New England Fishery Management Council
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 29, 2020

TO: Groundfish Committee

FROM: Groundfish Plan Development Team

SUBJECT: **Framework Adjustment 61 - Analysis for the priority to address allocation issues if raised by new MRIP data**

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on September 28, 2020, via webinar and discussed analysis for the priority to address allocation issues if raised by new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data.

A. Background on recreational allocation

Amendment 16 (A16) to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) fishery management plan (FMP) implemented the process for allocation to commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries. Specifically:

> *An allocation will be made of certain regulated groundfish stocks to the commercial and recreational components of the fishery.*
>
> *An allocation will be determined after accounting for state waters catches taken outside of the FMP.*
>
> *An allocation will not be made in the case of stocks that are not fully harvesting the ACL.*
>
> *An allocation will also not be made if the recreational harvest, after accounting for state waters catches outside the management plan, is less than five percent of the removals.*

A16 also outlined the steps to determining an allocation, such that:

> *A defined time period will be used to calculate the allocation.*
>
> *When possible, the shares will be determined by using the numbers of fish in the years caught (as used by the assessment: harvested, landed, or discarded) by each component. The shares determined in this manner will be applied to the ACL to determine the weight of catch available for each component.*
>
> *If the number of fish caught by each component is not available, the shares will be calculated based on weight.*
>
> *The proportion for each year will be calculated, and then the average proportion over the time period will be the share for each component of the fishery.*

The proportions will be reviewed consistent with the periodic assessment cycle, and if determined necessary, changes can be implemented through a framework action.

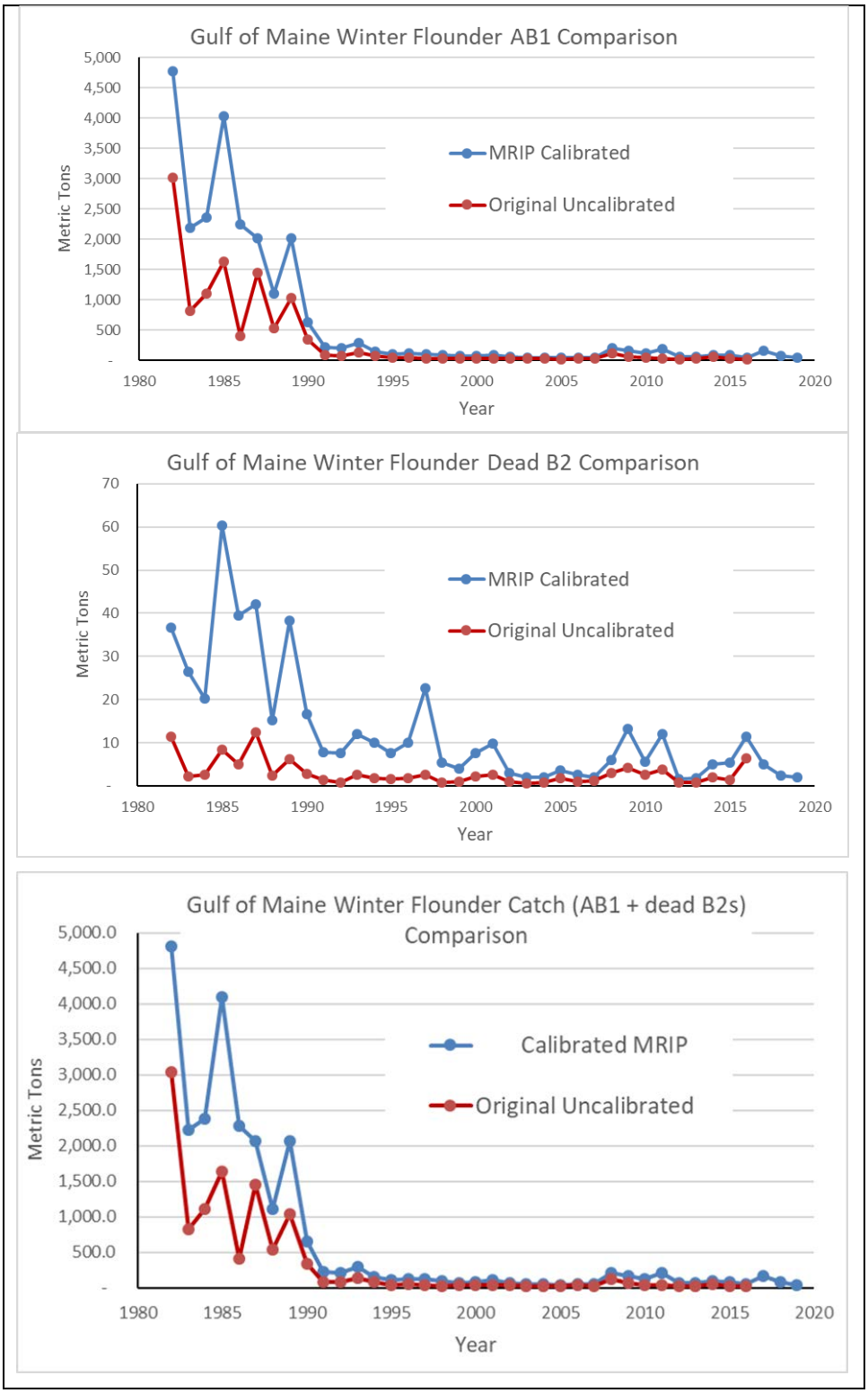
B. Results of Recent Groundfish Assessments

