



New England Fishery Management Council

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DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Monkfish Committee Panel
Radisson Airport Hotel, Warwick, RI
September 1, 2016

The Monkfish Committee met on September 1, 2016 in Warwick, RI to discuss specifications for FYs 2017 - 2019.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Ms. Laurie Nolan (Vice Chair), Mr. Mark Alexander, Mr. Terry Alexander, Mr. Mark Gibson, Ms. Libby Etrie, Mr. Steven Heins, Dr. John Quinn, Mr. John Pappalardo, and Mr. Mike Ruccio; Dr. Fiona Hogan (NEFMC staff) and Dr. William Whitmore (GARFO). In addition, approximately 5 members of the public attended.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The Committee tasked the PDT to investigate reducing the management uncertainty buffer to 3% in both management areas.
- The Committee supported updating the calculated discard rate using discard estimates from the 2016 operational assessment.
- The Committee recommended a future action to better utilize the TALs for both management areas for 2017 priorities.

AGENDA ITEM #1: REVIEW OF THE 2016 MONKFISH OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Staff provided a brief overview of the 2016 monkfish operational assessment. The SCALE model was not updated because new research questioned the validity of the growth data used. Landings have remained relatively stable over the last 5 years. Landings are dominated by trawl in the Northern Fishery Management Area (NFMA) and gillnet in the Southern Fishery Management Area (SFMA). The survey trend adjustment factor, if used, would result in a slight increase (2%) in the NFMA and a decline (13%) in the SFMA. The 2015 year class in the SFMA appears to be large but will be tracked by the PDT to determine what contribution it may make when it recruits to the fishery. In recent years, landings have been below the Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Total Allowable Landings (TAL).

Staff summarized the 2016 Fishery Performance Report. This report is new and is part of the Risk Policy Working Group recommendations; it was also presented to the SSC at their August 10, 2016 meeting. The TAL was under-harvested in FY2015 by 30% in the NFMA and 47% in the SFMA. Landings in the NFMA were higher than the previous 4 years in the time series but it is not clear whether this indicates a changing trend yet. Landings were down in the SFMA in FY2015 but fishery participants indicated that warmer water temperatures and weather affected the ability to catch monkfish. Total landings and revenues have remained relatively stable over the last 4 years. Category A and B permits continue to rely more on monkfish for landings and revenues than Category C and D permits. A large amount of latent effort continues to exist in the fishery. Approximately 10% of total DAS allocated were used by limited access vessels. Only 42% of the DAS allocated to active vessels were used in FY 2015.

AGENDA ITEM #1: MONKFISH SPECIFICATIONS FOR FYS 2017 - 2019

The SSC recommended status quo Overfishing Limits (OFLs) and ABCs for both fishery management areas. This would result in OFLs of 17,805 mt and 23,204 mt, for the NFMA and SFMA, respectively. The ABCs would be 7,592 mt and 12,316 mt, for the NFMA and SFMA, respectively. Between the ABC/ACL and the Allowable Catch Target (ACT) is the management uncertainty buffer, currently set at 13.5% and 6.5% for the NFMA and SFMA respectively. Discards are subtracted from the ACT to get the TAL. Sources of management uncertainty were documented by the monkfish PDT in 2009; the PDT discussed the list and did not have any changes to the list. Sources ranged from permits and DAS/trip limits to enforcement but no associated quantification of each item of uncertainty was found.

The PDT analyzed the performance of the discard rate calculation by comparing the difference in the predicted and actual ratios. The discard rate is calculated from the ratio of 3 years of discards to 3 years of total catch for each management area separately. The current methodology is performing well, i.e. it is setting aside sufficient discards each year to reduce the likelihood that the ACT will be exceeded. As part of this analysis, the PDT had discussed whether the management uncertainty buffer could be adjusted. However, the PDT did not reach consensus on an appropriate adjustment for each management area and calculated specifications for a range of management uncertainty buffers to aid in the Committee's discussion.

Discussion on the Presentation

A Committee member thought a lower trip limit in the NFMA would result in more DAS being used in that management area. It was also noted that monkfish assessment uses a very high calibration between the Bigelow and Albatross NEFSC survey vessels. A Committee member questioned whether the variability in discards in the SFMA was due to the scallop fishery. Scallop dredge gear is the largest contributor to monkfish discards in the SFMA based on the 2016 Monkfish operational assessment. It was noted that the ABC should not be treated as the OFL and that there are accountability measures in place that would address any overage of the ABC that may occur. Based on the growth rate of the 2015 year class estimated from the survey, that year class would be expected to recruit to the fishery in 1.5 to 2 years. A Committee member recommended that the PDT take into consideration all the work that has been done to close potential loopholes in this fishery, which would help justify reductions in the management uncertainty buffer. In particular, regulations were changed to prevent 3 hour trips from occurring in the SFMA. Based on recent fishery performance, it is unlikely that the ACL would be exceeded even if the management uncertainty buffer was reduced.

