

4.0 ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION

4.1 ACTION 1 – REVISED SPECIFICATIONS

4.1.1 Alternative 1 - No Action

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), there would be no changes to the specifications for FY2022 (Table 2). Default specifications for Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock would be in effect from May 1, 2022, to July 31, 2022, and would equal 35% of the FY2021 catch limits, after which no specifications would be in place for these management units. All other stocks have FY2022 specifications. There would not be new FY2022 quotas specified for the transboundary Georges Bank stocks (i.e. GB cod, GB haddock, GB yellowtail flounder), which are managed through the US/CA Resource Sharing Understanding (as provided in Table 3 and Table 4), and therefore updated Canadian quotas would not be accounted. These quotas are specified annually.

Rationale: The No Action alternative uses OFLs/ABCs/ACLs adopted in FW61. These values are based on previous assessments. However, more recent assessments for several of the groundfish stocks occurred in 2021.

Table 2 - Alternative 1/No Action - Northeast Multispecies OFLs, ABC, ACLs, and other ACL sub-components for FY2022-FY2023 (metric tons, live weight), adjusted for final sector 2021 rosters following the final rule for FW61, published July 27, 2021. Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton or tenth. Underlined stocks are subject to adjustments in 2022 based on US/CA quotas, 2021 CA quotas were used to adjust in the interim. Includes adjustments for Canadian catches (*)

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
<u>GB Cod</u>	<u>2022</u>		1,308	20	137		1,093	1,093.1		1,045	48		1,250
GOM Cod	2022	1,150	552	48	12		463	270.4	193	262	8.2		523
<u>GB Haddock</u>	<u>2022</u>	114,925	81,242		406		75,250	75,250.4		72,770	2,481	1,511	77,168
GOM Haddock	2022	14,834	11,526	38	38		10,690	7,055.9	3,634	6,879	177	107	10,873
<u>GB Yellowtail Flounder</u>	<u>2022</u>		80			12	64	63.6		59	5.1	1.5	78
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2022	184	22	0.2	3.3	2.0	16	15.6		12	3.6		21
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2022	1,116	823	58	37		692	691.9		651	41		787
American Plaice	2022	3,687	2,825	28	28		2,630	2,630.1		2,542	89		2,687
Witch Flounder	2022		1,483	44	52		1,317	1,317.3		1,273	44		1,414
GB Winter Flounder*	2022	974	608		27		563	563.2		517	47		591
	2023	1,431	608		27		563	563.2		517	47		591
GOM Winter Flounder	2022	662	497	194	7.5		281	280.9		267	14		482
	2023	662	497	194	7.5		281	280.9		267	14		482
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2022	1,438	456	21	132		288	288.1		247	41		441
	2023	1,438	456	21	132		288	288.1		247	41		441

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
Redfish	2022	13,354	10,062				9,559	9,558.9		9,421	138		9,559
	2023	13,229	9,967				9,469	9,468.7		9,332	136		9,469
White Hake*	2022	2,986	2,147	11	11		2,019	2,019.3		1,994	25		2,041
Pollock	2022	21,744	16,812	1,093	841		14,135	14,135		13,988	147		16,068
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2022		160	0.8	10	31	108	107.9			108		150
	2023		160	0.8	10	31	108	107.9			108		150
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2022	513	384	23	177	129	43	42.9			43		371
	2023	513	384	23	177	129	43	42.9			43		371
Ocean Pout	2022	125	87		33		50	49.8			50		83
	2023	125	87		33		50	49.8			50		83
Atlantic Halibut*	2022		101	20	3.5		73	73.4			73		97
	2023		101	20	3.5		73	73.4			73		97
Atlantic Wolffish	2022	122	92				86	85.6			86		86
	2023	122	92				86	85.6			86		86

4.1.2 Alternative 2 – Revised Specifications

Under Alternative 2, the annual specifications for FY2022 – FY2024 for GB cod, GOM cod, GB haddock, GB yellowtail flounder, and white hake would be as specified as in Table 5. Alternative 2 does not include adjustments to the state waters and other sub-component values from those specified in FW61 (see Appendix II) except for the incorporation of the recreational catch target for GB cod (see Alternative 3). No action for the recreational GB cod catch target is shown in the table. All other specifications would remain unchanged from those adopted through FW61.

