



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Groundfish Plan Development Team

By webinar

Wednesday, February 13, 2019

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met to discuss recreational measures for fishing year 2019, Council priorities for 2019, and Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring.

Meeting Attendance: Jamie M. Cournane PhD (Chair), Chad Demarest, Dan Caless, Dan Linden PhD, Greg DeCelles PhD, Julia Beaty, Katherine McArdle, Kevin Sullivan, Liz Sullivan, Mark Grant, Matt Cieri PhD, Matt Cutler PhD, Melissa Errend, Paul Nitschke, Robin Frede, and Tim Cardiasmenos, Terry Stockwell (Groundfish Committee Chair); Libby Etrie, Melanie Griffin, and Rick Bellavance (Groundfish Committee members); Frank Blount (Recreational Advisory Panel Chair); Scott Steinback (NEFSC) and Emily Keiley (GARFO); and the audience included Maggie Raymond, William Tower III, Tom Orrell, George Lapointe, Jessica Joyce, Matt Ayer, Gib Brogan and one additional person.

The meeting began at 12:30pm.

Key Outcomes:

- The PDT discussed possible recreational measures for 2019 for Gulf of Maine cod, Gulf of Maine haddock, and Georges Bank cod.
- The PDT reviewed the Council's 2019 priorities for groundfish.
- The PDT discussed planning for review by the Scientific and Statistical Committee of PDT analyses on Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring.

Recreational Measures for 2019

Mr. Steinback provided an overview of fishing year 2017 and preliminary fishing year 2018 recreational fishery catch and effort data for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod, GOM haddock, and Georges Bank (GB) cod. He also described possible options for management measures for GOM cod and haddock in 2019 – adjusting seasons, bag limits, and minimum fish sizes. In general, the model predicts more liberal measures are possible in fishing year 2019, including more access for haddock and the possibility of one cod under certain conditions (i.e., seasons, minimum fish size). Data on GB cod suggests a decrease in the minimum fish size is possible to reach the catch target in fishing year 2019.

The PDT focused on understanding the options for the stocks, then expanded to a discussion of uncertainties. Mr. Steinback explained that this is the 7th year using the bioeconomic model to help develop management measures for GOM cod and GOM haddock. Over the past six years, the model over-estimated mortality twice and under-estimated mortality four times for cod and haddock. The model results are less certain when several years removed from the terminal year of the stock assessment, as is the case this year. The bioeconomic model relies on recruitment projections from the assessment to predict catches for some ages, and projected recruitment may be overly optimistic.

The PDT also offered suggestions including 1) adding figures on GOM cod and GOM haddock catch size frequencies and 2) characterizing the uncertainty around the catch projections (e.g., using three-year averages of effort data to initiate the model or modifying the recruitment assumptions in the model).

The PDT discussed the possible minimum fish size options for haddock (as small as 15 in.) including the possibility to convert discards to landings. The PDT noted that reducing the minimum landing size could change fisheries selectivity, which would need to be accounted for in an assessment, especially in the evaluation of reference points. The PDT also noted that the commercial minimum fish sizes are 16 in. for haddock and 19 in. for cod.

Council Priorities for 2019

Dr. Cournane provided an overview of Council priorities for 2019¹.

Annual priorities include:

- Set ABCs/ACLs for all groundfish stocks for FY2020-2022 and US/CA stocks for FY2020
- Staff: TRAC/TMGC
- Groundfish Operational Assessments
- Address commercial/recreational allocation issues if raised by new MRIP data
- Staff: Sector five-year review
- Specify allocation review triggers
- Modify Council policy on gear standards to facilitate use of gear in AMs

Multi-year priorities include:

- Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring (including Fishery Data for Stock Assessment Working Group and possible workshops)
- Consider results of public listening sessions for possible initiation of an amendment to develop a limited access program for the party/charter fishery
- Staff: Cod Stock Structure Workshop

¹ Available on the Council webpage, here: <https://www.nefmc.org/council-meetings> under “Quick Documents” then select “2019 Council Priorities”.

Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring

The Amendment 23 (A23) portion of the PDT meeting consisted of a check-in on the status of the PDT analyses that will be peer reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and a discussion on planning for the review. The PDT work plan was impacted by the partial Federal government shutdown. Staff also provided an update on A23 progress in January during the shutdown. The PDT mainly discussed the structure of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the SSC peer review and the timeline for completing the analyses and scheduling the review.

