



June 2021 Council Meeting Agenda

Monday, June 7 – Thursday, June 10, 2021

Meeting by Webinar

<https://www.mafmc.org/briefing/june-2021>

Monday, June 7th

- 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Executive Committee (Closed Session)**
- Develop Advisory Panel appointment recommendations

Tuesday, June 8th

- 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. **2020 MRIP Estimation Methodology Presentation (Tab 1)** (Dr. Richard Cody, NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistics Division)

- 10:00 a.m. ***Council Convenes with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Management Board***

- 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment – Final Action (Tab 2)**
- Review public comments and recommendations from the Advisory Panel and Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT)

----- Lunch 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. -----

- 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. **Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment (Continued)**
- Consider final action

- 3:00 p.m. ***Council and Bluefish Board Adjourn***
- Council Convenes with the ASMFC Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board***

- 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. **Recreational Reform Initiative (Tab 3)**
- Receive update and discuss next steps

- 4:30 p.m. ***Council and Policy Board Adjourn***

Wednesday, June 9th

- 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. **Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog 2022 Specifications Review (Tab 4)**
- Review recommendations from the Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and staff
 - Recommend any changes to (previously set) 2022 specifications if necessary
 - Receive brief update on other surfclam and ocean quahog activities (clam survey, genetics study, species separation issues, etc.)

- 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Longfin Squid and Butterfish 2022 Specifications Review (Tab 5)**
- Review recommendations from the Advisory Panel, SSC, and staff
 - Review (previously set) 2022 longfin squid and butterfish specifications and recommend any changes if necessary
 - Consider changes to the butterfish mesh regulations
- 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. *///*ex Squid 2021-2022 Specifications (Tab 6)**
- Review recommendations from the Advisory Panel, SSC, and staff
 - Approve 2022 *///*ex squid specifications
 - Consider revisions to 2021 *///*ex squid specifications
 - Consider changes to the *///*ex incidental trip limit during fishery closures
 - Consider an additional *///*ex control date
- Lunch 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. -----
- 1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report (Tab 7)**
- Review annual report on landings of unmanaged species
- 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Habitat Update (Tab 8)**
- Update from NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Habitat Conservation Division on activities of interest (aquaculture, other projects) in the region
- 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Offshore Wind Updates (Tab 9)**
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
 - GARFO
 - Offshore Wind Developers
 - Vineyard Wind
 - Ørsted (South Fork and Ocean Wind)

Thursday, June 10th

- 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. ASMFC Policy Board Remand of Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocations (Tab 10)**
- Council discussion of ASMFC Policy Board decision to remand the commercial black sea bass state allocations to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and implications for the associated joint amendment/addendum.
- 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Business Session**
- Committee Reports (Tab 11)**
- SSC
 - Research Steering Committee
- Executive Director's Report (Tab 12) (Dr. Chris Moore)**
- Update on Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team discussions relative to the Mid-Atlantic region
 - Discussion of Draft Amendment 13 to the Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP

Organization Reports

- GARFO
 - Update on the Biological Opinion for the Scallop FMP
- NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center
- NOAA Office of General Counsel
- NOAA Office of Law Enforcement
- US Coast Guard

Liaison Reports (Tab 13) – New England Council, South Atlantic Council

Other Business and General Public Comment

This meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 USC 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

The above agenda items may not be taken in the order in which they appear and are subject to change, as necessary. Other items may be added, but the Council cannot take action on such items even if the item requires emergency action without additional public notice. Non-emergency matters not contained in this agenda may come before the Council and / or its Committees for discussion, but these matters may not be the subject of formal Council or Committee action during this meeting. Council and Committee actions will be restricted to the issues specifically listed in this agenda. Any issues requiring emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act that arise after publication of the Federal Register Notice for this meeting may be acted upon provided that the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. The meeting may be closed to discuss employment or other internal administrative matters.

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

April 6-8, 2021
Webinar Meeting

MOTIONS

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment

In order to prioritize work on the Recreational Reform Initiative, I move to postpone final action on this amendment until the December 2021 joint Council/Commission meeting, with an understanding of a January 2023 implementation date.

Council: DiLernia/deFur 16/2/1

Board: Borden/Gilmore Motion passes with no objection and 2 abstentions (USFWS and NMFS)

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Blueline Tilefish 2022-2024 Specifications

Move that the blueline tilefish ABC = 100,520 pounds for the 2022-2024 fishing years with status quo management measures. This results in status quo ACLs of 73,380 pounds and 27,140 pounds for the recreational and commercial sectors, respectively.

Council: Hemilright/Hughes

Motion carries by consent with no abstentions.

Golden Tilefish Framework

In section 5.1, move alternative 5.1.2 (alternative 2): specifications to be set for maximum number of years needed to be consistent with the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC) approved stock assessment schedule as the preferred alternative.

Council: Farnham/DiLernia

Motion carries by consent with no abstentions










In section 5.2, move alternative 5.2.2 (alternative 2): the golden tilefish fishing year is the 12-month period beginning with January 1, annually, as the preferred alternative.







Council: Farnham/DiLernia

Motion carries by consent with no abstentions

Stock Status of MAFMC-Managed Species

(as of 5/25/21)

SPECIES	STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA		Stock Status	Most Recent Assessment
	Overfishing $F_{\text{threshold}}$	Overfished $\frac{1}{2} B_{\text{MSY}}$		
Summer Flounder 	$F_{35\% \text{MSP}} = 0.448$	63 million lbs	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent benchmark assessment was 2018.
Scup 	$F_{40\% \text{MSP}} = 0.215$	103.64 million lbs	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent operational assessment was 2019.
Black Sea Bass 	$F_{40\% \text{MSP}} = 0.46$	15.53 million lbs	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent operational assessment was 2019.
Bluefish 	$F_{35\% \text{SPR}} = 0.183$	219.05 million lbs	No overfishing Overfished	Most recent operational assessment was 2019.
Illex Squid (short finned) 	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown Unknown	Most recent benchmark assessment was 2006; not able to determine current exploitation rates or stock biomass.
Longfin Squid 	Unknown	46.7 million lbs	Unknown Not overfished	Most recent assessment was 2020; not able to determine current exploitation rates.
Atlantic Mackerel 	$F_{40\%} = 0.26$	217.0 million pounds	Overfishing Overfished	Most recent benchmark assessment was 2017
Butterfish 	$F_{\text{Proxy}} = 2/3M = 0.81$	50.3 million lbs	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent assessment was 2020.
Chub Mackerel 	At least 3,026 MT of catch per year	At least 3,026 MT of catch three years in a row	No overfishing Not overfished	No stock assessment.

SPECIES	STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA		Stock Status	Most Recent Assessment
	Overfishing $F_{\text{threshold}}$	Overfished $\frac{1}{2} B_{\text{MSY}}$		
Surfclam 	$F/F_{\text{threshold}} = 1^a$	$SSB/SSB_{\text{threshold}} = 1^b$	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent assessment was 2020
Ocean Quahog 	$F/F_{\text{threshold}} = 1^c$	$SSB/SSB_{\text{threshold}} = 1^d$	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent assessment was 2020.
Golden Tilefish 	$F_{38\%MSP} = 0.310$	10.46 million lbs	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent assessment update was 2017.
Blueline Tilefish 	Unknown	Unknown	South of Cape Hatteras: No overfishing Not overfished North of Cape Hatteras: Unknown Unknown	Most recent benchmark assessment was 2017.
Spiny Dogfish (Joint mgmt with NEFMC) 	$F_{\text{MSY}} = 0.2439$	175.6 million lbs Female SSB	No overfishing Not overfished	Most recent assessment update was 2018.
Monkfish (Joint mgmt with NEFMC) 	NFMA & SFMA $F_{\text{MAX}} = 0.2$	NFMA - 1.25 kg/tow SFMA - 0.93 kg/tow (autumn trawl survey)	Unknown Unknown	Recent benchmark failed peer review and invalidated previous 2010 benchmark assessment results. Operational assessment in 2019 used survey data to scale earlier ABC.

SOURCES: Office of Sustainable Fisheries - Status Report of U.S. Fisheries; SAW/SARC, SEDAR, and TRAC Assessment Reports.

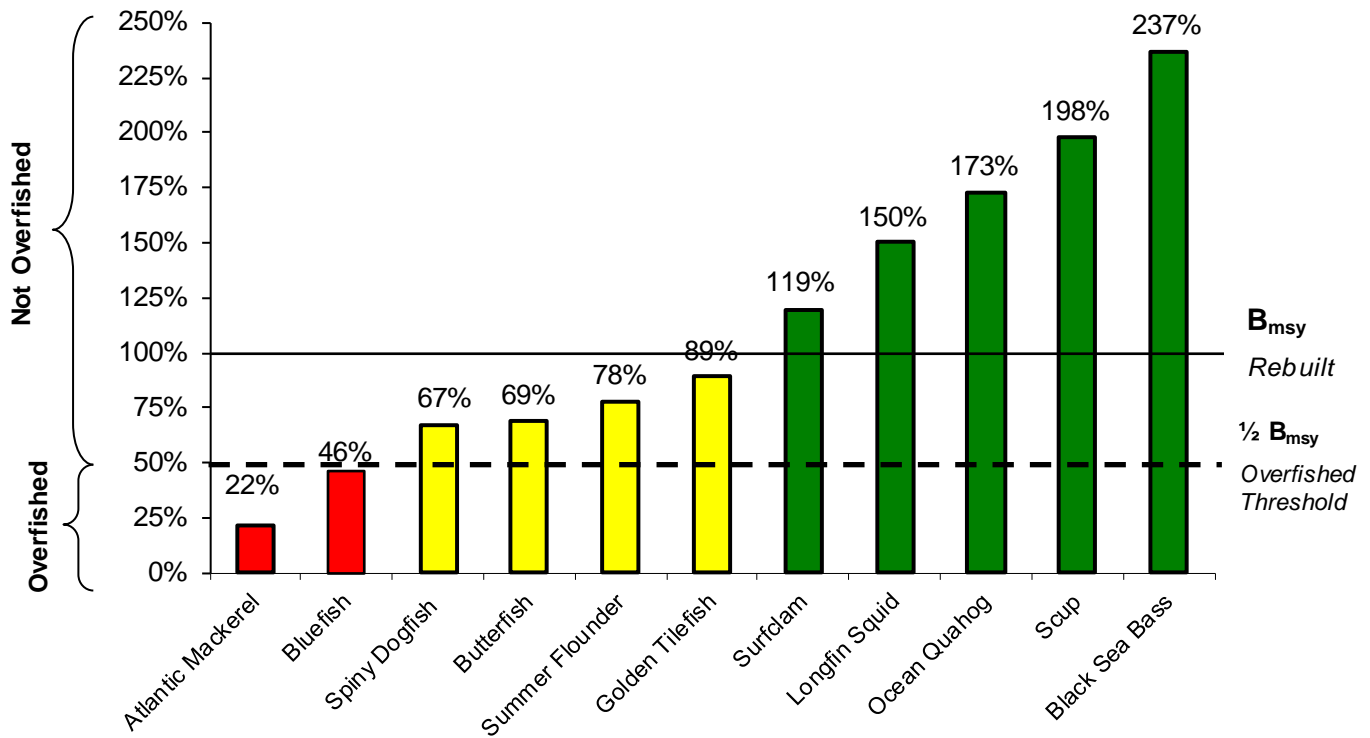
^a $F_{\text{threshold}}$ is calculated as 4.136 times the mean F during 1982 – 2015.

