



New England Fishery Management Council

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FINAL MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Advisory Panel Meeting

Sheraton Four Points – Revere, MA

March 31, 2015

The Scallop AP met on March 31, 2015 in Revere, MA to make recommendations for the Scallop Committee to consider the following day on three issues: 1) review the draft action plan for Amendment 19 and discuss the possible range of alternatives; 2) review a draft white paper on inshore scallop fishing issues and discuss ideas for a future workshop; and 3) have an initial discussion of research priorities for the 2016 RSA funding announcement. The AP also reviewed updated draft maps produced by the Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) for scallop fishing locations.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Peter Hughes (Chairman); James Gutowski (Vice Chair); Scott Bailey, James Fletcher, Eric Hansen, Kirk Larson, Michael Marchetti, Brady Lybarger, Robert Maxwell, Charles Quinn, and Edward Welch.

AP members absent: Ron Enoksen, Gary Hatch, Bob Keese, and Paul Parker

Deirdre Boelke and Demet Haksever (NEFMC staff); and Travis Ford (NMFS GARFO staff). In addition, approximately 10 members of the public attended.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The AP reviewed the draft action plan for Amendment 19 and discussed several recommendations for clarification.
- The AP did not have a full discussion of the draft white paper on the inshore fishing issue primarily because several AP members were not in attendance. Instead the AP will discuss at a future meeting.
- The AP provided some input to George Lapointe, working with NROC, on draft maps that are being prepared to summarize fishing location areas.
- The AP had an initial conversation about potential research priorities for the 2016 RSA announcement. One motion was passed related to this topic.

AGENDA ITEM #1: REVIEW AND DISCUSS AMENDMENT 19

PRESENTATION: DEIRDRE BOELKE, NEFMC STAFF, SCALLOP PDT CHAIR

Staff summarized the Draft Action Plan for Amendment 19 including a summary of the potential range of alternatives and various timelines. Final action for Amendment 19 is expected in

September 2015 with possible implementation in June 2016, which is after the start of the scallop fishing year. Therefore, all of the measures developed may not be in place until the 2017 fishing year.

There was some discussion of adding an alternative for an automatic mid-year adjustment. A question was raised about whether a Council meeting would be required or not. A member of the audience suggested that the document may want to specify that there are actually two types of No Action or Status Quo – both one year actions with one year default as well as two year actions with one year default. It was also suggested that the document include a clear explanation of data collection requirements for each alternative so it is clear if different options necessitate different requirements.

PRESENTATION: TRAVIS FORD, GARFO STAFF, SCALLOP PDT MEMBER

Mr. Ford gave a presentation on the process used in Alaska for timing of groundfish specifications. He noted that there are three major differences between the process there and the process currently used in the scallop fishery. First, the proposed rule published in AK is not the final Council recommendation; it is published earlier before the Council has made final recommendations. Second, the document the Council prepares and submits is a “supplemental information report” or SIR instead of a framework document with environmental assessment. Third, package only includes specifications, no additional measures are added. All of these reduce the overall time needed to develop, review, and implement specifications.

A member of the audience asked whether use of interim final rule could be used to also speed up the process. The AP discussed that the current delay is not as much of an issue for the GB access areas because many vessels do not want to be fishing in those areas in March and April anyway, but the delay can be an issue for the resource in MA access areas if the delay is too long. Another commented that these delays could become more of an issue in the future with current seasonal closures in the fall and potential seasons to reduce gear conflict with the lobster fishery (proposed to start on June 15). Overall the panel agreed that more time should be spent developing default measures to see if there are allocations that could be in place March 1 that are certain, and not likely to change. A member of the audience asked if the Amendment should also consider changing how fishing target levels are set to better incorporate the desire to stabilize catches from year to year and target larger animals to reduce mortality. If those are added as specific objectives in the Amendment, future specifications could be adjusted to meet those objectives, compared to the current program that is based on optimizing yield per scallop. Overall, the AP thinks the current list of potential measures should be developed further.