Dr. Cournane explained that today's webinar would focus on planning and checking in, and that more in-depth discussion of the analyses should occur at an in-person PDT meeting to be scheduled soon, for which second drafts of analyses will be due. The goals of today's discussion were to talk more broadly about the status of the analyses and the timeline.

Summary of A23 progress in January:

Ms. Frede provided a summary of the A23 discussion that occurred at the January Committee meeting, noting the accompanying staff memo which was designed to be a recap of September 2018 A23 discussions, including highlighting questions the PDT had posed to the Committee on A23 development, mainly dockside monitoring (DSM) alternatives. She noted that there was good discussion from the Committee on these questions, which is summarized in detail in the meeting summary, but there were no motions on developing DSM alternatives, as the Committee expressed a need to have the joint Committee/AP/PDT meeting on monitoring standards before recommending development of alternatives. Ms. Frede provided an overview of the January Council meeting discussion on A23, which was similar to the Committee's discussion. She also noted that related to A23, the Fishery Data for Stock Assessment Working Group report to the Council occurred at the January meeting and the group is in the process of finalizing its report.

TORs for SSC review of A23 analyses:

Dr. Cournane said the PDT should discuss today how to frame their work for the SSC peer review. Mr. Nitschke presented a proposal for how to structure the ToRs, which is to break up the ToRs into two main sections:

- 1) The first ToR would focus on demonstrating whether there is evidence of observer bias;
- 2) The second ToR would incorporate the other analyses, such that the question is that if there is evidence of observer bias then what does this mean and what is the magnitude of the problem.

Mr. Nitschke explained the rationale for this approach being that the observer bias work forms the basis of the analyses and is the most complete and is ready for review, while the other analyses are less developed at this point and may not ever be as definitive due to limitations in both the data and analytical tools. In this sense they can be considered supplemental exploratory analyses in an attempt to answer ToR 2 or perhaps attempt to bound the magnitude of the problem. The magnitude of the missing catch in the past will likely be the question that everyone would like to have an answer to. However, the PDT acknowledges that this will be very difficult

to definitively answer given the incentive structure in the present output control management system that likely results in biases within the underlining data. In addition, assuming the PDT could estimate the magnitude of the missing catch and if that magnitude was thought to be minor in the past, this would still not guarantee that this issue will remain a minor concern into the future since stock conditions will change along with the degree of incentive to discard fish under the quota-based system.

The PDT discussed this proposal for structuring the ToRs. Dr. Linden agreed with this assessment and suggested that the PDT could report what they have explored in the additional analyses but with the caveat in the ToRs that this is more of a difficult and uncertain venture rather than an objective to be met, as they may never know the magnitude of observer bias and this may be the best that can be done. The PDT agreed that holding up the observer bias work as the central analysis seems like the best way forward. The PDT discussed the value in presenting the analyses done for the second part at the review as this could be an opportunity for any new ideas on how to approach the analyses or to ensure that all analytical options have been exhausted. Dr. Cournane pointed out that this proposal mirrors the process of the PDT's development of the analyses in starting with the observer bias work as the core and then developing other questions from this.

Mr. Demarest raised the additional point that the PDT has identified two different concerns with the effects of observer bias – bias in the discard rates (inaccuracy in sub-legal fish estimates) and bias in total catch estimates as it relates to non-compliance (inaccuracy in catch estimates due to discarding of fish that should legally be landed). The PDT's work may demonstrate that observer bias differences are reflective of some aspect of fishing that either impacts discard rates alone or something more fundamental to monitoring and understanding catch, and he asked the PDT to consider whether the role of the peer review should be to comment on this aspect of the PDT's work. Further, Mr. Demarest offered that if the PDT's work demonstrates that observer bias has to do with illegal discarding and therefore, a failure to truly understand catch, this is something that should be brought forward to the Committee/Council and the public, and he feels it would be beneficial for the SSC review to comment on. Dr. Linden added that his preliminary bias simulations demonstrated that sub-legal fish estimates can be off without a major impact on overall catch estimates, and so therefore the PDT's hypothesis is that there is a greater concern with bias in what should be landed catch. Dr. Cournane noted that the PDT is planning to write up a summary of its analyses as background support material for the peer review, identifying which are most important for understanding monitoring issues and building towards the PDT's proposal for how to establish monitoring standards in A23, and asked the PDT to consider whether this is a statement that should be examined in peer review.

