Bluefish FMAT Meeting
Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment – Webinar Meeting Summary

April 2020

The Bluefish Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) met on Monday, April 13, 2020 to discuss developments of the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. This was the first meeting following the supplemental scoping period and discussions at the December 2019 joint Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC or Board) meeting.

FMAT members present: Ashleigh McCord (GARFO), Cynthia Ferrio (GARFO), Dave Stevenson (GARFO), Matt Cutler (NEFSC), Samantha Werner (NEFSC), Tony Wood (NEFSC), Mike Celestino (NJ DFW), Dustin Colson Leaning (ASMFC Staff), and Matthew Seeley (MAFMC Staff)

Others present: Greg DiDomenico (GSSA), Mike Waine (ASA), and Jose Montanez (MAFMC Staff)

Discussion

The FMAT received a presentation on the current status of the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment (Amendment), the scoping comment summary, initial draft alternatives for each issue, and next steps. Following the presentation, the FMAT discussed scoping comments and developed recommendations on the scope of issues to be included in the Amendment. Additionally, the FMAT made recommendations on how to approach developing draft alternatives for each amendment issue.

The following comments and suggestions will inform Amendment development and guide updates to the FMAT Action Plan. The FMAT will pursue drafting alternatives for each amendment issue for approval at the joint June Council/Board meeting. The FMAT spent substantial time discussing how many alternatives should be developed per issue. The FMAT was in consensus that a single alternative for Issue 1 was reasonable but was more conflicted about the remaining issues. The FMAT does not want to develop an unwieldy number of options, however, some issues contain important decision points that could be either resolved to one alternative through FMAT discussions or split into multiple alternatives. Ultimately, stakeholders will have the ability to add, refine, and subtract alternatives, and the FMAT welcomes any guidance the Council/Board might provide.

FMAT Requested Input – Staff Questions (Summary of FMAT requested input on each issue, approach, recommendation, and the associated questions).

Issue	Approach	FMAT Recommendation	Staff Questions
1. Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives	Revise vs. status quo	Revise (proposed revisions provided in FMAT summary)	Is there an important aspect of the fishery not currently captured by the suggested goals and objectives? Should an objective be removed entirely? Any other recommended revisions?
2. Commercial and Recreational Sector Allocations	Catch versus landings-based allocations	Recommend *catch based allocations*; captures the catch-and release aspect of the recreational fishery.	Should both catch and landings-based allocations be further developed?
	Revised percentages based on different data or time series	Keep for further consideration; FMAT recommends using time series of minimum 10 years to capture cyclical nature of fishery.	Which time series should be considered? What other approaches should be developed for consideration? • Revised time series • Trigger-based • Socioeconomic
	Discards	NEFSC-calculated or MRIP.	What approach should be taken when calculating recreational and commercial discards?
3. Commercial Allocations to the States	Catch versus landings-based allocations	Recommend *landings-based allocations*; **commercial discards are considered negligible**. Concerns regarding consistency.	Should both catch and landings-based allocations be further developed?
	Revised percentages based on different data or time series	FMAT recommends updating allocations due to several states consistently underutilizing their quota; longer timeframe recommended.	Which time series should be considered?

4. Quota Transfer Processes	Recreational to commercial transfer	Keep for further development; successful development of new allocations will reduce the need for transfers. Consider provisions that allow transfers in either direction.	Should the ability to transfer from the commercial to the recreational sector also be considered?
	Commercial state-to-state transfer	Keep for further development	Should commercial state-to-state transfers remain in the plan as an option?
5. Rebuilding Plan	5 rebuilding projections listed in Issue 5.	FMAT recommends removal of the rebuilding from the amendment and submitting the plan in a framework/addenda.	Should the rebuilding plan be removed from the amendment? If not, are additional projections needed?
6. Other Issues			
6.1 Sector specific management uncertainty	Sector specific management uncertainty	Keep for further development	Should a policy change be considered for further analysis?
6.2 Recreational sector separation	Separate allocations to for-hire vs. private sectors	FMAT requested further guidance from Council/Board as to which approach should be adopted.	What data should be used? Catch versus landings allocation?
	Separate management measures for for-hire vs. private sectors		Should a policy change (allowance) be considered for further analysis?
	Discards	NEFSC-calculated or MRIP.	What approach should be taken when calculating recreational discards?

FMAT Comments/Suggestions on the Scope of Issues for Amendment Development

Issue 1: Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Goals and Objectives

The FMAT plans to present the Council/Board with two options for the FMP Goals and Objectives: 1) Status quo/No action and 2) the draft option below with multiple opportunities to revise as needed. Immediately following the proposed FMP Goals and Objectives below are additional comments and recommendations from the FMAT on how to further refine the list.

