



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Groundfish Plan Development Team

Webinar

March 9, 2022

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on March 9, 2022, via webinar to discuss: 1) Framework Adjustment 65/Specification Measures (to be initiated), 2) Council Priorities for 2022, and 3) other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Alicia Schuler, Angela Forristall, Daniel Caless, Glenn Chamberlain, Jamie Cournane, Greg Ardini, Liz Sullivan, Mark Grant, Matt Ayer, Matt Cutler, Paul Nitschke, Rebecca Peters, Rich Balouskus, Robin Frede, Timothy Cardiasmenos, Chad Demarest, Deirdre Boelke, Richard Bellavance, Libby Etrie, Megan Ware, Jackie Odell, Allison Lorenc, Gareth Lawson

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION: Discussions were aided by the following documents: 1) agenda, 2) draft Framework Adjustment 65 (FW65) action plan, 3) draft acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rules work plan, 4) draft Amendment 23 (A23) review metrics work plan, and 5) February 2022 Council motions.

The meeting began at 1:00 p.m.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- Reviewed the draft action plan for FW65 (an action to be initiated by the Council in April),
- Reviewed the work plan for developing metrics for the review process to evaluate the revised groundfish monitoring system implemented through A23, and
- The PDT recommends a change in priorities this year in 2022 – to start developing a transition plan from management of Atlantic cod from 2 management units to up to 5 management units. This would be a multi-year priority.

AGENDA ITEM #1 FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 65/SPECIFICATION MEASURES (TO BE INITIATED)

Review action plan for FW65, including work plans for: revised rebuilding plans for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder, additional measures to promote stock rebuilding and, revisions to ABC control rules.

STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA

- This section would be a placeholder if status determination criteria change for certain stocks following the peer review of the research track and management track assessments.

REBUILDING PLANS FOR GULF OF MAINE COD AND SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND WINTER FLOUNDER

- GOM cod rebuilding plan:
 - The PDT plans to begin work on the draft alternative this spring.
 - The most recent stock assessment occurred in 2021.
 - The rebuilding plan would be developed using the current GOM stock.
 - Stocks are not adequately rebuilding so per the MSA there needs to be a revised plan even though the plan may become obsolete if there is a change to the management structure of the cod stocks¹.
 - Given that the stock structure might change, it might make sense to have another set of protections. Rather than focusing on the percent of F_{MSY} alone could put more of a focus on spawning protections, given the lower levels of F compared to historically levels. Although, overfishing is still occurring
 - The PDT could consider climate and environmental factors in the plan with possible measures to address the environmental factors, fishing pressure, and catches relative to limits.
- SNE/MA winter flounder:
 - Work will start after the spring peer review of the management track assessment and depends on the results of assessment.
 - Depending on what recruitment time stream is used for the BRPs, what if the new state of productivity indicates the stock is no longer overfished in 2022 and rebuilt ? Would there be a need to develop a new rebuilding plan?
 - However, there could a potential for it to be declared overfished in a subsequent assessment (akin to what occurred with SNE/MA yellowtail flounder).
 - Based on recruitment trends, it appears the stock could stay around or below the overfished threshold.
 - This stock is heavily influenced by changes in the environment, so it is likely unrealistic to continue targeting a larger biomass than can be sustained by the environment.
 - The rebuilding plan and management measures changes should focus on improving the probability of spawning and recruitment success.
 - Winter flounder mostly spawns in state waters, but it would be worth investigating spawning in federal waters.
 - There are key differences between state and federal management (e.g., common pool and state waters trip limits). These differences could be important during spawning seasons and inshore and offshore spawning areas as well .
 - The PDT has previously used trawl survey data to identify spawning fish in fall and spring surveys – could try this again.
 - Changes in management of SNE/MA winter flounder may have more of an impact on Mid-Atlantic fisheries than the groundfish fishery.

