New England Fishery Management Council
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DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team
November 5, 2020
Webinar Meetings

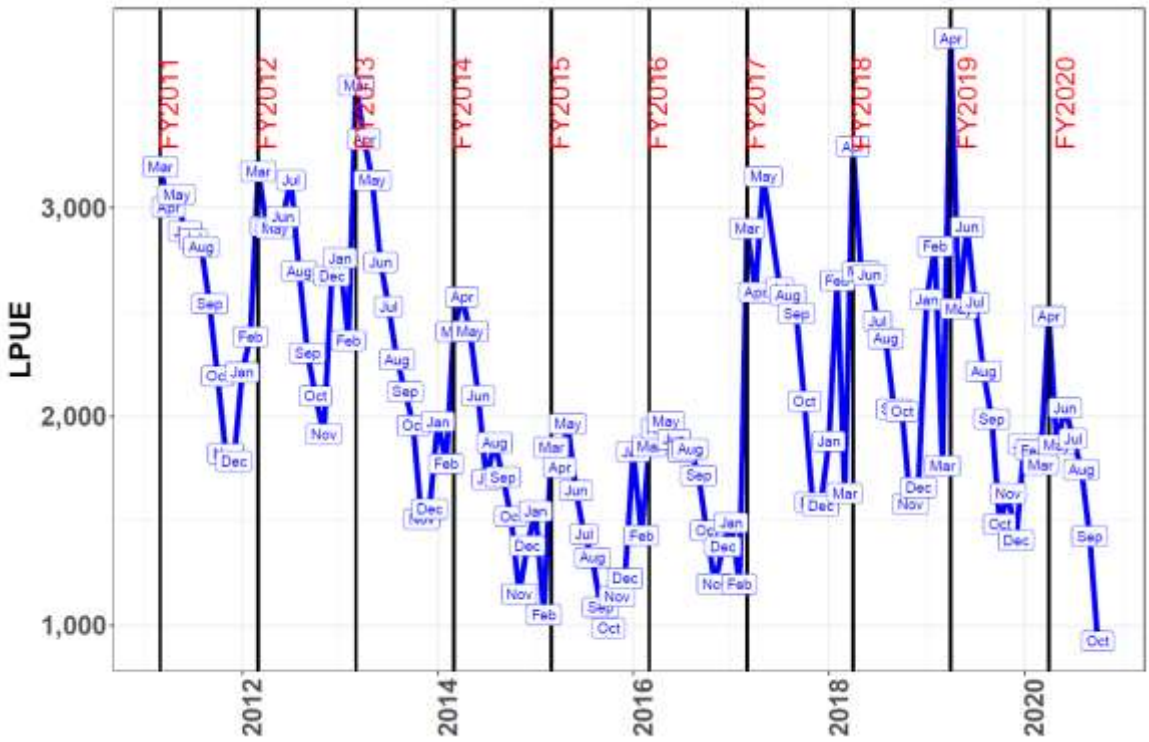
The Scallop PDT met via webinar on November 5, 2020 to: 1) review fishery performance data (i.e., market grades and LPUE), 2) discuss SAMS runs – LPUE considerations, OFL/ABC projections, initial SAMS runs, 3) review outline of SSC memo, 4) review updated FY2019 Year-End report.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:
Jonathon Peros (Plan Coordinator), Sam Asci, Ben Galuardi, Dave Rudders, Dvora Hart, Naresh Pradhan, Rachel Feeney, Chris Parkins, Travis Ford, Bill DuPaul, Kelly Whitmore, Tim Cardiasmenos, and Amber Lisi.

Fishery Performance Update

Ben Galuardi (GARFO) presented updated fishery performance data through October 2020. The calculation of open area landings per unit of effort (LPUE) for the limited access component is the total days-at-sea utilization divided by landings (based on dealer reports). DAS calculation is based on the time between a vessel crossing the demarcation line to when the vessel crosses back over the demarcation line returning to port. LPUE has been lower in FY2020 to date compared to FY2017-FY2019 and appears to be continuing to decline as the fishing year progresses (Figure 1). LPUE, monthly open area landings, and cumulative landings by month in FY2020 have been tracking closely with the trend seen in FY2016.

Figure 1 – LPUE by month for open area LA fishing. LPUE was calculated by dividing monthly scallop meat totals by the days-at-sea charged (source: GARFO).



Discussion on LPUE in the SAMS Model

The primary focus of the discussion on initial SAMS runs was around realized LPUE in FY2020 relative what was projected, and how to account for lower than expected LPUE in the SAMS model moving forward. Projected LPUE for FY2020 was roughly 2,450 pounds per day, though projections for the current year made recently have been less than 2,100 pound per day. In the SAMS model, LPUE is a function of exploitable biomass and the FY2020 projections of exploitable biomass were overestimated for the majority of SAMS areas, meaning realized LPUE is lower than what was projected as well. When large year classes recruit to the fishery, they are typically found in higher density aggregations which drive higher catch rates – in this situation, it is not uncommon for LPUE to be underestimated in the SAMS model. On the other hand, as year-classes in the resource are fished down, effort spreads out and occurs less on higher density aggregations that drive high catch rates – in this scenario, such as this year, it is not uncommon for LPUE to be overestimated in the SAMS model.