^b $SSB_{\text{threshold}}$ is calculated as $SSB_0/4$.

^c $F_{\text{threshold}}$ is 0.019.

^d $SSB_{\text{threshold}}$ is calculated as $0.4 * SSB_0$.

Stock Size Relative to Biological Reference Points (as of 5/25/21)



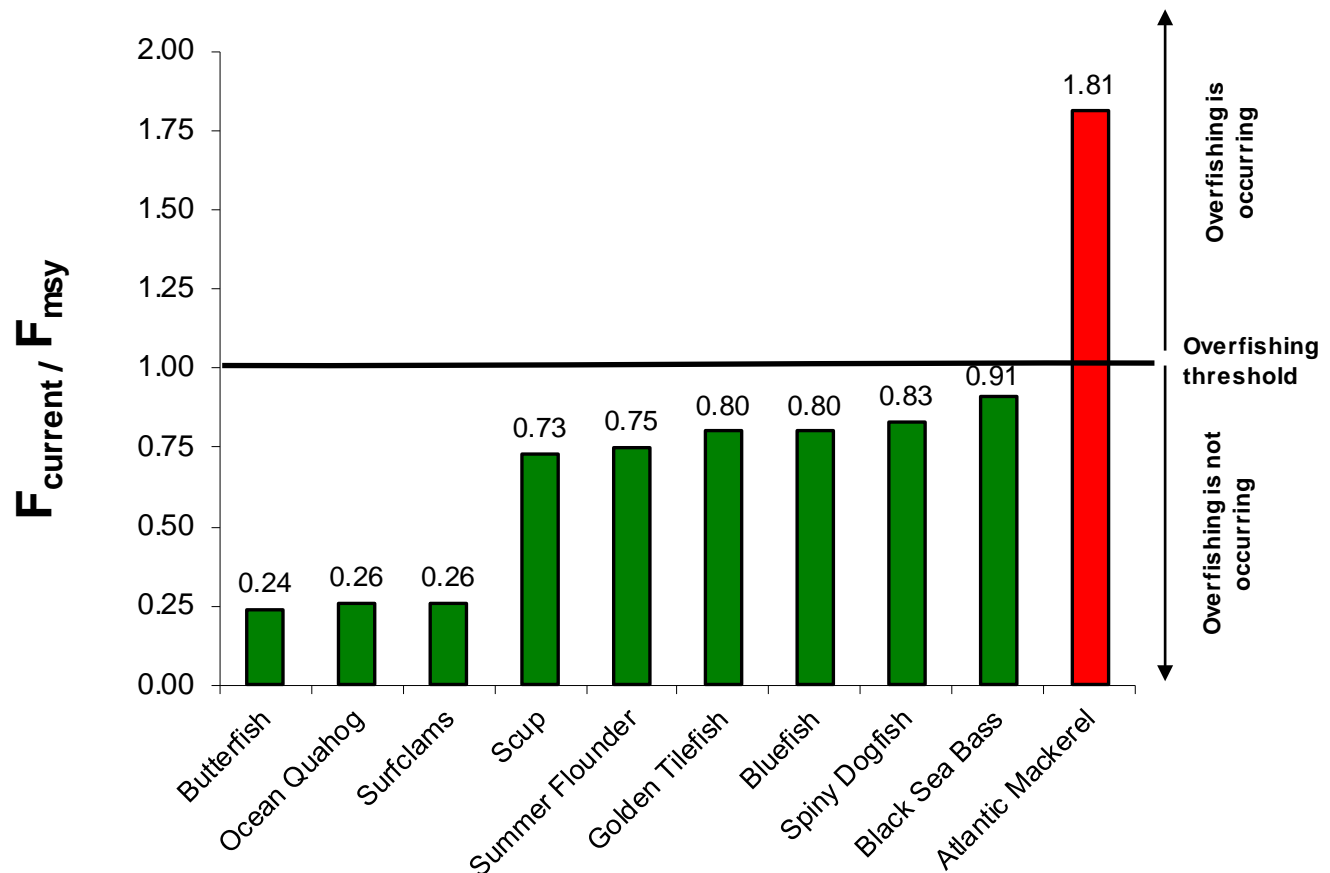
Notes:

- Unknown B_{msy} - *Illex* squid, monkfish (NFMA & SFMA), blueline tilefish (North of Cape Hatteras), and chub mackerel.
- Of the 15 species managed by the Council, 5 are above B_{msy} , 6 are below B_{msy} , and 4 are unknown.

Year of data used to determine stock size	
Atlantic Mackerel	2016
Black Sea Bass	2018
Bluefish	2018
Butterfish	2019
Golden Tilefish	2016
Longfin Squid	2018-2019 (average)
Ocean Quahog	2019
Spiny Dogfish	2018
Surfclam	2019
Scup	2018
Summer Flounder	2017

Fishing Mortality Ratios for MAFMC-Managed Species

(as of 5/25/21)



Notes:

- Unknown fishing mortality: *Illex* squid, Longfin squid, monkfish (NFMA and SFMA), blueline tilefish (North of Cape Hatteras), and chub mackerel.
- Of the 15 species managed by the Council, 9 are above F_{msy} , 1 is above, and 5 are unknown.

Year of data used to determine fishing mortality	
Atlantic Mackerel	2016
Black Sea Bass	2018
Bluefish	2018
Butterfish	2019
Golden Tilefish	2016
Ocean Quahog	2019
Spiny Dogfish	2017
Surfclam	2019
Scup	2018
Summer Flounder	2017



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: May 25, 2021
To: Council
From: Jason Didden, Staff
Subject: 2020 Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Estimates

NOAA Fisheries staff will make a presentation and answer questions regarding the recently-released 2020 MRIP catch estimates and the methodology they used to bridge the data gaps in 2020 caused by COVID-19.

The following is included for Council consideration on this subject:

- 1) Frequently Asked Questions on NOAA Fisheries' 2020 Marine Recreational Catch Estimates (provided by MRIP staff)
- 2) 2021 MRIP Implementation Plan Update

FAQs on NOAA Fisheries' 2020 Marine Recreational Catch Estimates

Where can I access the agency's recreational catch estimates?

The Marine Recreational Information Program maintains a searchable database of recreational catch and effort estimates known as the [MRIP Query Tool](#). Estimates can also be found on the program's [Recreational Fishing Data Downloads](#) webpage.

What information is available as part of the agency's 2020 catch estimates?

These estimates include catch (catch per trip), effort (trip), and total catch estimates for all fishing modes (shore, private boat, and for-hire, which includes charter and headboat) for the Atlantic Coast (Maine through Florida), Gulf Coast (Florida through Mississippi), and Hawaii. The estimates were produced using the agency's standard estimation methods and published at the standard levels of aggregation (annual, two-month sampling wave, geographic region, fishing mode, and area fished).

What is imputation?

In statistics, imputation is the process of filling data gaps with proxy, or replacement, values. These replacement values are known as imputed data.

Why did NOAA Fisheries select imputation as its method of addressing gaps in recreational catch data?

Imputation is a well-established, standard statistical practice for addressing missing survey data. The U.S. Census Bureau, for example, applies [imputation procedures](#) to data from its Survey of Income and Program Participation. Upon evaluation, both staff and statistical consultants agreed imputation would be a reasonable method of filling our catch data's gaps.

How was imputation applied?

Because NOAA Fisheries actively tracked sampling suspensions with our state data collection partners — monitoring when and where the angler intercept survey was interrupted — we were able to fill gaps in our catch data with corresponding catch records from prior years. This simple imputation approach involved using 2018 and 2019 catch data as proxy values to fill 2020's data gaps. These 2018 and 2019 data were not arbitrarily selected. Instead, imputed data are representative of the data gaps, matching the time, place, and fishing mode combinations that would have been sampled had the survey continued uninterrupted. To ensure imputed data weren't over-represented against observed data, the original sample weights for the 2018 and 2019 catch records were down-weighted. Imputation only affected catch data; because our effort surveys continued largely uninterrupted, imputation was not required for effort data.

How will data users know where imputation was applied?

The [MRIP Query Tool](#)'s Catch Time Series Query indicates the percent of each estimate that was produced using imputed catch records.

How did imputation affect catch estimates in my region?

When estimates that were produced with both imputed and observed data are compared with estimates that were produced using only observed data, we can see that the overall impacts of imputation on the agency's 2020 catch estimates were modest, with some regional variability. For example, impacts on landings estimates in New England and the Mid-Atlantic were larger than in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. These differences reflect differences in states' decisions to suspend

sampling: New England and the Mid-Atlantic saw longer sampling suspensions and larger data gaps than the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

Does NOAA Fisheries expect to revise 2020 estimates once 2021 data have been collected?

When data from 2021 are available in 2022, the agency will evaluate the effects of including 2021 data (for example, alongside 2019 data and instead of 2018 data) in the imputation. Because these effects are unknown, the agency cannot predict whether it will seek to revise its 2020 catch estimates.



NOAA
FISHERIES

FY 2021 Implementation Plan Update







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Executive Summary

The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is the state-regional-federal partnership that develops, implements, and continually improves a national network of recreational fishing surveys. The program uses data from these surveys to produce estimates of total recreational catch, which are vital to the assessment and management of U.S. fish stocks. These estimates could not be produced without the active participation of state agencies, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and regional fishery management councils. While NOAA Fisheries maintains a central role in establishing survey standards and developing and certifying survey designs, implementation occurs at the regional level. This accounts for differences in fisheries, fishing communities, and preferred methods of collecting information from anglers.

Our partners have shaped our goals, contributed to our accomplishments, and informed the priorities described in this report. As we enter a new fiscal year, we will maintain our focus on ensuring sound science, providing quality products that meet science and management needs, and increasing partner, customer, and public understanding of our work. In FY 2021, we will continue to:

- **Respond to the challenges of COVID-19.** Begin to address the data gaps caused by the widespread suspension of in-person and at-sea sampling, and monitor the pandemic's continued impact on recreational fishing data collection.



Photo: GA Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division

- **Transition to new survey and data standards.** Ensure changes to our statistical processes are communicated effectively and implemented smoothly, with input from the agencies and organizations that rely on them to assess and manage fish stocks.

- **Improve and expand our network of state, regional, and coastwide data collection programs.** Work with

regional partners to develop and implement a logbook-based for-hire data collection program, with intercept survey-based validation sampling, for the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Reestablish a data collection program in Puerto Rico, transition to a new or modified data collection design in Hawaii, and begin to develop a new data collection design for the U.S. Virgin Islands. Increase sampling in the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific, develop improvements to our Large Pelagics Survey, and support research to improve the data quality of

our general catch and effort survey designs.

- **Engage in continued dialogue with the recreational fishing community.** Research the needs of this key audience and deliver information to build understanding of recreational fishing data, its uses, and its limitations.

Better Data, Better Fishing

Learn more about our work to implement these tactics and to support NOAA Fisheries in its mission to maintain healthy and productive fisheries at countmyfish.noaa.gov.

Fiscal Year 2020 Key Accomplishments

Goal 1—Meet Customer Needs

Provide recreational catch and effort statistics that meet defined, understood, and prioritized needs—including, for example, timeliness of delivery of estimates, spatial and temporal survey coverage, precision of estimates, and statistics for special needs fisheries—of identified regional and national customers.

