



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Acting Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Monkfish Committee

Webinar

September 9, 2021

The Monkfish Committee met on September 9, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. via webinar to receive a presentation on discard estimation methods, to discuss issues related to the monkfish Research Set Aside (RSA) program, and to make recommendations for the monkfish management priorities for 2022.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Monkfish Committee: Libby Etrie (Chair), Peter Hughes (Vice Chair), Dan Farnham, Pete Christopher, Matthew Gates, Scott Olszewski, John Pappalardo, Paul Risi, and Kelly Whitmore. Other attendees were Greg DiDomenico (Advisory Panel Chair), Togue Brawn, Eric Reid, Jennifer Couture, Lou Goodreau, Chris Kellogg, Janice Plante, Jason Didden, Ryan Silva and Spencer Talmage. In addition, about six members of the public attended.

KEY OUTCOMES:

Committee members developed two consensus statements on:

- 1) requesting the Northeast Fisheries Science Center maintain their timeline and complete a 2022 monkfish management track assessment and
- 2) recommending 2022 Council priorities.

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, AND AGENDA REVIEW

Council staff provided an overview of the meeting agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #2: PRESENTATION ON MONKFISH DISCARD ESTIMATION

Dr. Cate O'Keefe provided a presentation and recommendations reviewed by the PDT on alternative methods for estimating monkfish discards. The presentation and PDT report completed a 2021 Council management priority to update monkfish discard estimates using 2019 data. All estimation approaches were reviewed by the Monkfish PDT, and the PDT recommended using 2011 as the start year and a median discard percent of catch as the preferred approach. This approach represented recent historical trends under consistent management measures with lower uncertainty in the estimate. Also, the PDT recommended: 1) maintaining the fishing year 2022 TALs, 5,882 mt for the southern area and 6,624 mt for the northern management area, with no change in discard estimation methods; 2) that a long-term discard approach be considered in a future monkfish management action and analyzed as part of the options for fishery specifications; and 3) an exploration of the monkfish recruitment index as a potential indicator of future discards. See [Presentation-Discard-Estimation](#) and for further detail, [Evaluation-of-Monkfish-Discard-Estimation-for-Calculating-TAL](#) and [Monkfish-PDT-Meeting-](#)

[Summary-August-23-2021](#). Dr. O’Keefe answered several questions about the reasons for the PDT recommendations including several about the choice of using the median value for recruitment instead of the mean.

In response to a question about whether using the mean instead of the median value of recruitment would result in a loss of information, Dr. O’Keefe explained that using the median addressed problems caused by anomalously high recruitment, as seen in a recent year, in projecting future recruitment and resulting discards.

Committee members suggested that the updated discard estimation method should be used in the next monkfish stock assessment and management action, but Mr. Kellogg reported that the Science Center has proposed that the monkfish management track assessment scheduled for 2022 be postponed. Also, the Council staff still is in the process of trying to work out a schedule with the Science Center that would meet Council management needs. Several committee members expressed concern that the management track assessment should be completed in 2022 to inform monkfish specifications for fishing years 2023 – 2025. As a result, the committee adopted the following consensus statement.

1. CONSENSUS STATEMENT

The Monkfish Committee strongly urges the Councils to request that the Northeast Fisheries Science Center maintain their timeline and complete a 2022 monkfish stock assessment.

Rationale: The FY 2023-2025 specifications will be completed in 2022 as a required action and it is unclear what information the Councils would have to use if there were no assessment. Also, discard estimation methods should be considered in the management track assessment to inform specification setting, consistent with the PDT’s recommendation.

AGENDA ITEM #3: MONKFISH RESEARCH SET-ASIDE (RSA) PROGRAM

The Committee discussed the challenges related to the monkfish RSA program including insufficient incentives to attract industry participation caused by depressed ex-vessel prices for monkfish and the opportunity for boats to land plenty of monkfish without participating in the program. As a result, GARFO decided not to solicit additional RSA proposals this year and instead work with current researchers to modify their grants to allow additional time for project completion and days at sea (DAS) to support their work. Longer term questions were whether changes could be made to the program to make it more viable under current market conditions or to make no changes and wait to see if circumstances become more favorable.

AGENDA ITEM #4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MONKFISH MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2022

As well as the need for FY 2023-2025 specifications, the Committee discussed the management priority recommendations it made but that were not selected by the Council for 2021. Several committee members suggested that a monkfish performance report might provide information that would help the Committee and Council identify management priorities in the future. Ms. Raymond commented that as a priority and to be consistent with the MSA, the Council should consider ways to minimize regulatory discards and avoid the unnecessary waste of fish. She explained that understanding the economic constraints that restrict landings in the southern area, discards still are higher than landings and total about 13 million pounds. Mr. DiDomenico suggested that the Committee request the Advisory Panel to comment on and rank the priority

recommendations. The Committee asked Council staff to elicit Advisory Panel input including the ranking of priorities through email correspondence if necessary.

As a result of its discussion and public comments, the Committee developed the following consensus statement about 2022 management priorities.

2. CONSENSUS STATEMENT

1. Initiate specifications for FY 2023-2025 including potential modifications to the discard estimation methods based on the recent work done by the PDT
2. To direct the Advisory Panel (AP) with assistance from the PDT to develop a fishery performance report to help the Council/Committee better understand present conditions in the fishery

The Committee also recommended the following priorities but did not rank them. In response to a request from Mr. DiDomenico, an AP member, it agreed that the Monkfish AP be consulted on how it would rank the following priorities.

- That the PDT analyze the characteristics of the fishery, including the active monkfish participants and any impacts of the entry of latent effort from other fisheries.
- To consider alternative ways to increase efficiency in the monkfish fishery by 1) reducing bycatch by turning discards into landings, 2) allowing either back-loading or front-loading DAS, 3) increasing trip limits, and/or 4) allowing monkfish DAS leasing
- To consider gear-specific discard mortality estimates based on any new research
- To consider a 12-inch minimum mesh size for gillnets in the monkfish fishery
- To consider requiring VMS for the federal monkfish fishery

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed by the Committee.

The Monkfish Committee meeting adjourned at about 12:30 p.m.