



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

July 28, 2021

Webinar Meeting

The Scallop PDT met via webinar on July 28, 2021 to: 1) receive update on 2021 work priorities and develop input on Evaluation of Rotational Management work priority; 2) discuss northern windowpane bycatch estimate and accountability measure; 3) develop input for Groundfish PDT on outlook for scallop fishing and GB yellowtail bycatch in FY2022; 4) Framework 34: discuss survey coverage issues, range of possible measures; and 5) discuss other business.

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, Sharon Benjamin, and Jessica Blaylock. There were approximately 8 members of the public listening in on the call.

Evaluation of Rotational Management

Following an overview of 2021 work priorities for the Scallop FMP, Council staff provided an overview of the “evaluation of rotational management” priority workplan. The Council hired a contractor (Dr. Cate O’Keefe) to assist with compiling information and writing the report as outlined in the [request for proposals](#) published on June 21, 2021.

Following a review of the draft project timeline, there were comments noting the target completion date (i.e., January/February 2021) and the overlap in completing the evaluation with development of Framework 34 in the fall. Given the busy fall schedule for Scallop PDT members, many suggested that extending the timeline for this work priority would allow the PDT to focus more attention on the evaluation and ultimately result in a more comprehensive end product. Some suggested extending the evaluation deadline following the late winter and early springs months. Staff noted that this is a one-year priority and that the work should be nearing completion before the next priority list is established (i.e., December); however, the Council could elect to extend the timeline at a later date. Based on this feedback, Dr. O’Keefe and Council staff will work with a sub-group of the PDT to compile a more detailed project outline and expected outcomes for further discussion at the PDT meeting in September.

For the content of the project, the PDT discussed elements of Amendment 10 (A10) that they felt were important to evaluate. It was noted that the rotational management program has evolved

considerably since the implementation of A10. A10 included many guidelines, such as the growth potential criteria that was meant to be the basis for opening and closing rotational areas. The PDT noted that while these have been considered in some years, they have not been used in the development of recent specifications packages. Overall, many on the PDT felt that the broader objectives of rotational management have been satisfied. It was also pointed out that the decisions made by the Council in developing specifications have evolved over time; for example, with more survey information, the Council has been able to manage rotational areas at a finer scale in recent years compared to when A10 was implemented. Other aspects of rotational management that have evolved include how the fishery accesses rotational areas; for example, the allocation of trips morphed to allowing broken trips, then changed so that access area allocations are made in pounds instead of trips giving vessels additional flexibility when fishing in access areas. It was also noted that the use of “flex” pounds should be a component of this evaluation. Many on the PDT felt that it will be important to get industry feedback on these aspects of rotational management that have evolved over time to gauge how they are working from an operational standpoint.

Flatfish Bycatch Issues

Staff noted that the scallop fishery sub-ACL for northern windowpane (NWP) flounder was exceeded for FY2020 (~290% of the sub-ACL). Typically, bycatch estimation for the scallop fishery is based on a cumulative d/K using the most recent 12 months of data. Because of the void in observer coverage due to COVID and somewhat lower coverage rates since August 2020, the 2020 bycatch estimates were instead based on a 2-year cumulative d/K from FY2019 and FY2020. Bycatch estimates were based on typical strata (i.e., by access area or open area, as well as by fleet); however, in areas like CAII where no observed data were available (i.e., prior to 2020, CAII hadn't been fished since 2017), bycatch estimates were based on the broad stock d/K from 2019. The PDT discussed this approach and there were some suggestions that NWP bycatch in CAII was likely overestimated because NWP bycatch is usually lower in CAII compared to the broad stock area. Most NWP bycatch comes from open area trips and to a lesser extent from CAI – also, looking back to 2019, a higher proportion of total NWP bycatch was from the LAGC fleet (broad stock d/K from 2019 included catch from both LA and LAGC components). The 2020 observed trips were not included in the broad stock d/K estimate because there was some concern around seasonal bias that could be introduced due to the limited stretch of time in 2020 when observers were deployed.

