



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Skate Advisory Panel – no quorum

webinar

May 13, 2021

The Skate Advisory Panel (AP) met on May 13, 2021 at 9:00 AM via webinar primarily to give input to the Skate Committee on making possession limit alternatives for the Fishing Year (FY) 2022-2023 Specifications, on Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP), updates to the list of skate-related research priority and data needs, and other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Advisory Panel: Mr. John Whiteside (Chair), Ms. Sonja Fordham, and Mr. Dan Nordstrom (present at the beginning of the meeting). The AP did not have a quorum. Council staff: Ms. Jennifer Couture, Dr. Rachel Feeney (Plan Development Team (PDT) Chair), Mr. Lou Goodreau, Mr. Chris Kellogg, and Ms. Janice Plante. Skate Committee: Ms. Elizabeth Etrie (Vice Chair), Dr. Matt McKenzie (Chair), Mr. Dan Salerno, and Ms. Kelly Whitmore. In addition, two members of the Skate PDT and about three others attended.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The AP did not have a quorum. There were no motions or consensus statements, but those present gave their individual input on the topics. The AP Chair will follow up with advisors and other skate stakeholders to gather additional input before the May 18 Committee meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #1: INTRODUCTIONS, APPROVAL OF AGENDA, AND TIMELINE AND OTHER UPDATES

AP Chair opened the meeting by introducing AP members, reviewing meeting ground rules, and seeking approval of the agenda. There were no agenda changes, other than adding one other business item about the PDT seeing input on interpreting wing landings data. Staff reviewed the near-term timeline for developing the 2022-2023 specifications and Amendment 5. One AP member could only attend the meeting for a short time and briefly commented on several agenda items. Those comments are incorporated below.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2019 SKATE 2022-2023 SPECIFICATIONS

Staff recapped progress on developing specifications. The Skate PDT is developing a recommendation for the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). There are challenges with following the ABC control rule exactly due to the recent gaps in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center bottom trawl survey time series. The PDT continued its discussion of potential ABCs and possession limits during two April PDT meetings. Data were presented on FY 2018 landings relative to possession limits.

An AP member noted (at the start of the meeting) that he is interested in status quo of the bait fishery possession limits, keeping all three bait season possession limits as is.

Another AP member asked if barndoor skate has become an important part of the wing fishery, if the 25% possession limit for barndoor is working as it was initially designed, and if barndoor landings are close to the limit. Staff noted that additional landings data by species can be added to the documents. The AP member is concerned about the previous decrease in the uncertainty buffer given the uncertainty in stock assessments and biological characteristics of skates, thus, recommends keeping possession limits the same.

The AP Chair noted that the pandemic greatly impacted landings in 2020 and 2021 so it is unclear what changes should be made to specifications at this time. He noted that a couple of people involved in processing are interested in revising the seasonal wing possession limit to 2,000 lb in Season 1 and 6,000 lb in Season 2 to have increased landings flexibility in the fall and winter.

AGENDA ITEM #3: AMENDMENT 5

Staff recapped the results of the April Council meeting where the Council approved developing recommendations for updates to two objectives of the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan. The Council also decided to discontinue developing a skate limited access permit program as part of Amendment 5 but approved developing alternatives for creating an intermediate possession limit, making the skate federal permit a permit that needs to be retained year-round, and considering revisions to At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) and Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements. The Council also considered a motion on updating the skate control dates, but that was tabled until the June 2021 Council meeting.

Staff presented ideas for potential alternatives for: the intermediate possession limit for the wing and bait fisheries (including trigger alternatives and possession limit reduction options) and alternatives for a year-round Federal fishing permit, providing recent data on issuing and cancelling skate permits. Other approaches to the year-round Federal fishing permit that could improve data monitoring and accounting were also discussed. Ideas for ASM and VMS alternatives were presented to the AP to open the discussion for developing alternatives.

An AP member noted (at the start of the meeting) that he is interested in status quo of the bait fishery and does not feel the need for additional monitoring given his vessels already have at-sea observers through the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP). This member also noted he is not interested in intermediate possession limits for the bait fishery at this time; this could change if/when additional effort enters the fishery, however.

For intermediate possession limits and at-sea monitoring, the AP Chair was uncomfortable with adding measures until more advisors voice their input given the likely impact these measures will have on fishermen's livelihoods through increased cost, low margin fishery, etc. Another AP member noted that she defers to experts on the PDT and industry for intermediate possession limits but is generally in favor of increased monitoring given the uncertainty in the fishery.

Regarding a year-round Federal fishing permit, an AP member recommended either a joint skate plan or coordination with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. She was not in favor of no action and suggested aligning with the groundfish plan where a skate permit would be obtained within 45 days of the start of the fishing year. This would support better accounting and monitoring of state landings. The AP Chair supported no action until he hears more input from the advisors and industry members.

For VMS measures, the AP Chair recalled advisors not being interested in changing VMS requirements because most skate fishing occurs on either a groundfish or a monkfish Day at Sea, which already requires VMS.

For updating FMP objectives, an AP member agreed with the PDT recommendations.

AGENDA ITEM #4: 2021-2025 COUNCIL RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND DATA NEEDS

Staff briefed the AP on the research priority setting directive and process and stepped through skate-related priorities. The PDT recommends revising the discard mortality rate priority to focus work on species/gears that still use the default 50% discard mortality rate rather than work focused on overfished species.

An AP member suggested focusing priority #61 (investigate discard mortality rates) on thorny skate given the species remains overfished, and it is not clear what exactly is preventing the species from recovering. She suggested this could be due to climate change (as shown by recent research), changes in habitat, and bycatch. The AP member offered to provide outreach to the greater elasmobranch scientific community to elicit this type of research.

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS

Staff briefly discussed a couple of wing fishery questions from the PDT regarding known cases where wing live pounds equals landed pounds and where landed weight is greater than live weight. The PDT is interested in knowing what fishery or dealer practices may cause this and how various skate codes (cheeks and skate racks) are documented by fishermen and the dealers.

Other business was briefly discussed at the beginning of the meeting as one AP member could only attend for a few minutes. This bait advisor noted that this topic is focused on the wing fishery, thus, is generally outside his area of expertise. However, he noted seeing vessels land whole skates which are then later winged.

Public Comment:

- **James Fletcher (United National Fishermen's Association)** - elasmobranchs (skates and dogfish) are shown to aggregate along the wind turbine cables. This needs to be considered given their affinity for electromagnetic fields.

The Skate AP meeting adjourned at about 11:00 a.m.