



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116

John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Recreational Advisory Panel

Four Points by Sheraton, Wakefield, MA

January 21, 2020

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on Jan. 21, 2020 in Wakefield, MA to discuss and make recommendations on: (1) recreational measures for fishing year (FY) 2020 for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and GOM haddock, (2) Council priorities for 2020, and (3) other business as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Frank Blount (Chair), Barry Gibson (Vice Chair), Jasper Coutu, Rip Cunningham, Tom DePersia, Kevin Niland, Patrick Paquette, Michael Pierdinock, Michael Plaia, James Reilly, Jonathan Sterritt, Tim Tower, and Terry Stockwell (Groundfish Committee Chair), Jamie Cournane, PhD and Melissa Errend (Council staff). In addition, approximately 21 members of the public attended, among these Michael Pentony, Pete Christopher, Emily Keiley, Liz Sullivan (GARFO), Rick Bellavance (Vice-Chair Groundfish Committee), Libby Etrie (Groundfish Committee), Mark Godfroy (Groundfish Committee), Melanie Griffin (Groundfish Committee/MA DMF), and Chris Kellogg (Council staff).

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION: Discussions were aided by the following documents and presentations: (1) Meeting memorandum and agenda dated Jan. 14, 2020; (2a) Summary of recent recreational catch and effort data, NMFS, (2b) Presentation: Bioeconomic model results, NFMS (2c) Presentation: Council staff; (2d) Council staff to groundfish committee memo re recreational accountability measures; (3) Presentation: 2020 Council priorities, Council staff; and (4) Correspondence.

The meeting began at approximately 9:02 a.m.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The RAP recommends to the Groundfish Committee recreational measures for both GOM cod and GOM haddock for FY2020. These measures would add additional open seasons for both stocks in April in addition to the two-week open season in September that was approved for FY2019.
- The RAP considered several alternatives to their top proposal, including other open seasons in the fall, or later in April, but concerns about impacts on spawning cod, or increasingly short “derby” seasons led to such proposals failing. The RAP rank-ordered all options discussed.
- The RAP recommends to the Groundfish Committee that the recreational Atlantic halibut possession limit increase from 1 fish to 2 fish, with no changes to other measures.

AGENDA ITEM #1: RECREATIONAL MEASURES FOR FISHING YEAR 2020

SUMMARY OF RECENT RECREATIONAL CATCH AND EFFORT DATA, STEINBACK (NMFS STAFF)

Mr. Scott Steinback (Northeast Fisheries Science Center, NEFSC) presented an overview of recent recreational catch and effort data, focusing on the most recent two years of data, noting that FY2019 data is incomplete since the season is ongoing, but includes data on the open cod season in September, so the estimate should be viewed as preliminary. Mr. Steinback discussed changes associated with the new, re-calibrated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates used in the recent assessments and to evaluate fishing effort. The two-week open season for GOM cod in September was a change in regulations from FY2018. Mr. Steinback discussed how effort increased substantially over the two-week period, from 5,000 angler trips to over 46,000 angler trips, noting that GOM cod removals by weight only went up by a few metric tons. In general, most GOM cod removals come from release mortality, with about 25% of all removals attributed to the two-week open period.

For Georges Bank (GB) cod, Mr. Steinback discussed cod catch went up considerably in FY2019 over FY2018 levels in the same periods (under both the old and new MRIP estimates). The Council recommended maintaining the GB cod recreational catch target the same for FY2020 at 138 mt. Mr. Steinback discussed how there is a good probability that the catch target for GB cod could be exceeded in FY2020, especially when examining the new MRIP estimates.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

The RAP discussed how weather during the open period might influence GOM cod fishing effort. Mr. Steinback prepared a figure on observed wave heights during September, highlighting that wave conditions were mild, around 2 feet. The RAP discussed how other factors, such as chop, due to wind velocities, might be a better indicator of fishing conditions. In addition, other members were interested in comparing effort and removal numbers from MRIP with those collected from electronic vessel trip reports (eVTRs). Council staff clarified that while this has been prepared in the past, coordination with GARFO would be needed.

The RAP discussed the results for GB cod, specifically noting that uncertainty in the MRIP estimates is much greater for GB cod, than for GOM cod or GOM haddock stocks. Other panel members commented that the MRIP estimates did not appear consistent with what was observed on the water, specifically that party/charter effort seems underrepresented while private effort seemingly overestimated.

BIOECONOMIC MODEL RESULTS, NMFS (STEINBACK)

Mr. Steinback also presented the results of the NEFSC bioeconomic model. This model has been used since 2012 to set recreational measures for GOM cod and GOM haddock, after peer review by the New England Council's and Mid-Atlantic Councils respective Scientific and Statistical Committee. The model accounts for size and age-selectivity that has been realized in the fishery as well as the economic probability that a trip would occur based on angler preferences and biology of the stock. Overall, Mr. Steinback noted that the model tends to over-predict haddock mortality, which could be in part because of the assessment projections. In addition, MRIP data show that smaller, but legal-sized, haddock are being released, while the model predicts that all fish of legal size would be kept.

For GOM cod and GOM haddock, 67% of simulation runs from the model predicted that cod catch would be under the sub-ACL under status-quo regulations (two-week opening in September), while 100% of

simulations predict haddock will be below the sub-ACL. Another option presented includes an open season from April 15 - 30, which showed similar risk of exceeding the sub-ACL, at 65% of simulation runs being under the sub-ACL. Other possible options were rejected because less than 50% of simulation runs were below the sub-ACL, including options for cod that would increase the retention limit to 2 fish, have longer open seasons in September, create slot limits, and have open seasons in May, August, and earlier in September.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

The RAP discussed the two options for different GOM cod measures examined with the bioeconomic model presented by Mr. Steinback, as well as other proposals, particularly for earlier in April, or later in the fall, such as in October. Some RAP members suggested that there is no reason for a closed season for haddock, but Mr. Steinback notes that a primary motivator is that cod is caught on haddock trips. A longer season for haddock might result in a shorter or even closed season for cod.

