



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 19, 2022
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee
FROM: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference – Overfishing limits, acceptable biological catches, and discard deduction approach for monkfish, 2023 through 2025**

OVERFISHING LIMITS AND ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCHES

Terms of Reference

1. Review information from the September 2022 management track assessment for monkfish and provided by the Monkfish Plan Development Team (PDT).
2. Comment on the conclusion of the assessment and peer review that the stock status of monkfish is unknown and the applicability of the NOAA Fisheries [*Procedural Guidance for Changing Assessed Stock Status from Known to Unknown*](#).
3. Recommend overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for monkfish in both the northern and southern management areas for fishing years (FY) 2023-2025 that will prevent overfishing, meet the objectives of the fishery management plan, and consider the Council’s Risk Policy Statement.

Background

On September 20-22, 2022, an operational assessment for monkfish was peer reviewed. The assessment updated catch data revised the discard mortality rate for scallop dredges, and updated trawl survey indices. Due to uncertainties with monkfish aging and growth, monkfish assessments since 2016 have been unable to estimate monkfish abundance and a fishing mortality rate. Instead, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center has been using the recent trend in the trawl survey index for developing catch advice. The 2016, 2019, and 2022 assessments have concluded that the stock status of monkfish is unknown, though NOAA Fisheries has not officially changed the status from the conclusion of the 2013 assessment: not overfished and overfishing not occurring. Additionally, the PDT provided information on updating specifications using the results of the 2022 assessment and other information for the SSC to consider.

DISCARD DEDUCTION APPROACH

Terms of Reference

1. Review analyses provided by the Monkfish PDT of alternate approaches for setting the discard deduction from the annual catch target when setting specifications.
2. Recommend an approach for setting the discard deduction, commenting on the PDT's recommendations.

Background

For the northern and southern monkfish management areas, specifications are set every three years and follow a hierarchy of an ABC, an annual catch limit (ACL) set equal to the ABC, an ACT set equal to 97% of the ACL (a 3% management uncertainty buffer), and TAL set equal to the difference between the ACT and expected discards (i.e., the discard deduction). For each monkfish stock, the TAL is set by first identifying the discard rate. This rate is the latest 3-year mean of calendar year monkfish discards divided by calendar year monkfish catch. Next, the discard rate is applied to the ACT to identify the expected discards. Last, the expected discards (i.e., the discard deduction) is subtracted from the ACT to identify the TAL.

In December 2021, the Council set the following as a work priority for the FY 2023-2025 specifications action: "Potential modifications to the discard estimation methods based on the recent work done by the PDT". As the unusually large 2015-year class entered the fishery, discards in 2016-2018 increased, causing the discard rate and expected discards for setting FY 2020-2022 specifications to increase. The discard rate for the northern area increased modestly from the FY 2017-2019 specifications (13.9% to 18.2%), but the increase in the southern area was more pronounced (24.6% to 50.8%). Thus, the TALs for FY 2020-2022 were lower than expected, especially for the southern area. Over the past few years, the PDT and a contracted consultant (Fishery Applications Consulting Team) have explored alternate approaches for setting the discard deduction.

In 2022, PDT has analyzed five alternate approaches to setting the discard deduction and is providing a recommendation for the SSC to consider approving.

INFORMATION

1. 2022 Management Track Assessment of Monkfish
 - a. NEFSC staff presentation
 - b. Stock assessment report
 - c. Peer review report
2. Presentation: Monkfish PDT report (NEFMC staff)
3. Memo from Monkfish PDT to SSC re OFLs and ABCs for FY 2023 – 2025, October 19, 2022
4. NEFMC Risk Policy
 - a. Risk Policy Matrix for Monkfish
 - b. NEFMC Risk Policy Road Map (2016), that includes the Risk Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, see pp. 4-5 and 10-12.
5. NOAA Fisheries [*Procedural Guidance for Changing Assessed Stock Status from Known to Unknown*](#)
6. Memo from SSC to Council re OFLs and ABCs for FY 2020-2022
7. Discard deduction approaches
 - a. Memo from Monkfish PDT to SCC re discard deduction approaches, October 19, 2022

- b. O'Keefe C. (2020). *Evaluation of Methods to Estimate Monkfish Discards for Calculating Total Allowable Landings*. Fishery Applications Consulting Team LLC with support from the New England Fishery Management Council. 32 p.
 - c. O'Keefe C. (2021). 2021 Evaluation of Monkfish Discard Estimation for Calculating Total Allowable Landings. Fishery Applications Consulting Team LLC with support from the New England Fishery Management Council. 19 p.
8. Background Information
- a. 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report
 - b. NOAA/NEFSC. *2022 State of the Ecosystem Reports*. Available at:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/ecosystems/state-ecosystem-reports-northeast-us-shelf>

Other 2022 monkfish stock assessment documents are available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/peer-review-2022-september-management-track-assessments>