

*Scientific and Statistical Committee  
Report of July 24-26, 2023 Meeting*

to

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
August 11, 2023

*Tab 16*

# *Agenda: July 24-26, Philadelphia*

- *Bluefish\**
- *Black Sea Bass\**
- *Scup\**
- *Summer Flounder\**
- *Longfin Squid\**
- *Atlantic Mackerel\**
- *NMFS Draft Climate Governance Policy\**
- *Comments on Updated NS1 Guidelines*
- *Other Business*

*\*Items previously covered*

# *Comments on NS1 Guidance on Reference Points and Status Determination*

- Presentation by Rick Methot, NMFS
- Considerable progress since 1998
  - Data Limited stocks
  - Dynamic Reference Points—responding to climate change
    - Short vs long-term changes?
    - Environmental effects vs Dependent processes?
  - Moving average methods may be useful
  - Need for more spatial analyses in fisheries: Energy development, closed areas
- SSC comments
  - Changing life history characteristics when fishing mortality is reduced
  - Utility of long time series of fishery independent and dependent data
  - Utility of field experiments
  - Useful document for future assessments and SSC work

# *Other Business*

- OFL CV sub-group will meet on August 24<sup>th</sup> to address:
  - Refinement of OFL CV process: clarity, transparency, completeness
  - Projection assumptions, especially catch in the first year
  - ABC reviews in between assessments—what constitutes a sufficient “signal” to recommend a change?
- Ecosystem Work Group will meet on August 28<sup>th</sup> to address:
  - Update on research efforts
  - MSE
  - Quantifying changes in Biological Reference Points.
- Next SSC meeting: September 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> in Baltimore.
- Additional meeting in fall (tbd) to review MTA for Spiny Dogfish and Atlantic Mackerel.

# Questions?



# *Bluefish Specifications 2024-25*

- Received a Level 2 MTA of the updated assessment. First MTA after Research Track Assessment.
  - Advances: State-space model, revised measures of MRIP CPUE, changes to Natural mortality rates, reduced retrospective pattern
  - Current stock is 60% of Bmsy proxy [NOT Overfished]
  - Current F is 64% of Fmsy proxy [Overfishing NOT occurring]
- **The SSC recommended the use of an OFL CV of 100% (see attachment 4 in SSC report)**
- **SSC recommended ABCs of 7,929 mt for 2024 and 9,903mt for 2025.**

# *Black Sea Bass Specifications 2024*

- The SSC reviewed updated fishery information, and staff recommendations for 2024. Timeline for RTA has been extended.
- Stock size in 2021 was 210% of  $B_{msy}$  and fishing mortality was 85% of  $F_{msy}$ .
- Stock size is predicted to decrease as dominance of 2011 and 2015 year classes declines. Population is becoming more reliant on recent average recruitments.
- **Despite concerns over the expected decline in SSB and taking into account that current SSC is twice the size of  $SSB_{msy}$  and  $F$  is below  $F_{msy}$ , the SSC recommended setting the 2024 ABC equal to the 2023 ABC of 7,557 mt.**
- Noted difficulties of forecasting harvests and discards in the recreational fishery.
- **Greatest source of uncertainty—absence of an assessment since the 2021 MTA.**
- 2021 assessment needed a correction for retrospective pattern.
- SSC needs to develop better criteria for evaluating “interim measures” of stock status. When are changes warranted? What are admissible magnitudes of changes in catch recommendations?

# *Scup Specifications 2024-25*

- The SSC reviewed results of a Level 2 MTA of the updated assessment through 2022.
- Current biomass is 246% of  $B_{msy}$ ; fishing mortality is 52% of  $F_{msy}$ .
- Concerns: dome shaped selectivity pattern (i.e., lower mortality on older fish)
- SSC applauded efforts to evaluate long term effects of Gear Restricted Areas.
- SSC increase estimate of OFL CV from 60% to 100% (see Attachment 5). Need for retrospective adjustment now required.
- **SSC recommended ABCs of 19,876 mt for 2024 and 18,028 mt for 2025.**
- Highlighted need to consider risks along with uncertainty when making projections.



# *Summer Flounder Specifications 2024-25:*

- The SSC reviewed the results of a Level 2 MTA of the updated assessment through 2022.
- Stock is 83% Bmsy proxy; **fishing mortality is 103% of Fmsy proxy.**
- Review of OFL CV criterion (Attachment 3) suggested continuation of 60% for OFL CV (Attachment 6).
- **The SSC recommended ABCs of 8,111 mt in 2024 and 9,411 mt in 2025, respectively. If the Council should prefer to adopt a constant average ABC policy, an ABC of 8,761 mt for 2024 and 2025 would satisfy the Council's risk policy.**
- Recruitment has been below average and projections are based on observations from the last 12 years.
- Changes in life history characteristics: declining growth rates, maturity at age decreasing, changing sex ratios.
- Potential environmental effects not quantified.

# *Longfin Squid Specifications 2024-26*

- The SSC reviewed results received a Level 2 MTA of the updated assessment through 2022.
- Survey indices do not show any trends and catch levels have been stable.
- Seasonal differences (fall vs spring) in survey abundances and catch levels between survey, and evidence of seasonal growth difference, suggest need for finer temporal scale models.
- No analytical stock assessment models have been developed to date.
- Trimester system seems to balance effects of seasonal spatial variations.
- **The SSC recommended ABCs of 23,400 mt each year for 2024, 2025 and 2026.** (relies on period of apparent low exploitation(1976-2009).
- The SSC looks forward to the results of the Research Track Assessment in 2026 and its application for determination of future ABCs.

# *Atlantic Mackerel Specifications 2024-25*

- The SSC reviewed the results of a Level 1 MTA (direct delivery) of the updated assessment through 2022.
- Stock status changed from overfishing occurring to overfishing NOT occurring. Level 2 MTA required under current NRCC process
- Recovery of stock biomass has not occurred as previously predicted.
  - MTA suggested recent year classes were overestimated.
  - DFO Canada has recommended closure of its commercial fisheries.
- To address these prediction concerns, the 2022 year class was assumed to be equal to median value. As a result, Frebuild changes from 0.11 to 0.07. Rebuild probability estimated at 61% in 2032; SSC expressed low confidence in this projection.
- **The SSC recommended ABCs of 2,726 mt in 2024 and 3,900 mt in 2025.**
- Results considered provisional until reviewed by Level 2 MTA review in September.

Extra slide (covered elsewhere)

# *NMFS Draft Climate Governance Plan*

## *Tab 8*

- Webinar on July 12. Chaired by Michael Wilberg
- Positive
  - Acknowledged importance of addressing spatial distribution of species
  - Applauded effort to address changes comprehensively
- Negative
  - Insufficient to support changes to management jurisdictions
  - Quantification of species movements is difficult, especially for decision making.
  - Distinguishing short from long-term changes in species distributions
  - Economics criteria: {Species} vs {Economic and Management Responses}?
  - Potential delays due to joint management
  - Increased cost for all partners