- Continued to work with the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources to evaluate new survey designs that will better monitor target species. Began work to modify Hawaii's Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) site sampling and interview schedule to better suit local monitoring needs. (Also supports Goals 2 and 5.)
- Continued to work with the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, and U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources to produce a plan to:
 - Re-evaluate the condition of all public fishing access sites in Puerto Rico following substantial hurricane and earthquake damage.
 - Review data needs and collection methods to prepare for resumption of data collection in Puerto Rico and establish a data collection program in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
 - Identify a regional governance structure to oversee these developments and future survey administration. (Also supports Goal 5.)

Goal 2—Provide Quality Products

Achieve consistency, quality, timeliness, accessibility, and transparency in data collection, production of estimates, and program operations.

- Transitioned the For-Hire Survey (FHS) from contractor to state conduct.
- Improved the Public Fishing Access Site Register and added Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit-holders to the For-Hire Vessel Directory, among other changes, to facilitate vessel information entry, coding, and linking with permit information.



Photo: NOAA Fisheries

- Continued to work with state, regional, and federal partners in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico to develop a comprehensive for-hire data collection program that will:
 - Improve the validation of logbook-collected data, as well as the integration of such data across state and federal programs.
 - Ensure vessels that do not report via logbooks are covered through a certified survey or other methods.
 - Reduce reporting burden through improved data sharing. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Developed a dockside validation survey to support the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Completed a Customer Satisfaction Assessment and identified recommendations to improve customer satisfaction with our data products, confidence in the quality of the information we provide, and understanding of the uses and limitations of our estimates. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Adopted MRIP Survey and Data Standards to promote consistency, comparability, and interoperability across our national network of recreational fishing data collection programs. (Also supports Goal 4.)

Goal 3—Increase Understanding

Strengthen two-way communications with partners and stakeholders to improve their knowledge of the properties and use limitations of catch statistics, and to build confidence in the data.

- Worked with state and regional partners to facilitate recreational fishing listening tours in Virginia and North Carolina, which included two listening sessions with more than 30 private anglers and for-hire captains and crew; six meetings with bait and tackle shops; five meetings with fishing clubs and associations; one boat show; and a half-day shadowing an APAIS field interviewer. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Completed the first phase of the recreational angler social network analysis, examining the information-sharing habits of saltwater recreational anglers, as well as their opinions about recreational fishing data collection and management.
- Worked with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), the Gulf Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN), and state agency staff to test new outreach materials, discuss state communications needs, and identify opportunities for collaboration. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Developed a series of outreach materials including an infographic, rack cards, and fact sheets to communicate programmatic activities and priorities.
- Delivered educational briefings to Marine Resource Education Program science workshops, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Introductory Fisheries Science for Stakeholders course, and Sea Grant outreach staff.
- Developed and tested a Partner Needs and Satisfaction Assessment, which will assess the strength of our relationship with partners, their understanding of our program, and satisfaction with our communications channels and the products we develop.

Goal 4—Ensure Sound Science

Maintain a strong science foundation for the program that includes robustness, integrity, transparency, and innovation, and that develops and incorporates new advancements in survey design and data collection and analysis.

- Completed a pilot study to evaluate a web-push design for estimating recreational fishing effort, comparing

the data quality, response rates, and reported demographic characteristics and fishing activity of the standard Fishing Effort Survey (FES) with those of a design that first encouraged households to respond via online questionnaire.

- Completed data collection and preliminary analysis for a study to evaluate the impact of question order on coastal household reports of shore and private boat fishing activity.
- Designed and initiated a study to determine whether FES estimates are impacted by nonresponse bias.
- Developed and initiated testing of an innovative survey design that combines probability and nonprobability sampling to overcome the rare-encounter nature of large pelagic species in the dockside Large Pelagics Intercept Survey.
- Monitored the impacts of COVID-19 on recreational fishing data collection and evaluated alternative estimation methods to compensate for interrupted survey activities.
- Reviewed, approved, and released several pilot study reports, including:
 - Developing an Electronic Logbook to Census For-Hire Angler-Trip Effort, Catch, and Harvest in Alaska.
 - [Electronic Data Collection for the Atlantic Coast Access Point Angler Intercept Survey.](#)
 - Analysis of Marine Recreational Angler Information Gathering and Sharing Habits and Opinions Regarding Fisheries Management and Data Collection (social network analysis).

Goal 5—Operate Collaboratively

Maintain effective collaborations with state, interstate, regional, and national partners for cost-effective and responsive recreational data collection and catch estimation.

- Worked with the California, Oregon, and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife toward certifying existing data collection programs. (Also supports Goal 2.)
- Supported the transition toward specialized state surveys in the Gulf of Mexico, completing reviews of an Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources report on Snapper Check and a proposed

Florida State Reef Fish Survey calibration approach. (Also supports Goal 2.)

- Worked with GulfFIN to prepare for the transition from paper forms to tablet-based APAIS data collection.

Goal 6—Meet Program Resource and Funding Needs

Ensure that the program's value and funding needs are well documented and communicated; resources are utilized efficiently; opportunities to expand capability through leveraging partner resources are fully explored; and actions are taken as authorized to ensure sufficient funding to support the needs of the program (federal and state support).

- Administered \$3 million in Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act (Modern Fish Act) investment funds to ACCSP, GulfFIN, and Pacific RecFIN to support increased sampling along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts. This was supported by new permanent funds dedicated to improving coverage of rarely encountered species and the precision of catch estimates. (Also supports Goals 2, 4, and 5.)



Photo: Victor Vecchio/Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office

Fiscal Year 2021 Priorities

Priority activities are detailed below, organized by the six goals and associated key tactics outlined in our five-year strategic plan.

Goal 1—Meet Customer Needs

Key Tactics:

Modify survey designs to meet customer needs in ways that are both feasible and cost-effective.

- In Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, determine non-commercial fishery data collection needs, considering the feasibility, cost, and logistics of monitoring catch for select federally managed invertebrates. Select modified (Puerto Rico) and new (U.S. Virgin Islands) survey designs to be documented—and, if necessary, certified—and implemented in the region. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- In Hawaii, determine the feasibility and cost of modifying the APAIS to a boat-based rather than angler-based interview to allow for the inclusion of select federally managed invertebrates in catch reports. Complete documentation of the selected survey design and its review for certification. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Initiate the modernization of the Alaska Statewide Harvest Survey, developing a web-based survey with multiple survey waves to improve response rates and reduce recall bias. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Develop and implement methodology for generating annual catch estimates for regions in which catch data collections were interrupted due to COVID-19.

Goal 2—Provide Quality Products

Key Tactics:

Collect data (i.e., conduct surveys) consistent with minimum requirements.

- Use Modern Fish Act investment funds to restore, maintain, and in some cases, increase sampling along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts to improve the precision of catch estimates. (Also supports Goals 5 and 6.)
- Complete a study by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) on the suitability of MRIP catch estimates for in-season management

of annual catch limits (ACLs). The study will include recommendations for data collection improvement and management system changes to address any documented unmet needs. Upon receipt of the NASEM findings and recommendations, work with the Office of Sustainable Fisheries to prepare a plan to address the recommendations, and submit the plan to Congress. (Also supports Goal 1.)

- Work with ACCSP to optimize sampling across surveys. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Enhance marine groundfish sampling in Southeast Alaska.
- Continue to support the development of a comprehensive for-hire data collection program for the Atlantic coast that will increase the use of logbooks and reduce overall reporting burden. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Implement MRIP Survey and Data Standards.

Create and support regional bodies to monitor the consistency and quality of the data being generated and to ensure continual improvement of data quality (as part of regional implementation teams).

- Complete Transition Plans as necessary for modified and replacement survey designs, including Pacific RecFIN (for California, Oregon, and Washington state surveys); the Southeast For Hire Electronic Reporting Program; and Puerto Rico. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Complete Transition Plan for fully integrating calibrated catch estimates from Gulf of Mexico supplemental state surveys (Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi) and replacement survey (Louisiana) into NOAA Fisheries stock assessments and management. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Continue to work with the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources and other partners in the region (including NOAA Fisheries and the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council) to develop a Transition Plan for any necessary benchmarking, calibration, and implementation of new or modified surveys for non-commercial fishery monitoring in Hawaii. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Finalize the Alaska MRIP Regional Implementation Plan. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- In Hawaii, design an improved data processing and quality control/quality assurance program to support

field data collection. Include tablet-based data collection in the revised administrative structure and process. (Also supports Goal 5.)

Create clear and concise minimum requirements for data collection, statistical estimation, access, and information management, and for providing measures of precision and sources.

- Develop statistical approaches to identify survey data and/or estimates that are inconsistent with historical trends or time series. (Also supports Goal 4.)

Goal 3—Increase Understanding

Key Tactics:

Identify and maintain contact with key stakeholders. Periodically evaluate stakeholder understanding of MRIP and adjust communications strategies as needed.

- Complete the second phase of the recreational angler Social Network Analysis, implementing a qualitative in-person survey to examine angler information networks.
- Host MRIP 101 sessions with regional fishery management council and interstate marine fisheries commission members; non-governmental organizations; and fishing clubs and associations.
- Host listening sessions with private anglers and the for-hire sector.
- Continue to create a series of infographics on topics such as for-hire data collection, weighted estimation, and MRIP's role in fisheries science and management.
- Produce a series of videos on topics such as an overview of MRIP, tablet-based data collection, and the catch and effort estimation process.
- Conduct outreach to for-hire owners and operators in the Southeast regarding the implementation and transition to new federal for-hire electronic reporting requirements. Ensure HMS permit holders are aware of the relationship between these new requirements and existing HMS catch reporting requirements. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Conduct outreach to charter and guide operators in Alaska around eLogBook requirements, including “how-to” videos and demonstrations at industry

meetings. Improve understanding and use of eLog-Books, especially where use will be mandatory to provide Chinook salmon harvest data. (Also supports Goal 5.)

- Conduct proactive media outreach.
- Maintain active engagement in the Marine Resource Education Program and Introductory Fisheries Science for Stakeholders course.
- Provide communications and outreach support to address the requirements of the Modern Fish Act.
- Consult with stakeholders to evaluate their perceptions of survey estimates.

Provide our partners with the tools and coordination necessary to enable consistent communications about recreational data collection methods, uses, and limitations.

- Conduct a Partner Needs and Satisfaction Assessment. Based on the results, develop a communications and outreach toolkit. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Host “Ask Me Anything” sessions between program staff and state field interviewers, port agents, recreational fishing coordinators, and additional NOAA Fisheries staff. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Develop leadership backgrounders on high-profile topics, such as calibration, estimation, outliers, rare-event species, and survey design certification.
- Continue to leverage regional communications working groups to execute Regional Implementation Plan

priorities and related communications and outreach efforts. (Also supports Goal 5.)

Assess customer understanding of and satisfaction with our data products and communications.

- Improve customer access to documentation that describes our statistically rigorous and scientifically sound survey design and estimation methods. (Also supports Goal 5.)
- Develop materials to support an onboarding process for new customers, such as webinars and/or user guides. (Also supports Goal 5.)

Goal 4—Ensure Sound Science

Key Tactics:

Support research aimed at designing, testing, and implementing new and/or improved recreational fishing surveys that address independent review recommendations and specific partner needs.

- Implement the Recreational Fishing Boat Survey in three states as a study to evaluate APAIS bias in estimating distribution of effort by area fished.
- Finalize the design of and implement the License Sensitivity Survey to evaluate the sensitivity of reporting fishing effort when asked about possessing a fishing license.
- Continue redesigning and conducting field testing for the Large Pelagics Survey.