In addition, the RAP discussed that while the Council recommended an April open season for GOM cod last year, it ultimately was rejected by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Ms. Emily Keiley (GARFO) clarified that the reason for this disapproval stemmed from the impact of a late-April opening on spawning cod. She suggested that if new science were available that indicated that this would not be the case, that may change the Agency's opinion, but in lieu of that, the outcome for this year would be the same. The RAP discussed potential inconsistencies with this opinion and with federal commercial regulations, but Ms. Keiley clarified that historically rolling closures also applied to the commercial component of the groundfish fishery.

The RAP also discussed how the model might overpredict cod bycatch when targeting haddock. Mr. Steinback explained the data shows that charter and headboats have been more successful at avoiding cod, compared to private anglers, but private anglers still constitute most of the effort.

One RAP member asked if any open seasons were considered for the month of October. Mr. Steinback explained that while open seasons in October were not looked at, they could be, but effort could be underestimated similarly for other seasons in April, since there is no data for open seasons for that month.

Finally, the RAP discussed trade-offs between several different proposals for combinations of open seasons for GOM cod, including an open season earlier in April, which might be more approvable by NMFS, weekends in August, and a longer open season in September.

Motions for some of the RAP proposals were made after the discussion.

Motion 1: Paquette/Cunningham

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 recreational measures:

- Gulf of Maine cod
 - Open Season: September 15-30 and April 1-14
 - Bag Limit: 1 fish
 - Minimum Size: 21 inches
- Gulf of Maine haddock
 - Open Season: May 1 - February 28 and April 1-30
 - Bag Limit: 15 fish
 - Minimum Size: 17 inches

Motion 1a: Plaia/DePersia

To amend, such that:

the Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 recreational measures:

- Gulf of Maine cod
 - Open Season: September 15-30 and April 1-14
 - Bag Limit: 1 fish
 - Minimum Size: 21 inches
- Gulf of Maine haddock
 - Open Season: year-round
 - Bag Limit: 20 fish
 - Minimum Size: 17 inches

Motion 1a to amend Motion 1 *failed* 1/10/0.

Motion 1 *carried* 7/4/0.

Motion 2: Tower/Sterritt

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 recreational measures an additional model run for possible consideration/recommendation and to be brought in time for the Groundfish Committee meeting:

- Gulf of Maine cod
 - Open Season: September 15- October 14
 - Bag Limit: 1 fish
 - Minimum Size: 21 inches
- Gulf of Maine haddock
 - Open Season: May 1 - February 28 and April 15 - 30
 - Bag Limit: 15 fish
 - Minimum Size: 17 inches

Motion 2 *failed* 2/8/1.

Motion 3: Gibson/Pierdinock

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 recreational measures an additional model run for possible consideration/recommendation and to be brought in time for the Groundfish Committee meeting: an opening of Gulf of Maine cod in August for as many consecutive dates as possible (rather than the proposed September opening).

Motion 3 *carried* 11/0/0.

Motion 4: Pierdinock/Gibson

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 and future years recreational measures: the development of separate measures by mode (party, charter, and private):

- Develop a catch target for party/charter [using a variation of previous approach presented a few meetings back] and
- With an option for May and September opening for Gulf of Maine cod for party/charter

Motion 4 *failed* 4/7/0.

Motion 5: Niland/Pierdinock

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee for fishing year 2020 recreational measures an additional model run for possible consideration/recommendation and to be brought in time for the Groundfish Committee meeting: an opening of Gulf of Maine cod in mid-August through the end of September for as many weekends (Friday-Sunday) as possible (rather than the proposed September opening for cod), which would be up to 21 days open.

Motion 5 *carried* 7/3/1.

Consensus Statement #1:

The Recreational Advisory Panel ranks, in order of priority, the following options for an open season for Gulf of Maine cod:

- September 15-30 and April 1-14
- August for as many consecutive days as possible
- Mid-August to September, for as many weekends (Friday-Sunday) as possible
- Status Quo: September 15-30

By *consensus* and *without objection*.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2020 COUNCIL PRIORITIES, COURNANE (COUNCIL STAFF)

The RAP received a short presentation from Dr. Jamie Cournane on the Council's 2020 priorities. Dr. Cournane notes that a limited entry program for the party/charter did not make the priority list at the December Council meeting, rather a strawman/white paper approach. In addition, the SSC has a priority to work on different options for control rules as a multi-year process. Finally, it is anticipated there will be a meeting later this fall that will include data updates and revisions to the bioeconomic model where specific options such as the ones proposed today, could be explored.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS

Motion 6: Tower/Paquette

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee to increase the recreational Atlantic halibut possession to 2 legal-sized fish (from 1 fish), with no changes to other measures.

Motion 6 *carried* 11/0/0.

Matt Ayer, MA DMF, provided public comment that Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) produced a “haddock fishing guide” which highlights areas where higher haddock to cod ratios were encountered. Maps are free to download and available at mass.gov/haddock.

Fishing liaisons from several offshore wind companies were identified as being present and able to meet with stakeholders if they had any questions after the meeting concluded.

The meeting ended at approximately 12:00 p.m.