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New England Fishery Management Council
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E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: **November 25, 2015**

TO: Council

FROM: Tom Nies

SUBJECT: **2016 Council Priorities – Executive Committee Recommendations**

1. The Executive Committee (ExComm) met November 24, 2015 and developed recommendations for 2016 Council priorities. These are summarized in attachment (1). The Executive Committee considered my comments on priorities during their discussion (see attachment (2), without attachments). The Council and Executive Committee were provided information on the ranking of priorities by Council members in my memorandum dated November 20; this information is not attached to this memo.

2. In most cases, the Executive Committee decisions on priorities were easily reached. There were a four, however, where there was some disagreement. The Committee asked that I highlight these for the Council as the final decision may benefit from a broader discussion. These are briefly discussed below. These issues are:

a. Limited entry for the groundfish party/charter fishery
b. Groundfish Committee motion to review the biological implications and catch accounting methodology for the MWT haddock catch cap
c. Limited entry for the skate fishery
d. Development of an observer policy

Groundfish

3. The Committee discussed at length the interest in a limited entry program for the party/charter fishery. This was ranked near the bottom of the all priorities by the Council. Nevertheless, there is strong interest in pursuing this by the Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP). Should the Council decide to pursue this task in 2016, adjustments will have to be made by eliminating other priorities. The ExComm thinks that Council should seriously consider this as a priority next year (2017).

4. At a Committee meeting in November, the Groundfish Committee passed a motion to consider an additional priority related to the haddock catch cap in the herring fishery. This has not been ranked by the full Council. The ExComm did not recommend adopting this task as a groundfish priority. Since much of this issue is related to monitoring of the herring MWT fleet, it would seem this is more appropriately a herring priority. Should the Council choose to adopt this as a groundfish priority, adjustments will have to be made by eliminating other priorities. Similarly**,** the Herring Committee may not have time to address it given the amendment that is under development.

Monkfish

5. The Ex Comm does not recommend working on Monkfish Amendment 6 this year given other priorities and in part due to staffing shortfalls.

Sea Scallops

6. The Scallop Committee suggested two additional priorities at its meeting in November. The ExComm only recommends pursuing one of these two (review the overall performance of the ACL structure). The workload for the Scallop Committee and PDT for this year is already full. The ExComm cautions that not all of the identified tasks are likely to be completed this year.

Red Crab/Jonah Crab

7. The Ex Comm does not recommend pursuing a Jonah crab FMP this year. ASMFC adopted an FMP and is considering an addendum that, if adopted, will help address concerns of the non-trap fishery. If this addendum is not adopted or other issues are raised, the Council could consider a Jonah crab action next year.

Skates

8. The ExComm did not recommend developing limited entry for the skate fishery this year. This topic warrants additional Council discussion because some participants in the fishery are concerned about recent increases in effort as groundfish vessels enter the fishery. The Council as a whole ranked this as a low priority.

Observer Committee

9. Last winter the Council passed a motion for the Observer Committee to develop a policy for monitoring commercial fisheries. The ExComm discussed whether this is duplicative of ongoing efforts within NMFS to revise the fishery dependent data program. The full Council should discuss this issue.

Grouping

10. Attachment (1) does not group all tasks into management actions. This will be done after the Council makes its decisions.

Just over the horizon

11. While not an issue for this year's priorities, it may be helpful to note issues that may surface in the near future.

a. The NRCC is exploring the possibility of changes to the assessment process. This will be discussed with the Council in January. This could have implications on setting ABCs/ACLs in the future, and may require modifications to Council FMPs to adapt to a new system.
b. A lawsuit was filed challenging the recently submitted SRBM amendment. Though the process is at a very early stage, the suit should proceed through the court system in 2016.
c. Fishery dependent data projects are ongoing at several levels. GARFO offered to take the lead on an omnibus amendment that will facilitate some changes. In addition, development of EM is likely to continue, and observer funding issues may continue to be a challenge. It is not clear how Council input will be developed for these projects.
d. The Marine Recreational Information Program will announce modifications to the way recreational effort is calculated in 2017. This is likely to result in revised recreational catch estimates for all time series. This could affect stock assessments for GB cod, GOM cod, GOM haddock, GOM winter flounder, and SNE/MA winter flounder. New catch estimates may also suggest that recreational/commercial allocations may need to be revisited. More information is available at http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/recreational/pdf/MRIP%20FES%20Transition%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf.

Attachments: (1) 2016 Draft Priorities – Executive Committee Recommendations

(2) Executive Director memorandum to the Executive Committee dated November 20, 2015 (without enclosures)