Photo: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Marine Fisheries

- Develop and implement methods to produce recreational catch and effort estimates in response to the data gaps that resulted from COVID-19 related sampling interruptions.
- Complete internal technical and policy reviews and publish outstanding pilot study reports to the MRIP website.
- Continue evaluations of alternative estimation methodologies for rare event species that were developed with support from MRIP consultants. Identify next steps for the project including 1) developing recommendations on guidance for use, 2) developing tools for implementing alternative estimation approaches, and 3) exploring additional estimation methodologies including small area estimation methods.

Seek independent reviews of current and proposed survey designs, estimation methods, and data collection technologies that are on the MRIP Certification Track.

- At the request of the Project Management Team, review designs submitted for certification, including, for example, the For-Hire Survey.

Goal 5—Operate Collaboratively

Key Tactics:

Evaluate and, as appropriate, support and enable delegating responsibility of survey operations to regions, based on standards to maintain data consistency and comparability.

- Continue expanded engagement by ACCSP in council and commission meetings regarding the development of electronic for-hire trip reports and potential use for fisheries management.
- Support collaboration among the Atlantic HMS Division and the NOAA Fisheries One Stop Reporting initiative, ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee, ACCSP Gear Codes Working Group, Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program, and others to ensure data collection efforts meet Atlantic HMS data needs.
- Continue to support GulfFIN's transition from paper forms to tablet-based APAIS data collection.
- Update the Atlantic MRIP Regional Implementation Plan and Atlantic HMS Regional MRIP Implementation

Plan to reflect achieved objectives and new priorities. (Also supports Goal 4.)

- Continue to support the development and improvement of databases, documentation, reporting systems, and applications for RecFIN and PacFIN data users, including a web API that provides access to data tables, an application that supports data queries, and a mobile app that supports the identification of West Coast rockfish species.
- Prepare a catch-weighted length composition report for the RecFIN Groundfish Management Team to support the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in providing length composition of groundfish species, weighted by catch estimates from the RecFIN database.
- Continue to work with the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program to develop and implement a dockside validation survey to support electronic logbook reporting by federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. Evaluate the survey design for use with state and federal for-hire logbook programs on the Atlantic coast. (Also supports Goal 5).

Respond to the requirements of the Modern Fish Act.

- Complete a Plan for State Partnerships that addresses the requirements of the Modern Fish Act, and includes a summary of the regional MRIP state-federal partnerships, their priorities and needs, evaluations of data states submit, and opportunities to improve and expand the partnerships.
- Prepare an updated report to Congress, as required by the Modern Fish Act, on the status of implementation of the recommendations of the 2017 NASEM review of MRIP. (Also supports Goal 3.)

Goal 6—Meet Program Resource and Funding Needs

Key Tactic:

Administer Modern Fish Act investment funds.

- Continue to administer an additional \$3 million in Modern Fish Act investment funds to support the highest priorities identified in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific Regional Implementation Plans. (Also supports Goals 4 and 5.)

MRIP Strategic Plan Tactics At-a-Glance

The following charts summarize tactics MRIP is utilizing to support our six goals. The charts are based on strategies, tactics, and schedules identified in the 2017 MRIP strategic plan; the numbers listed next to each tactic correspond with the goal and strategy the tactic supports in the strategic plan, which may be viewed in its entirety [online](#).

The tactics and timelines from the strategic plan guide the annual implementation planning process, with additional tactics added to annual implementation plans to reflect the evolution of new needs and requirements. The timelines reflected in these charts are drawn from the strategic plan; some of those tactical implementations remain on track, while others are behind schedule.




















Acronyms used in the charts refer to MRIP teams, unless otherwise noted:

- CET: Communications and Education Team
- ECT: Expert Consultant Team
- ESC: Executive Steering Committee
- LT: Leadership Team
- OC: NOAA Fisheries Office of Communications
- OT: Operations Team
- PMT: Program Management Team
- RET: Research and Evaluation Team
- RFPA: NOAA Fisheries Recreational Fishing Policy Adviser
- RIC: Regional Implementation Council
- RITs: Regional Implementation Teams
- SOT: Survey Operations Team
- SF3: Office of Sustainable Fisheries (Domestic Fisheries Division)
- ST: Office of Science and Technology
- ST1: Office of Science and Technology (Fisheries Statistics Division)
- TT: Transition Team

Tactics	Responsible Entities	Timeline							
Goal 1—Meet Customer Needs		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
➤ 1.1.1. Identify primary customers.	ST1, CET	◆			◆				
➤ 1.1.2. Identify customer needs at intervals of not more than five years, in conjunction with reviews of Regional Implementation Plan updates.	ST1			◆			◆		
➤ 1.2.1. Assess customer satisfaction at intervals of two to three years.	CET; Contractors; ST1				◆			◆	
➤ 1.3.1. Evaluate feasibility and costs of meeting different customer needs through regional implementation planning process and customer needs assessments (per Tactic 1.2.1).	LT; ST1		◆—————◆						
➤ 1.3.2. Modify survey designs to meet customer needs in ways that are both feasible and cost-effective.	ST1		◆—————◆						
Goal 2—Provide Quality Products		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
➤ 2.1.1. Create clear and concise minimum requirements for data collection, statistical estimation, access, and information management, and for providing measures of precision and sources of bias in:	ST1; ECT; MRIP teams as relevant		◆—————◆						
• 2.1.1.1. Data collection.	ST1; ECT; SOT		◆—————◆						
• 2.1.1.2. Statistical estimation.	ST1		◆—————◆						
• 2.1.1.3. Access and information management.	ST1		◆—————◆						
• 2.1.1.4. Measures of precision and sources of bias.	ST1		◆—————◆						
➤ 2.1.2. Collect data (i.e., conduct surveys) consistent with minimum requirements.	ST1; partners	◆	—————▶						
➤ 2.1.3. Establish minimum quality (precision and absence of bias) standards for survey statistics provided to the public.	LT			◆————◆					
➤ 2.1.4. Seek periodic independent reviews of program (i.e., OST five-year Science Plan reviews).	LT; ESC; ST1		◆					◆	
➤ 2.2.1. Create and support regional bodies to monitor the consistency and quality of the data and to assure continuous improvement of data quality (as part of regional implementation teams).	RITs; ST1		◆—————◆						
➤ 2.2.2. Document the major elements of MRIP program management, policy and procedures (e.g., Organizational Governance, Planning and Implementation, Certification/ Transition, Budget Processes).	ST1		◆————◆						
➤ 2.3.1. Develop complete documentation of survey and estimation protocols, quality assurance procedures, and data quality control procedures.	ST1	◆	—————▶						
➤ 2.3.2. Maintain public website with comprehensive documentation of methods, sample frames, and statistics.	ST1; CET	◆	—————▶						
➤ 2.4.1. Develop and execute transition plans that outline a process and timeline for implementing new and/or improved survey designs.	TT; ST1; SF3	◆	—————▶						
➤ 2.4.2. Assess need for development and use of tools that convert statistics produced by surveys into common currency across all surveys and develop as necessary.	ST1; RITs	◆	—————▶						

Tactics	Responsible Entities	Timeline						
Goal 3—Increase Understanding		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
➤ 3.1.1. Conduct an internal annual assessment of partner and stakeholder communication and outreach needs, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of current communications products..	CET; ST1	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
➤ 3.1.2. Develop outreach materials to provide consistent messaging regarding recreational fishing data improvement efforts among internal and external partners.	CET; ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.2.1. Identify and maintain contact with key stakeholders (e.g., Social Network Analysis).	CET; ST1					◆		
➤ 3.2.2. Conduct a formal external MRIP communications and outreach feedback and needs assessment every three to five years.	CET; ST1	◆				◆		
➤ 3.2.3. Establish an MRIP onboarding process(es) for key stakeholders and primary customers (may be different processes).	CET; ST1					◆		
➤ 3.3.1. Develop targeted outreach materials and tactics to educate stakeholders on the importance of various survey components and limitations.	CET; ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.3.2. Periodically evaluate stakeholder understanding of MRIP and adjust communications strategies, as needed.	CET; ST1		◆————→					
➤ 3.3.3. Host primary customer workshop to train participants to effectively access, analyze, and/or use data tools; assess results and determine benefits of repeating.	CET; ST1					◆		
➤ 3.4.1. Expand Communications and Education Team to include members of partner education and outreach programs.	CET, ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.4.2. Pursue inclusion of MRIP in curricula for Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) and new Council member trainings.	CET; ST1; SF3		◆————→					
➤ 3.4.3. Provide support to a NMFS recreational fisheries outreach and education initiative.	OC; RFPA; CET; SF; ST		◆————→					
➤ 3.4.4. Provide our partners with the tools and coordination necessary to enable consistent communications about recreational data collection methods, uses, and limitations.	CET; ST1		◆————→					
➤ 3.5.1. Maintain current content on website.	CET; ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.5.2. Assess web analytics to improve web content and usage.	CET; ST1		◆————→					
➤ 3.6.1. Increase use of public relations; social and digital media.	CET; ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.6.2. Provide content for inclusion in stakeholder outreach products and publications (e.g., fishing magazines, blogs).	CET; ST1	◆————→						
➤ 3.7.1. Revise/expand the MRIP Strategic Communications Plan to include the recommendations in the 2017 MRIP Review by NASEM, including measures to enhance two-way dialogue with key stakeholders and effective outreach to anglers.	CET; ST1	◆						
➤ 3.7.2. Adopt and execute communications plans for high-profile MRIP implementation actions (e.g., FES Transition).	CET; ST1	◆————→						

Tactics	Responsible Entities	Timeline							
Goal 4—Ensure Sound Science		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
➤ 4.1.1. Support research aimed at designing, testing, and implementing new and/or improved recreational fishing surveys that address independent review recommendations and specific partner needs (e.g., private access, discards).	OT; ST1	◆							
➤ 4.1.2. Evaluate the potential application of new electronic technologies into the program.	OT; ST1	◆							
➤ 4.1.3. Develop an analytical tool that enables optimization of sample allocation within and among surveys to address desired levels of precision for varying purposes, as identified in Regional Implementation Plans.	ST1; ECT					◆			
➤ 4.1.4. Develop a plan for prioritizing and addressing the survey design improvement recommendations in the 2017 MRIP Review by NASEM.	ESC; MRIP LT; ST1; CT	◆							
➤ 4.2.1. Provide technical support for the program through hiring staff highly qualified in survey and mathematical statistics disciplines, and maintain peer-accepted external consultants.	ST1	◆							
➤ 4.2.2. Increase staff expertise in survey statistics, survey operations, statistical software, new technologies, and survey management through trainings and other development opportunities.	ST1	◆							
➤ 4.2.3. Publish research results in peer-reviewed journals and organize and/or participate in scientific symposia.	ST1; ECT	◆							
➤ 4.3.1. Seek independent reviews of current and proposed survey designs, estimation methods, and data collection technologies that are on the MRIP Certification Track.	OT; ST1	◆							
➤ 4.3.2. Conduct periodic regional reviews of data programs to identify potential sources of bias and errors.	RITs; ST1			◆					
Goal 5—Operate Collaboratively		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
➤ 5.1.1. Conduct periodic reviews to ensure that partners are adequately represented and actively participating on the various MRIP teams.	CET; Contractor		◆			◆			
➤ 5.1.2. Assess partners' sense of ownership in MRIP (i.e., do partners consider themselves partners?).	CET; Contractor					◆			
➤ 5.1.3. Periodically review management structure to address evolving program functions and priorities.	ESC; LT		◆					◆	
➤ 5.1.4. Evaluate options to enhance recreational fisheries stakeholders' participation in MRIP advisory structure.	ESC; LT					◆			
➤ 5.1.5. Expand MRIP collaborations, including adding additional experts in survey design and communications to MRIP consultant team.	ST1	◆							
➤ 5.1.6. Revise program management and team structure periodically to assure full partner engagement, based on results of Strategy 5.1 reviews and provisions of Regional Implementation Plans.	ESC			◆					
➤ 5.2.1. Develop Regional Implementation Plans that include R&D priorities for developing and certifying new methods that address partner needs.	RITs; ESC; OT	◆							
➤ 5.2.2. Attend and actively participate in FINs and FIN partner meetings when data needs are being discussed.	ST1	◆							

