New England Fishery Management Council
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MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team
May 20, 2021; May 27, 2021; June 2, 2021
Webinar Meetings

The Scallop PDT met via webinar on May 20, 2021, May 27, 2021, and June 2, 2021 to: 1) discuss work presented at the 2021 Research Share Days and develop input on 2022-2023 Scallop RSA research priorities as well as the Council's 2021-2025 research priorities and data needs; 2) begin discussion on evaluation of rotational management; 3) begin discussion on LAGC IFQ trip accounting; 4) discuss the 2021 work plan; 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, Danielle Palmer, Sharon Benjamin, Jessica Blaylock, and Amber Lisi. There were approximately15 members of the public listening in on each call.

The following summarizes PDT discussion that occurred over three meetings on May 20, May 27, and June 2, 2021. The goals for the meeting were to make recommendations on the Council's research priorities related to scallops, discuss recent presentations from the 2021 Scallop Research Share Days, form recommendations on 2022/2023 Scallop RSA priorities, and begin work on 2021 work priorities including evaluation of rotational management and LAGC IFQ trip accounting.

Scallop Research Priorities Feedback

The PDT had limited discussion around updates to the Council's research priorities for 2021-2025. The majority of PDT feedback on this topic was communicated through correspondence. There was some discussion around one research priority that was recommended via correspondence: "Study how scallops (and their associated communities and ecosystems) are responding to climate change and evaluate possible adaptations to the changing environment, including signs of evolving genetic structure (per Lehnert et al. 2019, attached), with a rating of important". It was clarified that this recommendation was in reference to ecological/biological communities of scallops, not fishing communities that depend on the scallop fishery; however, it was pointed out that a priority is on the list looking at the impact of climate change and wind development on fishing communities. There was also a recommendation to add the priority "Increase understanding of scallop spatial population structure and population dynamics, including processes such as connectivity, source-sink dynamics" to the list.

2022/2023 Scallop RSA Priorities Discussion

The PDT reviewed Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) priorities from the 2021/2022 cycle to inform discussion and recommendations around 2022/2023 Scallop RSA priorities.. The PDT did not recommend changes to the research topics for the 2022/2023 cycle, but did suggest modifications to the existing language within some topics, and adjusted the rankings of non-survey priorities.

The PDT first focused on non-survey related priorities. Key points from that discussion include:

- The PDT had some broad discussion on long-term research ideas, such as the collection of oceanographic data to inform climate change, ocean acidification, the impacts of offshore wind development, and some aspects of sea turtle research. There was agreement that while aspects of these topics are of interest to the scallop industry, the Scallop RSA program may not be the appropriate funding source to support long-term monitoring and data collection efforts. It was pointed out that other funding sources and organizations are focused on this type of monitoring/research, such as RODA/ROSA, NERACOOS, and NOAA/NOS grants program.
- There was discussion around the scope of sea turtle research that would best inform management of the scallop fishery. There was acknowledgement that research on the impacts of the scallop fishery to sea turtles (i.e., interactions) and the impacts of sea turtles to the scallop fishery (e.g., spread of nematodes) are important topics to pursue. Given the on-going Biological Opinion for the scallop fishery, many on the PDT spoke in favor of keeping the turtle research priority on the list of 2022/2023 RSA priorities. It was noted that the RSA has supported important research related to turtles that was directly integrated into management, such as the development of gear modifications and spatial boundaries for turtle avoidance measures. The PDT recommended adding language to the turtle priority that linked the research to current management measures.

Next, the PDT discussed survey related research priorities. Key points from that discussion include:

- Related to research priorities and the Scallop RSA priorities topic, there was a suggestion around considering mid-season surveys of the scallop resource in addition to annual surveys that occur in the late spring/early summer. Examples of when this would have been useful could be in areas where concentrated fishing occurs and the realized impact of fishing might be uncertain, such as the Nantucket Lightship West in 2019, or potentially in the Mid-Atlantic Access Area as biomass decreases. Many found the idea to be interesting, but questioned how it would be integrated into management given the limited amount of time available to synthesize annual survey data while developing specifications. It was suggested that the PDT continue looking at fishery data and observer data in-season to best inform decisions later in the year (i.e., in place of a mid-season survey). It was also suggested that this topic might be worthwhile to discuss at the Scallop Survey Working Group.

