



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: Friday, January 17, 2014

TO: Scallop Plan Develop Team (SC PDT)

CC: Groundfish Oversight Committee (GF OSC)

FROM: Groundfish Plan Development Team (GF PDT)

SUBJECT: Scallop Framework Adjustment 25

The Groundfish PDT held two conference calls on November 5, 2013 and January 13, 2014 with members from the Scallop PDT to discuss Framework Adjustment 25 (FW 25) and review the analysis completed. A summary of the major points made by Groundfish PDT members are provided.

Projected groundfish bycatch in the scallop fishery

The Groundfish PDT expressed concerns that, with the exception of the No Action alternative for scallop specifications, the bycatch of windowpane and yellowtail flounder are projected to increase under the alternatives under consideration. Under each of the FW 25 alternatives, the projected catch of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder exceeds the 2014 scallop fishery sub-ACL, and ranges from 114% to 213% of the sub-ACL (i.e., the 2014 sub-ACL is 51 mt, with projected Georges Bank yellowtail flounder catch ranging from 58-109 mt). Projected catch of Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder also exceeds the 2014 scallop fishery sub-ACL under some of the scenarios. The Groundfish PDT also recognized that Georges Bank yellowtail flounder has the lowest management uncertainty buffer out of all for the groundfish stocks at 3%. Therefore, alternatives under consideration in FW 25 that potentially increase Georges Bank yellowtail flounder catches may potentially exceed the management uncertainty buffer for the stock. For example if each component of the fishery exceeds its allocation in 2014 and the scallop fishery exceeds their sub-ACL, the total ACL (318 mt) could be potentially be exceeded as well as the ABC (328 mt) since the uncertainty buffer is 3% (10 mt).

The Groundfish PDT also discussed with the Scallop PDT how the discard estimates were calculated. This year the Scallop PDT included a projection based on 2012 bycatch rates as well as 2013 bycatch rates since the 2013 rate in Georges Bank Area II is less than half of the 2012 rate. In particular, the Groundfish PDT thought recent estimates of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder might be low, relative to previous years. The Scallop PDT explained that this might be due to a handful of factors including less yellowtail flounder in the area, scallop effort shifts

from higher bycatch months to lower bycatch months, and perhaps positive impacts from the SMAST voluntary bycatch avoidance program. The Scallop PDT also noted that the fishing year is not complete and more thorough analyses would be needed to further evaluate the observed lower bycatch rate.

Proposed Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measures for the Scallop Fishery

The Groundfish PDT reviewed information from the Scallop PDT on the development of alternatives for windowpane flounder accountability measures for the scallop fishery. The Groundfish PDT noted in discussions with the Scallop PDT that:

- Gear modification studies suggest that the accountability measures may lead to reductions in windowpane flounder bycatch while having a modest decrease in scallop catch.
- Areas defined for the accountability measures correspond well with previous windowpane flounder bycatch hotspot analyses completed by the Groundfish PDT in preparing Groundfish FW48 (see Appendix IV).
- The Groundfish PDT expressed some concern about the accuracy of the “windowpane flounder reduction” estimates presented in the analyses. The Groundfish PDT supported the overall methodology developed in terms of shifting effort and re-calculating windowpane flounder catch to evaluate the potential impact of the AM. However, it was noted that there are many uncertainties and caution should be used when considering the possible impacts of the closures/gear modifications.