

Groundfish Committee Meeting

Warwick, RI
November 18, 2015

Meeting Motions

Framework Adjustment 55

Motion 1: Alexander/Pappalardo

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council a preliminary ABC for witch flounder of 394 mt (with associated ACL and sub-ACLs) described in Table 10, Option 2 (Revised ACLs in Draft FW55 Alternatives, November 10, 2015). The Committee further recommends that the Council requests that the SSC reconsider the ABC taking into consideration the incidental, non-target catch of witch flounder under the current prevailing operating conditions of the fishery.

Rationale: The witch flounder ACL is allocated to "groundfish" and to "other" and state water fisheries. Of the total ACL, 271 mt is allocated to sectors. This allocation is not sufficient to cover the non-target bycatch of witch flounder by sectors operating across all broad stock areas. It is not possible for sector vessels to avoid witch flounder in the same way that they can avoid a stock found in only one stock area (e.g. GOM cod, SNE yellowtail, etc.)

Of the total ACL, 103 mt is allocated to others and state waters, which highlights the wide range of the witch flounder population, and the inability of other fisheries to avoid witch flounder. Those fisheries, allocated one-third of the total ACL, are not directly accountable to their bycatch, while sectors are accountable.

The Committee reviewed the Council's policy on remanding back to the SSC and felt that their recommendation was based on these criteria: *(b) an error, if fact or omission, in the materials provided to the committee* and *(d) failure of the committee to following its standard operating procedures.*

Motion 1 **carried** 11/0/0.

Motion 2a: Goethel/Etrie

The Groundfish Committee votes to express no confidence (i.e., volatility in highs and lows, lack of stability) in the latest round of groundfish stock assessments.

Rationale: The results of the latest round of stock assessments are not only divorced from the reality of what fishermen are seeing on the water, they are now increasingly at odds with prior assessments and show decreasing predictive ability. The Committee raised concerns about the retrospective issues in the assessments as well.

Motion 2b as friendly amended: Goethel/Etrie

The Groundfish Committee votes to express no confidence (i.e., volatility in highs and lows, lack of stability) in the latest round of groundfish stock assessments.

- 1) The Groundfish Committee recommends that the current assessment process be modified to enhance the AP's role in the assessment process.
- 2) The Groundfish Committee strongly emphasizes the need for improved assessments rather than more assessments, which is being followed under the Operational Assessment ("turning of the crank") process.

Rationale: The Committee is not rejecting the recommendations from the SSC by the motion. Rather, the results of the latest round of stock assessments are not only divorced from the reality of what fishermen are seeing on the water, they are now increasingly at odds with prior assessments and show decreasing predictive ability. The Committee raised concerns about the retrospective issues in the assessments as well. The Advisory Panels would convene prior to the SSC meeting to provide information for the SSC to consider when recommending OFLs/ABCs. The example of the SSC's discussion in 2014 of the GOM cod ABC was identified as a time when the GAP was asked for additional input. Another example was the MAFMC fishery performance report and AP vetting process. The Committee provided examples of what improved assessments means to them: better model diagnostics, improved model residuals, less retrospective concerns, using improved data such as industry-based information (CPUE, surveys, industry observations and experience), and incorporating ecosystem dynamics. For many stocks, their last benchmark was years ago.

Motion 2c as further friendly amended: Goethel/Etrie

The Groundfish Committee expressed continued and growing concerns (i.e., volatility in highs and lows, lack of stability) in the latest round of groundfish stock assessments.

- 1) The Groundfish Committee recommends that the current assessment process be modified to enhance the AP's role in the assessment process.
- 2) The Groundfish Committee strongly emphasizes the need for improved assessments rather than more assessments, which is being followed under the Operational Assessment ("turning of the crank") process.

Rationale: The Committee is not rejecting the recommendations from the SSC by the motion. Rather, the results of the latest round of stock assessments are not only divorced from the reality of what fishermen are seeing on the water, they are now increasingly at odds with prior assessments and show decreasing predictive ability. The Committee raised concerns about the retrospective issues in the assessments as well. The Advisory Panels would convene prior to the SSC meeting to provide information for the SSC to consider when recommending OFLs/ABCs. The example of the SSC's discussion in 2014 of the GOM cod ABC was identified as a time when the GAP was asked for additional input. Another example was the MAFMC fishery

performance report and AP vetting process. The Committee provided examples of what improved assessments means to them: better model diagnostics, improved model residuals, less retrospective concerns, using improved data such as industry-based information (CPUE, surveys, industry observations and experience), and incorporating ecosystem dynamics. For many stocks, their last benchmark was years ago.

Motion 2c **carried** 8/1/2.

Motion 3: Alexander/Goethel

Move that the Groundfish Committee recommend that the Council accept the OFLs and ABCs for FY 2016- FY 2018 recommended by the SSC for all groundfish stocks.

Motion 3 **carried** 10/0/1.

Motion 4a: Alexander/Etrie

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council Option 2 in each of these sections: 4.2.1 (Implementation of an Additional Sector), 4.2.2 (Sector Approval Process), 4.2.3 (Modification to the definition of a haddock separator trawl), and 4.3.2 (Management Measures for US/CA TACs) be selected as preferred.