Old Bluefish FMP Goals and Objectives

Goal: Conserve the bluefish resource along the Atlantic coast.

1. Objective: Increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery.
2. Objective: Provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish.
3. Objective: Provide for cooperation among the coastal states, the various regional marine fishery management councils, and federal agencies involved along the coast to enhance the management of bluefish throughout its range.
4. Objective: Prevent recruitment overfishing.
5. Objective: Reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

Proposed Draft Bluefish FMP Goals and Objectives

Goal: Conserve the bluefish resource through stakeholder engagement to maintain sustainable recreational fishing and commercial harvest.

1. Ensure the biological sustainability of the bluefish resource in order to maintain a sustainable bluefish fishery.
    a. Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.
    b. Promote catch and release within the recreational fishery.
2. Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states to support the development and implementation of management measures.
    a. Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.
    b. Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource under changing environmental conditions.
3. Provide access to the fishery throughout the management unit that reflects constituent preferences.
4. Balance the needs and priorities of different user groups and optimize economic and social benefits from utilization of the bluefish resource.

or

Goal 1. Conserve the bluefish resource through stakeholder engagement to maintain sustainable recreational fishing and commercial harvest.

1. Ensure the biological sustainability of the bluefish resource in order to maintain a sustainable bluefish fishery.
    a) Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.
    b) Promote catch and release within the recreational fishery.

2. Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states to support the development and implementation of management measures.
    a) Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.
    b) Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource under changing environmental conditions.

Goal 2. Provide access to the fishery throughout the management unit that reflects constituent preferences.

Goal 3. Balance the needs and priorities of different user groups and optimize economic and social benefits from utilization of the bluefish resource.

- The FMAT would like to receive feedback from the Council/Board on the structure of the FMP Goals and Objectives. Is the current layout of one goal followed by multiple objectives and sub-objectives (or strategies) appropriate?
    - Several FMAT members agreed that the goals should be overarching statements, and objectives and sub-objectives should be specific to how the goals will be achieved.
    - FMAT members were concerned that the sub-objectives are too prescriptive. The sub-objectives should not constrain management to a narrow set of policy options.
- The FMAT will continue to refine the FMP Goal and Objectives once we receive input from the Council and Board.
- Do the objectives adequately embody the overarching goal of "conservation"?
- Under objective 4, the FMAT tried to encompass all user groups from the snapper/bait anglers to the offshore party/charter fleets.
- Objectives 3 and 4 are very similar. The FMAT should consider revising Objective 3 to be a sub-objective or strategy under objective 4.

Issue 2: Commercial and Recreational Sector Allocations

The FMAT discussed whether allocations should be landings or catch-based and what time series should be used. The current allocations set in Amendment 1 are landings-based and use data from 1981-1989. The FMAT offered the following comments and recommendations:

- The FMAT discussed switching to catch-based landings since the fishery is dominated by the recreational sector.
    1. Identify why landings were initially used and clarify if there are data quality issues.
    2. Communicate which data sources are used for the commercial allocations (landings vs. catch which is subject to change depending on what method is used i.e., CFDERS to VTR) and recreational allocations (landings vs. catch (both MRIP).
    3. Consider the opportunity costs and possible data consequences of switching from landings to catch data.

- *The FMAT noted that there is still no set approach to how recreational discards are estimated – NEFSC-calculated and MRIP.*
- Many anglers view bluefish as a catch and release species, so incorporating discards into the allocation calculation will capture the recreational nature of the fishery.
- According to the most recent operational stock assessment, commercial discards are considered negligible in the bluefish fishery.
- A lot of fishing goes unaccounted when setting landings-based allocations.
    - Many anglers prefer some aspect of catch-and-release and do not want released fish transferred to the commercial sector.
- Dead discards are counted against the overall quota, so the FMAT discussed including them in the allocation calculations.
- Use the calibrated MRIP estimates to update the recreational time series (Table 1).
    - Generate the same allocation tables in the scoping presentation, but with catch data instead of landings.
    - Use a timeseries including the most recent 10 years (2009-2018) of data.
    - Use a timeseries including the most recent 20 years (1999-2018) of data.
        - Bluefish seem to have cyclical life history patterns, so the FMAT recommends using time series with a minimum of 10 years to capture the shifts in catch (reflecting distribution and availability) over a longer time period.