LAGC IFQ Access Area Trip Accounting Discussion

Council staff provided an overview on the 2021 scallop work priority "LAGC IFQ access area trip accounting".. Key points from discussion on LAGC IFQ access area trip accounting include:

- For the reasons described in the staff presentation and discussion document (e.g., data availability, uncertainty in landings in real-time, etc.), GARFO staff noted that trip accounting works far better

when effort is tracked in trips as opposed to pounds. They and others on the PDT strongly recommended that tracking access area fishing in the LAGC IFQ component should continue to be done in numbers of trips (i.e., do not transition to tracking access area fishing in pounds).

- While there was agreement that access area fishing continue to be tracked in trips as opposed to pounds, a variation of the current approach was suggested to better capture actual landings per trip. Instead of assuming that each LAGC IFQ access area trip lands the full possession limit (i.e., currently 600 pounds), average pounds per access area trip could be analyzed, and the maximum landings per trip could be used as an assumption of landings per trip. This way, trip accounting is still based on a certain number of trips, but the assumption of scallops landed is more reflective of reality. This also ensures that closures occur before the total number of expected landings per access area are exceeded.
- There was some discussion around the differences in catch accounting for LAGC AA trips (i.e., counted in trips) and the NGOM management area (i.e., counted in pounds landed). The NGOM was used as an example of why tracking catch in pounds in real-time is difficult (i.e., due to a lag in dealer data, and challenge in accurately projecting a closure when the rate of harvest is high). By tracking catch in pounds, it is impossible to precisely project when the area will close without there being either an overage or underage of the TAC. It was noted that if trips were allocated to the NGOM instead of pounds, closure of the area would be far more precise. This would also mean that reactive AM's for overages in the NGOM would not be necessary because the area could be closed when the total number of trips allocated to the area have been taken.
- It was suggested that there is likely to be some percentage of allocated access area pounds that are not harvested by the limited access fleet. It was also pointed out that LAGC IFQ vessels are only charged the pounds that they land on a trip (i.e., they are not losing IFQ by landing less than the access area trip limit).
- Other rationale for counting trips as opposed to pounds landed is that it makes monitoring access area fishing much easier for the LAGC IFQ fleet. This is because the number of trips taken are known in real-time and can be updated on NMFS quota monitoring website quickly, whereas actual pounds landed are not known for a week or more after trips are complete due to a lag in dealer data.

Follow-up items to be addressed for LAGC IFQ access area trip accounting:

1. Develop the 'maximum average' for calculating a trip, which is described above.
2. Explain the original rationale for tracking IFQ access area effort in trips instead of pounds.
3. Explain the differences between accountability measures for LAGC IFQ access areas and the NGOM management area in the discussion document.

Evaluation of Rotational Management Discussion

Council staff presented background information on the Council's 2021 scallop work priority "evaluation of rotational management", including past PDT discussion on this topic from 2019. The plan for this priority is to bring in a contractor to help the PDT evaluate various aspects of the rotational management program and to report out how the program has performed over time. Key points from the PDT's discussion on this topic include:

- Performance of the rotational management program could be analyzed through available fishery data and biological information collected through annual surveys.

- Many PDT members pointed to the original guidelines for rotational management established through Amendment 10 and noted that the Council has deviated from them over time. It was suggested that the performance of the program could be evaluated against the original criteria for opening and closing access areas.
- Amendment 10 established an area closure/opening criteria based on growth potential. It was noted that this is an output of the SAMS model, but that managers have not used it directly to inform decisions on access area fishing in recent years. Another interesting point to look at would be examining density dependence as it related to growth potential in access areas.
- As data resolution has increased over time, the Council has been able to manage rotational areas on a finer spatial scale. There was interest in analyzing the performance of access area fishing in terms of the spatial scale of access areas.
- Another point of interest would be to analyze fishing behavior in access areas (e.g., such as the response to catch rates, meat yield, and time of year).
- A higher level question that could be investigated is whether the success of the scallop fishery could have been achieved without the balance of rotational management and input controls (such as open-area days at sea management).
- A member of the PDT felt that our experience with both open area and access area fishing has indicated that a catch share management approach is not a good idea. This is because both input and output controls have issues, and they felt they should be used to balance each other. For example, if open area DAS allocations are over-allocated, it does not have a detrimental effect on the resource because vessels are limited by the amount of time they can fish, not the amount of scallops they can harvest. When access areas are over-allocated, realized fishing mortality is elevated compared to what was projected because vessels continue to fish in the area to harvest the pounds that were allocated (i.e., even if they are not there).
- A member of the PDT referenced research performed by Bill Kirkley in the 1990's on a bio-economic model for the scallop fishery that analyzed optimal fleet size and effort – they thought this could be something that is reviewed when discussing the rotational management program.