U.S./Canada Total Allowable Catches

This alternative would specify total allowable catches (TACs) for the U.S./Canada Management Area for FY2022 for Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder as indicated in Table 3. If NMFS determines that FY2021 catch of GB cod, haddock, or yellowtail flounder from the U.S./Canada Management Area exceeded the respective 2021 TAC, the U.S./Canada Resource Sharing Understanding and the regulations require that the 2022 TAC be reduced by the amount of the overage. Any overage reduction would be applied to the components of the fishery that caused the overage of the U.S. TAC in 2021. To minimize any disruption to the fishing industry, NMFS would attempt to make any necessary TAC adjustment in the first quarter of the fishing year.

A comparison of the proposed FY2022 U.S. TACs and the FY2021 U.S. TACs is shown in Table 4. Changes to the U.S. TACs reflect changes to the percentage shares, stock status, and the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee’s (TMGC) recommendations.

Table 3 - Proposed FY2022 U.S./Canada TACs (mt).

	Eastern GB Cod	Eastern GB Haddock	GB Yellowtail Flounder
Total Shared TAC	571	14,100	200
U.S. TAC	160	6,627	122
Canada TAC	411	7,473	78

Table 4 - Comparison of the Proposed FY2022 U.S. TACs and the FY2021 U.S. TACs (mt).

Stock	U.S. TAC		Percent Change ((FY2022-FY2021) /FY2022)*100
	FY2021	FY2022	
Eastern GB cod	190.5	160	-16.1%
Eastern GB haddock	6,486	6,627	+ 2%
GB yellowtail flounder	80	122	+53%

Table 5- Alternative 2 Revised Northeast Multispecies OFLs, ABC, ACLs, and other ACL sub-components for FY2022-FY2024 (metric tons, live weight), based on final 2021 sector rosters. Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton or tenth. Underlined stocks are subject to adjustments in 2023 and 2024 based on US/CA quotas, 2022 CA quotas were used to adjust in the interim. Includes adjustments for Canadian catches (*), and state waters component and other sub-component for most stocks. Specifications in gray are unadjusted from FW61. [To be updated post-Committee re recreational GB cod catch target options and if selected 2-year TACs for US/CA stock]

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
<u>GB Cod</u>	<u>2022</u>		343	20	137		177	177		169	8		334
	<u>2023</u>		343	20	137		177	177		169	8		334
	<u>2024</u>		343	20	137		177	177		169	8		334
GOM Cod	2022	724	551	48	12		462	270	192	262	8		522
	2023	853	551	48	12		462	270	192	262	8		522
	2024	980	551	48	12		462	270	192	262	8		522
<u>GB Haddock</u>	<u>2022</u>	114,925	81,383		<u>406</u>		<u>75,381</u>	<u>75,381</u>		<u>72,896</u>	<u>2,485</u>	<u>1,514</u>	<u>77,302</u>
GOM Haddock	2022	14,834	11,526	38	38		10,690	7,055.9	3,634	6,879	177	107	10,873
<u>GB Yellowtail Flounder</u>	<u>2022</u>		122			19	97	97		89	7.8	2.3	118
	<u>2023</u>		122			19	97	97		89	7.8	2.3	118
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2022	184	22	0.2	3.3	2.0	16	15.6		12	3.6		21
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2022	1,116	823	58	37		692	691.9		651	41		787
American Plaice	2022	3,687	2,825	28	28		2,630	2,630.1		2,542	89		2,687