Motion 4b: as friendly amended: Alexander/Etrie

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council Option 2 in each of these sections: 4.2.1 (Implementation of an Additional Sector), 4.2.3 (Modification to the definition of a haddock separator trawl), and 4.3.2 (Management Measures for US/CA TACs) be selected as preferred.

Rationale: The Committee explained that implementation of an additional sector and changes to the management measures for US/CA TACs would provide sectors with greater flexibility, especially under low ACLs including GB cod. The Committee is deferring its judgement on section 4.2.2 (Sector Approval Process) until the Council meeting. It is hoped at that time that General Council can clarify if the alternative drafted would not be appropriate for a framework adjustment action.

Motion 4b **carried** 11/0/0.

Motion 5: Kendall/Alexander

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council Option 2 (Change in authority to modify GOM recreational possession limits) in Section 4.3.3 (Modification to the GOM cod protection

measures) be selected as preferred and update the document so the section title reads as “modify GOM recreational possession limits”

Rationale: With an increasing GOM cod ACL, the flexibility and ability to adjust measures within the same year is important. The Committee recommended that this section should be revised to better reflect the RA’s authority. It continues to be the Committee’s desire that any adjustment to possession limits however, do not impact the overall purpose of the GOM Protection Measures.

Motion 5 **carried** 11/0/0.

Motion 6a: Alexander/Goethel

In Section 4.1.2 (Annual Catch Limits) under 4.1.2.2 (Option 2: Revised Annual Catch Limit Specifications – Scallop Fishery sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder), the Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder sub-ACL for the Scallop fishery be set at 90% of the scallop fishery’s estimated catch (as estimated by the Scallop PDT).

Rationale: The Groundfish Committee feels that a reduction in the projected catch to specify the sub-ACL is needed to incentivize the Scallop fishery to reduce catches of SNE/MA yellowtail flounder. An allocation of 90% of estimated catch is consistent with the Council’s approach in recent years.

Motion 6b to amend: Kaelin/Pappalardo

In Section 4.1.2 (Annual Catch Limits) under 4.1.2.2 (Option 2: Revised Annual Catch Limit Specifications – Scallop Fishery sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder), the Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder sub-ACL for the Scallop fishery be set at 100% of the scallop fishery’s estimated catch (as estimated by the Scallop PDT).

Motion to amend **failed** 3/5/3.

Motion 6c as the main motion 6a: Alexander/Goethel

In Section 4.1.2 (Annual Catch Limits) under 4.1.2.2 (Option 2: Revised Annual Catch Limit Specifications – Scallop Fishery sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder), the Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder sub-ACL for the Scallop fishery be set at 90% of the scallop fishery’s estimated catch (as estimated by the Scallop PDT).

Rationale: The Groundfish Committee feels that a reduction in the projected catch to specify the sub-ACL is needed to incentivize the Scallop fishery to reduce catches of SNE/MA yellowtail

flounder. An allocation of 90% of estimated catch is consistent with the Council's approach in recent years.

Motion 6c **carried** 8/0/3.

Motion 7: Alexander/Balzano

The Groundfish Committee recommends that the witch flounder other sub-component be 15% (59 mt) and state waters would be 3% (12 mt), this would result in no change to these percentages in this action.

Rationale: The status quo percentages for the other sub-component and state waters would be maintained for the witch flounder. This is 32 mt increase to the GF sub-ACL. The reduction in the groundfish sub-ACL from FY 2015 to FY 2016 should not be further reduced. Contrary to the PDT's recommendation, the Committee expects other sub-component and state waters catches to decline in FY 2016.

Motion 7 **carried** 7/2/2.

Motion 8a: Etrie/Alexander

The GF Committee requests the Council request the Agency to calculate the "total observer coverage rate" starting in FY 2016 utilizing a five year average as indicated in Appendix IV of the PDT memo dated November 16, 2015. The stock that has the highest realized CV as averaged across the last 5 fishing years (*in which a completed data set is available and the realized CV has been calculated in accordance with the protocols currently used by the Agency - calculating realized CV at the stock basis*) will serve as the basis for the upcoming fishing year total observer coverage rate.

Rationale: Robust reporting requirement already in place. The current method of using the most recent year to set the following year coverage rates has resulted in a broad range of annual coverage rates that have been driven by different stocks each year.

The intent of this request is improve the efficiency of the ASM program and to evolve the methodology used to set coverage rates by utilizing the significant depth of data that now exists to provide a more stable basis for inter-annual changes in coverage rates. Stability and efficiency are essential for the independent ASM providers and fishing interests to sustain the program going forward.

Motion 8b as friendly amended: Etrie/Alexander

The GF Committee requests the Council request that the Agency and also have the PDT develop an additional option 4.3.1.4 for the “total observer coverage rate” starting in FY 2016 utilizing a 3 year and 5 year multi-year approach as indicated in Appendix IV of the PDT memo dated November 16, 2015. The stock that has the highest realized CV as averaged across the last 3 or 5 fishing years (*in which a completed data set is available and the realized CV has been calculated in accordance with the protocols currently used by the Agency - calculating realized CV at the stock basis*) will serve as the basis for the upcoming fishing year total observer coverage rate.

