



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team

webinar

July 1, 2021

The Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team (Skate PDT) met on July 1, 2021, via webinar at 9:00 AM to discuss the 2022-2023 fishery specifications, fishery data query methods and quality assurances, and Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Dr. Rachel Feeney (PDT Chair) and Jenny Couture (Council staff); Cynthia Ferrio, Ashleigh McCord, and John Sullivan (GARFO); Dr. Trish Clay, Dr. Kathy Sosebee, and Samantha Werner (NEFSC); and Eric Schneider (RI DEM). Skate Committee members attending were Dr. Matthew McKenzie (Chair), Ms. Libby Etrie (Vice-Chair) and Ms. Kelly Whitmore (MADMF). A few members of the public attended.

TIMELINE

The Skate PDT is working to support the July 29 meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Advisory Panel and Committee meetings in mid-September. There will be a PDT meeting August 9 to prepare the specifications document and support Amendment 5. Work on Amendment 5 continues throughout but keeping specifications on-track for final action by the Council in September is a priority.

SPECIFICATIONS

The PDT continued to develop an approach for the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) that accounts for recent gaps in trawl survey coverage. Two PDT sub-groups that met since the prior PDT meeting reported out on the topics of developing the description of the “Nontarget Species” section of the Affected Environment, the type of document that the PDT needs to prepare to conform with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; likely a Supplemental Information Report) and developing an ABC approach. The PDT developed the draft memo to the SSC, the draft Risk Policy Matrix spreadsheet, and discussed supplying species-specific landings and discard data. On the latter, there are concerns about the accuracy of the species data and the methods for extrapolating the data. These issues will be examined in the 2023 assessment, which could change the calculations. However, the PDT agreed to provide bar charts for now to show the general trends by species.

Follow-ups – Prior to July 20

- Sullivan – Provide the FY 2020 year-end landings and catch accounting numbers.
- Feeney – Revise PDT memo, inserting more references to the Affected Environment, the FY 2020 fishery data, removing the figure on historic catch and better highlighting the ABC alternatives upfront.

- Sosebee – Provide the bait and wing landings data by species.
- McCord – Request text on the recent Biological Opinion from the protected resources staff at the Greater Atlantic Regional Office (GARFO).
- Couture – Include protected resources text into Affected Environment.
- Feeney – Revise Risk Policy Matrix.

Follow-ups - Ongoing

- Feeney - Develop the NEPA document for review in August by the PDT.

DATA QUERY METHODS AND QUALITY ASSURANCES

The PDT sub-group on fishery data met since the prior PDT meeting and reported out on ongoing work on how to handle oddities in the skate landings data, particularly:

- Extreme outliers of landed weight and/or price.
- Landed weight = live weight and the disposition code indicates wing.
- Landed weight > than live weight.
- Bait landings that do not have a market code, or other missing data.

The distribution in wing prices is generally wider than bait and the PDT is confident that prices over \$0.30 are truly wing. Applying this decision rule would account for about 70% of the records with oddities. Many of the odd records below \$0.30 have an unclassified market code. There are about ten dealers that account for over 50% of the oddities and the PDT plans to reach out to these dealers to better understand the processes for landing and marketing skate to help develop a more concrete decision rule or ways that fishery data may be improved in the future. The next PDT data sub-group meeting is on July 22 and a staff member of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program is expected to attend to help the PDT learn what quality control measures are in place and discuss how data quality could improve. A Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) data manager has also been invited.

The PDT sub-group also reported on the transition to using a database called the Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) that unifies the databases currently held at GARFO and the NEFSC. The existing approach to finalizing fishery data using the Area Allocation tables (“AA tables”) is being phased out. For FY 2019 data, the equivalent of AA tables with the same data elements will be generated from CAMS and be available within the next month. A briefing for Council and ASMFC staff is planned for August. It is expected that 2020 data will be available in September. Documentation for using CAMS is in process.

For the analysis of intermediate possession limits in Amendment 5, the PDT plans to use the FY 2018 AA tables that are available now. For FY 2019, the first half of the year is available through the AA tables. The PDT could compare the first half of 2019 using AA and CAMS to ensure the data methodologies are equivalent and to provide confidence in using the CAMS-generated tables as substitutes for AA tables for future fishing years, including FY 2019.

Follow-ups

- Goodreau – Convene the data sub-group.
- Werner and Clay – Talk with dealers to better understand fishery and market practices.
- Werner – Encourage a staff member of the NEFSC data quality team to attend the data sub-group meeting and ask for CAMS training for the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch.
- Sullivan – Assist other PDT members with training on how to use CAMS and alert the PDT to when the briefing may be scheduled.

AMENDMENT 5

The PDT discussed the tasking from the Skate Committee to “estimate the realized NEFOP observer coverage rates for MNK declaration for wing fishery and DOF declaration for bait fishery.” There is not a straightforward link between observer data and trip declarations, so the PDT discussed how to overcome this challenge. Kristina Thorpe from the NEFSC Observer Program is assisting with a data query of FY 2018 to match the fishing year data that are in the discussion document already. She is pulling the observer data for all trips landing skate, delineating between full and observed trips and including disposition codes where possible. If declarations cannot be linked, the PDT will try to identify the percentage of skate trips and landings that were observed through NEFOP and estimate which declaration is most likely. The declaration data (activity code) is in DMIS and linked to the dealer data, which can be linked to the VTR, but there is no direct link between VTR and observer data (CAMS is intended to resolve this issue). From the SBRM report, it was noted that the coefficient of variation was low for skates (5-7%) in recent years, though the percent of trips excluded from the analysis is high (not uncommon across species).

The PDT discussed the revisions to alternatives that the Council approved in June and refined the language for alternatives in the discussion document accordingly.

Follow-ups

- Couture and Werner – Continue coordinating and working on the PDT tasking.
- Schneider – Contact a staff member at Rhode Island DEM who may have successfully linked VTR and Observer data.
- Sosebee – Contact the SBRM report authors to understand the methods for how trips are included in the calculation of the coefficient of variation.
- Couture and Werner – Collaborate on analytical approaches regarding intermediate possession limits (developing code for using the FY 2018 AA tables).
- Ferrio – Ask the GARFO permit office on the timing of when groundfish, monkfish, and scallop permits need to be obtained.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned around 12:30 PM. The next Skate PDT meeting will be on August 9, 2021.