Of the 10 groundfish stocks assessed in 2020, three stocks (Gulf of Maine (GOM) winter flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder, and wolffish) include recreational catches. The time series of recreational catches were updated in the assessments (see Figure 1 - Figure 3).

1) Gulf of Maine winter flounder

The 2020 management track assessment for GOM winter flounder revised the time series of recreational catches to account for the re-calibrated MRIP data. The re-calibrating of the MRIP data resulted in a 2.4 times average increase in the GOM winter flounder recreational catch across the time series since the early 1980s. However, the overall trends in the recreational fishery have not changed. There was a large decrease in the recreational catch in the early 1990s and has remained relatively low for three decades.

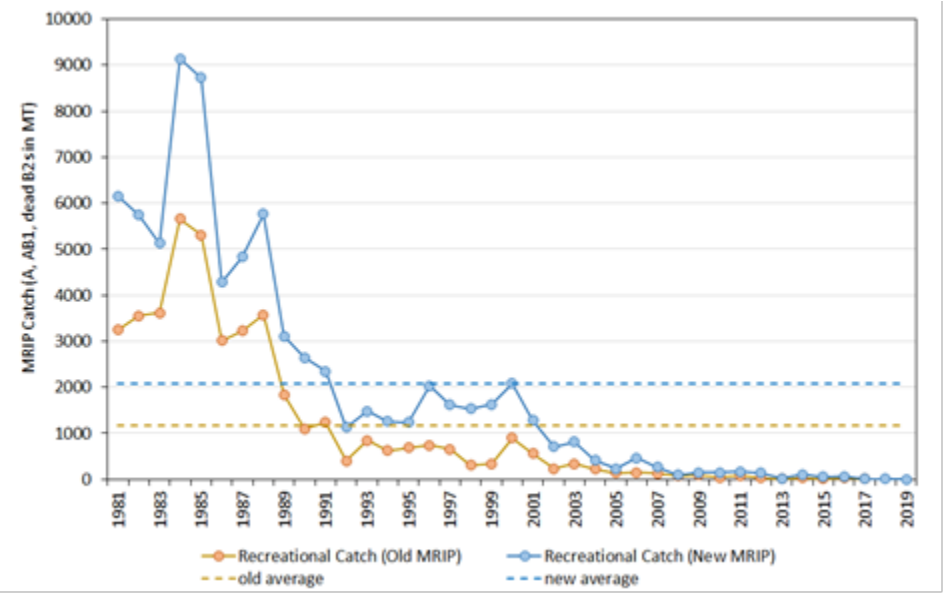
Figure 1- MRIP data comparison for Gulf of Maine winter flounder.



2) Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder

The 2020 management track assessment for SNE/MA winter flounder revised the time series of recreational catches to account for the re-calibrated MRIP data. The re-calibrated MRIP data resulted in a 2.4 times average increase in the SNE/MA winter flounder recreational catch across the time series since the early 1980s. However, the overall trends in the recreational fishery have not changed. There was a more gradual decline in the recreational catch from the early 1980s to the early 2000s with recreational catch remaining very low since 2003.

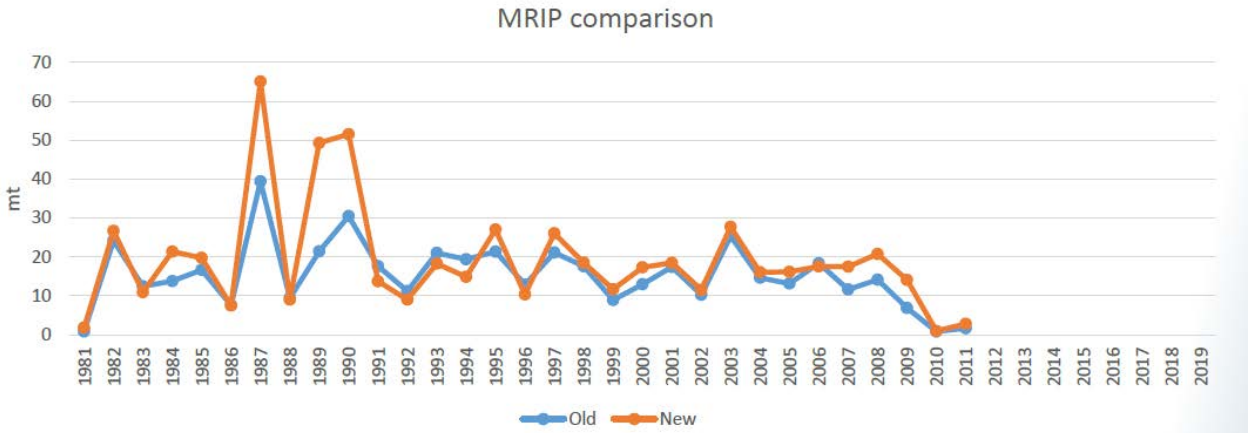
Figure 2- MRIP data comparison for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder.



3) Wolffish

The 2020 management track assessment for wolffish revised the time series of recreational catches to account for the re-calibrated MRIP data. Wolffish has relatively low recreational landings (20 mt average). Discards were assumed to be minor and not included in the estimated removals within the assessment model. Landings of wolffish became prohibited in the recreational fishery with the inclusion of this stock to the multispecies fishery management plan. The re-calibrated MRIP data resulted in a 26% average increase in wolffish recreational landings from 1982 to 2011.

Figure 3- MRIP data comparison for wolffish.



C. Summary of Recreational Measures for Winter Flounder

Federal- winter flounder species

- Open season: All year
- Minimum size: 12 inches
- Possession limit: None

Filleting at sea is allowed. Fillets must have some skin left on, and be consistent in size as that taken from legal size fish. Recreational vessels remain subject to the Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area.

States- varies by stock and state, as in Table 1.

Table 1- Recreational winter flounder regulations. Source: ASMFC.

State	Stock Unit	Creel Limit	Size Limit	Seasonal Closure (dates inclusive)
Maine	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
New Hampshire	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
Massachusetts	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1- February 28
Rhode Island	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28
Connecticut	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – March 31
New York	SNE/MA	2	12"	May 31 – March 31
New Jersey	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28

PDT Discussion and Recommendations

In relation to the allocation criteria identified in A16 (see evaluation in Attachment 1 for additional details):

