



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116

John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Monkfish Plan Development Team

The PDT held a conference call on August 12, 2019 and an in-person meeting on August 27, 2019. The PDT discussed monkfish specifications for FYs 2020-2022.

2019 Operational Assessment

1. The PDT reviewed the 2019 operational assessment, a Plan B assessment which provided guidance on how to use the multiplier derived from the survey to set catch advice.
2. The assessment suggested the northern fishery management area (NFMA) ABC could be increased by 20%. Given the recent performance of the fishery, the decreasing trend in abundance in the survey, and the 3 year specifications setting cycle, the PDT recommended a 10% increase in the NFMA ABC. The discard rate was also updated to use the most recent 3 calendar years resulting in an approximately 3% increase in the discard rate.
3. The assessment suggested the southern fishery management area (SFMA) ABC should remain status quo. The discard rate was also updated to use the most recent 3 calendar years resulting in an approximately 25% increase in the discard rate. The PDT discussed alternate methods for calculating discards in the SFMA. However, no alternative approaches appear more appropriate than the current one at this time. As the 2015 year class matures it's possible we'll see lower discards in the near future, and the PDT may investigate alternative discard prediction approaches in future specifications actions.

Monkfish Effort Controls

1. The PDT discussed the need to modify current effort controls and concluded that it was not warranted in either management area at this time.
2. The 10% increase in the ABC in the northern area was dampened by the slight increase of 3% in the discards in this region. FW9 (NEFMC 2016) eliminated the monkfish possession limit in the NFMA when fishing on both a NE multispecies and monkfish DAS. FW10 (NEFMC 2017) increased the incidental monkfish possession limits in the NFMA when on a NE multispecies DAS. The changes in the NFMA possession limits may have contributed to recent fishery performance (Table 1). The PDT concluded that modifications to the unlimited possession limit in the NFMA were not warranted at this time as the TAL was not consistently being exceeded. The incidental possession limits were also unlikely to cause an overage in the proposed TAL.
3. Landings in the SFMA have remained below the TAL in recent fishing years (Table 2). The proposed specifications would maintain the status quo ABC but would reduce the TAL because of the increased discards. The PDT concluded that no reductions in effort controls were needed because the fishery has not achieved the proposed TAL (5,882 mt) in recent years. The new TAL is not expected to be constraining, unless unforeseen changes in the fishery or market occur in the next few fishing years. The PDT did note that if changes did occur in the market that increased

demand in monkfish, any necessary Council action could be considered by the Council and added to the priority list in advance of the next specifications action in. Assuming that the SFMA fishery doesn't increase its landings above the most recent 5 years (Table 2), no overages of the TAL would be expected in that region, therefore no reductions in possession limits or DAS allocations would be necessary.

Potential Impacts on Valued Ecosystem Components (VECs)

1. The PDT discussed the impacts of the proposed specifications on the VECs. The PDT did not expect impacts to differ from those analyzed in Framework 10 (NEFMC 2017).
2. The basis for previously analyzed management measures are not proposed to be changed in this action. The 2016 operational assessment moved from a model based assessment to an empirical assessment based on commercial data and fishery-independent data (Richards, 2016). The 2019 assessment update used the same empirical approach to provide catch advice as was previously analyzed, just updated with more recent information (Richards, 2019). The most recent information results in changes to the NFMA specifications - a small increase in the NFMA ABC and an update to the discard rate (the updated discard rate helps to offset the increase in the ABC). There was a change in the discard rate applied to the SFMA, however the method for calculating discards did not change and there was no recommendation to adjust the SFMA ABC. This decrease did reduce the SFMA TAL from the previous EA but it is not expected to constrain fishery operations or result in changes to how the fishery operates given that the SFMA fishery has not achieved its TAL (or the lower TAL proposed here) in the last 5 fishing years. Overall, the specifications for both management areas are not substantially different than what was previously analyzed in the EA for the 2017-2019 specifications (Table 2). The revised specifications would not warrant changes to effort controls, possession limits and day-at-sea (DAS) allocations, in either region.
3. The revised TAL in the NFMA represents a small increase (10%) when compared to the specifications established in the previous specifications EA (NEFMC 2017). The previous specifications EA also established the current possession limits and DAS allocations for both management areas and evaluated the impacts on the Valued Ecosystem Components (target, non-target/bycatch, protected species, habitat, and human communities) of the monkfish fishery. Changes in impacts to these VECs are not expected from this proposed action. When considered in this context, there is very little change in the specifications beyond what has been previously analyzed. These effort controls have been in place for 3 fishing years (2017-2019) and the ABC has not been exceeded, in that time. The TAL in the NFMA has only recently been achieved, which could be a combination of revised management measures (possession limits) and the large 2015 year class. Individuals from the 2015 year class have grown large enough to be retained by the fishery and are less likely to be discarded because of minimum size regulations. The TAL in the SFMA has not been fully achieved in the last 5 fishing years. (Copy and paste tables of recent performance and reference here).
4. The impacts of the proposed action are largely the same as in the previous action (Table 3), since the risk of monkfish overfishing in either management area (Table 1 & Table 2) is about the same as previously analyzed (NEFMC 2017) and the changes in catch limits are expected to cause little change in fishing behavior, targeting of monkfish or other species, fishing costs, or revenue from landing monkfish.

Table 1 – Recent landings in the NFMA compared to target TAL (data from [GARFO quota monitoring site](#))

NMFA			
Fishing Year	Landings (mt)	TAL (mt)	Percent of TAL achieved
2014	3,403	5,854	58
2015	4,080	5,854	70
2016	5,447	5,854	93
2017	6,807	6,338	107
2018	6,168	6,338	97

Table 2 – Recent landings in the SFMA compared to target TAL ([data from GARFO quota monitoring site](#))

SMFA			
Fishing Year	Landings (mt)	TAL (mt)	Percent of TAL achieved
2014	5,415	8,925	61
2015	4,733	8,825	53
2016	4,345	8,925	49
2017	3,802	9,011	42
2018	4,600	9,011	51

Table 3 – Summary of impacts on VECs from Framework 10 (NEFMC 2017)

	Habitat Impacts	Allocated Target Species	Non-allocated Target Species and Bycatch	Endangered/Protected Species	Human Community Impacts
ACL	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Low negative to neutral	Neutral to low positive
Effort Controls: NFMA	Neutral	Neutral to low positive	Neutral	Low negative	Neutral to low positive

Effort Controls: SFMA	Neutral	Neutral to low positive	Neutral	Low negative	Low positive to positive
-----------------------	---------	-------------------------	---------	--------------	--------------------------