Tactics	Responsible Entities	Timeline						
Goal 5—Operate Collaboratively (continued)		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
➤ 5.2.3. In regions that do not have a FIN, create and maintain ad hoc Regional Implementation Teams.	ST1							
➤ 5.2.4. Annually specify national priority-setting criteria for providing support for needs identified in the Regional Implementation Plans.	OT; ST1; LT							
➤ 5.3.1. Evaluate and, as appropriate, support and enable delegating responsibility of survey operations to regions, based on standards to maintain data consistency and comparability.	ST1							
➤ 5.3.2. Conduct evaluation of cost/benefits of centralized vs. regionalized catch and effort estimation.	ST1; RITs							
➤ 5.4.1. Respond to the requirements of the Modern Fish Act.	ST1							
Goal 6—Meet Program Resources and Funding Needs		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
➤ 6.1.1. Develop and share criteria for priority-setting and decision-making on funding allocation to research and survey implementation.	OT; ST1; LT; ESC							
➤ 6.1.2. Use Regional Implementation Plans to develop a national inventory of partner needs and associated costs (see Goal 5—Operate Collaboratively).	ST1; LT							
➤ 6.1.3. Explore opportunities to expand program support through leveraging funding and capability of partner and stakeholder programs, including NOAA programs.	ST1; RITs							
➤ 6.2.1. Provide a cost-benefit analysis of funding level options for primary stakeholders (i.e., NOAA/NMFS).	ST1							
➤ 6.2.2. Advocate for meeting funding needs during annual DOC/NOAA budget opportunities.	ST1							
➤ 6.2.3. Utilize relationships with Interstate Fishery Management Commissions to help identify resources for recreational data collection.	ST1; RITs							
➤ 6.2.4. Document partner contributions for funding data collection efforts.	RITs							
➤ 6.2.5. Create a compelling narrative on MRIP and partner success stories to share with key stakeholders.	CET							
➤ 6.3.1. Administer Modern Fish Act investment funds.	ST1							



U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.

Acting Under Secretary
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Dr. Neil Jacobs

NOAA Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries
Chris Oliver

SEPTEMBER 2020

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National Marine
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Office of Science and Technology
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 19, 2021

To: Council and Board

From: Matthew Seeley, Council staff

Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment: Cover Memo for Final Action

The Council and Board are developing an amendment to the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan to address several issues in the bluefish fishery. The Council and Board approved a public hearing document at the February 2021 joint meeting. Public hearings were then held in March and April 2021 to recruit public feedback on the final range of alternatives. This public input was reviewed by the Bluefish Advisory Panel (AP) and Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT). Now, the Council and Board will take final action on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment on Tuesday, June 8th at 10:00 a.m.

The following briefing materials are enclosed behind this tab:

- 1) Bluefish Amendment Final Action Staff Memo – May 19, 2021
- 2) FMAT Summary – May 12, 2021
- 3) Bluefish Amendment Public Comment Summary Document – May 2021
- 4) Bluefish Public Hearing Document – Revised in May 2021
- 5) Advisory Panel Meeting Summary – April 27, 2021
- 6) Bluefish Amendment Alternatives Reference Guide – February 2021

In addition, the ASMFC's Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Draft Amendment Document, which was also revised in May 2021, is available on the Council's meeting page.

As noted above, the Bluefish Public Hearing Document was revised in May 2021. A minor error was discovered in the commercial allocations to the states alternative set within the Public Hearing Document (Table 6) and the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Draft Amendment Document. This error was in the status quo allocation column of both tables and included values for some states that were off by a few hundredths of a percent. Given many of the alternatives in the commercial allocations to the states section are linked, this error affected other tables and text within the section. However, all revisions have been made and are highlighted in yellow in the documents. Economic analyses were rerun and all conclusions from the impacts remain the same.



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 19, 2021
To: Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Matthew Seeley, Staff
Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment: Staff memo for final action

On Tuesday, June 8th, the Council and Board will review public comments, input from advisors and the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) before considering final action on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. This memo outlines Council staff recommendations for each alternative set being considered in the amendment (except *de minimis* – Board only action) with respect to the public comments and input provided by the advisors and FMAT.

FMP Goals and Objectives

Council staff fully support the FMAT recommendations on the FMP Goals and Objectives, which include implementing minor revisions to the language that were suggested during the public comment process. The revisions below (in red), reflect the comments that the FMAT and Council staff recommends be considered by the Council and Board when taking final action. Specifically, the recommendation to change “discard” to “release” encompasses the catch-and-release aspect of the fishery while avoiding the negative connotation that accompanies the term “discard”. This potential change carries the same message as using the term “discard” but better suits the desires of the recreational community. The recommendation to change “along the coast” to “within the management unit” allows for the inclusion of inland bluefish consumers that do not live on the coast.

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

Objective 1.1: Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.

Objective 1.2: Promote practices that reduce ~~discard~~ **release** mortality within the recreational and commercial fishery.

Objective 1.3: Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states by promoting compliance and to support the development and implementation of management measures.

Objective 1.4: Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.

Objective 1.5: Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource.

Goal 2: Provide fair and equitable access to the fishery across all user groups throughout the management unit.

Objective 2.1: Ensure the implementation of management measures provides fair and equitable access to the resource across to all **user** groups ~~along the coast~~ **within the management unit**.

Objective 2.2: Consider the economic and social needs and priorities of all groups that access the bluefish resource in the development of new management measures.

Objective 2.3: Maintain effective coordination with stakeholder groups to ensure optimization of economic and social benefits.

Commercial/Recreational Sector Allocations

The public continues to discuss the cyclical and environmentally driven aspect of the bluefish stock. Given the stock's fluctuations in abundance and availability, Council staff agrees with the FMAT conclusions that alternatives associated with a shorter time series may not be as appropriate for determining allocation between the two sectors. Ideally, capturing the fluctuations in abundance over time will best represent the trends in the bluefish fishery.

Given the FMP stipulates that the allocation percentage be applied to the Acceptable Biological Catch to determine each sector's Annual Catch Target, Council staff recommends using catch data to inform the allocations. Council staff agrees with the FMAT that using catch data as the basis for the allocations of catch will more effectively encompass the needs of a large subset of the recreational sector that receive economic and social benefits from catching and releasing fish, as opposed to harvesting fish.

As noted by the assessment scientist on the FMAT, the status quo alternative does not represent the reality of the fishery anymore. The status quo alternative was based on uncalibrated MRIP estimates from 1981-1989. These estimates are no longer being used in the stock assessments or in catch accounting and should not be considered as the Council and Board discuss reallocation.

As noted by the economist on the FMAT, alternative 2a-4 offers the highest economic benefit to the commercial sector followed by 2a-3 and 2a-2, amongst the allocations based on catch data.

Council staff recommends alternative 2a-3 (87% recreational, 13% commercial) given: 1) the vast majority of public comments supported this alternative, 2) it offers the second highest economic benefit to the commercial sector, 3) is based on catch data, and 4) the time series encompasses the most recent 20 years of fishery performance, which considers more of the cyclical nature present in this fishery over time, as compared to a shorter time series.

For the phase-in alternatives (alternative set 2b), the FMAT and Council staff recommends alternative 2b-1 (no phase-in). This recommendation is consistent with the overwhelming majority of public comments which identified that the phase-in approach does not offer much benefit when the allocations are changing by such a small amount. Additionally, the phase-in approach would add an unnecessary level of complexity and administrative burden.

Commercial Allocations to the States

As described in the sector allocations section, the bluefish fishery often experiences cyclical and environmentally driven levels in abundance. The status quo alternative (3a-1) represents fishery abundance and allocations from 1981-1989, which no longer reflect the current nature of the bluefish fishery. Over time, the bluefish fishery is available in certain regions due to the migratory habits and preferences for offshore waters. Moreover, this change in availability is more well represented over a longer time series, so Council staff does not recommend alternative 3a-2. By design, alternative 3a-4 captures a wide range of years including the historical aspect of the overall time series. However, since half the time series is weighted towards historical abundance, the allocations do not fully represent the current needs of all states and may still warrant state-to-state transfers immediately following reallocation. Finally, public comments were fairly evenly split, however most support was provided for alternative 3a-2, followed by 3a-3, 3a-1, and 3a-4. ***Given the justification provided above, Council staff recommends alternative 3a-3 and notes that while reallocation should reduce the need for state-to-state transfers in years immediately following amendment implementation, transfers may still occur as needed.***

In regard to the option to phase-in, Council staff and the FMAT indicated that the selection of a more recent time series to inform reallocation will more accurately reflect current state-specific needs and may reduce the need to phase-in any changes. Similar to the recommendation for the sector allocations, Council staff and the FMAT noted that the phase-in alternative set was also unpopular (often at public hearings) despite receiving some support from the public. Phasing-in allocations has added levels of complexity and administrative burden, especially given the changes associated with implementation of a rebuilding plan and updated stock assessments. Overall, Council staff believes the perceived benefits of phasing-in potentially small allocation changes for most states does not outweigh the complexity and administrative burden. ***Therefore, Council staff recommends alternative 3b-1, no phase-in.***

After reviewing all public comments related to the trigger alternative set (3c), the FMAT and Council staff recommends alternative 3c-1, no trigger. Council staff and the FMAT noted that the public found the trigger approach to be overly complicated with limited perceived benefit.

Considering the commercial allocations to the states section included 4 sub-alternatives, Council staff and the FMAT believes the complexity tied to sub-alternative sets 3b and 3c may have influenced the public's widespread support on minimum default allocation alternatives. ***Ultimately, the FMAT and Council staff recommend implementation of a 0.10% minimum default allocation (3d-2).*** This alternative will allow states that would otherwise lose their allocation through the reallocation process to retain a minimum default allocation, which will allow small amounts of bluefish caught in these states to be harvested instead of discarded. Council staff agrees with the FMAT that 0.10% strikes a balance between reducing regulatory discards and not overburdening other states' allocations.

Rebuilding Plan

As indicated in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the preferred rebuilding plan shall be as short as possible, taking into account the status and biology of any overfished stocks of fish, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by

international organizations in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the overfished stock of fish within the marine ecosystem; and not exceed 10 years, except in cases where the biology of the stock of fish, other environmental conditions, or management measures under an international agreement in which the United States participates dictate otherwise.

Council staff agrees with the FMAT that the rebuilding plan should be as short as possible while considering the needs of the fishing communities that depend on the resource. Additionally, the rebuilding plan should account for the inherent uncertainty associated with the cyclical and environmentally driven nature of the stock. Given the spread in public comments, Council staff and FMAT members noted that alternative 4c may be a fair middle point that considers both the biological and social requirements as required in MSA. Furthermore, alternatives 4c and 4d offer catches that increase steadily over the duration of the rebuilding plan, as compared to the constant harvest approach (4b) which rebuilds as quickly as possible with low harvest limits. According to the economist on the FMAT, alternative 4c and 4d offer higher gross and average revenues to the commercial sector compared to 4b. Furthermore, 4b has the potential to be particularly damaging to the commercial sector. The culmination of rebuilding plan alternative 4b could create an instability in market supply and weaken supply chain linkages in addition to offering the lowest economic returns to the commercial sector. This in turn could compound the commercial sector's economic burden by imposing several years of reduced market share due to low quotas during the rebuilding period. Council staff and FMAT members cautioned that once the stock is rebuilt, regulations could likely be liberalized.