2021 Work Plan and FY2021 Updates

Council staff provided an overview of the 2021 work plan, including timelines for completion of Amendment 21, development of Framework 34, and how each 2021 work priority will be addressed (Table 1). It was noted that many of the measures proposed through Amendment 21 will be implemented through FW34. During the discussion on FW34, a PDT member noted that there could be some changes to the structure of economic and social impacts as a result of an on-going SSC sub-group that recently reviewed Scallop FW32. Council staff will also be working with NMFS staff to modify the structure of the regulatory impact review (RIR) section that is contained in each Council action. Overall, the plan is to form PDT sub-groups to make progress on each work item over the course of the year and to report back to the full PDT. Subgroups are identified in Table 2 below.

Table 1 - Overview of workplan for integrating A21 measures into FW34.

FW34							
	June	**July**	**August**	**September**	**October**	**November**	**December**
Incorporate NGOM into ACL flowchart			Start Planning	Implement	SSC Review		Final Action WORK ALREADY COMPLETE!
Increase Scallop RSA by 25,000 pounds		RSA FFO			Implement		
Implement New Allocations for NGOM		Start Planning	Draft options for LA and LAGC IFQ harvest	AP & CTE input	Implement		
Increase LAGC IFQ possesion limits to 800 pounds in AA			Planning		Implement		
LAGC IFQ Access Area Accounting	AP & CTE	Draft measures		AP & CTE input	Alternatives in document		
Agency Implementation of A21							
Monitoring the NGOM		PDT Update in July?					
Observer compensation rates and coverage levels							

Table 2 - PDT sub-groups and topic areas (2021 work priorities)

LAGC IFQ Trip Accounting and transitioning to 800lb AA trip limits	**NGOM (ACL Flowchart and Implementing Allocations)** *This includes the OFL/ABC, NGOM allocation split, and how the LA and LAGC IFQ could fish the area*	**Evaluation of Rotational Management** *Data Gathering in June and July – Data pulls.*
Sam Asci (Lead) Travis Ford Ben Galuardi	**Jonathon Peros (Lead)** Sam Asci Travis Ford Dvora Hart Amber Lisi Kelly Whitmore	**Jonathon Peros (Lead)** Sam Asci Ben Galuardi Dvora Hart Jessica Blaylock Dave Rudders Bill DuPaul Sharon Benjamin

Staff also reviewed fishery data to date for FY2021 and encouraged the PDT to share any reports they have heard from the water. Some general comments were made around 20-30 market grades being landed from the NLS-South-Deep, and that meat sizes seemed to be higher than what was expected for FY2021. Other reports noted that open area fishing throughout the southern flank of Georges Bank continues to be better than anticipated, while fishing in the Mid-Atlantic Access Area appears to be tapering off compared to recent years (which was expected). Overall, ex-vessel prices reported on the auction have been higher than the past several years.

Other Business

A representative of the Fisheries Survival Fund (FSF) raised the topic of wind development in the Mid-Atlantic Bight region on the May 27, 2021 call. They (FSF) are in the process of advocating for buffers between the current NY-Bight wind energy areas and the Mid-Atlantic Access Area and are trying to gather information that describes the importance of the Hudson Canyon scallop area to the scallop resource. The PDT noted that this is typically a very productive area and pointed to several references that have examined the relationship between Hudson Canyon and scallop productivity throughout the southern range of the Mid-Atlantic. Council staff suggested the FSF contact NMFS for data on this topic, and explained that the Council is addressing wind related impacts on fisheries through the Habitat Committee.