The PDT discussed whether the ToRs for the review would be structured so that the PDT's work will demonstrate what issues are present with the current monitoring program. The PDT agreed that one likely focus of the TORs is for the observer bias analysis to demonstrate that the current CV standard is inappropriate for determining monitoring levels. Mr. Demarest said an important point to consider is that the current monitoring program was developed for the past Days at Sea (DAS) program with different conditions in the fishery and different incentives from today's sector program, and the discard incentives work would help to inform potential changes to the monitoring program that may be considered to address these different incentives. He also said

that stock area misreporting is a component of monitoring and that the policy responses to a concern over stock area catch are different than one over discard estimates. Dr. Cournane noted that the Mike Palmer paper on stock area misreporting does discuss potential policy changes to address this, and suggested it might be a good idea for the PDT to discuss this for A23. The PDT discussed whether the stock area apportionment work should be considered in the peer review, and suggested that it could be provided as a background document for the SSC.

Mr. Grant pointed out that some of these questions are PDT discussion and not for peer review, and emphasized that the peer review should be about the technical merit of the analyses, with the purpose of the review being for the SSC to clear these methods and initial conclusions for use by the PDT in its discussion and development with the Committee about how to address monitoring issues. He clarified that the ToRs should be framed as asking whether the SSC thinks the analyses are appropriate for the questions the PDT has tried to explore and whether the conclusions are clear, and not a review of whether the work supports one monitoring solution over another. Dr. Cournane agreed that there is a fine line with the PDT's conclusions between what is needed as background information for the peer review in helping the public understand the potential application of these conclusions, and they would not want to ask the peer review to comment on conclusions as alternatives.

Dr. Cournane and Mr. Nitschke agreed to draft the ToRs and bring to the next in-person PDT meeting. Dr. Cournane cautioned that the PDT will need to be mindful of the distinction between what questions are appropriate for the SSC peer review and what are policy questions for Committee discussion. The PDT agreed that reviewing the draft ToRs and revising as needed to frame the work should occur at the next PDT meeting when the analyses are more complete.

Status of analyses write-ups:

The lead analysts provided an update on the status of A23 analyses, following impacts from the partial Federal government shutdown.

Observer bias in the Northeast groundfish fishery - C. Demarest

Observer bias work is complete, just a few sections need write-up to be completed.

Discard incentives in the groundfish fishery and estimating prohibited discards of groundfish stocks – M. Errend

If splitting into two components, then the first part of the analysis – estimating discard incentives – does not need much work. The second part - estimating the magnitude of prohibited discards - may need more work in revising the approach.

Dr. Cournane suggested Ms. Errend work on the clustering issues for the prohibited discards estimate work with the smaller PDT sub-group that has been focused on this work.

Predicting GOM cod catch on New England groundfish sector trips: evidence of observer bias
– D. Linden

Write-up should be complete in time for the next in-person PDT meeting.

Hotspot analysis/comparison of survey, observer (NEFOP and ASM) and commercial landings - P. Nitschke

Some further exploration of the hotspot analysis and an appendix summary write-up is needed.

Comparison of Gulf of Maine landings to Kall ratios between observed and unobserved trips – P. Nitschke

Mr. Nitschke also presented a preliminary analysis examining Gulf of Maine observed to unobserved landings ratios for trawl and gillnet trips, which demonstrated there is more cod landings on observed trips compared to unobserved. The PDT briefly discussed the preliminary analysis, and Mr. Nitschke said he plans to continue developing this analysis and will bring an update to the next PDT meeting.

Timeline for completing A23 analyses:

Dr. Cournane said that ideally the write-ups of the analyses should be as complete as possible at least a week in advance of the next PDT meeting, as the PDT will need time to consider these before the meeting. The hope is to have the SSC review of the analyses before the April Council meeting, but she acknowledged there are impacts from the shutdown on the planned timeline. Given that, Dr. Cournane proposed holding a PDT meeting at the end of March, and suggested a deadline of March 18th for the write-ups.

Most of the lead analysts felt they could make this deadline, although there are some concerns due to other obligations during this time. Dr. Cournane planned to follow-up with the analysts and determine a due date for the next draft of the analyses.

Other Business

No other business.

The Groundfish PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 p.m.

Table 1- Follow-up items from February 13, 2019 Groundfish PDT meeting.

Task	Name(s)	Due Date
Draft meeting summary	Jamie/Robin	2/20/2019
Review draft meeting summary	PDT	2/25/2019
Draft A23 analyses write-ups	Lead analysts – Chad/Melissa/ Dan L./Paul	TBD
Draft A23 peer review Terms of Reference	Jamie/Paul	TBD
Schedule next in-person PDT meeting	Jamie	ASAP