For the reasons provided above, Council staff recommends alternative 4c. Moreover, alternative 4c uses the updated 2019 Council risk policy, which by design, evaluates current stock biomass in relation to its target and threshold and adjusts risk accordingly.

Sector Transfers

The reallocation process in this amendment will most likely reflect more recent fishery performance and reduce the need for sector transfers in the immediate future post rebuilding plan. The staff recommendation on sector allocations reduces the commercial allocation, which will likely result in limited quota to transfer from the commercial to recreational sector, should bi-directional transfers be preferred. Furthermore, sector transfers will not be allowed while the spawning stock biomass (SSB) is below the SSB threshold and if overfishing is occurring.

As with the FMAT, Council staff also notes the almost even split in support for bi-directional transfers (5a-2), but when accounting for the form letter, the vast majority of comments do support bidirectionality. Many of the public comments describe that alternative 5a-2 is more fair and equitable since transfers can be sent in both directions. For these reasons, ***Council staff recommends alternative 5a-2 and notes that the Council and Board will have the ability to make an informed decision on how to set transfers during the annual specifications process given the needs of both the commercial and recreational fishery at the time.***

For alternative set 5b, the FMAT and Council staff recommend alternative 5b-2, a transfer cap up to 10% of the ABC. A transfer cap that scales with biomass is a sound approach from a biological and process-oriented perspective. During times of lower biomass, it makes sense to be precautionary by limiting the amount of transferred quota to reduce the risk of a transfer

contributing to overfishing. Conversely, during times when biomass is much higher, the transfer cap would increase, allowing for more flexibility to address each sector's needs. The status quo option, which caps transfers from summing to a commercial quota greater than 10.5 million pounds, does not offer as much flexibility as alternative 5b-2. The 10.5-million-pound value is now outdated, considering biomass is projected to increase significantly throughout the rebuilding plan.

Management Uncertainty

Council staff and the FMAT noted that the majority of public comments supported the status quo alternative. However, individuals supported the post-sector split alternative, while organizations (and form letters) support the status quo alternative.

The FMAT and Council staff recommend alternative 6b. From a process perspective, this alternative allows the Monitoring Committee to be as precise as possible with applying a management uncertainty buffer to one sector without negatively affecting the other. The application of management uncertainty is more fair and equitable under alternative 6b and has received strong support from many user groups.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations are provided for each alternative set. At times, the FMAT did not make a consensus recommendation for a specific alternative set and only a Council staff recommendation is present.

Alternative	Management Issue	Recommendation
1: FMP Goals and Objectives		
Current	Status quo	
Proposed	Proposed	FMAT and Council Staff
2: Sector Allocations		
2a-1	83% Rec, 17% Comm (Status quo) 1981-1989: Landings-Based	
2a-2	89% Rec, 11% Comm 2014-2018, 2009-2018: Catch-Based	
2a-3	87% Rec, 13% Comm 1999-2018: Catch-Based	Council Staff
2a-4	86% Rec, 14% Comm 1981-2018: Catch-Based, 2014-2018 and 2009-2018: Landings-Based	
2a-5	84% Rec, 16% Comm 1999-2018, 1981-2018: Landings-Based	
2b-1	No Phase-in	FMAT and Council Staff
2b-2	Phase-in over preferred rebuilding plan duration	

Alternative	Management Issue	Recommendation
3: Commercial Allocations to the States		
3a-1	Status quo Old MRIP 1981-1989 (Amend 1)	
3a-2	5 year 2014-2018: Landings-Based	
3a-3	10 year 2009-2018: Landings-Based	Council Staff
3a-4	1981-1989 (50%) and 2009-2018 (50%) Landings-Based	
3b-1	No Phase-in	Council Staff
3b-2	Phase-in over preferred rebuilding plan duration	
3c-1	No Trigger	FMAT and Council Staff
3c-2	Pre-Transfer Trigger	
3c-3	Post Transfer Trigger	
3d-1	No Minimum Default Allocation	
3d-2	0.10% - Minimum Default Allocation	FMAT and Council Staff
3d-3	0.25% - Minimum Default Allocation	
4: Rebuilding Plan		
4a	No action/Status quo	
4b	Constant harvest: 4 years	
4c	P* approach: 5 years	Council Staff
4d	Constant F: 7 years	
5: Sector Transfers		
5a-1	No Action/Status quo	
5a-2	Bidirectional transfers	Council Staff
5b-1	No Action/Status quo	
5b-2	Sector transfer cap: up to 10% of ABC	FMAT and Council Staff
6: Management Uncertainty		
6a	No Action/Status quo	
6b	Post Sector-Split	FMAT and Council Staff



Bluefish Allocations and Rebuilding Amendment

FMAT Meeting: April 30, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Summary (Dated: May 12, 2020)

The objective of this meeting was for the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) to review the public comment summary document, Advisory Panel (AP) comments, and provide recommendations of preferred alternatives to be presented to the Council and Board at the joint meeting hosted by the Council in June. At the meeting, the Council and Board will take final action on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment.

There are several issues that the FMAT believes are policy decision that should be made solely by the Council and Board with thorough consideration of the input provided thus far, but the FMAT made recommendations where they thought it was appropriate.

FMP Goals and Objectives

The FMAT discussed the public and AP comments on the proposed FMP Goals and Objectives and noted that the vast majority of comments support the proposed option. The FMAT considered a number of suggestions from the public and the AP but determined that the majority of comments received were already captured in the FMP Goals and Objectives, as currently written. For example, there were many comments received pertaining to managing the fishery based on optimum yield and recognition of many angler's preference to utilize the resource through catch-and-release. The FMAT felt that maintaining a sustainable spawning stock biomass (objective 1.1), providing fair and equitable access to all user groups (goal 2), and considering the economic and social needs and priorities of all groups (objective 2.2) already captures the definition of managing for optimum yield. In addition, several public comments suggested increasing recognition of the role that environmental factors and forage fish play in the health of the bluefish stock. Again, the FMAT thought that promoting science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management (objective 1.5) already captures the topic. While the FMAT agreed that the issues raised by the AP and members of the public are important considerations, the FMAT determined the proposed FMP Goals and Objectives already capture these important issues.

However, the FMAT did support implementing minor revisions to the language that were suggested during the public comment process. The revisions below (in red), reflect the comments that the FMAT recommends be considered by the Council and Board when taking final action. Specifically, the recommendation to change "discard" to "release" encompasses the catch-and-release aspect of the fishery while avoiding the negative connotation that accompanies the term "discard". This potential change carries the same message as using the term "discard" but better

suits the desires of the recreational community. The recommendation to change “along the coast” to “within the management unit” allows for the inclusion of inland bluefish consumers that do not live on the coast.

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

Objective 1.1: Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.

Objective 1.2: Promote practices that reduce ~~discard~~ **release** mortality within the recreational and commercial fishery.

Objective 1.3: Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states by promoting compliance and to support the development and implementation of management measures.

Objective 1.4: Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.

Objective 1.5: Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource.

Goal 2: Provide fair and equitable access to the fishery across all user groups throughout the management unit.

Objective 2.1: Ensure the implementation of management measures provides fair and equitable access to the resource across to all **user** groups ~~along the coast~~ **within the management unit**.

Objective 2.2: Consider the economic and social needs and priorities of all groups that access the bluefish resource in the development of new management measures.

Objective 2.3: Maintain effective coordination with stakeholder groups to ensure optimization of economic and social benefits.

Commercial/Recreational Sector Allocations

To start, the FMAT discussed the cyclical and environmentally driven aspect of the stock that is continuously commented on by the public. Given the stock’s fluctuations in abundance and availability, the FMAT believes alternatives associated with a shorter time series may not be as appropriate for determining allocation between the two sectors. Ideally, capturing the fluctuations in abundance over time will best represent the trends in the bluefish fishery.

The FMAT also recommends utilizing catch data (landings plus dead discards) to inform allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors. The FMP currently stipulates that the allocation percentage be applied to the Acceptable Biological Catch to determine each sector’s Annual Catch Target. In short, the allocation percentage will inform the allocation of catch between both sectors, not landings. In addition, the FMAT believes using catch data as the basis for the allocations of catch will more effectively encompass the needs of a large subset of the recreational sector that receive economic and social benefits from catching and releasing fish as opposed to harvesting fish. Given alternative 2a-5 is derived from landings data, the FMAT recommends not moving forward with this alternative.

Alternative 2a-3 received the most support, however, when excluding the form letter, the status quo alternative received the most support. The assessment scientist on the FMAT noted that the

status quo alternative does not represent the reality of the fishery anymore. The status quo alternative was based on uncalibrated MRIP estimates from 1981-1989. The uncalibrated MRIP estimates are no longer being used in the stock assessments or in catch accounting and should probably not be considered as the Council and Board discuss reallocation.

The economist on the FMAT noted that of the remaining alternatives, 2a-4 offers the highest economic benefit to the commercial sector followed by 2a-3 and 2a-2.

Ultimately, the FMAT did not offer a formal recommendation by consensus on one alternative from the alternative set 2a. The FMAT agreed that selection of an allocation alternative is ultimately a policy decision that should be made solely by the Council and Board with thorough consideration of the input provided thus far. ***However, the FMAT does recommend consideration of either alternatives 2a-2, 2a-3, and 2a-4.***

For the phase-in alternatives (alternative set 2b), the FMAT recommends alternative 2b-1 (no phase-in). This recommendation is consistent with the overwhelming majority of public comments which identified that the phase-in approach does not offer much benefit when the allocations are changing by such a small amount. Additionally, the phase-in approach would add an unnecessary level of complexity and administrative burden.

Commercial Allocations to the States

To start, the FMAT noted that all alternatives in set 3a are justified as appropriate under potential future circumstances and for various states, as this stock rebuilds and availability increases. ***Therefore, the FMAT made no recommendation on a preferred 3a alternative. Selecting an allocation alternative is a policy decision that should be made solely by the Council and Board with consideration of the Public Hearing Document's impact analyses and public input provided thus far.***

In regard to the option to phase-in, the FMAT indicated that the selection of a more recent time series to inform reallocation will more accurately reflect current state-specific needs and may reduce the need to phase-in any changes. Similar to the recommendation for the sector allocations, the FMAT noted that the phase-in alternative set was also unpopular. Again, the FMAT described the added levels of complexity and administrative burden to implementing a phase-in approach. As the allocation alternatives are based on landings data, a phase-in approach may prolong inefficiencies via the need for state transfers. However, the FMAT recognizes the public comments which highlights that there may be an economic benefit from phasing-in for states incurring a large percent decrease in quota. ***Overall, the FMAT did not provide a consensus recommendation for alternative set 3b.***

After reviewing all public comments related to the trigger alternative set (3c), the FMAT made a consensus recommendation for alternative 3c-1, no trigger. The FMAT noted that the public found the trigger approach to be overly complicated with limited perceived benefit.

