar

May 10, 2022

The Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team (Skate PDT) met on May 10, 2022, via webinar at 1:00 PM to discuss methods for skate fishery catch setting and accounting and preparing the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Dr. Rachel Feeney (PDT Chair), Jenny Couture and Lou Goodreau (Council staff); Cynthia Ferrio, Ashleigh McCord, John Sullivan (GARFO); Kathy Sosebee and Samantha Werner (NEFSC); and Eric Schneider (RIDEM).

2022 TIMELINE AND UPDATES

The PDT briefly reviewed the status of 2022 work items. On Amendment 8, a notice of availability has published, and the comment period closes at the end of May. The decision package is being drafted. PDT work on research priority updates is done.

METHODS FOR FISHERY CATCH SETTING, MONITORING AND ACCOUNTING

The PDT reviewed outcomes of the March 7 PDT meeting, confirming recommended changes to tracking catch through in-season quota monitoring and year end accounting, and to specification setting. The PDT also discussed the timing and how these changes should be implemented.

Recreational catch

When Skate FMP was first adopted, recreational catch was considered non-existent. Thus, recreational catch data was not included in the fishery catch data used to update reference points and set ABC, and there has been no specific deduction for expected recreational catch. However, recreational catch has been increasing, making up 10-32% of the uncertainty buffer in the last few years.

The PDT confirmed that the NEFSC is already planning to include recreational catch data next year when updating reference points and for fishing year 2024-2025 ABC setting, though there needs to be work on discard mortality assumptions. PDT members agreed that if there is known catch, it should be included. There was concern that if recreational catch continues to increase, it will take up more of the uncertainty buffer, without a dedicated deduction.

Research catch

Catch from research trips has been included in the setting of reference points. There has been no specific deduction in specifications setting; research catch has fallen within the uncertainty buffer. Research landings in dealer data have been included in year-end catch accounting, within the “commercial

landings” tally. However, and research catch reported solely via vessel trip reports (VTR; not in dealer data) are excluded.

The PDT confirmed that research catch has been very small. Recent research landings from dealer data have been about 1% of the uncertainty buffer. The PDT confirmed that catch from Research-Set-Aside research trips are reported in Vessel Trip Reports and to dealers. There are other research landings reported on VTRs (defined as 'sub-legal catch landed for research' or 'legal catch landed for research', EFP trips only', but no skates have been reported as such since 2015. The PDT agreed that if there are landings reported solely on VTRs again in the future, they should be added to the year-end ACL accounting.

Non-landed bait

Bait skate that is sold directly to other vessels or kept as bait are reported via VTR and are not in dealer data. These landings are included in the ABC calculation, are monitored in-season against the Bait TAL, but have not been included in year-end accounting, because generally, all VTR data are excluded.

The PDT recommends that if there is known catch, it be included in year-end accounting, especially in this case because it is monitored in-season against the Bait TAL.

State catch

The state landings deduction from the ACT in specifications is a recent three-year average on the fishing-year year-end catch accounting values for state landings. In year-end catch accounting, the “commercial landings” and “state landings” bins are based on permit number. Landings where permit = 000000 are “state” and where permit >000000 are “commercial”. The first time a vessel gets a federal permit, it assigned a 6-digit number. There are skate landings by vessels have a permit >000000, but there is no federal skate permit on the day of landing. Thus, there are landings without a federal skate permit in the year-end “commercial landings” bin rather than the “state landings.” For in-season quota monitoring, if there is any federal fishing permit on the day of landing, then all skate landings are counted against the TAL. Thus, some skate landings without a federal skate permit are being tracked against the TAL.

The PDT has been concerned that state vs federal landings are identified in year-end accounting and specifications based on the 6-digit permit number, not whether the landings were under state or federal regulations. The PDT also feels that the state landing deduction should be based on calendar year to be consistent with how the other deductions are calculated. That change would be simple to implement. There was also concern that using the terms “commercial” and “state” landings in year-end accounting is confusing, because the state landings are likely all commercial as well.

Discards

GARFO and the NEFSC use two methods for calculating dead discards, the NEFSC uses calendar year and GARFO uses fishing year and there are differences in data assumptions, weightings, and extrapolations. The PDT also noted that this issue for many fisheries, not just skates. This is an issue that will hopefully be addressed through the upcoming transition to the use of the Catch Accounting Management System (CAMS) by both offices.

Method changes agreed to:

Recreational Catch. Starting in 2023, for FY 2024-2025 specifications and beyond:

- Recreational catch data should be included in the updated reference points (used for setting the acceptable biological catch).
- There should be a deduction from the ACT of the most recent three-year average of recreational catch, using the calendar data used for the ABC setting.

Research Catch

- At least in the near-term, research catch should remain within the uncertainty buffer, that there should not be a specific deduction.
- If there is research catch in VTR data not reported in dealer data, it should be included in year-end accounting.

Non-landed Bait

- Bait skate catch reported via VTR, not included in dealer data, should be included in year-end accounting

State Catch

- Calendar year rather than fishing year should be used for the state landings deduction from the ACT.
- For year-end accounting, the “state landings” should be defined as landings with no federal skate permit on the day of landing. Landings with a federal skate permit should be the “commercial landings.” Further, the term “commercial landings” should be replaced with “federal commercial landings” to reduce confusion.
- For in-season monitoring, only landings with a federal skate permit on the day of landing should be monitored against the Federal TAL, rather than the current practice that includes skate landings by vessels that had any federal permit on the day of landing.

Discards

- Calendar year should continue to be used for specifications and fishing year for year-end accounting.
- Consideration of revising discard calculation methods should be postponed until CAMS is in place, which may result in a harmonized approach.

PROCESS FOR IMPLEMENTING CHANGES

The GARFO staff on the PDT confirmed that the changes contemplated here do not require a regulatory change and are within the scope of the PDT and the GARFO/APSD office to implement to better track data through the specifications setting and catch monitoring processes. There is no need for formal approval by the GARFO/SFD office to implement these changes. The APSD office needs to give final approval prior to implementing these changes. The PDT will work to confirm approval.

For the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report, the PDT agreed that:

- Indices of abundance will be updated by the NEFSC, but there is insufficient time and resources to add the recreational catch data. This will occur next year.
- The year-end ACL accounting would be changed to:
 - Include for any research catch reported only via VTR (Likely none or minimal)
 - Include non-landed bait
 - Revise the “state landings” to include all landings with no federal skate permit on the day of landing. This will likely increase the state landings deduction in future years.
 - Replace the term “commercial landings” with “federal commercial landings”
- The year-end accounting should be presented using the old and new methods for comparison. Recent prior years should be recalculated. This will be necessary for setting specifications next year.

For FY 2022 in-season TAL monitoring, the PDT agreed to implement the change: only landings with a federal skate permit on the day of landing should be monitored against the Federal TAL. The fishing year

just started on May 1 and APSD has not yet issued its first monitoring report. This change would result in fewer landings being monitored against TAL, so there should not be any unexpected fishery disruptions.

PREPARING THE 2022 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

The updates to the indices of abundance and ACL accounting should be completed in July. It was noted that a recent monkfish research project focused on skates, and this could be noted in the report. Dr. Curtis can be consulted on the status of research. The PDT will develop guidance when it meets in August to review the report.

NEXT STEPS

- Sullivan – Confirm APSD approval of method changes. Adjust in-season monitoring as appropriate.
- Sosebee – complete updates to abundance indices
- Sullivan – Complete year-end ACL accounting and comparison of methods in current and recent years
- Feeney – Ask Dr Curtis for help with updating the status of research
- Feeney/Couture – Draft the Annual Monitoring report.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 2:10 PM.