



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Skate Plan Development Team

The PDT met on February 27, 2017 at the Mariner’s House in Boston, MA. A follow-up webinar was held on March 20, 2017. This document summarizes the PDT discussions from both meetings.

Limited Access Scoping Comments

1. The PDT reviewed the written and oral comments received during the public scoping period for considering limited access in the skate fisheries. There were 6 public hearings during the scoping period. The PDT attempted to summarize the data to reflect the perspective of the two fisheries and geographic locations. A number of the comments heard at the scoping hearings were focused on incidental possession limits and did not clearly state a position on limited access. The PDT agreed to not infer an opinion from any comments that did not clearly state a position. The written comments suggested a slight preference for limited access; however, the spoken comments indicated more opposition to limited access (Table 1). Stock status and abundance were considered to be a factor in a number of public comments. If the quota were to increase then support for limited access may change for some participants. However, the PDT noted that the AP and Committee requested a control date for the bait fishery around 8 years ago, which implied long-term support for limited access.

Table 1 – Summary of total written and spoken comments provided at scoping hearings on limited access in the skate fisheries.

	For	Against	Unknown
Written	7	6	4
Scoping meeting	10	13	11

*Individuals submitting both written and spoken comments were included in both counts. Individuals attending multiple scoping hearings were only included once in the spoken count.

2. Given the close comment counts and the suggestions to treat the bait and wing fisheries differently, the PDT examined the level of support within each fishery for limited access (Table 2). This was complicated by the lack of request in the scoping document to state which fishery each commenter was participating in. Therefore, the level of support within each fishery is likely underestimated as a number of comments did not state which fishery they participated in.

Table 2 – Summary of written and spoken comments provided regarding limited access by fishery.

	For	Against
Wing	7	9
Bait	3	1
Both	2	2

*These numbers should not be expected to match those in Table 1 because it was not possible to determine what fishery was participated in if it was not specified.

- The PDT examined the level of support based on geographic distribution (Table 3). This information is limited as the scoping hearings could not be held in every port. Written comments did not provide a clear pattern in support across the region. Participation in specific fisheries, e.g. wing, bait, groundfish, may have greater influence than geography in determining support.

Table 3 – Summary of spoken comments by scoping hearing location.

	Portsmouth, NH	Bourne, MA	Narragansett, RI	Montauk, NY	Cape May, NJ
For	2	4	4		2
Against		3		9	
Unknown		1	9		1

- The PDT discussed the public comments requesting that the bait skate control date be updated. As noted in item 1 above, long-term support for limited access for the bait fishery is apparent. A number of changes have been made in other fisheries since 2009 that may have affected the level of participation in the bait fishery, which could lend support to either upholding or revising the existing control date. The PDT is interested in guidance from the AP regarding the control date for the bait fishery. The PDT requests, if limited access is moved forward, some guidance on the likely range of alternatives for limited access, i.e. range of qualification dates, qualification criteria, and potential implementation of catch shares.

Framework 4

- The PDT discussed the 2017 NEFMC priority to remove the prohibition on landing barndoor skate. The group's initial thoughts were to keep it simple and to take a relatively cautious approach. Discussions centered on whether there should be an overall limit to how much barndoor skate should be landed and the best approach to achieve that. Potential scenarios discussed included taking a percentage of the existing wing possession limit, e.g. 25%, and allow landing of barndoor up to that point, and a seasonal fishery depending on feedback from industry. Enforcement will be consulted but they have advised in the past that a fixed number is an enforceable approach. The PDT has yet to analyze an appropriate percentage for barndoor.

6. The PDT requests guidance from the AP and CTE on whether there is a seasonality to the fishery or whether a stable, year-round possession limit is preferred.

7. As barndoor skate already contributes to the overall ABC, no adjustments to the TAL would be expected from the removal of the prohibition to land barndoor skate. However, there may be an effect if dead discards are converted to landings.

8. The PDT will begin analyzing 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. The most recent 3 years of discard data available may not be representative of discards when barndoor can now be landed.