Public comments related to the minimum default allocation alternative set (3d) were evenly dispersed across the three alternatives. The FMAT discussed the utility of implementing minimum default allocations in that they allow states to continue to harvest bluefish without major disruption

to other states with larger allocations. Considering the commercial allocations to the states section included 4 sub-alternatives, the FMAT believes the complexity tied to sub-alternative sets 3b and 3c may have influenced the public's perspective on minimum default allocations. ***However, given the cyclical and ever-changing nature of the bluefish fishery, the FMAT recommends a 0.10% minimum default allocation (3d-2).*** This alternative will allow states that would otherwise lose their allocation through the reallocation process to retain a minimum default allocation, which will allow small amounts of bluefish caught in these states to be retained instead of discarded. The FMAT agreed that 0.10% would strike a balance between reducing regulatory discards and not overburdening other states' allocations.

Rebuilding Plan

The FMAT discussed that the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) indicates: 109-479 (4) "For a fishery that is overfished, any fishery management plan, amendment, or proposed regulations prepared pursuant to paragraph (3) or paragraph (5) for such fishery shall —

(A) specify a time period for rebuilding the fishery that shall—

- (i) be as short as possible, taking into account the status and biology of any overfished stocks of fish, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organizations in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the overfished stock of fish within the marine ecosystem; and
- (ii) not exceed 10 years, except in cases where the biology of the stock of fish, other environmental conditions, or management measures under an international agreement in which the United States participates dictate otherwise;

Given the data limitations, data concerns and associated uncertainty, selecting a rebuilding plan is an important policy decision that the Council and Board will need to make. However, the FMAT discussed the implications and consequences that may apply to each of the alternatives and offered the following discussion as supporting context for recommending a preferred rebuilding alternative.

Through this discussion, the FMAT noted that the rebuilding plan should be as short as possible while considering the needs of the fishing communities that depend on the resource and accounting for the uncertainty inherent in the cyclical and environmentally driven nature of the stock. Interestingly, the public comments indicated that individuals prefer alternatives 4b and 4c (relatively short rebuilding periods with lower short-term catches) while organizations prefer alternative 4d (the longest rebuilding period associated with higher short-term catches). ***Given the spread in comments, FMAT members noted that alternative 4c may be a fair middle point that considers both the biological and social requirements as required in MSA. Furthermore, alternatives 4c and 4d offer catches that increase steadily over the duration of the rebuilding plan, as compared to the constant harvest approach (4b) which rebuilds as quickly as possible with low harvest limits.*** Alternative 4c and 4d offer higher gross and average revenues to the commercial sector compared to 4b. Furthermore, 4b has the potential to be particularly damaging to the commercial sector. The culmination of rebuilding plan alternative 4b could create an instability in market supply and weaken supply chain linkages in addition to offering the lowest economic returns to the commercial sector. This in turn could compound the commercial sector's

economic burden by imposing several years of reduced market share due to low quotas during the rebuilding period. FMAT members cautioned that once the stock is rebuilt, regulations could likely be liberalized.

The stock assessment scientist indicated that the general comment provided by many members of the public that “the stock is cyclical/environmentally driven/and moving offshore; fishing mortality is not the problem” has merit and could influence the stock’s ability to reach the rebuilt target. It is hypothesized that some components of the stock are not accessible to the inshore fishery (i.e., inshore charter and shore anglers) in certain years due to offshore migrations. Furthermore, the assessment scientist expressed concern that presently there are no offshore surveys that could pick up and verify these trends. In addition, there are limited tagging studies assessing regional bluefish abundance and migration. The last comprehensive study was published in 2006¹. Therefore, certain data may not be available to inform the model, and in turn, rebuilding goals may not be met, which will have implications on how projections may change over time.

The FMAT wanted to ensure the Council and Board are aware of the implications, benefits, and consequences of all rebuilding alternatives. The FMAT recommends a review of the general rebuilding process, including regular reviews of adequate progress; as well as a thorough discussion of how the different rebuilding scenarios could look or change as data are updated.

Sector Transfers

The FMAT first discussed the fact that there were a number of public comments received that were asking for clarity on the interplay between the rebuilding plan and sector transfers. The FMAT clarified the criteria that dictate if and when a transfer could occur under the bi-directional transfer process alternative 5b. When the stock is in an overfished state or overfishing is occurring, transfers from one sector to the other cannot occur. However, once the stock is above the spawning stock biomass (SSB) threshold (not overfished) and if the fishing mortality rate is less than fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (or its proxy), a transfer can occur. In this scenario where a transfer can still occur, bluefish may be under a rebuilding plan (not yet at the SSB target), but no longer overfished or experiencing overfishing.

The FMAT noted that the public comments (excluding the form letter) were evenly split between supporting and opposing bi-directional transfers. Interestingly, many people commented on removing sector transfers from the FMP altogether, despite not being an alternative within this amendment. One FMAT member offered that the need for transfers should decline in the near future as the purpose of reallocating better suits each sector’s present needs. ***However, the FMAT offered no specific recommendation on alternative set 5a and noted that it is more of a policy decision for the Council and Board.***

For alternative set 5b, the FMAT recommends alternative 5b-2 by consensus. The FMAT indicated that a transfer cap that scales with biomass is a sound approach from a biological and process-oriented perspective. During times of lower biomass, it makes sense to be precautionary by limiting the amount of transferred quota to reduce the risk of a transfer contributing to

¹ Shepherd, G.R. & Moser, Joshua & Deuel, D. & Carlsen, Pam. (2006). The migration patterns of bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*) along the Atlantic coast determined from tag recoveries. Fishery Bulletin. 104. 559-570.

overfishing. Conversely, during times when biomass is much higher, the transfer cap would increase, allowing for more flexibility to address each sector's needs. The FMAT agreed that the status quo option, which caps transfers from summing to a commercial quota greater than 10.5 million pounds, does not offer as much flexibility as alternative 5b-2. The FMAT thought that the 10.5-million-pound value is now outdated, considering the biomass is projected to increase significantly in order to achieve the SSB target.

Management Uncertainty

The FMAT noted that the majority of public comments supported the status quo alternative. However, individuals supported the post-sector split alternative, while organizations (and form letters) support the status quo alternative.

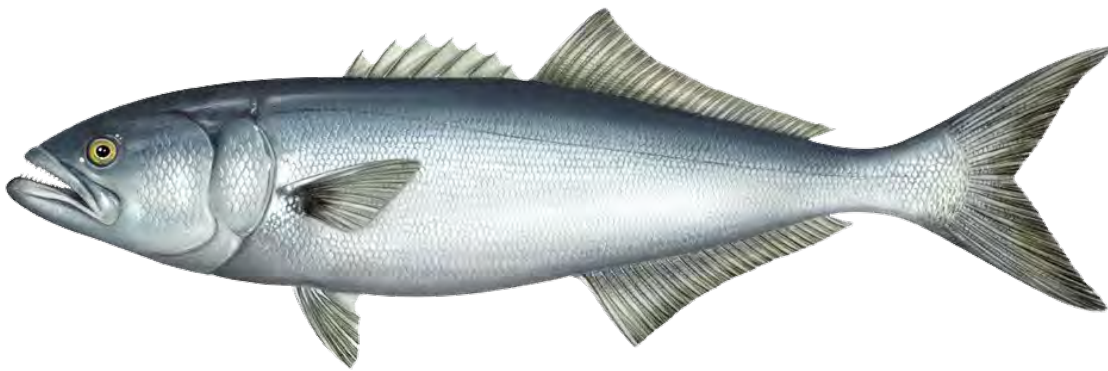
The FMAT recommends alternative 6b by consensus. From a process perspective, this alternative allows the Monitoring Committee to be as precise as possible with applying a management uncertainty buffer to one sector without negatively affecting the other. The application of management uncertainty is more fair and equitable under alternative 6b and has received strong support from all sorts of user groups.

De Minimis

The FMAT discussed the *de minimis* alternative set and public comments and noted that the majority of comments were in favor of the status quo alternative (7a). One FMAT member noted that the Board will have to weigh the economic and social benefits of increased access for recreational fishers in *de minimis* states against the potential risk of shifts in effort from neighboring states resulting from more liberal measures within *de minimis* states' waters. ***Ultimately, the FMAT offered no specific recommendation because this is a Board-only policy decision.***

BLUEFISH ALLOCATION AND REBUILDING AMENDMENT

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY DOCUMENT
MAY 2021



Prepared by the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC or Council) and the
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC or Commission)



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1 INTRODUCTION AND COMMENT SUMMARY

1.1 OVERVIEW

This document summarizes public comments on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. Through this action, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) are considering potential modifications to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) goals and objectives, current allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors, current commercial allocations to the states, initiating a rebuilding plan, revising the quota transfer processes, revising how the FMP accounts for management uncertainty, and revising *de minimis* provisions in the Commission's plan. Additional information and amendment documents are available at: <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>.

Five virtual public hearings were held between March 24 and April 8, 2021, targeted toward certain states or regional groupings of states (Table 1). Hearings were attended by 134 people in total (excluding Council and Commission staff). Not all attendees provided comments.

Written comments were accepted from February 22, 2021 through April 23, 2021. In total 361 individuals or organizations either provided written comments (84) or sent in a form letter (277) on this action. Some of these commenters overlapped with those providing comments at hearings.

In total, 378 unique individuals and organizations provided comments during hearings and/or in writing. Attempts were made so that individuals who provided multiple comments (e.g., in person and written, multiple in person, or multiple written comments) were only counted once towards the tallies included later in this document. In some instances, individuals provided in-person comments on behalf of an organization and those organizations also submitted written comments. In those instances, the individual and the organization comments were counted as one comment. The tables below differentiated comments received from individuals, organizations, and via form letter to help provide a clear picture of the comments received.

All public hearing comments are summarized in Section 2 of this document and all written comments are included in Section 3.

Ninety-two percent of the 378 individuals and organizations who provided in-person and/or written comments were primarily affiliated with the recreational fishery, and 5% with the commercial fishery (Table 2). About 80% of the comments associated with the recreational fishery came from the form letter.

Table 1: Amendment public hearing schedule.

Date and Time	Regional Grouping
Wednesday, March 24, 6-8pm	North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida
Thursday, March 25, 6-8pm	Delaware, Maryland, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and Virginia
Tuesday, March 30, 6-8pm	Connecticut and New York
Thursday, April 1, 6-8pm	Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island
Thursday, April 8, 6-8pm	New Jersey

Table 2: Number of individuals and organizations who provided in-person and/or written comments (including 277 form letters which were associated with the recreational sector) by primary affiliation.

Sector	Individuals	Organizations	Percent of Total
Recreational	333	13	92%
Commercial	14	4	5%
Unknown/not specified	10		3%
Other	2	1	<1%
Multiple	1		<1%

1.2 COMMENT SUMMARY

Public comments are summarized in the text and tables below grouped by management issue (commercial/recreational allocation, commercial allocations to the states, rebuilding plan, sector transfers, management uncertainty, *de minimis*, and general comments). Only those topics addressed by more than three individuals or organizations, or those directly related to specific alternatives are included in the summaries below. However, all comments are included in sections 2 and 3 of this document.

