

**Small-Mesh Multispecies Specifications (2015-2017)
Sample Management Action
NEFMC Program Review**

Staff Lead: Andrew Applegate

I. Rationale for selecting this action for the Review Panel

This is an example of the Council's most streamlined action; catch specifications (setting Annual Catch Limits, ACLs). It is also an example of how this process works with a data limited stock.

II. Summary of the action/ proposed action

The proposed action would make two changes to existing catch limits and management measures. One change (described in Section 5.1 of the final environmental assessment [EA]) proposes to adjust catch specifications, applying the latest assessment of stock size using updated information on catch and survey biomass through calendar year 2013 (and spring 2014 survey data for northern red hake). The other change (described in Section 5.2) is proposed to modify northern red hake possession limits and/or accountability measures (AM) triggers to reduce the risk of continuing northern red hake overfishing and make a correction for a prior error in 2012-2014 specifications.

III. Purpose and need, and preferred alternatives

This table provides a summary of the purpose and need for this action.

NEED	CORRESPONDING PURPOSE(S)
For all small mesh multispecies, modify specifications in response to changes in stock biomass to provide for sustainable yield and prevent overfishing. For red and silver hake, modify the total allowable landings in response to changes in discard rate.	Set red and silver hake specifications for 2015 – 2017 fishing years.
	Consider measures that would reduce the risk of continuing overfishing of northern red hake.
Correct the northern red hake accountability measure.	Avoid unnecessarily penalizing small-mesh multispecies fishermen for a calculation error inadvertently made when setting the 2012-2014 specifications in Amendment 19.

The preferred alternatives are described in Section 5 of the [final EA](#).

IV. Brief summary of pertinent information on process, including timing, scoping/public comment, Committee/PDT/AP meetings, and Council meetings.

[Amendment 19](#) to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (April 4, 2013; 78 FR 20260) established a process and framework for setting the small-mesh multispecies catch specifications.

The remainder of this section details the focus of all these meetings, including when recommendations and decisions were finalized. Opportunities for public comment would have been provided at all of these meetings, though sometimes are limited during PDT conference calls and meetings.

- Science and Statistical Committee (SSC)
 - 8/26/14 - SSC met to discuss the specifications and to recommend Acceptable Biological Catch (ABCs) for the 2015-2017 small-mesh fishery.
 - 9/13/14 – SSC Memo to Tom Nies for ABC recommendations

- Whiting Oversight Committee
 - 7/23/14 – Committee met to discuss management adjustments to be included in the 2015-2017 specifications package.
 - 9/9/14 – Committee met to consider SSC recommendations and PDT advice to identify and recommend management adjustments for the 2015-2017 specifications package.
 - 10/30/14 – Committee met to review a draft 2015-2017 specifications document, impact analysis, and PDT advice to recommend final measures to the Council.

- Whiting Plan Development Team
 - 8/4/14 – PDT met to develop recommendations on 2015-2017 ABC specifications for the August 26, 2014 SSC meeting and finalize the 2013 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report.
 - 9/3/14 – PDT met to evaluate whether existing measures and proposed specifications are likely to be sufficient to prevent future overfishing of northern red hake.
 - 9/5/14 – PDT conference call to continue their evaluation from the September 3rd meeting.
 - 9/25/14 – PDT met to analyze effects of proposed management adjustments in the 2015-2017 specifications document, including possible changes to Northern Fishery Management Area red hake possession limits, amongst other topics.
 - 10/9/14 – PDT met to discuss analyses for and development of the specifications document, as well as evaluate the implications of assignment of Cultivator Shoals Area catches of red hake to the southern stock area and develop advice for the Committee.

- October 22, 2014 memo to Committee from the Whiting PDT providing advice on assigning the Cultivator Shoals Area red hake catch.
 - 10/28/14 – PDT met to develop and review a draft 2015-2017 specifications document, including analysis of impacts of management alternatives.
- Whiting Advisory Panel
 - 9/8/14 – AP met to consider ABCs recommended by the SSC and advice from the Whiting PDT, to develop recommendations for management measure adjustments to be included in a 2015-2017 specifications document.
- Council
 - 11/17/14 – Council approved the final specifications for recommendation to NMFS.

V. Key analysis/data used to inform decisions

- 2010 Benchmark Assessment: Northeast Fisheries Science Center. 2011. 51st Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (51st SAW) Assessment Report. US Dept Commer., Northeast Fish Sci. Cent. Ref Doc. 11-02; 856 p.
- GARFO report on ACL accounting and fishery performance – July 2014
- An update/operational assessment was performed by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) – July 2014
- Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for Fishing Year 2013 – Small Mesh Multispecies (NEFMC, Whiting Plan Development Team, August 2014). *This document summarizes the update of both the red and silver hake stock assessment results based on the last adopted benchmark approach in 2010.*
- In this updated assessment, catch and survey indices through 2014 were updated to develop ABC recommendations for fishing year 2015-2017. Catch information consisted of commercial landings, discards for both red and silver hake and recreational catch data for only red hake. Catch data was combined with fisheries independent survey data from the fall and spring NEFSC trawl survey in a simple index-based approach that utilizes a three year moving average of the fall and spring biomass index and relative exploitation ratio of catch to the survey. Uncertainty in the Overfishing Limits was re-estimated and ABC recommendations were provided based on the current Amendment 19 ABC definitions for both red and silver hake. Consistent with approved procedures from the benchmark assessment, the PDT recommended ABCs for both silver hake stocks using the 25th percentile and both red hake stocks using the 40th percentile.
 - Following the accepted index approach from the 2010 benchmark assessment, this assessment update for both stocks of silver hake

are based on the three year moving average of fall survey and exploitation indices for years 2011-2013. (*Not overfished/overfishing not occurring*)

