



## New England Fishery Management Council

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### MEETING SUMMARY

#### Scallop Plan Development Team

May 12, 2020

Webinar Meeting

The Scallop PDT met via webinar on May 12, 2020 to: 1) discuss the outlook for 2020 surveys and preparing for FY2021-2022 specifications development; 2) receive an update on discussion from the NLS-West sub-group; 3) receive a brief update on impact analyses for A21; and 4) discuss other business.

#### **MEETING ATTENDANCE:**

Jonathon Peros (Plan Coordinator), Sam Asci, Ben Galuardi, Chad Keith, Dave Rudders, Dvora Hart, Naresh Pradhan, Rachel Feeney, Chris Parkins, Travis Ford, Bill DuPaul, Carl Wilson. Scallop RSA partners on the call included Kevin Stokesbury and Kyle Cassidy (SMAST), Liese Siemann and Tasha O'Hara (CFF).

Vincent Balzano (Scallop Committee Chair) was in attendance along with approximately 10 members of the public listening in on the call.

The meeting began at 10:01 AM. Council staff welcomed the PDT and members of the public to the call. The primary goal for the meeting was to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the timing of 2020 surveys and development of 2021-2022 specifications given potential data delays. The PDT would also receive and update on recent discussion by the NLS-West sub-group and a brief update on the status of Amendment 21.

#### 2020 Survey Outlook Discussion

The PDT reviewed key points from a recent call with RSA survey groups related to the impact of COVID-19 on the timing of 2020 surveys. Staff emphasized that the health and welfare of all survey groups and industry partners is paramount, and that the 2021/2022 specifications can be completed with using data from last year's survey information (basically a two-year specification cycle). No survey group should feel forced or obligated by NMFS or the Council to complete work this year – arrangements can be made to delay projects/awards. Additional details on this matter were provided by each survey group as follows.

*VIMS Dredge Survey:* Dr. Rudders has been in discussion with the VIMS administration on planning for the 2020 dredge survey but had no other news to report.

*SMAST Drop Camera:* Dr. Stokesbury noted that the UMass administration would be providing an update on the COVID-19 response later in the day. In addition to the mobile testing facility available to fishermen in New Bedford, a "quick test" facility has now gone online in Fall River, MA that serves the

test fishermen and shoreside workers. Some seafood processors and scallop vessels have reported COVID-19 cases recently, so it is important more than every to be cautious when planning survey efforts in the near future.

*CFF HabCam:* Tasha O'Hara explained that CFF is still planning to complete an 18-day HabCam survey over two trips starting in late June or early July.

*Maine DMR Dredge:* Carl Wilson did not have any further updates on the ME DMR dredge survey of Stellwagen Bank aside from what had already been reported to the PDT. One of the key issues ME DMR is dealing with is scientists and fishermen coming from an area with very low community transmission (i.e. Maine) to a place with more dense population (i.e. Gloucester).

*NEFSC Dredge/HabCam:* Chad Keith noted that NEFSC had been in discussion with the University of Delaware and have been assured that the scallop survey is the priority for the R/V Sharp. Sea time will be available to NEFSC for the dredge/HabCam surveys when NOAA and public health guidelines allow it. At this time, the R/V Sharp will be delayed leaving the dock until at least July 1<sup>st</sup>. Ahead of the survey itself, NEFSC needs to be in the office 3-4 weeks before the survey departs to prepare, meaning they would need access to the office in the near future in order for preparations to be complete by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Prep time is also needed for the HabCam portion of the survey, which is currently located at WHOI.

It was suggested that as things progress and survey groups get closer to sailing, that it would be helpful to make other groups aware of the protocols they have put in place.

### Discussion on Timelines for Developing 2021-2022 Specifications:

Council staff reviewed a series of timelines for developing 2021-2022 specifications that account for potential delays in survey data. This year is more complicated than other years because of the expected delays caused by COVID-19, Labor Day falling on September 7<sup>th</sup>, and the scallop management track assessment scheduled for the week of September 14<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Hart highlighted the workload associated with the management track scallop assessment and the magnitude of time and attention that will be needed preparing for it by NEFSC stock assessment scientists; they noted that the timeline for developing specifications would be strained as a result of the assessment, regardless of a potential delay in survey data. Council staff felt that this timing/workload bottleneck was not strictly the product of COVID-19 delays, and indicated they planned to speak with Council leadership about these concerns. Further discussion suggested that another option would be to do the management track assessment in the spring, but that doing so would mean that any changes to  $F_{msy}$  would not be accounted for until the 2022/2023 specifications process.

