



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Recreational Advisory Panel

Webinar

January 18, 2022

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on January 18, 2022, via webinar to discuss: 1) Fishing Year 2022 Recreational Measures 2) Council Priorities for 2022; and 3) other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Frank Blount (Chair), Barry Gibson (Vice Chair), Rip Cunningham, Thomas DePersia, Keven Niland, Patrick Paquette, Michael Plaia, James Reilly, Jonathan Sterritt, and Tim Tower; Dr. Jamie Cournane, Robin Frede, and Angela Forristall (New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) staff); and Scott Steinback (Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)). In addition, 13 members of the public attended, among them were Pete Christopher, Daniel Caless, Kyle Molton, Liz Sullivan, Samantha Tolken (Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)); Rick Bellavance (Groundfish Committee chair); Melanie Griffin, Michael Pierdinock, Daniel Salerno, Megan Ware (Groundfish Committee); Matthew Ayer (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries); Matthew Gates (Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection); and Michael Wayne (American Sportfishing Association).

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION: Discussions were aided by the following documents and presentations: (1) Meeting memorandum dated January 11, 2022; (2) Agenda; (3a) Recent catch and effort summary for Gulf of Main cod and Gulf of Maine haddock; (3b) Summary of measures options from the bioeconomic model; (3c) Presentation: Council and NEFSC Staff; (4) 2022 Council Priorities; (5a) Recreational Advisory Panel, meeting motions, Nov. 29, 2021 (5b) Groundfish Committee, meeting motions, Nov. 20, 2021; and (6) Correspondence.

The meeting began at 9:30 am.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee
 - Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes
 - Open season: September 1 - October 7; April 1 - 14
 - Minimum size: 21 inches
 - Possession limit: 1 fish per day
 - Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)
 - Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
 - Minimum size: 17 inches
 - Possession limit: 20 fish per day

AGENDA ITEM #1: FISHING YEAR 2022 RECREATIONAL MEASURES

PRESENTATION: RECREATIONAL GROUND FISH FISHERY FISHING YEAR 2022 MEASURES, DR. COURNANE AND MR. STEINBACK

MEETING GOALS

Dr. Cournane provided an overview of the meeting goals and Fishing Year 2021 (FY 2021) recreational measures for Gulf of Maine cod and Gulf of Maine haddock. Dr. Cournane provided a table of recent recreational catches for FY 2018-2020 and the Council's current and proposed catch limits for FY 2021 and FY 2022. The recreational sub-ACL has not been exceeded in the past three years, nor are they anticipated to be in FY 2022. She stated the RAP could recommend to the Groundfish Committee that FY 2021 measures are maintained or that new measures are selected based on a suite of alternatives.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

A RAP member asked if the table displaying recent catches spanning FY 2018-2020 could include the FY 2021 catch data. Staff explained that FY 2021 does not end until April 2022, and that the last four months of FY 2021 recreational catch have been estimated.

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

Mr. Scott Steinback (NEFSC) presented an overview of recent recreational catch and effort data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The presentation focused on the most recent two years of data, noting that FY2021 data is incomplete since the season is ongoing. Mr. Steinback explained that the last four months (Wave 6 and Wave 2) of fishing data from FY2020 were used as proxies for the last four months of FY 2021.

Highlights from the Gulf of Maine data summary are as follows:

- FY 2020 had the highest number of cod/haddock angler trips in several years. There was a slight decline in FY 2021, but trip numbers were still high relative to years past.
- For cod, there was a decline in number of fish caught and landed (8%) and weight of caught fish (18%) from FY 2020 to FY 2021.
 - A decline in effort combined with the decline in average size of fish caught resulted in a 25% drop in cod removals from FY 2020 to FY 2021.
- For haddock, there was a larger (about 30%) decline in removals due to a decrease in the number of fish caught per trip. The average size of the fish remained about the same.
- When comparing trip mode, in both FY 2020 and FY 2021 most trips targeting cod and haddock were private trips.
 - Mr. Steinback noted the importance of knowing which mode cod and haddock contribute the most to in order to understand portfolio diversity within modes. Trips targeting cod and haddock made up over 60% of all Gulf of Maine head boat trips, but only 10% of all private trips.
- 81% of cod removals in FY 2020 were due to private trips. Only 12% of removals were from head boat trips and 7% from charter boat trips.
 - Haddock removals followed similar trends. Private removals were a slightly lower percentage but still the dominant mode.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

One RAP member asked if there have been any observed behavioral patterns that caused the decline in haddock catch. They noted that there was a tremendous decline in haddock when dogfish were present. Mr. Steinback noted that these numbers are just pure statistics and cannot answer that question, but some of those patterns may present themselves in the bioeconomic model.

