New England Fishery Management Council
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E.F. "Terry" Stockwell, Chairman | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 12, 2016

TO: Groundfish Committee

FROM: Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT)

SUBJECT: **PDT Discussion on 2016 Priorities and 5-Year Research Priorities**

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on January 7, 2016 via webinar. The following summarizes the PDT discussion.

2016 Council Priorities for Groundfish

- The PDT recognizes that the Committee will be discussing 2016 Council priorities for Groundfish at their next meeting on January 14th.
- At the Committee meeting, the Committee may be working on a problem statement for the At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) action.
- In advance of that discussion, the PDT reminds the Committee of past PDT work on ASM. Summaries of the PDT's recent discussion on ASM include:
    - PDT Memo to the Committee, November 16, 2015
    - PDT Memo to the Committee re ASM, August 27, 2015
    - PDT Memo to the Committee re ASM, June 2, 2015
    - PDT Memo to the Committee re PDT Meeting Report for July 25, 2012, dated July 27, 2012
    - PDT Memo to the Committee re PDT Meeting Report from May 16, 2012, dated May 25, 2012

5-Year Research Priorities

- The process for developing multi-year research priorities is as follows:
    - Plan Development Teams (PDTs) will generate a list of multi-year research priorities.
        - PDTs review the list from 2010-2014 with respect to the FMP of interest.
        - PDTs update this list for research priorities for the FMP of interest.
    - PDTs send lists to Committees for input.
    - Council staff compiles the final list for SSC input.
    - After SSC input, then the Council will discuss and consider approving the list.

- At the January 7th meeting, the PDT developed the following draft list of 5-year research priorities for groundfish stocks for consideration by the Committee. The list is organized by topic, and not in a particular order.

- Draft List of 5-Year Research Priorities:

  - Stock Assessments
    - Continue efforts to understand sources of uncertainties in stock assessment (e.g., retrospective issues) and appropriate corrections (e.g., when and if to use Rho adjustment);
    - Explore breaking out the Bigelow series as a separate index of abundance as this time series lengthens;
    - Advance assessments by incorporating other surveys as appropriate (e.g., state surveys);
    - Develop a process/guidance/standards for rejecting assessments (e.g., Atlantic halibut assessment and GB yellowtail flounder) and what to do after an assessment has been rejected;
    - Evaluate the SSC's control rule for groundfish for effectiveness and develop guidance on when to use "Option C" and how to estimate ABC under "Option C";
    - Simulate whether the loss of winter survey (i.e., designed as a flatfish survey) impacts the results of flatfish assessments in Southern New England and George Bank;
    - Conduct studies to better determine survey efficiencies (i.e., several assessments completely rely on the catchability coefficients - GOM winter flounder and GB yellowtail flounder – when determining catch advice). Improved understanding of gear efficiency may provide an additional diagnostic for the determining whether biomass estimates from an analytical stock assessment are believable. Cooperative research studies can be conducted to inform or bound the gear efficiency estimates by stock. Studies may inform the influence of herding with regards to gear efficiency can help bound area swept estimates;
    - Develop a conversion factor between the Albatross and Bigelow for wolffish (currently the conversion factor for ocean pout is used);

  - Surveys
    - Supplement existing surveys with surveys in untrawlable areas (e.g., long-line survey work and support efforts underway);
    - Incorporate other surveys with the NMFS trawl surveys (e.g., state surveys, NEMAP);

  - Biology
    - Atlantic halibut stock structure;
    - Atlantic cod stock structure;

- Economic/Social
    - Continue to support data collection efforts;
    - Improve the ability to quantify the economic impacts of closed areas (e.g., seasonal Gulf of Maine protection closures), which may include development of a spatially-explicit fleet behavior model;

- Management
    - Discuss approaches to estimate non-groundfish fishery catches of groundfish species;
    - Study permit splitting feasibility (e.g., splitting stocks off of permits);
    - Explore how to re-define the directed groundfish fishery; and
    - Examine inshore and offshore components of the groundfish fishery.