- The FMAT discussed identifying a standard methodology for how recreational discards are calculated. The standard methodology should be used for both monitoring the fishery as well as in the stock assessment and not revised each year as it has been in recent years.
    - Assessment Scientist: There are challenges in determining what the recreational discard mortality rates are. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center method for calculating discards was accepted through the benchmark stock assessment process but were not ultimately used in management.
- The FMAT recommends commercial discards continue to be considered insignificant. Commercial discards are calculated using the standardized bycatch reporting methodology. These discards still remain insignificant from the last benchmark stock assessment.
    - Assessment Scientist: Since commercial discards are so small relative to the other catch components, the FMAT recommends the common approach of assuming 100% discard mortality.

Table 1. Landings-based sector allocations.

Avg Time Series	Amend 1 1981-1989	38 years 1981-2018	20 years 1999-2018	10 years 2009-2018	5 years 2014-2018	3 years 2016-2018	1 year 2018
Recreational	89.73%	86.73%	84.95%	87.26%	86.97%	87.23%	85.76%
Commercial	10.27%	13.27%	15.05%	12.74%	13.03%	12.77%	14.24%

Issue 3: Commercial Allocations to the States

The FMAT's discussion on the commercial allocations to the states focused on the decisions regarding the use of landings or catch-based data and selecting the appropriate time series. The current allocations set in Amendment 1 are landings-based and use data from 1981-1989. The FMAT also acknowledged that this issue needs to be considered along with the transfer provisions that allow for commercial state-to state transfers. The FMAT offered the following comments and recommendations:

- The FMAT discussed maintaining using landings-based data to set the commercial allocations to the states.
    1. Identify why landings were initially used and clarify if there are data quality issues.
    2. Communicate which data sources are used for the commercial allocations (landings vs. catch which is subject to change depending on what method is used i.e., CFDERS to VTR) and recreational allocations (landings vs. catch (both MRIP).
    3. Consider the opportunity costs and possible data consequences of switching from landings to catch data.
    - Discards are negligible and difficult to estimate in the commercial fishery.
    - Develop alternatives using an updated time series since northern states often exceed their own commercial quota (prior to transfers) and species distribution/availability has shifted in the last three decades (Table 2).
        - Use a timeseries including the most recent 10 years (2009-2018) of data.
        - Use a timeseries including the most recent 20 years (1999-2018) of data.
            - The longer time series ensures historical participation is considered when setting allocations.
            - Bluefish seem to have cyclical life history patterns, so the FMAT recommends using time series with a minimum of 10 years to capture the shifts in catch/landings over a longer time period.
            - The FMAT noted the two allocation issues do not have to have the same time series alternatives (i.e. Allocations for Issue 2 can be catch-based while allocations for Issue 3 can be landings-based). However, clear justification needs to be provided for each allocation decision.
    - Use the state-to-state transfer table in the scoping document as an indicator for how the allocations should change.
        - A representative from the commercial industry drew issue with this suggestion. He thought that it was a dangerous precedent to set, which would incentive states to avoid transfers in the future knowing that allocation decisions are made based on quota transfers.
- Commercial discards are trivial at the scale of the entire fishery and the FMAT lacks confidence in the accuracy of commercial discard estimates. The FMAT recommends a landings-based approach be taken for setting commercial allocations to the states.
    - While commercial discards are trivial at the scale of the entire fishery, it is presently unknown whether they are trivial at the scale of the commercial fishery,

or whether they can be estimated at the state-specific level. The FMAT has identified this as an area of further investigation.

Table 2. Landings-based commercial state-to-state allocations.

State	1994-2018 Avg 25 years	1999-2018 Avg 20 years	2009-2018 Avg 10 years	2014-2018 Avg 5 years	2016-2018 Avg 3 years	2018 Avg 2018
ME	0.09%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
NH	0.66%	0.18%	0.13%	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%
MA	8.74%	8.11%	10.80%	11.25%	10.44%	8.87%
RI	9.20%	8.67%	10.25%	12.49%	13.26%	10.76%
CT	0.97%	0.80%	1.08%	1.22%	1.56%	2.19%
NY	21.53%	20.91%	21.18%	21.45%	21.29%	24.48%
NJ	17.55%	16.26%	14.82%	11.87%	10.14%	2.55%
DE	0.49%	0.40%	0.39%	0.63%	0.33%	0.29%
MD	1.72%	1.63%	1.88%	1.66%	1.34%	1.24%
VA	7.74%	6.95%	5.88%	5.06%	5.16%	4.66%
NC	34.19%	34.43%	29.73%	29.51%	30.35%	34.75%
GA	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
FL	2.99%	3.04%	3.90%	4.84%	6.11%	10.21%
Total	105.85%	101.39%	100.03%	100.02%	100.00%	100.00%