Another RAP member asked if head boat and charter vessels use the eTrips app to report catch and effort. Mr. Steinback stated yes, and that the effort information makes it into the MRIP data, but that catch reported via Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTRs) is not. He stated that catch data for the for-hire sector comes from the for-hire captain telephone survey and MRIP estimations. The advisor asked why effort data but not catch data used. Mr. Steinback explained that it is a longstanding issue stemming from problems validating logbook data since there are many non-groundfish, non-federal boats that are not required to report through eVTRs. He noted that even effort data wasn't used until recently. The advisor stated there should somehow be a distinction from a head boat that could have 85 hooks in the water from a small, private charter that likely has only 2-4.

Matt Ayer (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) corrected that catch data comes from dockside interviews for charter boats and ride-along samplers for head boats. No catch data comes from telephone surveys.

BIOECONOMIC MODEL

Mr. Steinback gave a brief overview of the bioeconomic model. He noted that it is the same model that has been used since 2013, with a few improvements made from 2017 to the present. On the biological side, the model calculates the expected encounters per trip – how many fish anglers are expected to catch on a given trip and what the length of the fish would be. Fish kept and released are a function of the length structure of the model, selectivity, and regulations. On the economic side, the model estimates the probability that an angler trip would occur under FY 2022 stock conditions and alternative regulations. The model predicts how many cod and haddock trips anglers would take in total, and how many fish would be retained or discarded. These numbers of fish are then converted into weights to estimate total FY 2022 mortality.

The FY 2022 biological model used an annual MRIP length-frequency distribution. Mr. Steinback noted that in years past monthly length-frequencies have been used but due to data limitations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic there was not enough data to make robust estimates. Using an annual length-frequency results in lost seasonal changes, but this was not predicted to have a major impact on model estimates.

Economic parameters were updated based on the 2019 economic survey of individuals that caught or targeted GOM cod or haddock. The value of keeping cod relative to haddock increased when compared to the findings of the 2014 economic survey. Mr. Steinback explained that this make sense give that cod stocks are at very low levels and haddock stocks are at very high levels - angler behavior will be more responsive to policy changes in cod harvest over haddock harvest since effort will change more.

A graph of the model predicted mortality estimates compared to the final MRIP estimates for the past eight years showed that the model has overestimated mortality in four years and underestimated mortality in four years, and that the recreational sub-ACLs were exceeded in 2013, 2014, 2016, and 2017.

FISHING YEAR 2022

Mr. Steinback described the FY 2022 mortality projections for the different bioeconomic model runs. He noted that because anglers catch cod in the two - four age range and the high prevalence of age two cod, anglers will be catching smaller fish in 2022 than in 2021. Status quo regulations would therefore result in a lower metric ton cod mortality in FY 2022 than in FY 2021. Haddock open seasons and regulations from FY 2021 were maintained in the model runs (open season of May - Feb 28, April 1 – April 30; 17-inch size limit; 15 fish catch limit). For cod, simulation options included:

- Cod size of 21-inches (status quo), 22 inches, or a slot limit of 22-28 inches;
- Fall season length ranging from four to six weeks during the weeks of September 1st to October 14th.

No models looked at increasing the cod limit above one fish or altering the April 1 – April 14 opening. For status quo cod regulations, 100% of simulation runs were below the sub-ACL. The two options that performed the worst had six-week fall open seasons from September 1st – October 14th and either a 21- or 22-inch size limit. Around 70% of simulations were below the sub-ACL for these six-week options. Options that had only a four-week fall opening were simulated to be below the sub-ACL 80-90% of the model runs. The three options that varied the season length but utilized a slot limit scored below the sub-ACL 90-96% of the time.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

One RAP member asked if there was any discussion about what a season would look like if the cod limit was increased to two fish. Mr. Steinback responded that there was a lot of thought given to this, but it was ultimately decided that a longer season would be preferable to a shorter season with a two fish bag limit. It was unclear how favorable a two-fish option would be viewed given the current status of cod.

Another RAP member mentioned that they have asked in the past to have haddock bag limit increased but it has not yet occurred. They noted that in April cod fishing is slow and in September haddock is a bigger attraction when charter boats are fishing for tuna. They noted it is all about perspective – if people think they can catch 20 fish instead of 15 they might be more likely to go out. Mr. Steinback noted that there has been discussion at previous RAP meetings about increasing the haddock limit to 20 or even 25 fish, but ultimately it has stayed at 15. When looking at the MRIP data, very few individuals even come home with 15 fish. He noted that it would change little in haddock mortality but could potentially raise the cod mortality since there would be more time on the water. He stated that the simulations would need to be run with a 20 haddock limit to be certain.

Motions for the FY 2022 recreational measures were made after this discussion.