Council staff walked through three scenarios for completing the 2021/2022 specifications. In a typical year, data would be due the week of August 14<sup>th</sup> to the NEFSC for the Council to take action in December of 2020. Staff reviewed a scenario where data delivery is delayed 3 weeks for a final vote at the December Council meeting, and a scenario when survey data is due October 1, 2020 and the Council takes final action in January 2021. Dr. Hart felt that a late September data deadline might work better for getting to a final vote on specifications in January. Council staff stated that an earlier date could be considered once more information on the survey outlook is available.

## Discussion on FY2020 Market Grades/Prices/LPUE

Some RSA survey partners had raised concern about the impact of COVID-19 on scallop prices as it relates to the ability of survey groups to achieve the funding they budgeted for based on the RSA common price of \$9.50 per pound. Ben Galuardi (GARFO APSD) provided the PDT with a brief presentation on trends in market grade, price, and LPUE thus far in fishing year 2020. A key point from the presentation was that scallop price has been trending upwards for most areas since start of the 2020 fishing year, but that the average ex-vessel price still remains slightly under \$10 per pound.

The PDT discussed fishing behavior as a response to COVID-19. Larger scallops command a premium as this market grade usually is sought after by restaurants as opposed to smaller scallops which generally support the retail/freezer market. With restaurants being closed for several months, the demand for U10s has diminished and many scallop vessels are electing to fish in areas with 10-20 and 20-30 count scallops as these grades have continued supporting a stable market.

It was noted that many survey groups will have trouble meeting the demands of the work that was budgeted for through RSA awards for 2020 surveys if prices continue to be below the common price of \$9.50. The PDT will continue tracking price trends and work with RSA survey groups and the NEFSC on this issue moving forward.

There was some general discussion on price forecasting as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on seafood markets. The PDT does not forecast scallop prices in season, but does do some projections as part of specifications. This issue is something that the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch would investigate. Council staff noted that NOAA has been looking at this on a national level, and more information may be released later this summer. There was interest expressed in price forecasting models by a member of the PDT.

There were some general comments in support of continuing to hold PDT meetings remotely while there is any risk of exposure to COVID-19.

## NLS-West Discussion

Council staff presented key discussion points from a recent call of the NLS-West sub-group. This PDT sub-group is focused on investigating the cause of the 50 million pounds of unaccounted for biomass in the NLS-West between 2018 and 2019. The sub-group is interested in examining the NLS-West access area on a finer scale in terms of scallop biomass and fishing effort. When the area opened, there were multiple patches of scallops in high densities. The goal is to understand when and where mortality may have happened. A member of the PDT reiterated a point about the reported split meats from the NLS-West in FY2018—they and others agreed it could potentially have contributing factor to the lost biomass, but did not feel it could be attributed as the leading cause. Tyler Staples (NEFOP) noted that there were over 300 observed tows conducted in the NLS-West during trips where the observer had a gonadosomatic 3D camera—the images have not yet been reviewed, but Mr. Staples suggested coordinating with WHOI to get the images for further investigation. There was continued discussion on the importance of understanding area swept in the NLS-West to potentially inform what cause the loss of biomass there. The PDT will continue working on this issue over the summer (i.e. following the June Council meeting).

## Amendment 21 Update

Council staff reviewed the changes made to Amendment 21 as directed by the Council at their April meeting. Staff continue analyzing impacts of the range of alternatives in A21 and the Council is expected to select preferred alternatives at the June Council meeting. Council staff are planning to complete an EA for Amendment 21. This will require modifications to the timeline that has been presented, which assumed that an EIS would be required. Staff explained that after the June Council meeting they will need to work with the Committee Chair to schedule public hearings, and plan next steps. When the Council considers taking final action will depend on how and when it would like to hold public hearings. Holding in-person meetings will be difficult in the short term. Staff explained that there will be trade-offs with delaying final action, such as having little time to address new priorities in 2021. There were no questions on comments from the PDT on this agenda item.

## Other Business

It was noted that all scheduled PDT, AP, CTE, and Council meetings are being held remotely, and that PDT members are encouraged to listen in to upcoming scallop meetings. No other business was discussed.

The meeting adjourned a 11:36 AM.