For the SAMS model base run, the PDT discussed down weighting the LPUE assumption used in the SAMS model by 15% to account for the lower open area catch rates that are expected for FY2021. The justification for reducing LPUE by 15% is that this equates to observed LPUE in the fishery at present (~1,800 pounds per day) – making this adjustment is not saying that the fishery is underperforming, but rather that the exploitable biomass is lower than expected. It was noted that down weighting LPUE will not affect the OFL/ABC projection for 2021. Overall, the PDT felt that adjusting LPUE is consistent with using the best available science and recommended down weighting LPUE by 15% in SAMS model runs for FY2021.

Discussion on Initial SAMS Runs, Outlook for FY2021

The PDT reviewed initial SAMS outputs for No Action, Status Quo, PDT Base Run, and PDT Base Run adjusted for lower LPUE (Table 1).

- A spatial management scenario of four access area trips at 18,000 pounds with 24 DAS resulted in between 40.4 and 42.7 million pounds of landings for 2021. The range is driven by different estimates of LPUE of the DAS (discussed above). This scenario called for two trips in the MAAA, one trip in the NLS-S, and one trip in CAII-SW.
- Some concerns were raised around potential fishing behavior in Closed Area II Southwest (CAII-SW) should a trip be allocated there in FY2021. This area has a high density aggregation of scallops concentrated in a relatively small area – comments were made on this being a similar situation as the NLS-West in past years; however, it was also noted that CAII-SW is different than the NLS-West in that it has different bottom type and is more suitable for scallop growth. Concerns around sediment clogging the gills of scallops (i.e., one theory on what happened in the NLS-West) are minimal in CAII-SW. The PDT noted the importance of CAII-SW to the fishery moving forward, and several PDT members voiced support for a trip to this area in FY2021.
- In the MAAA, projected F in FY2021 is expected to be around 0.6 with two trips. Dr. Hart suggested that, based on the age of the majority of scallops in the area (~8 years old), ramping up effort is consistent with the principals of rotational management – at their age and size, natural mortality exceeds their growth rate, meaning the less scallops harvested next year will mean less yield in FY2022. Some felt that less effort in FY2021 would mean this area could support another trip in FY2022.
- The tradeoff of increasing DAS in 2021 to achieve the same open area harvest as projected under the base run is that LPUE will be reduced over the course of FY2021 and for years to follow. The PDT expressed some concern around the outlook for open area fishing in the coming years and felt it will be important to fish conservatively so that the open bottom is not exasperated. With regard to CAII-Ext, the PDT noted this area has a lot of growth potential and felt it should remain closed for FY2021, but that it could potential be candidate for open area fishing in FY2022.
- The Southern Flank is a large area and the biomass is more spread out compared to other parts of eastern Georges Bank with high density aggregations (e.g., CAII-SW, CAII-Ext). The PDT felt the SF should remain as part of the open bottom for FY2021.
- The PDT considered access area trip increments of 9,000-pounds with an 18,000-pound possession limit (i.e., similar to FW32) as a tool to meter effort in partial trips. For example, instead of 2 trips allocated to the MAAA or NLS-South, 1.5 trips could be allocated to relieve fishing mortality. Partial trip allocations and allowing trip trading in half-trip increments, such as what was done for FY2020, are not an enforcement issue and have been handled well administratively.

Table 1 – Initial 2021 SAMS runs output for No Action, Status Quo, and PDT Base runs.

Run	MAAcc		CL2SE		CL2SW		NLSS		Open				Total Landings	
	Trips	F	Trips	F	Trips	F	Trips	F	DAS	F	Catch	LPUE	mt	mill lbs
Base	2	0.6	0	0	1	0.25	1	0.21	24	0.36	8420	2098	19368	42.70
Base-LowLPUE	2	0.6	0	0	1	0.25	1	0.21	24	0.31	7410	1799	18359	40.47
NA/Default	1	0.23	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0.28	6816	2127	9546	21.05

SSC Memo

Council staff gave an overview of the draft memo to the SSC re: OFL/ABC projections for FY2021/2022. The goal is to send the memo to the SSC on November 17th and the PDT will continue updating the memo via correspondence before then. There was no PDT discussion.

FY2019 Year-End Report Update & State Waters Landings

Ben Galuardi provided a brief overview on the updated FY2019 Year-End report. Modifications were made to the state water landings estimate that was previously presented to the PDT in October. The PDT briefly discussed how state water landings are accounted for fishery-wide catch limits and ultimately recommended using the updated state water landings estimate to calculate the three year average that will be incorporated into the ACL-flow chart for FY2021.

General Discussion on Bycatch

The PDT briefly discussed the lack of new observer data from CAII and how it related to flatfish bycatch projections moving forward. The most recent 12-months of data are used for bycatch projections, meaning 2017 data will be used for CAII (i.e., the most recent year of observer data available for this area). Based on the downward trend of both northern windowpane and GB yellowtail flounder over the past several years, the PDT noted that projections based on 2017 data will likely be overestimated. There were several suggestions for potential sensitivity analyses that could be conducted to support this discussion in the future, such as looking to VIMS/CFF data from CAII. The PDT will continue discussing this topic later in November.

The meeting ended at 2:57 PM.