



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*

MEETING SUMMARY

Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team

webinar

April 9, 2021

The Northeast Skate Complex Plan Development Team (Skate PDT) met on April 9, 2021 via webinar at 9:00 AM to discuss Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan, the 2022-2023 fishery specifications, and other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Dr. Rachel Feeney (PDT Chair); Cynthia Ferrio, Ashleigh McCord, and John Sullivan (GARFO); Jenny Couture and Lou Goodreau (Council staff); Dr. Trish Clay, Dr. Kathy Sosebee, and Samantha Werner (NEFSC); and Eric Schneider (RI DEM). Skate Committee Chair Dr. Matthew McKenzie and about three others attended.

TIMELINE

The Skate PDT will likely meet on April 19 to review the April Council motions and prepare documents for the Advisory Panel (AP) and Committee meetings in May. There will be a PDT meeting in late-spring-early summer to finalize ABC recommendations and after the July 29 SSC meeting to prepare the specifications document. Work to support Amendment 5 will continue throughout but keeping specifications on-track for final action by the Council in September will be a priority.

AMENDMENT 5

The PDT reviewed the AP and Committee recommendations on Amendment 5. Work will proceed pending outcomes of the Council meeting on April 14. On the recommendation to update the control dates for a future action, PDT members noted that the Council is not bound to using the control dates that it sets for an action, updating the dates indicates that the Council feels that there is recent change that should be acknowledged, and that process-wise, it is awkward for control dates for a future action be set for the same issue that is being considered in an ongoing action. If limited access is developed for wing and bait, it would likely be helpful to the vessels that land both skate wings and bait to have the same qualification years used.

The PDT discussed whether there should be additional discard data provided, particularly by species, as recommended by the AP. Although the Committee did not approve the AP motion on this topic, the PDT has a responsibility to monitor all aspects of the fishery and bring any concerns to the Committee. The recent Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) report noted that skates continue to be the most discarded species group. Discards by species is calculated each year, though with no observers in March-August 2020, calculating discards for 2020 is challenging. The PDT could look more closely at thorny skate discards and if possession limits are resulting in regulatory discards. The PDT agreed to present discards by species for the current specifications action and noted that the report produced for the Endangered Species Act determination on thorny skate would be informative.

Follow-ups

- Feeney – Apprise the PDT of the Council meeting outcomes and plan next steps. Share SBRM and thorny skate reports with PDT.

SPECIFICATIONS

Acceptable Biological Catch

The PDT continued developing a recommendation for the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) given the challenges of following the control rule exactly with the recent gaps in the survey time series. In addition to No Action, the PDT considered two approaches discussed in March, Options B and C below. The PDT felt that continuing to use a three-year average was likely preferable over dropping 2017 data. The PDT also discussed whether the time series of catch for the catch/biomass ratio should be updated; the terminal year of 2016 was used for the last two cycles. Given that adding a few years of data would have little influence on the time series, the PDT opted to keep 2016 as the terminal year. For the deductions of dead discards and state landings from the Annual Catch Target, the PDT opted to use a three-year average of 2017-2019. The PDT agreed to develop Option D, which is essentially Option B with the methods for the time series of catch and the deductions specified. In general, the PDT views Option D as a bridge until the management track assessment in 2023 can provide a more rigorous review of the data and methods.

		FY2020-2021 (No Action)	Control Rule	Discussed March 4		Option D
				Option B	Option C	
Spring	Little	2017-19	2019-21	2017-19	2018-19	2017-19
Fall	Rosette & Clearnose	2016 & 18	2018-20	2018-19	2018-19	2018-19
	Barndoor, thorny, smooth, winter	2016-18		2017-19	2018-19	2017-19
Time series of catch for C/B		Time series to 2016	Not always updated	TBD	TBD	Times series to 2016
Deductions		2016-18	2018-20	TBD	TBD	2017-19

Uncertainty Buffer

The PDT then discussed the uncertainty buffer and if any quantification of known sources of catch should be included in the description

State Landings. The PDT acknowledged that state landings are not controlled by the Federal FMP and could exceed the current deduction, particularly as the deduction only includes landings by vessels with a permit # = 0, meaning that the vessels has never been assigned a Federal fishing permit. Rather than account for the landings by vessels with a 6-digit permit number but no federal fishing permit in the buffer, the PDT feels that a redefining the state landings deduction would be more appropriate. The PDT agreed to not redefine state landings in the current specs action but wait until the next cycle when there will be a more in-depth evaluation due to the assessment.

Recreational Catch. This is a known value that is not included in the catch to calculate ABC but is in year-end ACL accounting. The PDT felt that ideally, this would be a separate deduction in the ABC flow chart, but for this specifications cycle, agreed to quantify this in the description in the buffer. Again, with

the 2023 assessment, the next specifications may be a more appropriate time to change ABC flow chart methods.

Follow-ups

- Sullivan – Supply the year-end dead discard and state landings totals to calculate the deductions.
- Sosebee – Develop ABC options for review at a subsequent PDT meeting.
- Feeney – Review the uncertainty buffer section for review.

OTHER BUSINESS

Fishery Data sub-Group

The PDT received a report of its informal sub-group on fishery data on recommending a skate price to use as a threshold for deciding if the landing is likely to be bait rather than wing. About 6% of skate landings are known cases where: 1) live pounds equals landed pounds, but the disposition code indicates that it is wing landings, and 2) cases where landed weight is greater than live weight. The PDT generally supported the sub-group's recommendation that any value above \$0.30 should be considered wing (which accounts for about 70% of the cases) and any value under \$0.30 should be analyzed to determine if the disposition code should be bait. The PDT discussed whether additional analyses should be done to potentially stratify the threshold by year, seasons, states, gear, or other variables. There was some concern about the marginal return on further investigation, and the PDT did not come to a decision on if and what decision rule should apply for data queries.

The PDT would like to work with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program to learn what quality control measures are in place and how data quality could improve.

Research Priorities

The PDT postponed discussion of updates to skate-related research priorities and data needs.

Follow-ups

- Schneider – reach out to ACCSP and invite a representative to a future PDT or data sub-group meeting to discuss data management.
- PDT – Send ideas for research priority updates to Feeney for compilation.
- PDT – continue data and research priority discussions at a future meeting.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM. The next Skate PDT meeting will likely occur on April 19, 2021.