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
Witch Flounder	2022		1,483	44	52		1,317	1,317.3		1,273	44		1,414
GB Winter Flounder*	2022	974	608		27		563	563.2		517	47		591
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Redfish	2022	13,354	10,062				9,559	9,558.9		9,421	138		9,559
	2023	13,229	9,967				9,469	9,468.7		9,332	136		9,469
White Hake*	2022	3,022	2,116	11	11		1,990	1,990		1,965	193		2,011
Pollock	2022	21,744	16,812	1,093	841		14,135	14,134.7		13,988	147		16,068
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2022		160	0.8	10	31	108	107.9			108		150
	2023		160	0.8	10	31	108	107.9			108		150
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2022	513	384	23	177	129	43	42.9			43		371
	2023	513	384	23	177	129	43	42.9			43		371
Ocean Pout	2022	125	87		33		50	49.8			50		83
	2023	125	87		33		50	49.8			50		83
Atlantic Halibut*	2022		101	20	3.5		73	73.4			73		97

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2023		101	20	3.5		73	73.4					97
Atlantic Wolffish	2022	122	92				86	85.6					86
	2023	122	92				86	85.6					86

Rationale: This measure would adopt new specifications for GB cod and GOM cod stocks consistent with the most recent stock assessment information and for white hake following the new rebuilding plan. The U.S. and Canada coordinate management of three management units that overlap the boundary between the two countries on Georges Bank. Agreement on the amount to be caught is reached each year by the TMGC. This framework includes the recommendations of the TMGC, which are consistent with the most recent Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee (TRAC) assessments.

4.1.3 Alternative 3 – Recreational Catch Target for Georges Bank Cod

4.1.3.1 Option 1 – No Action

Under No Action, the current recreational fishery GB cod catch target would remain at 138mt through FY2022. The catch target does not account for the revised MRIP data in the 2019 or 2021 stock assessments of GB cod. As the catch target is not a sub-ACL, the catch target is apportioned into the state waters and other sub-components for FY2022.

Rationale: The development of a recreational fishery GB cod catch target formed the basis for the development of the current GB cod recreational fishery management measures (by using information from the 2017 stock assessment). Maintaining the catch target of 138 mt through FY2022 allows a portion of the total ACL to be set aside for recreational catch, while maximizing the quota available to the commercial fishery. If the recreational fishery catch exceeds the amount set aside and contributes to an overage of the ACL, the commercial fishery would be responsible for paying back the overage, based on evaluating a 3-year average of recreational catch.

4.1.3.2 Option 2 – Revised recreational catch target for Georges Bank cod

[To be developed]

4.1.4 Alternative 4 – Changes to the Default Specifications Process

4.1.4.1 Option 1 – No Action

Under No Action, the current default specifications process applies to each groundfish stock or management unit that lacks a full year of specifications. For those that lack specifications, 35 percent of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL is specified for the first three months (May 1 to July 31) of an upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications may not exceed the anticipated ABCs for the upcoming fishing year. If the default specification does exceed the anticipated ABC, the default specification would be set equal to the ABC for the upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications are in place from May 1 up to July 31. Starting on August 1, fishing for stocks without specifications in place would cease, along with fishing for other groundfish stocks that share the same broads stock area (BSA) as stocks with no specifications.

Default specifications are replaced by approved OFL, ABC, and ACL values upon rulemaking. All catches occurring while default specifications are in place (after May 1 through final rulemaking) are counted against each component's allocation and the updated ACL for the fishing year. Northeast groundfish sectors are not subject to a 20% holdback of the prior year's Sector Annual Catch Entitlement while default specifications are in place.

Rationale: This measure allows the directed groundfish fishery to begin on-time (May 1) if full year specifications are not in place for the start of the fishing year. A percentage less than 100% of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL, not to exceed the next year's ABC, reflects a more precautionary approach than carrying forward 100% of the prior year's specifications, reflecting variation in stock statuses within the multispecies complex. Reducing the allowable catch in the fishery by 65% builds in precaution to protect stocks whose stock status may have changed. Allowing the fishing year to begin on time accommodates fishing businesses that prosecute the fishery early on the fishing year. Delays in specifications actions have persisted in the past four out of five fishing years, but the August 1 deadline has not been missed to-date.