Issue 4: Quota Transfer Processes

Recreational to Commercial Transfers

- The successful development of sector allocations that adequately reflect recent fishing trends will reduce the need for sector transfers.
- The transfer provisions are a very useful tool for adaptive management.
    - If the ability to transfer quota across sectors are removed from the FMP, ensure it is added as a frameworkable action that can be included again in the future.
- Many anglers prefer some aspect of catch-and-release and do not want released fish transferred to the commercial sector.
- The FMAT requests guidance from the Council and Board on whether additional modifications to the transfer process should be considered. As it currently stands, the alternatives may be: “status quo” and “remove the provisions”.
    - Additional modifications may include: 1.) Guidance under what conditions transfers may occur, 2.) The upper limit bound of the transfer (currently up to 10.5 million lbs), and 3.) Guidance on potential to transfer quota from the commercial to recreational sector.
        - From 2009-2018, on average, ~4.6 million pounds of quota has been transferred from the recreational to commercial sector per year. Furthermore, on average, only 17.4% of the transfer was used per year.

Commercial State-to-State Transfers

- The successful development of commercial allocations to the states that reflect recent fishing trends will lead to fewer transfers in the short-term. Yet, transfers will likely be utilized in the long-term because bluefish are a dynamic stock that experience frequent changes in regional distribution and abundance.
- The transfer provisions are a very useful tool for adaptive management.
    - If the ability to transfer quota across states are removed from the FMP, ensure it is added as a frameworkable action that can be included again in the future.
- Each state's quota increases proportionally when quota is transferred across sectors, so the sector-based transfer supplements the state-to-state transfers.

Issue 5: Rebuilding Plan

- The Bluefish Rebuilding Plan needs to be completed by November 2021 (two years after notification). The FMAT discussed whether the rebuilding plan should be removed from the Amendment, as it would offer more time to develop/conduct the necessary alternatives and analyses for the other issues in the Amendment.
    - The FMAT noted that the rebuilding plan may rush amendment development and not leave enough time to sufficiently develop all alternatives.
    - The FMAT supports removing rebuilding to allow more time for the rest of the Amendment.
- The review of scoping comments suggest that fishing pressure caused the change in stock status.
    - The FMAT suggests that fishing is probably not the driver of this stock shift.
        - Changes in the data caused this disruption – the model needs to settle and then things may change over the next few years.
- Projections to run:
    - Catch in 2020 and 2021 of 7,385 with a rebuilding f that rebuilds the stock in 10 years – constant rebuilding f
        - Requires a modification to the Council risk policy because the catches will most likely exceed the catches associated with the p* approach.
    - Catch in 2020 and 2021 of 7,385 with a rebuilding f that rebuilds in 7 years – constant rebuilding f
        - Requires a modification to the Council risk policy because the catches will most likely exceed the catches associated with the p* approach.
    - Constant harvest strategy that will allow the fishery to be rebuilt in 10 years – highest catch possible equal across all years
    - Run p* with catch in 2020 and 2021 of 7,385 until the stock is rebuilt – 100% CV (use the new p* approach)
    - Constant harvest of the 7,385 ABC that rebuilds in 4-5 years

Issue 6: Other

- Many of the "other" comments discussed were related to actions that can be addressed through specifications (e.g., regulations with minimum sizes).

- The FMAT recommends the Council/Board offer guidance on sector-specific management uncertainty. Management uncertainty falls under "ABC=ACL" in the flow chart. The Council/Board indicated at a previous meeting that they may want to add a management uncertainty box that can be applied to the recreational and commercial sector, separately.
    - There is no standard across all management groups on how recreational discard projections are estimated, which leads to very different discard projections. The Monitoring Committee (and/or Council/Board) has expressed interest, especially in the most recent specification cycle, in a more targeted sector approach when making recommendations concerning management uncertainty. As it currently stands, any concerns regarding recreational management measures may only be addressed by increasing management uncertainty for both sectors. This has the negative consequence of unjustifiably affecting commercial quotas (Figure 1).
- The FMAT discussed for-hire sector-separation/allowance and requests further discussion and direction from the Council/Board.
    - Some members of the public have asked for for-hire sector separation in the form of a sub-ACL allocation. Others have requested a "for-hire allowance", which would allow the for-hire sector to maintain separate measures from the recreational fishery without a separate allocation.
    - The FMAT indicated that using a recent time series to estimate a for-hire "allocation" will result in an allocation of less than ~3%.

Table 3. Summary of landings and catch representing for-hire sector separation/allowance using MRIP calibrated estimates.