- For northern red hake, the three-year moving average of the spring survey index for years 2012-2014 and exploitation index for years 2011-2013 were used in this assessment update. (*Not overfished/overfishing not occurring*)
- In the case of the southern red hake stock, spring 2014 index was excluded from this update due to survey not covering the full southern area therefore the three year average spring survey and exploitation indices for years 2011-2013 were used instead. (*Not overfished/overfishing IS occurring*)

VI. Final Timeline and Key Regulatory Documents

This section provides a summary table of the regulatory timeline and describes the process and key documents below.

1.Council approval	2.Preliminary EA submission	3.Formal EA submission	4.Proposed Rule Pub	5.Final Rule Pub	6.Regs effective	Days from #1-6
11/17/14	12/10/2014	1/28/15	4/8/15	5/28/15	5/28/15	196

- Council approval: Council members voted to approve the specifications package (EA, Regulatory Impact Review [RIR], Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis [IRFA]).
- Preliminary EA submission: The Council submitted the preliminary EA to NMFS for review.
- Formal EA submission: The Council submitted the final EA to NMFS for approval. Additional work revising the IRFA and RIR analyses was conducted in early March, and the final EA was re-submitted mid-March 2015.
- Proposed Rule: NMFS published the Proposed Rule in the Federal Register (FR) and started the 30-day comment period. This included information on how to obtain the draft final EA.
- Final Rule: NMFS published the Final Rule in the FR with the same effective date.
- Days: The amount of time from the final Council approval to the effective date is 196 days.

For more information:

- Final EA/Specifications Document:
<http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/2015-2017-Specificatins-Documents-2.pdf>

- Final SAFE Report: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/SAFE-Report-for-Fishing-Year-2013.pdf>
- Final Rule: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/15mulsmallneshspecsfr.pdf>

VII. What worked well/ what could be improved? Please include information on any major setbacks in the process and how/if they were resolved.

Information provided in this section will be elaborated on during a TOR 3 presentation at the Program Review meeting.

- Northern red hake overfishing status:
This was the first operational assessment conducted since the 2010 benchmark assessment. Although the 2013-2014 catches had exceeded the ACLs, triggering Accountability Measures (AMs), the assessment update indicated that a very large 2013 year class was evident and biomass was thus increasing. Northern red hake were again assessed in 2015, which confirmed the large year class and the Council re-adjusted the specifications for 2016-2017 fishing year.
- Uncertainty in the red hake stock structure:
The 2010 benchmark assessment investigated all available data related to stock structure, but the results were inconclusive and the Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) recommended using the existing management areas for purposes of assessment. Some industry advisors felt strongly that red hake were a single unit stock, but the catches from the Cultivator Shoals Area were definitely attributable to the (then) more productive southern stock. The committee asked the PDT to advise on the implications of attributing the Cultivator Shoals Area catch to the southern stock. The PDT pointed out that shifting the Cultivator Shoals Area catch to the southern stock would be inconsistent with the reference points, which would need re-evaluation through a benchmark assessment. Since then, no new information has come forth with respect to red hake stock structure. The source of red hake catches in the Cultivator Shoals Area remains uncertain. More red hake from a southern stock may be appearing here seasonally in response to warming water temperatures. A benchmark assessment is scheduled for 2019 with sufficient age samples to perform an age-structured assessment.

Subsequent divergent trends in recruitment do not support a single unit stock, in the opinion of the PDT Chair. The source of red hake catches in the Cultivator Shoals Area however remains uncertain. More red hake from a southern stock may be appearing here seasonally in response to warming water temperatures.

- Incomplete 2014 spring survey:
Due to mechanical difficulties, the RV Bigelow was unable to sample some Mid-Atlantic strata, which were used in the red hake assessment. Thus, the NEFSC only used the 2012-2013 survey data to estimate southern red hake biomass (and specifications). Estimated biomass from these missing strata were imputed from trend analysis in the following year's update assessment.
- Improvements:
The only improvements that the PDT Chair suggests are a reduction in the documentation requirements for a routine specifications adjustment. We have explored using a Supplemental Information Report (which was used in the 2016-2017 adjustment), but GARFO denied using this approach for the 2018-2020 specifications because of the change in southern red hake status and the right whale issues. Otherwise, the PDT efficiently completes the update assessment and catch estimates, recommends specifications, and discusses alternatives with advisors, the whiting committee, and the SSC. However, the whiting specification schedule sometimes runs afoul of various PDT, SSC, and Committee vacation, and scientific meeting schedules in July and August.