



## New England Fishery Management Council

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# MEETING SUMMARY

## Monkfish Plan Development Team

webinars

July 15 and 20, 2022

The Monkfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on July 15 and July 20, 2022, via webinar to continue work on Framework Adjustment 13 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan. Under Other Business, recommendations for 2023 Council work priorities were made and scallop dredge discard mortality assumptions were discussed. This document summarizes both meetings. Recommendations for 2023 priorities were also refined through subsequent correspondence.

### ***MEETING ATTENDANCE***

Dr. Rachel Feeney (PDT Chair), Jenny Couture (NEFMC); Sharon Benjamin, Spencer Talmage, and Kris Winiarski (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba and John Walden (NMFS/NEFSC); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Renee St. Amand (CT DEEP), and Dr. Tara Dolan (MADMF). Monkfish Committee Chair Libby Etrie, Committee member Kelly Whitmore, and a few members of the public attended.

### ***TIMELINE AND UPDATES***

The PDT is preparing for a review by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the discard deduction methods memo.<sup>1</sup> The PDT will need to meet shortly after the monkfish assessment peer review (September 20) to develop Acceptable Biological Catch recommendations prior to the SSC meeting on October 12 (potentially postponed until October 26).

### ***FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 13***

#### ***Discard Deduction Methods***

The PDT sub-group reported progress on completing an analysis of the current and four alternate discard deduction methods. On July 15, it was noted that providing the variance around the mean or median may help identifying which approach results the closest prediction of discards and in fishery stability and the tradeoffs associated with that. It appears that there is little difference between use of mean or median. The PDT wanted to add more information on if the 2015-year class is still being caught by the fishery. The PDT wanted to be sure that the correct Annual Catch Target values are being used in the retrospective analyses and asked that an additional analysis be performed where estimated discards are updated annually (with a two-year lag in data).

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<sup>1</sup> It was later determined that this review would be postponed to October.

On July 20, the PDT reviewed sub-group work on the analysis and developed recommendations. It was noted that for the retrospective analysis of how well each alternative would have predicted discards, each alternative method has a high amount of error.

*Next steps:*

- Winiarski – Look at recent discards by gear to see where discards may be occurring.
- Feeney – Continue reviewing analysis, report writing.
- Dolan – Revise analysis as needed.

#### Effort Control Alternatives - DAS Allocation and Possession Limits

The PDT discussed the Committee's goal for adjusting effort controls and tasking to develop alternatives that would increase Day-At-Sea allocations and possession limits in the southern area. The PDT reviewed alternatives that had been bundled to reduce the number of potential combinations of alternatives that would need to be analyzed. A PDT member suggested considering removing possession limits and only managing with DAS. It was clarified that the Committee considered that idea in May but opted to limit this action to smaller changes. A PDT member suggested it might be useful to also reflect on past discussions that the assessment results and possible ABC changes may affect the practicality of various management measures.

The PDT then discussed analytical approaches, noting challenges with assuming how effort would change. The PDT agreed to convene a sub-group to discuss analytical approaches further (Didden, Talmage, Walden, Winiarski, Couture, Feeney), noting the analysis developed for Framework Adjustment 10. There may be protected species concerns to consider with changes in fishing effort.

*Next steps:*

- Couture – Facilitate analytical sub-group.

#### ***OTHER BUSINESS***

##### Draft 2023 Council Management Priorities Regarding Skates

##### *PDT Comments on 2022 Priorities*

The following were the 2022 Council management priorities for monkfish, with PDT notes on progress.

1. "Develop and submit action to adjust monkfish specifications for 2023-2025, including potential modifications to the discard estimation methods based on the recent work done by the PDT; consider a 12-inch minimum mesh size for monkfish gillnets; consider requiring VMS for the federal fishery, including evaluation of costs; consider measures to reduce discards in the southern monkfish management area."

This task is being completed through Framework Adjustment 13, which the Council is expected to take final action on in December 2022. Consideration of VMS was removed from this priority in June 2022.

2. "AP and PDT develop a fishery performance report to help the Council/Committee better understand present conditions on the fishery"

This task will be completed shortly after the August 30 meeting of the Advisory Panel and will be presented to the Council in September 2022.

3. "Monkfish management track assessment"

The monkfish management track assessment is underway and will be peer reviewed in September 2022. While this is primarily the work of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, stock assessments regularly get listed on Council management priority lists, to acknowledge the time that PDT members spend supporting an assessment.

*Draft 2022 Priorities NOT Approved by the Council*

The following were considered by the Council, but not approved for 2022 priorities:

1. Consider gear specific discard mortality estimates based on new gear research.
2. Consider ways to increase efficiency in the monkfish fishery by 1) reducing bycatch by turning discards into landings, 2) allow either back-loading or front-loading of DAS, 3) increasing trip limits, and/or 4) allowing monkfish DAS leasing.
3. Review the rationale for recent changes to IVR regulations; consider whether concerns can be addressed through revisions to administration of trip limits and/or DAS clocking/accounting regulations to increase efficiency and flexibility for vessels and to reduce monkfish discards.
4. Review recommendations from the RSA program review and develop measures to improve the Monkfish RSA program's effectiveness.
5. Revisit use of RSA DAS and ability to flip to a directed RSA DAS while at sea.
6. Analyze the characteristics of the fishery, including the active monkfish participants and any impacts on the entry of latent effort from other fisheries.

The PDT reviewed these draft work priorities for 2022 that were not approved by the Council and noted that some ended up being addressed through Framework Adjustment 13 or the assessment, particularly #1, 2 and 3.

*PDT Recommendations for 2023*

The PDT drafted the following recommendations:

1. Review recommendations from the [Research-Set-Aside \(RSA\) program review](#) and develop improvements to the Monkfish RSA program. Consider use of RSA DAS and whether additional flexibility is warranted (e.g., flip to a directed RSA DAS while at sea).
2. Address monkfish recommendations in the NOAA Fisheries [Draft Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large Mesh Gillnet Fisheries](#).

The PDT also recommended that the Committee consider if and when to update the fishery performance report but did not specifically recommend creating a performance report in 2023.

*PDT Rationale*

1. The RSA program review was conducted a few years back and the Council should take time to consider the results and how to improve the program, noting that NOAA Fisheries opted again to not issue a request for proposal due to challenges with implementing this RSA program (see performance report for challenges).
2. The sturgeon action plan will likely be finalized in the fall of 2022, which includes a recommendation that the NEFMC consider a range of potential measures to reduce Atlantic sturgeon bycatch in federal large mesh gillnet fisheries.

*Scallop Dredge Discard Mortality Assumptions*

The assessment scientist asked the PDT to discuss Weissman et al. to inform potentially revising monkfish discard mortality assumptions. The PDT had some concerns about revising assumptions based on this study alone, due to the small sample size and that temperature seemed an important factor in mortality. The PDT considered whether there could be different mortality rates in the north and south, but that decision would only be informed by this research which was conducted in the south. The PDT acknowledged that similar studies have led to revising mortality assumptions for other species (e.g., skates) and recommend exercising caution in revising the assumption downward (currently 100%).

Weissman A, Knotek R, Mandelman J, Rudders D, Roman S & Sulikowski J. (2021). Determining discard mortality of monkfish in a sea scallop dredge fishery. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*. 41.