Landings: A+B1

Bluefish Time Series	Years	Private/Shore %	For-Hire %
Base Years	1981-1989	86%	14%
5 Most Recent Years	2014-2018	99%	1%
10 Most Recent Years	2009-2018	98%	2%
15 Most Recent Years	2004-2018	98%	2%

Catch: A+B1+B2

Bluefish Time Series	Years	Private/Shore %	For-Hire %
Base Years	1981-1989	87%	13%
5 Most Recent Years	2014-2018	98%	2%
10 Most Recent Years	2009-2018	98%	2%
15 Most Recent Years	2004-2018	98%	2%

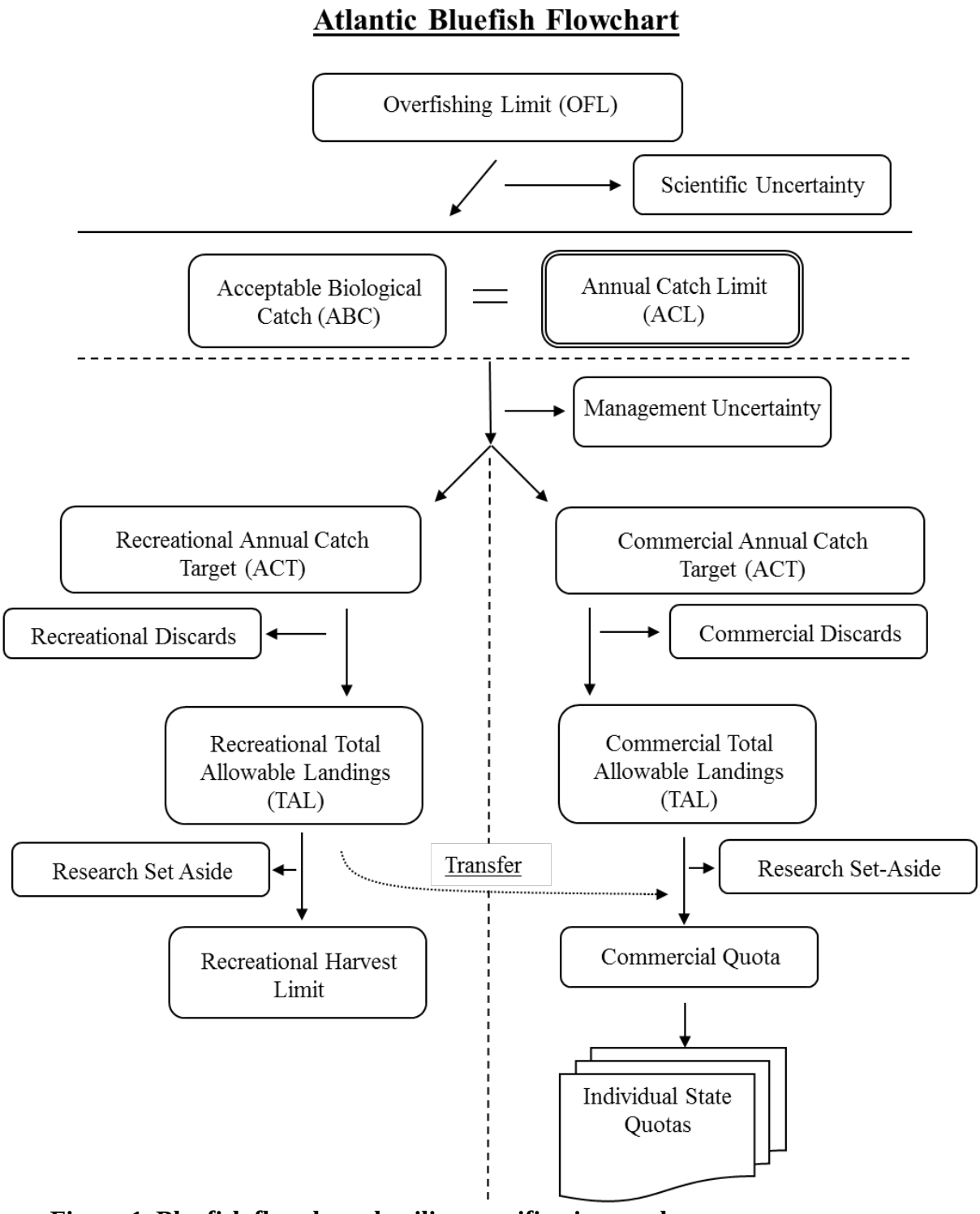

Figure 1. Bluefish flowchart detailing specifications and management measures.