- **Gulf of Maine winter flounder**: Examining the last five calendar years (2015-2019) in the 2020 assessment, recreational catches on average are 32% of total catches. However, overall utilization for the past five fishing years (2014-2018) on average is 38%. Therefore, the stock is not fully utilized. **The PDT recommends continuing to monitor recreational catches and utilization of GOM winter flounder in future assessments and monitoring.** If overall utilization relative to the ACL becomes high, consider creating a sub-ACL for the recreational fishery for GOM winter flounder. **Recreational catches would continue to be accounted for through the sub-component analysis.**

- **Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder**: Examining the last five calendar years (2015-2019) in the 2020 assessment, recreational catches on average are

4% of total catches. However, overall utilization for the past five fishing years (2014-2018) on average is 62%. Therefore, the stock is not fully utilized, and recreational catches are less than 5% on average. **The PDT recommends continuing to monitor recreational catches and utilization of SNE/MA winter flounder in future assessments and monitoring.** If overall utilization relative to the ACL becomes high and recreational catches exceed 5%, consider creating a sub-ACL for the recreational fishery for SNE/MA winter flounder. **Recreational catches would continue to be accounted for through the sub-component analysis.**

- **Wolffish**: Recreational landings are 0 and discards are not a part of the stock assessment. Overall utilization is very low. **The PDT recommends continuing to monitor recreational catches and utilization of wolffish in future assessments and monitoring.**

- **The PDT recommends incorporating the analysis within this memo into the Affected Environment of Framework 61**.

- **The PDT provides the summary of federal and state recreational regulations for winter flounder if the Council decides to adjust the federal recreational measures in Framework 61.**

Attachment 1- Evaluation of recent recreational catches. Data sources: 2020 Management Track Assessments (NEFSC) and Year-End Multispecies Fishery Catch Reports (GARFO).

Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder

2020 Assessment

	Recreational			Commercial					Recent Monitoring			
Calendar Year	discards	landings	total	discards	landings	total	Assessment Catch	% Recreational (Recreational Total Catch/Assessment Catch)	Fishing Year	ACL	Total Catch	Utilization
2014	5	89	94	5	215	220	315	29.8%	2014	1040	240.8	23.1%
2015	5	85	90	2	179	181	271	33.2%	2015	489	205.8	42.1%
2016	11	41	52	3	185	188	241	21.6%	2016	776	247.7	31.9%
2017	5	161	166	3	210	213	378	43.9%	2017	776	308.1	39.7%
2018	2	80	82	3	158	161	244	33.6%	2018	428	233.9	54.6%
2019	2	42	44	4	102	106	150	29.3%				

Southern New England / Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder

2020 Assessment

	Recreational			Commercial					Recent Monitoring			
Calendar Year	discards	landings	total	discards	landings	total	Assessment Catch	% Recreational (Recreational Total Catch/Assessment Catch)	Fishing Year	ACL	Total Catch	Utilization
2014	4	99	103	64	660	724	827	12.5%	2014	1612	703.2	43.6%
2015	13	39	52	82	661	743	795	6.5%	2015	1607	886.7	55.2%
2016	3	61	64	125	516	641	704	9.1%	2016	749	597.2	79.7%
2017	2	10	12	101	495	596	608	2.0%	2017	749	550.5	73.5%
2018	4	10	14	108	326	434	449	3.1%	2018	700	398	56.9%
2019	2	1	3	105	202	307	310	1.0%				

Wolffish

2020 Assessment

	Recreational		Commercial					Recent Monitoring		
Calendar Year	landings	discards	landings	total	Assessment Catch	% Recreational (Recreational Total Catch/Assessment Catch)	Fishing Year	ACL	Total Catch	Utilization
2014	0	1	0	1	1	0.0%	2014	65	15.1	23.1%
2015	0	1	0	1	1	0.0%	2015	65	30.1	46.3%
2016	0	1	0	1	1	0.0%	2016*	77	0.8	1.0%
2017	0	2	0	2	2	0.0%	2017	77	1.7	2.2%
2018	0	3	0	3	3	0.0%	2018	84	1.6	1.9%
2019	0	3	0	3	3	0.0%				

*change in discard mortality assumption