



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team

webinar

August 9, 2021

The Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team (Skate PDT) met on August 9, 2021, via webinar at 1:00 PM 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, Alicia Schuler, and John Sullivan (GARFO); Kathy Sosebee and Samantha Werner (NEFSC). 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 September 16 meetings of the Skate Advisory Panel and Committee meetings. Work on Amendment 5 continues throughout but keeping specifications on-track for final action by the Council in September is a priority. The next Skate PDT meeting will be a short webinar in early October.

SPECIFICATIONS

The PDT is developing two documents: the specifications alternatives and the Draft Supplemental Information Report (SIR). The PDT discussed that a SIR is appropriate type of document, because the impacts are likely within the range considered in the last Environmental Assessment (Framework Adjustment 8) and there are no major changes in data sources or the status of the valued ecosystem components. For the alternatives, the PDT noted that the wing fishery total allowable landings should be in the units of “wing lb” rather than “landed lb” to be consistent with the regulations which set limits as “whole weight” and “wing weight.” For the SIR, the PDT focused on clarifying the language about protected resources and the level of detail necessary in the socioeconomic analysis.

Follow-ups – Prior to September 1

- Alternatives Document
 - Feeney – Revise alternatives document to clarify the wing TAL in wing weight.
 - Whole PDT – Review.
- Draft SIR
 - McCord – Address NEPA questions in Sections 2.0., 5.1., 5.3., 8.2., and 8.8.
 - Feeney – Include bar charts on discards by species in Section 5.0.
 - Schuler – Identify the protected species language necessary to include in Sections 5.2, 8.3. and 8.4.

- Clay, Goodreau and Werner – Identify the socioeconomic information necessary to include in Section 5.3.
- Sosebee – review target and non-target impact analysis in Section 6.0 and 7.0.
- Schuler – review protected species impact analysis in Section 6.0 and 7.0.
- Feeney – ask Michelle Bachman to review habitat impacts in Section 6.0 and 7.0.
- Clay, Goodreau and Werner – review human community impacts in Section 6.0 and 7.0.
- Feeney – Finish developing Section 8.0.
- Clay – Complete Section 8.11.
- Ferrio and McCord – review document when above work is complete.

Follow-ups – after September Council meeting

- Draft SIR
 - Goodreau and Werner – Complete Regulatory Flexibility Act analysis.
 - Feeney – prepare document for preliminary submission.

DATA QUERY METHODS AND QUALITY ASSURANCES

The PDT sub-group on fishery data met since the prior PDT meeting and reported out on several topics.

Regarding the NMFS project to develop a database called the Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) that unifies the databases currently held at GARFO and the NEFSC, the sub-group reported that the 2019 data is not ready for use, but the project seems on track. A training is expected in August.

Regarding the ongoing work on how to handle oddities in the skate landings data, the sub-group reported on discussions with staff of the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program and GARFO. The PDT is reporting data oddities for investigation. PDT members have talked with a few dealers, and it appears that some oddities were reporting errors that the dealers will correct going forward. The PDT agreed that a metadata file would be helpful to document what has been learned about the skate data and possible analytical approaches. It was noted that many data errors could be communication issues and misunderstandings of what to report and how. The PDT could review the dealer reporting tool to determine if the data entry instructions could be improved.

The sub-group also worked on analyses for Amendment 5, reported on below.

Follow-ups

- Sullivan – Let PDT know when CAMS training will occur.
- Goodreau and Werner – co-lead the development of a metadata file.
- Ferrio – Reach out to the port agents on how reporting may improve through better communication with dealers.

AMENDMENT 5

The PDT first discussed preliminary analyses of the intermediate possession limit alternatives in Amendment 5. The PDT noted that, while FY18 is the latest year in which trip-level data is available, it was a complicated year to use for this analysis, as specifications were delayed and the uncertainty buffer changed part-way through. It is generally difficult to predict fishing behavior changes, particularly without behavioral models. The PDT made some recommendations on how to clarify the analysis, more clearly linking the analysis to actual TAL performance and clarifying if and how results are additive. It was agreed that perhaps the Regional Administrator (RA) could have a wider timeframe to use discretion on not implementing an intermediate limit; perhaps 30 days rather than the current 15 days for the incidental limit.

The PDT then 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, and the PDT continued discussing how to overcome this challenge. The PDT explored using the Allocation Monitoring System (AMS) database, but there was a poor match with observer data. After seeking input of other NEFSC staff, the PDT developed a query where just 9% of Skate_Land DMIS records did not have a match with the linking variable needed to merge with the observer database and 6% of observer records did not have a match with the linking variable needed to merge with the Skate_Land DMIS database, which was an improvement. The PDT discussed these results and agreed that they seem reasonable. Sullivan is working on another approach and the PDT will compare the results. It was noted that matching of databases has been a longtime challenge.

Follow-ups

- Intermediate possession limits
 - Feeney – Ask the Committee if a 30-day buffer for RA discretion is preferable.
 - Couture – Finish writing draft analysis.
 - Whole PDT – review analysis once draft is complete.
- Observer coverage tasking
 - Sullivan – further develop additional query method and compare outcomes.
 - Couture – Finish writing draft analysis.
 - Whole PDT – review analysis once draft is complete.

2021 COUNCIL MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

The PDT discussed possible management priorities for 2022. The PDT recommended continuing Amendment 5 (discretionary) and creating the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report (required). No additional actions were recommended. It was noted that, although smooth skate was declared rebuilt a few years ago, possession is still prohibited. As the status of all the skate species will be reviewed in the 2023 assessment, perhaps the specifications action in 2023 could consider revising this prohibition. It was suggested that allowing a small amount of landings at first could help phase the species into the fishery, like how barndoor skate was integrated into the fishery (25% wing possession limit). Fully integrating barndoor could be considered as well.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned around 3:40 PM. The next Skate PDT meeting will be in early October 2021.