¹ Letter “220216_Pentony to Reid_2021 Stock Status”

Summary of rebuilding status for GOM cod and SNE/MA winter flounder based on the most recent assessment

Groundfish Stock	Rebuilding Plan Start of the Current Plan	Planned Rebuilding Date	Years Remaining in Plan, starting with FY2022	Total ACLs exceeded within past three completed FYs? If yes, identify the FYs.	Has the original rebuilding F been achieved? Or is this unknown? Indicate the current F estimate relative to F rebuild at the start of the plan.	What is current SSB estimate relative to SSBMSY? Or is this unknown?
Gulf of Maine cod	5/1/2014	2024	3	No	F rebuild (plan start) = 0.161 (m=0.2 model) and 0.177 (m-ramp model) F2019full = 0.249 (m=0.2 model with retrospective adjustment) and 0.172 (m-ramp model)	SSB2019 = 1,969 mt (m=0.2 model with retrospective adjustment) and 3,223 mt (m-ramp model) 5% and 5%, respectively of SSBMSY proxy 39,912 mt (m=0.2 model) and 60,010 mt (m-ramp model)
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder	5/1/2004	2023	2	No	F rebuild (plan start) = 0.175 F2019 = 0.077	SSB2019 = 3,638 mt 30% of SSBMSY

ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS

Summary of the last year of specification by stock/management unit

2022	2023	2024
GB cod GB haddock GOM haddock SNE/MA yellowtail flounder CC/GOM yellowtail flounder American plaice Witch flounder White hake Pollock	Eastern GB cod Eastern GB haddock GB yellowtail flounder GB winter flounder GOM winter flounder SNE/MA winter flounder Redfish Northern windowpane flounder Southern windowpane flounder Ocean pout Atlantic halibut Atlantic wolffish	GOM cod

- FW63 includes changes to the default specifications process – 75% for 6 months, 2-year US/CA TACs
- Would include a review of the GB haddock sub-ACL for the herring fishery.
- The majority of stock assessments will be done in the fall management track, but SNE/MA winter flounder, GB cod and GB yellowtail flounder will be available sooner.
- The PDT will update the risk policy matrix for all stocks with the most recent assessment results and an additional update with the assessments done later this year.
- Sub-component reviews were skipped in FW63. Since most stocks are within this framework action, a sub-component review will be appropriate to include. This would include state fisheries set-aside and other non-groundfish (other) federal fisheries
- There should be an examination of management uncertainty buffers as part of the specifications process – specifically for sectors post-implementation of A23. It has been a while since full review in the FW process.
- The next PDT meeting may focus on GOM cod and GB cod.

ABC CONTROL RULES

- GMRI and others have laid the groundwork for how the ABC control rule could be changed. A subgroup with three PDT and three SSC members is working to develop a working document for the full PDT to eventually work through.
- The sub-group will start with the current control rule and look at a range of options with input from the PDT and the Committee. The subgroup will present a summary white paper in July/August to the full PDT.
- The change could be a FW depending on how much revision is needed and what the Committee proposes.

***ADDITIONAL COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES TO PROMOTE STOCK
REBUILDING FOR GOM COD AND SNE/MA WINTER FLOUNDER***

- **The PDT asks the Groundfish Committee - Should the focus in this section be on spawning protections or ways to promote spawning? Or some other aspect of rebuilding these stocks?**
- As work on the rebuilding plan happens, what is needed to rebuild will become clearer and might help shape this.
- As an initial step, the PDT could summarize spawning based on recent reports, publications, and potentially a new PDT analysis to identify times/areas.
- See the rebuilding plan discussion for how these link together.