AGENDA ITEM #2: PROVIDE INPUT ON DRAFT WHITE PAPER ON INSHORE SCALLOP ISSUE AND DISCUSS NEXT STEPS

Staff reviewed the draft white paper the PDT has been working on. Background information from the recent IFQ Report is included as well as some new information on catch rates in open areas for both limited access and LAGC vessels. The AP discussed the draft report for some time, but ultimately decided to delay in depth conversations until more of the AP could be present. Several key members that have raised this issue in the past were absent; therefore, the

AP did not want to define the issues and identify objectives for a future workshop without more AP members in attendance.

One AP member explained that fishing has changed dramatically in the LAGC fishery, specifically a lot of effort has moved from the south to the north. Some of these trends could be lost in the summary of catch rates by fleet since a portion of quota has completely shifted north to different areas and on different vessels. New areas and vessels may have very different catch rates, so it may be necessary to look at these data differently to fully appreciate how these changes have impacted catch rates differently. An audience member explained that leasing alone can be a factor that affects catch rates if more quota is being leased into an area. In addition, in the past a vessel may have primarily fished in higher meat weight seasons (spring and summer), but if more quota is leased in that vessel may be fishing a longer season with lower meat yields negatively impacting average catch rates. The possession limit has increased as well from 400 pounds to 600 pounds, so time at sea is expected to increase to some degree.

Another AP member explained that it is known that scallop biomass is cyclical, especially in inshore areas, so variation in catch rates in these areas is expected. It was noted that the catch rate data in the draft white paper show that average catch rates are down for both fleets, not just the LAGC fishery. Another AP member explained that there are different fleets within the LAGC fishery that fish with different strategies, so this issue will not be the same for all. But he added that overall the LAGC fishery does have a narrower range in terms of where vessels can fish, so that should be kept in mind.

Later in the meeting a motion was developed to table this issue until a later date, but the motion failed. There was some frustration expressed at the meeting that the key participants that brought this issue up were not present and a general statement of the management problem was still not clearly defined. The maker of the motion argued that maybe the low attendance at the table and in the audience suggested that this may not be as much of an issue as it was in the past. Some speakers did not think the PDT should be spending so much time developing a white paper on this issue until the problem is more clearly defined. One speaker stated that 2015 is going to be hard for everyone until younger scallops grow into the fishery. A few AP members were prepared to speak about this issue in detail, but expressed reservation to do so without more participation from other AP members and audience.

Ultimately the motion failed because the majority of the AP did not want to recommend taking this issue off the table for more discussion before the full AP could discuss it more. However, timing concerns were raised that if this workshop gets pushed back too far into the year it could interfere with completing work on Amendment 19 and Framework 27. The AP decided to push this discussion to the next meeting, and it was suggested that industry members could meet separately between meetings to help clarify the issues so more valuable meeting time is not wasted.

Motion 2. Welch/Quinn

Table the discussion on inshore fishing issue until 2016.

Vote: 2:4:4, motion fails

AGENDA ITEM #3: REVIEW NROC MAPS

Mr. George Lapointe summarized the mapping effort by NROC to identify the various ocean uses in the Northeast. A number of draft maps were posted in the meeting room and AP members had several questions and suggestions. First, it is not clear if the time vessels are “declared out of fishery (DOF)” is in the maps or not. Second, under scallop area rotation certain areas are sometimes closed to the fishery; therefore, fishing effort may seem low in a certain area depending on whether the area was open or closed in those years. This should be noted somehow and explained as a limitation of the maps. A suggestion was made to add the boundaries of both closed areas and scallop access areas for reference. If it is possible to separate out LA and LAGC fishing activity separately that may be useful to better express how fleets could be impacted differently because in some cases they fish in different areas. And if that can be done it would be very helpful to share those maps with the Council for the inshore workshop planned for this year, which is discussing issues of inshore fishing spaces by the two different fleets. Finally, showing survey abundance information would be useful as well to show not just where fishing effort currently is, but where it may be in the future if conditions change. Abundance maps would help show the overall extent of the resource, not just the current fishery, which may be limited for other reasons.

