



## New England Fishery Management Council

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John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** October 10, 2019  
**TO:** Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)  
**FROM:** Tom Nies, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** **Terms of Reference – Overfishing levels (OFLs) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for groundfish stocks for fishing years 2020 to 2022**

#### Terms of Reference

Review the 2019 Groundfish Operational Assessments and work of the Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT). Considering the Council's Risk Policy Statement, provide an OFL and an ABC for each stock for each year 2020, 2021, and 2022 that will prevent overfishing, and achieve rebuilding if needed, consistent with the Council's ABC control rule for groundfish stocks. (See list of documents for the assessment summary and Groundfish PDT report under Information below).

#### Background

Fourteen groundfish stocks were recently assessed (as listed below) and ten of these stocks were peer reviewed during the 2019 Groundfish Operational Assessments in September 2019, while the remaining four stocks (marked with “\*”) were provided by direct delivery to the PDT and SSC as recommended by the Assessment Oversight Panel (i.e., as Level 1 assessments<sup>1</sup>). Stocks to review include:

1. Georges Bank Cod\*
2. Gulf of Maine Cod
3. Georges Bank Haddock
4. Gulf of Maine Haddock
5. Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder
6. Cape Code/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder
7. Georges Bank Winter Flounder
8. American Plaice
9. Witch Flounder\*
10. Pollock
11. White Hake
12. Atlantic Halibut\*
13. Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Windowpane Flounder
14. Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Windowpane Flounder\*

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the process, see [https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/11\\_Stock-assessment-process-FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/11_Stock-assessment-process-FINAL.pdf).

ABC recommendations are to be based on the fishing mortality strategies approved by the Council in Amendments 13 and 16 and related management actions. Status determination criteria should be used that are specified in Amendment 16 or subsequent actions. The general control rule for groundfish stocks that has been adopted is:

*"These ABC control rules will be used in the absence of better information that may allow a more explicit determination of scientific uncertainty for a stock or stocks. If such information is available - that is, if scientific uncertainty can be characterized in a more accurate fashion -- it can be used by the SSC to determine ABCs, these ABC control rules can be modified in a future Council action (an amendment, framework, or specification package):*

- a. *ABC should be determined as the catch associated with 75% of  $F_{MSY}$ .*
- b. *If fishing at 75% of  $F_{MSY}$  does not achieve the mandated rebuilding requirements for overfished stocks, ABC should be determined as the catch associated with the fishing mortality that meets rebuilding requirements ( $F_{rebuild}$ ).*
- c. *For stocks that cannot rebuild to  $B_{MSY}$  in the specified rebuilding period, even with no fishing, the ABC should be based on incidental bycatch, including a reduction in bycatch rate (i.e., the proportion of the stock caught as bycatch).*
- d. *Interim ABCs should be determined for stocks with unknown status according to case-by-case recommendations from the SSC."*

## **Information**

- A.1 The Council's Risk Policy Road Map (2016), that includes the Risk Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, see pp. 4-5.
- A.2 Operational Stock Assessments of 14 Northeast Groundfish Stocks through 2018, including the peer review reports for each stock, version for PDT and SSC meetings (NEFSC, October 2019)
- A.3 Supplemental Information: Stock Assessment Support Information (SASINF) - use this link to access the database which include the assessment reports, peer review presentations, additional information and :  
[http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi\\_report\\_options.php](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi_report_options.php)
- A.4 Background: Affected Environment, excerpt from DRAFT Amendment 23/Groundfish Monitoring, NEFMC, October 2019.
- A.5 Background: State of the Ecosystem and Current Conditions. NOAA/NEFSC. Available at : <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/ecosys/ecosystem-status-report/> and <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/ecosys/current-conditions/>
- A.6 Memo SSC to Council re OFL and ABC recommendations for groundfish stocks for fishing years 2018-2020, Nov. 30, 2017.
- A.7 Memo SSC to Council re OFL and ABC recommendations for Atlantic halibut for fishing years 2018-2020, Jan. 16, 2018.
- A.8 Memo from the Groundfish PDT to SSC re candidate groundfish OFLs/ABCs for FY2020-FY2022.
- A.9 Presentation: Overview of the 2019 Groundfish Operational Assessments (NEFSC staff)
- A.10 Presentation: Groundfish PDT Report (NEFMC staff)