Rationale: Robust reporting requirements for the sector program are already in place.

The current method of using the most recent year to set the following year coverage rates has resulted in a broad range of annual coverage rates that have been driven by different stocks each year.

The intent of this request is improve the efficiency of the ASM program and to evolve the methodology used to set coverage rates by utilizing the significant depth of data that now exists to provide a more stable basis for inter-annual changes in coverage rates. Stability and efficiency are essential for the independent ASM providers and fishing interests to sustain the program going forward.

Motion 8b **carried** 8/1/0.

Motion 9: Pappalardo/Alexander

GF committee recommends to the Council for inclusion in FW 55, exempt ELM 10”+ Sector Trips (GF catch counts against Sector ACE) and allow trips to fish 6.5”+ mesh to target dogfish within the footprint of the existing Dogfish exempted fishery. (Require retention of GF, universal to all sectors)

Rationale: This approach would provide greater flexibility for those sector trips targeting non-groundfish stocks and with very low groundfish catch.

Motion 9 **carried** 9/0/0.

Motion 10: Etrie/Alexander

To move in Section 4.3.1.3/Option 3 – fishery performance criteria to considered but rejected.

Motion 10 was **withdrawn without objection**.

Motion 11: Etrie/Goethel

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that FW 55 clarify that the primary goal of ASM is to verify area fished, catch, and discards by species, by gear type and in such a manner that would reduce the cost of monitoring. Other goals/objectives identified under FW 48, such as additional data for stock assessment purposes, are secondary benefits achieved through catch verification.

Rationale: Purpose of this motion is to provide clarification on the current goals/objectives as it relates to the At-Sea Monitoring Program. This motion does not change overarching goals/objectives of monitoring programs in general, it simply clarifies what the primary goal/objectives of the Sector At-Sea Monitoring program should be designed to achieve in its current state and also in any future modifications/improvements.

Motion 11 **carried** 8/1/0.

FY 2016 GOM Recreational Fisheries Measures

Motion 12: Goethel/Alexander

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the FY 2016 GOM haddock bag limit be 15 fish, with all seasons open (except in wave 2 – March and April- in which only April 15-30 would be open), and a 17 in minimize size.

Motion 12 **carried** 8/0/1.

Motion 13: Goethel/Kendall

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the FY 2016 GOM cod bag limit be one cod, with a minimum size of 24 inches, and wave 5 (September-October) and 6 open (November – December) open.

Motion 14 As friendly amended

The Groundfish Committee recommends to the Council that the FY 2016 GOM cod bag limit be one cod, with a minimum size of 24 inches, and wave 5 (September – October) open.

Motion 14 **carried** 3/2/4.

Consensus Statement

The Groundfish Committee requests that an analysis of the RAP's recommendation for FY 2016 GOM cod and haddock be made available in time for the December Council meeting.

The RAP recommended:

- a. GOM cod: 1 cod bag limit, minimum size 24 in fish, open in wave 4 (July-August)
- b. GOM haddock: 15 haddock bag limit, 17 in, minimum size 24 in fish, with all seasons open (except in wave 2 – March and April- in which only April 15-30 would be open)

Priorities

Motion 15: Kaelin/Alexander

Moved that for 2016 the Groundfish Committee recommend to the Council to add to the list of priorities a review of the biological implications and catch accounting methodologies of the Georges Bank haddock catch cap in the herring fishery, with the goals being the realization of Optimum Yield in the Atlantic Herring and Atlantic Mackerel fisheries, minimizing the mortality of Georges Bank haddock to the extent practicable, and establishing vessel-specific catch cap accountability.

Rationale: As clarified by the Committee chair, this motion would be to add to the list of priorities for Groundfish for the purpose of discussion at the Council meeting.

The maker of the motion explained that on October 22, 2015, NMFS closed the directed herring fishery in the Herring Georges Bank Haddock Accountability Measure Area based on a determination that the Georges Bank Haddock Catch Cap had been harvested. This Area will be closed to the fishery until May 1, 2016. This closure was based on 6 observed trips, out of a total 156, with a haddock catch cap CV of 75.3 percent. More than 12,000 mt of herring will not be taken this year as a result of this closure and a mackerel fishery cannot be prosecuted in the consequence area given the 20-30% of herring often found in mackerel catches. The herring MWT sub-ACL has no significant impact on the biological status of the haddock resource or the directed haddock fishery - 12% of the groundfish GB haddock ACL had been harvested when the GB herring fishery was recently closed. This motion would have the Council address this inequity during 2016. This could be accomplished through modifications to the GB haddock sub-ACL and/or associated AM allocated to the herring fishery under the Groundfish FMP or the AM may be addressed directly in the Herring FMP (as is done in the scallop plan for GB YT AMs).

Motion 15 **carried** 6/1/2.