Staff reviewed the draft memo to the Groundfish PDT related to Georges Bank yellowtail (GB yellowtail) bycatch in the scallop fishery and the outlook for the scallop fishery in the GB yellowtail stock area. The purpose of this memo is to help inform SSC discussion when recommending catch limits for GB yellowtail later this summer. There was limited discussion on the draft memo, but the PDT would provide feedback via correspondence following the meeting.

Framework 34

Staff reviewed the workplan for Framework 34. Related to development of specifications for the 2022 fishing year, survey groups provided updates on their progress for the 2021 survey season:

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) 2021 dredge survey of the Mid-Atlantic Bight, Nantucket Lightship region, and eastern Georges Bank and Closed Area I Sliver were completed

on time. There was no evidence of a large recruitment event in the Mid-Atlantic Access Area, and that area appears to be getting to the end of its life cycle. There were no changes to the downward trend in biomass in the DMV area (i.e., it remains very low) and nematodes appeared to be distributed throughout the Mid-Atlantic similar to past years. Not much recruitment was evident in the Long Island region. George Bank surveys suggested an encouraging signal of biomass and fishing activity. Multiple year classes were observed along with fishing activity in and around Closed Area II. There were also some incoming recruits observed in Closed Area II. Not much had changed in the Nantucket Lightship region between the 2020 and 2021 surveys. There were some scallops observed in Closed Area I Sliver and the Great South Channel, but no exceptional recruitment was detected in either area.

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) dredge and HabCam survey covered areas on Georges Bank. On the Northern Edge, moderate recruitment was observed of what appeared to be three year old scallops and the larger, older scallops were observed in the deeper part of CAII HAPC. Extensive mussel beds were also observed in this part of CAII. There were patches of scallops and recruitment in the Great South Channel as is typical for this area. The HabCam survey of the NLS-West observed some recruitment of one year old scallops – this year class was not as substantial as the 2013 year class, but could still afford a viable fishing opportunity if they recruit to the fishery in several years. In the Nantucket Lightship South, the eastern part of the area appeared to be fished down but other parts of the area continue to hold higher densities. The HabCam survey had a technical issue that the R/V Sharp had difficulty addressing at sea (i.e., reterminating the optical cable), so the HabCam survey was cut short. The planned HabCam coverage that was not completed was in the Great South Channel, part of the NLS-North, and CAI.

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) survey was on track for completing survey and annotation work as scheduled. Field work had been completed and SMAST was aiming to have annotations completed by the end of the week.

The PDT discussed preliminary measures that could be included in FW34, such as a potential seasonal closure in the MAAA to limit fishing in this area to times of the year when yield is high, and a closure north of Hudson Canyon to improve yield per recruit in the MAAA. There was also a suggestion that the MAAA could be reverted to open bottom in addition to closing the concentration of scallops observed directly north of the MAAA. The closure north of the MAAA could potentially help seed areas farther south. It was also noted that the area north of the MAAA that could be candidate for potential closure overlaps with wind development areas. Several PDT members spoke strongly in support of pursuing these ideas through FW34.

Related to potentially reverting the MAAA to open bottom, many felt that accessing this area through days at sea management would help self-regulate fishing mortality; for example, vessels fishing DAS will only fish in a certain area if catch rates are viable, whereas fishing mortality can be higher than expected in access areas that cannot support the level of allocation (i.e., vessels continue to fish in the area because they are not limited by time). Overall, the PDT agreed these options were worth considering through Framework 34.

There was another suggestion that the CAII rotational boundaries could be reconfigured to better capture the multiple year classes in that part of the resource for FY2022. The PDT will continue discussion around FW34 after reviewing results from the 2021 surveys in early September.

No other business was discussed. The meeting adjourned at 3:34 PM.