4.1.4.2 Option 2 - 4 months duration, 75% of the previous year's specifications, no holdback provision, and 2-year US/CA TACs

Under Option 2, the default specifications process applies to each groundfish stock or management unit that lacks a full year of specifications. For those that lack specifications, 75 percent of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL is specified for the first four months (May 1 to August 31) of an upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications may not exceed the anticipated ABCs for the upcoming fishing year. If the default specification does exceed the anticipated ABC, the default specification would be set equal to the ABC for the upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications are in place from May 1 up to August 31. Starting on September 1, fishing for stocks without specifications in place would cease, along with fishing for other groundfish stocks that share the same broads stock area (BSA) as stocks with no specifications.

Default specifications are replaced by approved OFL, ABC, and ACL values upon rulemaking. All catches occurring while default specifications are in place (after May 1 through final rulemaking) are counted against each component's allocation and the updated ACL for the fishing year. Northeast groundfish sectors are not subject to a 20% holdback of the prior year's Sector Annual Catch Entitlement while default specifications are in place.

This option establishes a second-year total allowable catch (TAC) for the US/CA management units of Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock, such that the TAC set for Year 1 would be held for Year 2. The Year 2 TAC would be a default specification for the full year.

Rationale: This measure allows the directed groundfish fishery to begin on-time (May 1) if full year specifications are not in place for the start of the fishing year. A percentage less than 100% of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL, not to exceed the next year's ABC, reflects a more precautionary approach than carrying forward 100% of the prior year's specifications, reflecting variation in stock statuses within the multispecies complex. Reducing the allowable catch in the fishery by 25% builds in some precaution to protect stocks whose stock status may have changed. Allowing the fishing year to begin on time accommodates fishing businesses that prosecute the fishery early on the fishing year. Delays in specifications actions have persisted in the past four out of five fishing years. The addition of one month to the current expiration date of default specifications (August 31 vs. July 31) retains a timeline for rulemaking and slightly reduces the likelihood of having specifications for groundfish stocks expire. Transboundary stocks/management units are managed through the US/CA Resource Sharing Understanding and the quotas are specified annually. Setting a second year TAC for Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock as a placeholder would eliminate disruptions to the fishery from these two stocks consistently requiring default specifications.

4.1.4.3 Option 3 - 5 months duration, 75% of the previous year's specifications, no holdback provision, and 2-year US/CA TACs

Under Option 3, the default specifications process applies to each groundfish stock or management unit that lacks a full year of specifications. For those that lack specifications, 75 percent of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL is specified for the first five months (May 1 to September 30) of an upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications may not exceed the anticipated ABCs for the upcoming fishing year. If the default specification does exceed the anticipated ABC, the default specification would be set equal to the ABC for the upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications are in place from May 1 up to September 30. Starting on October 1, fishing for stocks without specifications in place would cease, along with fishing for other groundfish stocks that share the same broads stock area (BSA) as stocks with no specifications.

Default specifications are replaced by approved OFL, ABC, and ACL values upon rulemaking. All catches occurring while default specifications are in place (after May 1 through final rulemaking) are

counted against each component's allocation and the updated ACL for the fishing year. Northeast groundfish sectors are not subject to a 20% holdback of the prior year's Sector Annual Catch Entitlement while default specifications are in place.

This option establishes a second-year total allowable catch (TAC) for the US/CA management units of Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock, such that the TAC set for Year 1 would be held for Year 2. The Year 2 TAC would be a default specification for the full year.

Rationale: This measure allows the directed groundfish fishery to begin on-time (May 1) if full year specifications are not in place for the start of the fishing year. A percentage less than 100% of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL, not to exceed the next year's ABC, reflects a more precautionary approach than carrying forward 100% of the prior year's specifications, reflecting variation in stock statuses within the multispecies complex. Reducing the allowable catch in the fishery by 25% builds in some precaution to protect stocks whose stock status may have changed. Allowing the fishing year to begin on time accommodates fishing businesses that prosecute the fishery early on the fishing year. Delays in specifications actions have persisted in the past four out of five fishing years. The addition of two months to the current expiration date of default specifications (September 30 vs. July 31) retains a timeline for rulemaking and moderately reduces the likelihood of having specifications for groundfish stocks expire. Transboundary stocks/management units are managed through the US/CA Resource Sharing Understanding and the quotas are specified annually. Setting a second year TAC for Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock as a placeholder would eliminate disruptions to the fishery from these two stocks consistently requiring default specifications.

