



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Red Crab Plan Development Team

Webinar

Monday, August 26, 2019

1:00 PM

The Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Plan Development Team (PDT) met to discuss recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the specifications process for fishing years (FY) 2020-2023.

Meeting Attendance: NEFMC - Michelle Bachman, Jenny Couture, Rachel Feeney, Chris Kellogg; NEFSC – Toni Chute; GARFO - Marianne Ferguson, Allison Murphy, Danielle Palmer; Contractor – Jessica Joyce.

The meeting began approximately 1:10, pending a fix of technical issues with the webinar.

Key Outcomes:

- The PDT reviewed three preliminary recommendations from the SSC meeting and discussed which recommendation(s) would be part of this specifications process.
- The PDT discussed a final preparation and review schedule for Council decision documents, leading up to the Council meeting on September 24.

Discuss outcomes and recommendations from the August 21 SSC meeting.

The PDT discussed three recommendations from the SSC meeting, which are preliminary as the SSC had not yet drafted their report at the time of the PDT meeting¹:

1. Increase in the red crab Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and Total Allowable Landings (TAL) to 2,000 mt (from 1,775 mt) – the primary rationale the SSC provided was economic. We will understand the full biological and economic rationale when we see the draft SSC report.
2. Some kind of monitoring (in-season) for Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE), for the SSC to revisit the TAL if LPUE falls below 15% of the lowest observed LPUE.

¹ The final SSC recommendations were slightly different than discussed at the August 21 SSC meeting. See the SSC report for reference.

3. To conduct research to assess the potential implications of allowing the harvest of female red crabs.
 - The specifications/Supplemental Information Report (SIR) will focus on the first recommendation as the other two recommendations will need to be considered as part of the Council priority-setting process, which starts in September and is finalized in December for the following year (2020).

Jessica also mentioned an administrative change in the specifications cycle from 3-years to 4-years, which will be considered part of this action.

Rachel inquired whether the 15% LPUE monitoring would be in-season or every 4 years, and Chris replied that in-season monitoring could be resource intensive, and will need to be considered in a separate action. This recommendation, and the recommendation to harvest females can likely be included in the SSC report for the Council to consider these actions under the priority setting process. Typically, priorities would flow through the species committee; however, as red crab does not have a committee, it is appropriate for the SSC to bring them to the Council without PDT involvement.

At this point, it's unknown what information is available to assess the impacts of opening harvesting to females, and as it is complicated, it would likely have to be analyzed in a Framework or Amendment.

Coordinate document preparation for the 2020-2023 specifications package

Chris will provide rationale to address the administrative change to a 4-year specifications cycle, which can be included in the proposed action section.

The PDT discussed how best to address the SSC recommendation in the SIR. The proposed action is the SSC recommendation for an increased ABC/TAL, and no other alternatives will be analyzed. The two questions to consider (related to the SIR guidance questions) are:

1. If there is a substantial change in the nature of the stock that informed the new number (such as a big change in a stock assessment).
2. If the increase is meaningful in the context of the population (e.g., will a large change in specs have a significant bearing on the impacts?)

The PDT discussed whether or not there is a trigger for an action (increased TAL) being significant enough where a SIR would no longer be appropriate and an EA would need to be prepared. There is not a threshold – but more of an assessment of whether effort would change noticeably from what was analyzed in the Amendment 3 EA. While it was referenced that the fishery has only landed ~75% of the TAL in the last 10-years, on average, landings have increased in the last three years and are higher than the 10-year average.

PDT members who attended the SSC meeting discussed what they thought SSC members based their decision on to increase landings. The PDT recalled that SSC members mentioned

past landings, signs of recruitment, and the increasing size of landed males. The SSC is taking an adaptive management approach, where they would look at available information (e.g. changes in LPUE) to assess impacts of the increase in TAL on the red crab population.

The PDT Chair raised a question of how best to address these changes in Section 6 of the SIR, NEPA compliance. While impacts for non-target species and the physical environment should remain largely the same, and impacts on human community will remain positive, it's challenging to determine how best to assess impacts on target species and protected resources, not knowing how the fishery will adjust effort (i.e., more traps, more trips/longer seasons, change in soak time, or combination).

- Danielle said the Protected Resources Division will review closely if any changes equate to more vertical lines in the water or if there is a longer season or soak time.
- Chris suggested talking to an economist involved with assessing a trap/pot fishery, to discuss how effort changes with an increased TAL.

Alli mentioned that the change to a 4-year specifications cycle would need to be changed in regulations. Therefore Section 9 would need to include a Regulatory Impact Review pursuant to EO 12866. As this is an administrative action, it will be addressed in the proposed action and evaluated in the Regulatory Impact Review (per EO 12866), but it would not need to be analyzed at the same level as the increase in the ABC/TAL.

Discuss next steps in advance of the September Council meeting

- SIR review schedule: Council revisions to SIR to reflect SSC recommendation(s) and impacts (Aug. 26-30), then PDT review (Sept. 2-6), then PDT Chair incorporates changes (Sept.9-13) and submits to Council staff on Friday, September 13.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:15.