The Committee discussed the performance of the calculated discard rate based on the PDT analysis comparing the calculated ratio with the observed ratio. In all years examined, enough discards were accounted for in each year, even when there was a difference between the ratios. The impact of scallop dredge in the SFMA was a concern as that gear type contributes the largest proportion to monkfish discards in that area.

MAFMC staff considered that the likelihood of exceeding the ABC was very low under current fishing operations, which could lend support for no management uncertainty buffer. It would depend on the purpose of the management uncertainty buffer. However, some Committee members were hesitant to set the management uncertainty buffer to zero. Changes to the TAL would be unlikely to increase the fleet's ability to achieve the TAL. Other factors were considered to be limiting monkfish catch. In the NFMA, most monkfish are landed using trawl gear, however, a number of flounder quotas are low enough that they restrict fishing. A Committee member thought DAS allocations could be increased because active participants were using up to 90% of their DAS with only a low percentage of the TAL being achieved.

Adjusting the management uncertainty buffer would update and increase the transparency in why the numbers are set as they are.

Public Comment on the Presentation

Maggie Raymond, Associated Fisheries of Maine – I want to point out that including the OFL numbers would be helpful. There is a 10,000 mt difference between the OFL and the ABC. There is a huge scientific uncertainty buffer built into this under status quo. I think that's relevant to issue of the management uncertainty buffer. How many buffers do you need? I struggled to understand exactly where the 13.5% number and the 6.5% numbers come from in the flow chart. I understand that it is partially based on discard estimates but if you look at the table it sort of matches in the north and less in the south. The purpose of the ACT is to prevent exceeding the ACL. We haven't come close to that in 10 years. We're setting aside a huge amount and we shouldn't do it. From industry perspective, it doesn't make sense. I think with regards to the scallop fishery in the southern area and potential for increases in discards from the 2015 year class, it would be important when looking at the DAS and trip limit analysis to investigate whether the current discards are due to the trip limit or is it from undersized fish. If it's because they've exceeded the trip limit then it should be adjusted. I don't know what the mortality is with a scallop dredge, the fish shouldn't be wasted if we're not achieving the TAL. The 2015 year class are likely to be a 40-43 cm fish when they recruit to the fishery, which was also sexually mature. If that resource continues to grow then we should be able to harvest that because it will be sexually mature.

1. **Motion:** to reduce the NFMA management uncertainty buffer to 6% (Mr. Pappalardo/Mr. T. Alexander).

Rationale: This would also take into account the updated calculated discard rate to that from the 2016 operational assessment.

There was some hesitation to reduce the management uncertainty buffer to 3% in the SFMA because of the uncertainty surrounding the 2015 year class. It was noted that there is a large gap between the ABC and the OFL for both management areas. The OFLs were not able to be updated as they were based on the output of the SCALE model. A Committee member didn't think the level of uncertainty had changed since Framework 8 set specifications – the science had not improved, which is why a healthy buffer was implemented. The Committee member preferred to discuss opportunities to improve fishing, such as permit stacking or DAS leasing. Activating latent or new DAS was unfavorable in the SFMA but existing DAS could be moved into the fishery. There was some concern that the motion would limit the options of the Committee. The DAS allocation and trip limit analysis would help inform the Committee's decision but it would be preferable to not have multiple iterations of the analysis.

Public Comment on the Motion

Maggie Raymond –I was going to propose to make everyone comfortable we have one option at 3% and one at something else or zero % and see what falls out of that and then that could inform you rather than have the status quo, which we know is not going to achieve the TAL. I have to say that in terms of management uncertainty in the NFMA – monkfish is caught in the groundfish fishery. It is the most scrutinized fisheries. These numbers of discards should be accurate given the level of uncertainty in that fishery. Even at 6% there is a reduction in that assumption. I just want to offer that as a potential way to go forward.

Bill McCann – Correct me if I'm wrong but if increasing the buffer, which will increase the TAL which gives you more flexibility and since we're only catching 50-70%, what harm is it going to do?

Ted Platz – I agree that we’re stabbing in the dark. I’m comfortable with 3% or 6% but where the rubber hits the road is what we do with the DAS and landing limits. This decision probably won’t have that much impact in itself. The uncertainty largely comes out of the latent effort and advisors requested that we look at this in future management action and that’s how you reduce management uncertainty. Either way is fine by me. It gets down to what you’re going to do with the DAS that aren’t being used. If you’re increasing DAS you’re increasing access to winter skate. If we catch winter skate we’ll shut down the monkfish fishery. We’re already playing games with a reduction in the TAL and no reduction in limits. You could end up closing monkfish. You’d be better looking at daily limits rather than DAS. Make monkfish a priority next year and look at latent effort.

Rich LaRocca – I’m in favor of 3% motion which can hopefully lead to more DAS.