AGENDA ITEM #4: INITIAL DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 2016 RSA

The AP reviewed the list of priorities from last year. In general it was discussed that survey needs are similar to last year. The AP did not want to get into a detailed conversation about survey related needs until the summary report is available from the recent scallop survey methods peer review that the NEFSC held in March. There may be useful input from that report in terms of what methods are best for different situations and areas, how many, and how often. Therefore, the panel decided to wait on the survey related priorities until that report is available.

Next the panel discussed non-survey research priorities. The panel did not feel able to identify what the best priorities should be before knowing the status of current priorities. The AP voiced a need to have a better sense of whether current priorities have adequately been addressed or not before making recommendations about changing them. Staff can try to create a table for the next meeting that identifies which priorities have been funded, and the current status of research on each topic to better inform the discussion. The panel decided to wait for that information before identifying what the top research priorities should be moving forward. The panel appreciated the suggestion from staff that a shorter list may help identify what the key research priorities are, but comments were made that it is not always possible to know what the priorities will be a year in advance, so a longer list provides some flexibility to the process. A member of the audience suggested that the research priorities should be driven by projects that have direct impacts on future fishery allocations; for example, resource surveys, evaluating discard and incidental mortality, and ways to address bycatch so scallop allocations are not reduced for bycatch concerns.

The panel also discussed several general issues with the RSA program, not related to the research priorities themselves. First, an AP member explained that there is currently a project that may get funded with 2015 RSA that is being held up due to questions about data sharing with NMFS. Concerns were raised by the industry that in some cases vessels are asked to participate in an

RSA project understanding that data will be confidential, but if data are later data shared with NMFS, that could compromise voluntary participation in research. On the other hand, all data collected by a federal grant needs to be made available to the government if requested. No one at the meeting was familiar enough with the details of the issue and staff can look into this issue further.

Second, an issue came up recently about a Council member having a potential conflict of interest related to reviewing RSA applications; therefore, unable to participate in the RSA management review panel. Industry members at the meeting expressed concern about this because in their opinion it is vital that individuals at the management review panel have intimate knowledge of what research is needed for management. If certain Council members are prohibited from participating that could compromise the overall input the panel receives. In addition, this may trickle down and impact involvement of other individuals at the management review panel meeting (i.e. industry and PDT members). It was explained that this issue only recently came up and leadership at the Council and Center are looking into the issue with the Regional Office. Third, a concern was raised that the application for an RSA grant can be daunting for the average person. It is a very lengthy application and may be too complicated for some people to complete. No specific suggestions were offered.

Last, an issue came up from the audience about the need to publish the expected price per pound for RSA awards. It was explained that some applications assume a certain price, and if the award price assumes a higher price, these projects come out more expensive. It was discussed that it is not possible for the RSA announcement to include the actual award price per pound since a lot can change in a year and NMFS typically calculates the estimated price per pound much closer to when awards are granted. If proposals are based on what the research would cost, regardless of what price vessels actually get for the harvested catch this should not be as much of an issue. If that is not feasible it may be possible for NMFS to publish an expected price, with the understanding that it may not be the final value used.

In general the theme of the AP discussion on this topic is that it is very challenging for the AP to identify what future research priorities should be without a better handle on whether or not previous priorities have been met. For example, has a priority that was identified a few years ago been sufficiently addressed, or should it remain on the list. The AP discussed that they do not have a clear sense of how all results get back into the process. Results are folded in for some projects very efficiently, but others seem to fall off the radar. A motion was made including a suggestion to help ensure that results get back into the Council process. There may be other solutions, or better ways to address this issue, but the intent of the motion is to improve the feedback of RSA results into the management process.

1. MOTION: BAILEY/LARSON

Recommend that the Committee suggest the Council require that RSA recipients for non-scallop survey projects be required to present final results to the Scallop PDT/AP/Committee, including a summary of the implications of that research.

Vote: 10:0:0, motion carried

OTHER BUSINESS

The AP discussed an issue about the potential for developing a roe-on scallop fishery. Previous research was cited and the AP discussed the potential to increase overall yield from the fishery. A LAGC vessel could land roe-on scallops, but it would be held to the 600 pound possession limit. Currently there is no conversion ratio for meat weight to roe; it varies greatly with season, maybe 30-50%. The AP did not have any motions related to this topic.

The Scallop AP meeting adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m.