



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 31, 2015
TO: Groundfish Committee
FROM: Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT)
SUBJECT: **Development of Framework Adjustment 55 (FW 55)**

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on May 28, July 21 and August 21, 2015 to discuss Framework Adjustment 55 (FW 55). The following summarizes the PDT discussion.

Overview

The scope of FW 55 is to incorporate any status changes for groundfish stocks and set specifications for all groundfish stocks, to adopt an additional sector, and to make changes to the groundfish monitoring program. The objectives of the action are to meet regulatory requirements to prevent overfishing, ensure rebuilding, and help achieve optimum yield in the fishery, to provide for flexibility within the sector system to adapt to changing regulatory and legal circumstances, and to make the groundfish monitoring program more efficient and cost effective while achieving the stated goals of the program in Amendment 16 (A16) and Framework Adjustment 48 (FW48).

Thus, the likely range of alternatives for this action is:

- 4.1 *Updates to status determination criteria and annual catch limits*
 - 4.1.1 *Status Determination Criteria*
 - 4.1.2 *Annual Catch Limits*
- 4.2 *Fishery Program Administration*
 - 4.2.1 *Implementation of an Additional Sector*
- 4.3 *Commercial Fishery Management Measures*
 - 4.3.1 *Groundfish Monitoring Program¹*

¹ The number and complexity of alternatives may impact the timeline for this action.

Section 4.1: Updates to Status Determination Criteria and Annual Catch Limits

2015 TRAC Assessments

The Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee (TRAC) met July 7-9, 2015 in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada to conduct assessments for Eastern Georges Bank (EGB) cod, EGB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder. The final TRAC status reports (TSRs) and summary of allocation shares are available at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/trac/>.

2015 Groundfish Operational Assessments

The peer review of the Groundfish Operational Assessments is scheduled for the week of September 14, 2015. Additional details can be found on this website, which is being updated by NOAA regularly: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/groundfish/operational-assessments-2015/stock-status.html>

PDT Discussion

Catch projections for FY 2016-FY 2018:

- For stocks needing a “bridge” year to run catch projections, the PDT is estimating the projected CY 2015 catches for groundfish stocks. This information will be used in the projections within the 2015 Groundfish Operational Assessments in September and provided to the SSC for their October meeting
- The SSC is scheduled to recommend ABCs/OFLs for all the groundfish stocks at their October meeting (with the exception of GB yellowtail flounder in September).
- For the October SSC meeting, the PDT agreed to the following approach to its projection analysis:
 - Following the SSC’s control rule, the PDT will run ABC projections at 75% F_{MSY} and $F_{rebuild}$ if necessary.
 - For comparison purposes, the PDT will also run ABC projections holding the value at 75% F_{MSY} for 2016 constant for three years.
 - The PDT plans to calculate OFL under each of these approaches.

Other management measures for the Committee to consider:

- See PDT memo on ASM (dated August 31, 2015) for measures to consider adding into FW 55 that potentially could be implemented in time for the start of FY 2016. However, the number and complexity of alternatives selected for inclusion may impact the timeline for this action.
- The PDT may have other recommendations for the management measures for the Committee to consider pending the results of the 2015 Groundfish Operational Assessments.

Section 4.2: Fishery Program Administration

On May 18, 2015, the Council received a letter from Mr. Hank Soule, Manager of the Sustainable Harvest Sectors, requesting that the Council consider recommending a new sector to operate in FY2016. In June, the Council voted to include in FW 55 an alternative that would

potentially approve the new sector. Consistent with prior FW actions, the alternative is being developed within the Fishery Program Administration section of FW 55.

Potential language for the draft alternative:

DRAFT ALTERNATIVE TEXT

4.2 Fishery Program Administration

4.2.1 Implementation of an Additional Sector

Option 1: No Action

Under this option, the list of operating sectors would be limited to the 24 sectors that have been authorized through prior Council actions.

Option 2: Implement a New Sector for FY 2016

Sectors that wish to begin operating in a given fishing year are required to submit proposals and operations plans one year prior to the beginning of that fishing year. Under this option, one new sector would be authorized for FY 2016 and would begin operations on May 1, 2016. The new sector would be “Sustainable Harvest Sector II” and likely be comprised of active groundfish vessels, similar to the existing Sustainable Harvest Sectors.

Rationale: The approval of a new sector provides for flexibility within the sector system to adapt to changing regulatory and legal circumstances.

PDT Discussion

The PDT reviewed the letter from the Sustainable Harvest Sector, found it to be similar to the existing Sustainable Harvest Sector I, with proposed operations within the range of sectors already in operation. Preliminarily, it seems these operations are within the existing programmatic EA for sector operations and would not require an additional NEPA document to analyze the impacts.

The PDT recommends that the Committee consider adding an alternative to FW 55 that would allow NMFS to approve operations plans for, and allocate ACE to, new sectors without a previous Council action to implement the sector. The PDT recognizes that the Council may still wish to have input on new sectors. In that case, the alternative could include a consultation with the Council before NMFS approves a new sector.