AGENDA ITEM #2: COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR 2022

AMENDMENT 23 REVIEW METRICS

Discuss work plan for developing metrics for the review process to evaluate the revised groundfish monitoring system implemented through A23

- Initial discussion of which years to consider for a “pre A23” comparison:
 - Are there concerns about COVID-19 restrictions when observer coverage stopped – end of FY2019 (March 2020) and FY2020? Is FY2021 more of a typical year since COVID-19 waivers ended?
 - Should the years in the A23 analysis (through FY2018) be used as a basis?
 - The fishery has changed a lot since 2015 – should consider more recent years being more representative of current fishery conditions
 - Don’t eliminate any years for analysis at this stage - even FY2020 with low observer coverage due to COVID-19 waivers will be useful for understanding the relationship between catch and observer coverage
 - FY2020 could serve as a low coverage target year as a comparison to FY2022 which will be a high coverage target year
 - Consider for FY2022 a caveat that there is a potential for previous distribution and markets restoration in a “post pandemic” setting
 - Initial step may be to summarize market conditions for each year and how these relate to pre/post A23, maybe get input from the Groundfish Advisory Panel at some stage
- Next step to brainstorm metrics and indicators – could look to sector/catch share monitoring programs in other regions to see if any have review processes
- How does this review interact with the review of exclusions in A23? Consider taking up the reviews together as they are both specified to occur after two years of data.
- Items raised in proposed rule for A23 - 4 alternatives raised some issues in the proposed rule that the PDT may want to talk through, either as a part of the review or separately:
 - Electronic monitoring (EM) – if vessels opt in then cameras are on all the time, so vessels fishing under the 71 30 exclusion are excluded with at-sea monitoring (ASM) but not EM, exclusions would not apply to all vessels
 - Waivers if NMFS does not have funds to cover cost - what would it mean for the fishery management plan in the absence of this data?
 - Management uncertainty buffers - for trips excluded west of 71 30 this line bifurcates statistical reporting areas and will create uncertainty in catches, for maximized retention/electronic monitoring (MREM) operational discards may still occur, removing buffer affects sector carryover

- Regulations for implementation requiring dealers to participate in dockside monitoring (DSM) if they have multispecies permit

ATLANTIC COD MANAGEMENT UNITS

Discuss a February 2022 Council motion to the Groundfish Committee to discuss adding a priority to develop a transition plan for Atlantic cod management from two management units to up to five management units

- A possible change in priorities needs to go through the Committee first. The Committee motion will come to the Council and the Council will then discuss if priorities should be changed.
- Current/Anticipated Specifications for FY2022-FY2024:
 - GOM cod – FY2022-FY2024 (FW 63)
 - GB cod – FY2022 (FW63)
 - GB cod – FY 2023-FW2024 (would be though FW65)
- Next Stock Assessments for use in FY2024—FY2026 specifications²
 - Atlantic Cod Research Track peer review – March 2023
 - Management Track peer review – September 2023
- What type of action would be needed to change the biological units? Are additions/changes to stock structure a possible FW item? Verify it's on the list³ or if this would be an amendment. This is a follow-up item for the PDT.
- If this is not a priority this year, would the Council consider this for next year's priorities? Would that be too late?
- The next assessment for cod is the research track. There is the potential this no longer will give the basis for setting ABCs for the existing two stocks. What to do if the assessment is giving information for managing five stocks but are only managing two?
 - Is it possible to have a management track assessment that runs under the old stock structure with purpose of getting an ABC until the new structure can be adopted?
- Should discussion begin now on allocation issues?
- Would FY2023 or FY2024 be the transition year?
- Concerns about keeping two stocks/not utilizing latest science and concerns about creating one ACL for multiple biological stocks while ensuring subcomponent ABCs aren't exceeded. Can either be extra cautions or have a clear idea of catch? Increased coverage resulting from A23 might aid in better catch information.
- **PDT recommends a change in priorities this year in 2022 – to start developing a transition plan from management of Atlantic cod from 2 management units to up to 5 management units. This would be a multi-year priority.**

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS

None.

The Groundfish Plan Development Team meeting adjourned at approximately 3:50 p.m.

² <https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/2022-2026-Stock-Assessment-Schedules.pdf>

³ [https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-648/subpart-F/section-648.90#p-648.90\(a\)\(2\)\(iii\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-648/subpart-F/section-648.90#p-648.90(a)(2)(iii))