Motion 1: DePersia/Gibson

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee:
Gulf of Maine cod - Status Quo Measures

- Open season:
 - Private Anglers - September 15-30; April 1 - 14
 - Party/Charter Anglers - September 8 - October 7; April 1 - 14
- Minimum size: 21 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Discussion on the motion

One RAP member noted that it would be beneficial to begin the season on September 1st for private anglers because this would give them a holiday and a better weather window. There was agreement by other members of the panel, who noted that the stock projections allow for room to liberalize cod regulations and that the first week of October does not help northern party boat operators.

Panel members also discussed the realistic benefits of increasing the haddock limit to 20 fish if anglers are rarely even catching the 15 fish limit. The Chair reminded panel members that the Groundfish Committee will be looking at these recommendations in two days and there will be no time for a model run to determine the impacts of this change.

Motion 1a to substitute Motion 1, as friendly amended: Plaia/Reilly
The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee:
Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes

- Open season: September 1-30; April 1 - 14
- Minimum size: 21 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Motion 1a *carried* 7/2/1 and became the main motion.

Discussion on the motion

There was discussion by advisory panel members regarding a minimum size of 22 inches versus 21 inches. Mr. Steinback noted that the option run with a four week fall season and 22 inch limit was simulated to be under the sub-ACL 90% of the time and the option with a four week fall season and 21 inch limit was under sub-ACL 89% of the time.

Motion 1a as the main motion

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee:
Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes

- Open season: September 1-30; April 1 - 14
- Minimum size: 21 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Motion 1b to amend Motion 1a: Tower/Paquette

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee:

Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes

- Open season: September 1 - October 7; April 1 - 14
- Minimum size: 21 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Discussion on the motion

Mr. Steinback was asked what extending the season a week would do to the percentage. Mr. Steinback informed RAP members that this would probably come in under the sub-ACL around 80% of the time. RAP members discussed concerns about going over the sub-ACL and removing the best cod spawners from the water. Mr. Steinback reiterated that a smaller minimum size or slot limit would allow for longer seasons to be less likely to exceed the sub-ACL.

Motion 1c to further amend Motion 1b: Tower/Paquette

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee

Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes, with a slot limit

- Open season: September 1 - October 7; April 1 - 14
- Slot size: 22 inches to 28 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Discussion on the motion

Mr. Steinback noted that this option allowed for a quite a bit of cod savings, because the bigger fish weigh more and count in higher amounts against the sub-ACL. In addition, they are the main breeders. Some panel members felt that this option demonstrated that the RAP was willing to make changes in response to the current status of cod stocks, while others felt this option was giving up too much.

Motion 1c *failed to amend* Motion 1b 3/6/1.

Motion 1b to amend Motion 1a: Tower/Paquette

The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee:

Gulf of Maine cod- Adjust the open season, same for all modes

- Open season: September 1 - October 7; April 1 - 14
- Minimum size: 21 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Gulf of Maine haddock – Increase the bag limit to 20 fish (from 15 fish)

- Open season: May 1–Feb 28/29; April 1–30

- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 20 fish per day

Motion 1b *carried* 6/3/1 as the main motion.

The Chair asked the Recreational Advisory Panel members for any additional motions to amend or discussion on the main motion. The Chair stated the motion will be forwarded to the Groundfish Committee, without objection. No objections were made.

Motion 1b *passed without objection*.

AGENDA ITEM #2: COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR 2022

The RAP received a short presentation from Dr. Cournane on the Council's 2022 priorities. Dr. Cournane noted the annual priorities included setting ABCs/ACLs for roughly half of the groundfish stocks for FY2023-2025, revising rebuilding plans for GOM cod and SNE/MA winter flounder, and revising ABC control rules for Northeast Multispecies stocks in consultation with the SSC. Multi-year priorities included developing metrics to be used in the review process that will evaluate the monitoring system, as per Amendment 23 and allocating Georges Bank cod to the recreational fishery and establishing Accountability Measures.

Questions and Comments on the Presentation:

One RAP member clarified that they are not currently being asked to comment on the items that are not included as priorities for this year. Dr. Cournane stated yes but offered that she could explain why something wasn't included. The advisor noted that they have opinions on the recreational angler permits for GOM cod, but that it does not appear to be a priority for 2022. Dr. Cournane noted that is correct, but that that the issue has been discussed extensively.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS

Two RAP members raised concern with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) public hearings regarding cutbacks to the recreational and commercial Atlantic mackerel fisheries. The members felt the survey data utilized in the stock assessment was flawed and cutbacks will more heavily impact smaller boats. Staff noted that this agenda item is scheduled for the upcoming February Council meeting and individuals can provide public comment. It was also noted that the Chair will raise these concerns when they give the RAP report to the Groundfish Committee.

The RAP meeting adjourned at approximately 11:55 a.m.