The motion was modified to task the PDT to investigate a 3% management uncertainty buffer for both areas. This was seen to provide for flexibility in the future in case the Committee opted to maintain status quo in one area while changing the buffer in the other area. If time was limited then it was suggested the buffer be maintained in the SFMA and effort focused on what else could be done to increase landings. It was noted that the DAS allocation and trip limit analysis was run for Framework 8 and suggested a larger increase in allocated DAS was possible, however, that was not adopted at the time.

- 1a. **Motion as friendly amended:** to task the PDT to investigate a reduction in the management uncertainty buffer to 3% in both management areas.

The motion **carried** on a show of hands (7/0/0).

Public Comment on the Motion as Friendly Amended

Maggie Raymond – From the previous analysis you could have given the fishery more DAS and the Committee chose not to. If you’re going to do a new analysis and then don’t adjust the change, then there’s no point. I appreciate the sentiment but when the analysis comes out and you don’t adjust it that’s not helpful. Analysis is what it is then that causes a problem for industry when you don’t go with the analysis.

Rich LaRocca – I didn’t want to go with the 51 DAS, we wanted to be more cautious. Most fishermen thought 51 would be too much. I’m only speaking for the SFMA guys.

The motion as amended **carried** on a show of hands (7/1/0).

2. **Motion** – The Committee supports the PDT analysis that used the most recent 3 years for discard calculations as estimated from the 2016 operational assessment. (Ms. Etrie/Mr. Ruccio)

Rationale: This motion approves of using the updated calculated discard rate (from 2007 estimates to 2016 estimates) in the specifications for FY2017 – 2019 (as outlined in PDT memo to the Committee dated August 28, 2016).

The motion **carried** on a show of hands (7/0/0).

AGENDA ITEM #4: 2017 PRIORITIES

Staff reviewed the 2016 monkfish priorities and the recommendation of the AP members present at their August 17, 2016 meeting. There was no quorum at the AP meeting however, the members present

recommended a future management action that would address DAS leasing and latent effort. A Committee member was interested in adding permit stacking to the list, which would improve flexibility and efficiency for active participants. Conversion to a quota system was also listed as a potential priority but there has been resistance to such an action in the past. It was agreed that latent effort could be addressed first before the other issues but the primary goal was to ensure the TAL was fully achieved.

3. **Motion:** to recommended for 2017 monkfish priorities a future action to address:

- Latent effort
- Monkfish DAS leasing. (Mr. Heins/Mr. Gibson)

Public Comment on the Motion

Maggie Raymond – This came out of AP but the current AP is short of advisors from the NFMA. Pretty much all monkfish effort is defined as latent in the NFMA. Vessels in that area largely don't use DAS because it's incidental. How would DAS leasing help us? In order to make it work you'd need a finite number of DAS. We supported Amendment 6 moving towards a catch share program. In some ways that would do the same thing because if you had caught some monkfish you would be able to participate in a catch share program but we don't have DAS usage history to account for a leasing program. It is a big problem. History of the plan was the monkfish catch was, primarily in both areas, a component of scallop and groundfish fisheries. The original monkfish plan was to phase out the directed fishery. That changed over time but for the first years of the plan there were no trip limits. It was a component of the groundfish fishery - there was no trip limit or DAS allocation. There were a couple of years where we went over the TTAC and that's when we got DAS allocations and trip limits. Originally the plan said this was a bycatch fishery and we're going to account for that. You take off the catch for the incidentals. Now it's become the directed fishery will take precedence. I don't support this motion. How do you do that without taking out the fishery in the NFMA? You're going to define latent effort by usage in the fishery? Then you have to divide the line and say you can only fish in one area. We have boats that fish in both areas

Bill McCann – Aren't there now no trip limits in the NFMA? Now you have no limits and can fish as much as you want. You have no limit on a monkfish DAS and they have 46 monkfish DAS and if you lease then you have a few hundred. As far as leasing up north it will be a problem as more guys will do it.

Ted Platz – I worked with Dave Borden to come up with a plan for latent effort. You have 300 boats with a qualifying period from 2000 – 2010 they hadn't used a DAS in that time period. It will be contentious but you do have a stark numbers. The monkfish DAS leasing was a SFMA idea. We brought that up and there's a proposal that has been reviewed by NOAA and determined that it would not activate latent permits. When we worked on the leasing plan, I submitted a monkfish permit stacking idea. Not allowing leasing or stacking is expensive and less than ideally safe and not a good way to manage. It's clear quota is a stumbling block in the SFMA. Permit stacking and leasing would help efficiency and spread profitability with the crew.

3a. **Motion to substitute:** To recommend for 2017 monkfish priorities a future action to address strategies for better utilization of the TAL for NFMA and SFMA respectively (Ms. Etrie/Mr. T. Alexander)

Rationale –There are distinct differences between both areas and it is critical to look at this holistically but acknowledge they operate differently.

The motion to substitute **carried** on a show of hands (6/0/1).

The main motion as substituted **carried** on a show of hands (6/0/1).