4.1.4.4 Option 4 - 6 months duration, 75% of the previous year's specifications, no holdback provision, and 2-year US/CA TACs

Under Option 4, the default specifications process applies to each groundfish stock or management unit that lacks a full year of specifications. For those that lack specifications, 75 percent of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL is specified for the first six months (May 1 to October 31) of an upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications may not exceed the anticipated ABCs for the upcoming fishing year. If the default specification does exceed the anticipated ABC, the default specification would be set equal to the ABC for the upcoming fishing year.

The default specifications are in place from May 1 up to October 31. Starting on November 1, fishing for stocks without specifications in place would cease, along with fishing for other groundfish stocks that share the same broads stock area (BSA) as stocks with no specifications.

Default specifications are replaced by approved OFL, ABC, and ACL values upon rulemaking. All catches occurring while default specifications are in place (after May 1 through final rulemaking) are counted against each component's allocation and the updated ACL for the fishing year. Northeast groundfish sectors are not subject to a 20% holdback of the prior year's Sector Annual Catch Entitlement while default specifications are in place.

This option establishes a second-year total allowable catch (TAC) for the US/CA management units of Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock, such that the TAC set for Year 1 would be held for Year 2. The Year 2 TAC would be a default specification for the full year.

Rationale: This measure allows the directed groundfish fishery to begin on-time (May 1) if full year specifications are not in place in time for the start of the fishing year. A percentage less than 100% of the prior year's OFL, ABC, and ACL, not to exceed the next year's ABC, reflects a more precautionary approach than carrying forward 100% of the prior year's specifications because of the variation in stock statuses within the multispecies complex. Reducing the allowable catch in the fishery by 25% builds in some precaution to protect stocks whose stock status may have changed. Allowing the fishing year to begin on time accommodates fishing businesses that prosecute the fishery early on the fishing year. Delays in specifications actions have persisted in the past four out of five fishing years. The addition of three months to the current expiration date of default specifications (October 31 vs. July 31) retains a timeline for rulemaking and significantly reduces the likelihood of having specifications for groundfish stocks expire. Transboundary stocks/management units are managed through the US/CA Resource Sharing Understanding and the quotas are specified annually. Setting a second year TAC for Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock as a placeholder would eliminate disruptions to the fishery from these two stocks consistently requiring default specifications.

4.2 ACTION 2 – RECREATIONAL FISHERY MEASURES- GEORGES BANK COD

4.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

No Action would maintain the existing management measures currently in place for GB cod for the recreational fishery.

Minimum Fish Size- The minimum size for Georges Bank cod is 21 inches (53.34 cm.), total length for the recreational fishery (private, party, and charter).

Possession Limit-Party, charter, and private vessels in the recreational fishery are permitted to land 10 legal sized GB cod per angler, per day.

Management Measures- Changes to existing management measures would require a Council action. Currently, the recreational fishery does not have an allocation for GB cod. Amendment 16 outlined the process for determining when and how an allocation of certain regulated groundfish stocks be made to the recreational component of the fishery. The process would require Council action and that certain standards be met (e.g., the fishery components are fully utilizing their ACL, and the recreational harvest, after accounting for state waters catches outside the management plans, is five percent or greater of the removals).

Rationale: This approach would maintain the current GB cod recreational measures, and continue to allow the Council to adjust these measures through management actions as needed.

4.2.2 Alternative 2 – Additional Measures to Promote Georges Bank Cod Stock Rebuilding – Recreational Fishery Measures

[To be developed]