A total of 37 commenters provided feedback on the FMP Goals and Objectives. Many of these comments were unique with specific suggestions making it hard to tally across similar comment themes. As such, comments contained in section 2 and 3 should be carefully read and considered. However, there were a few reoccurring themes that can be highlighted. For example, many commenters supported consideration of managing for optimum yield in the FMP Goals and Objectives. Four recreational organizations emphasized that the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) requires fishery management measures achieve optimum yield, defined as a fishery's maximum sustainable yield reduced by any relevant economic,

social, or ecological factor. Several other commenters referenced the socioeconomic benefit of reduced harvest and increased abundance to catch-and-release anglers. A few comments referenced the need for better accountability across both sectors. Several commenters said that “fair and equitable” should be clearly defined in the FMP Goals and Objectives. Several other individuals commented on the importance of forage fish, the need to improve our understanding of the ecological role of bluefish and expressed a desire to implement ecosystem-based management. A few other comments included recognizing the cyclical and environmentally driven nature of the bluefish stock. Lastly, a few individuals said that environmental stressors should be addressed, and they were concerned about the impacts of sand mining and beach replenishment on inshore bluefish habitat.

Feedback on the commercial/recreational allocation alternatives was mixed. An individual’s or organization’s primary sector affiliation is indicative of which alternative was supported. For example, 20 commenters supported status quo allocations, and the majority of these 16 individuals and 4 organizations were affiliated with the commercial sector. In total, 287 commenters supported reallocating 87% to the recreational sector and 13% to the commercial sector (alt 2a-3). This alternative received support from the most organizations and from 277 form letters. Alternative 2a-2, which allocates 89% to the recreational sector and 11% to the commercial sector, also received significant support from 12 individuals and 4 organizations. The remaining alternatives received support from less than 10 individuals and organizations. The vast majority of commenters were opposed to phasing in allocation changes with 296 opposed and only 5 in support. However, it is worth noting that most comments that were in support of status quo commercial/recreational allocations did not provide input on the phase-in alternatives.

Support was spread fairly evenly across all four state commercial allocation alternatives. That being said, alternative 3a-2 received the most support with 8 individuals and 3 organizations expressing this reallocation alternative as their preference. Generally speaking, commercial stakeholders from states who stood to benefit from reallocation voiced support for using a more recent time series. Conversely, commercial stakeholders from states that would lose quota from reallocation voiced support for status quo, with only a few exceptions. In total, eight commenters supported a phase-in approach, only slightly more than the 6 commenters that supported no phase-in. The vast majority of comments received on the trigger approach expressed how complicated the approach was and did not support its use in management. Nine individuals and organizations supported providing states with a minimum default allocation versus 5 commenters who were opposed to the idea. Many commenters expressed support for the minimum default allocations in an effort to reduce regulatory discards in states that would otherwise have no allocation.

A total of 293 commenters said they supported the 7-year constant fishing mortality rebuilding plan, 14 supported the 5-year P* approach, 12 supported the 4-year constant harvest approach, and 5 supported taking no action on rebuilding. A few individuals who supported the 7-year rebuilding plan also voiced support for implementing a 10-year plan to allow the stock plenty of time to rebuild. Ten commenters voiced skepticism that the stock would be able to rebuild by the target date. Several reasons were provided including: the stock is cyclical or environmentally driven, the population is offshore, and abundance will not be detected inshore, or fishing mortality is not a large factor in the stock’s ability to rebuild. Seven commenters said that the lack of forage fish is a significant factor in the bluefish stock’s ability to rebuild. Lastly, 20 individuals said that they rarely encounter bluefish anymore and that drastic and immediate action should be taken by the Board and Council to rebuild this stock.

A total of 288 commenters said they support bi-directional transfers between the sectors and 15 supported maintaining the status quo transfer process. Similarly, a total of 288 commenters supported a 10% sector transfer cap, and 12 supported the status quo cap of 10.5 million lbs. Commenters who provided a rationale

for not allowing b-directional transfers tended to say that they were wary of using Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data to analyze the recreational sector's short term need for quota. Those who supported bi-directional transfers often mentioned equity as an important reason for allowing transfers both ways. Many commenters did not think transferring quota during a rebuilding period was a good idea. Finally, 17 individuals and 6 organizations thought that quota should not be transferred between sectors at all.

In regard to the management uncertainty issue, 6 individuals, 8 organizations and the 277 people who submitted a form letter were in support of making no changes to the way that management uncertainty is applied through specifications. By contrast 19 individuals and 5 organizations recommended updating management uncertainty so that it may be applied to each sector without negatively affecting the other sector.

A total of 14 commenters supported the status quo *de minimis* alternative that only exempts states from fishery independent monitoring. Approximately the same number of commenters supported updating the *de minimis* provision to allow states some level of flexibility in setting recreational measures, but support was spread amongst alternatives 7b-e. Those who voiced support for updating *de minimis* said that anglers should be allowed to have unrestrictive measures when fishing in states where bluefish are rarely encountered. Others said that it should not matter what their measures are considering that they have minimal impact on the health of the stock.

Reoccurring general comments are also listed at the end of the table. These comments either pertain to multiple management issues or are not directly related to the management issues under consideration in this amendment. Twenty-two individuals and organizations said that management should account for the catch-and-release aspect of the fishery and recognize the value of fish left in the water. The context in which this was said varied by commenter, but many said this in reference to managing for higher abundance to recognize the economic value of the sport fishing industry. Many also shared this sentiment in support of halting sector transfers. Ten commenters said that recreational reporting and accountability need to be improved, and similarly 4 individuals thought that the recreational discarding issue should be addressed by management. Nine commenters expressed strong concerns with using the MRIP data for management and thought that the data was not believable. The remaining reoccurring comments were in reference to the recreational bag and size limit or expressing the need to increase or lower the commercial quota.

Table 3: Summary totals of comments received on the amendment. Totals should not be summed between rows as this would result in double counting of individuals and organizations who commented in multiple categories.

Management Issue		Number of Form Letters/Individuals/Organizations			
Commercial/Recreational Allocation		Form Letter	Individuals	Organizations	Grand Total
2a-1	83% Rec, 17% Comm (Status quo)		16	4	20
2a-2	89% Rec, 11% Comm		12	4	16
2a-3	87% Rec, 13% Comm	277	3	7	287
2a-4	86% Rec, 14% Comm		8	1	9
2a-5	84% Rec, 16% Comm		3	1	4
2b-1	No Phase-in	277	9	10	296
2b-2	Phase-in		2	3	5
Commercial Allocations to the States		Form Letter	Individuals	Organizations	Grand Total
3a-1	Status quo		8	1	9
3a-2	5 year		8	3	11
3a-3	10 year		8	2	10
3a-4	½ 1981-1989 and ½ 2009-2018		6		6
3b-1	No Phase-in		5	1	6
3b-2	Phase-in		5	3	8
3c-1	No Trigger		7	2	9
3c-2	Pre-Transfer Trigger		1		1
3c-3	Post Transfer Trigger				
3d-1	No Minimum Default Allocation		3	2	5
3d-2	0.10% - Minimum Default Allocation		4	1	5
3d-3	0.25% - Minimum Default Allocation		3	1	4
Rebuilding Plan		Form Letter	Individuals	Organizations	Grand Total
4a	Status quo/No action		5		5
4b	Constant harvest (4 years)		11	1	12
4c	P* approach (5 years)		12	2	14
4d	Constant F (7 years)	277	5	11	293
General comments on rebuilding	Stock is cyclical/environmentally driven/offshore; fishing mortality is not the problem		7	3	10
	Bluefish abundance is low/we do not see bluefish anymore/immediate and drastic action needed		20		20
	Bluefish stock is hurt by low abundance of forage fish		6	1	7

Management Issue		Number of Form Letters/Individuals/Organizations			
Sector Transfers		Form Letter	Individuals	Organizations	Grand Total
5a-1	No Action/Status quo		12	3	15
5a-2	Allow transfer both ways	277	5	6	288
5b-1	No Action/Status quo		10	2	12
5b-2	Sector transfer cap: 10%	277	5	6	288
General comments on transfers	Quota should not be transferred between sectors		17	6	23
Management Uncertainty		Form Letter	Individual	Organization	Grand Total
6a	No Action/Status quo	277	6	8	291
6b	Post Sector-Split		19	5	24
De Minimis		Form Letter	Individual	Organization	Grand Total
7a	No Action/Status quo		12	2	14
7b	Recreational De Minimis – no management measures		2		2
7c	Recreational De Minimis – state-selected management measures		2	2	4
7d	Recreational De Minimis – rollover management measures		2		2
7e	Recreational De Minimis – 2020 management measures		4	1	5
General Comments		Form Letter	Individual	Organization	Grand Total
Management should account for the catch-and-release fishery (value of fish left in the water)			13	9	22
Recreational reporting and accountability need to be improved			7	3	10
Implement a minimum size limit			9		9
Strong concerns with MRIP data; unbelievable/unreliable			6	3	9
Lower the bag limit			6		6
Increase the bag limit			3		3
Cut the commercial quota			6		6
Increase the commercial quota			4		4
Address recreational discard issue			4		4

2 PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARIES

A summary of each public hearing is provided below. Due to the complexity and high number of amendment alternatives, each management issue was presented and commented on individually. Comments are summarized by hearing and individual comments are grouped by management issue and paraphrased.

2.1 NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, AND FLORIDA

Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: (18 excluding Council/Commission staff): Chris Batsavage, Michael Carotta, Michelle Duval, James Fletcher, Cynthia Ferrio, Sonny Gwin, Hannah Hart, Doug Haymans, Dewey Hemilright, Rusty Hudson, William Mandulak, Thomas Newman III, Will Poston, Art Smith, Eric Summers, Sara Winslow, Amy Zimney, Wes Townsend

Summary: The meeting started with an introduction and briefing from the hearing officer Chris Batsavage (NC). Five members of the public offered public comment on the amendment alternative sets. The majority of comments were focused on the allocation alternatives with an emphasis on ensuring quotas remain at levels that support positive fishery participation from both sectors. Some members of the public expressed their frustration with the complexity of alternatives associated within the commercial allocations to the states. The two who spoke on this issue were supportive of maintaining status quo commercial allocations for their respective state to ensure quotas do not fall much lower than the current levels. Feedback was mixed on how to proceed with the rebuilding plan and the transfer process. Members of the public did express their frustration with the current stock status and offered comments to that effect. The two comments received on management uncertainty were in support of adopting sector specific management uncertainty. Finally, the one comment received on *de minimis* status voiced support for status quo. Questions from the public mainly focused on the new MRIP estimates, the overfished stock status, current quotas and management measures, and the transfer provisions.

Comments

FMP Goals and Objectives

- **William Mandulak (Recreational – NC):** I am concerned about how you are going to evaluate sustainable harvest, given migratory patterns of bluefish. Are you taking measurements from ME-FL? How are you going to do that? In that objective, you said promote practices that reduce discard mortality within the commercial/recreational fishery. Does that mean if we find discard mortality is high in gillnets/trawl we ban that gear? I am confused when you say we are going to give fair and equitable access. If you have 1,000 people on the beach fishing for bluefish, and maybe 1000 commercial fishermen fishing for bluefish, how do you determine equitability?

Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- **William Mandulak (Recreational – NC):** Many of the changes increase the recreational allocation. However, over a long period of time there were transfers from the recreational to the commercial sector. Without knowing what the specific impacts are going to be on the fishermen that are on the beach, we might as well just take the most we can get. But, I think it's important to provide a maximum allocation to the commercial sector as well. Therefore, keep things status quo for now.

- **Thomas Newman (Commercial – NC):** 2a-1 (status quo) allows for adequate commercial allocation. Commercial fishing reporting and accountability happens in real time during the season. Last year, we went to a 300-pound limit to avoid going over our limit. The recreational sector catch is not accounted for until later in the year. We have no bycatch in our gillnet fishery.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman’s Association, Commercial – NC):** We are using MRIP data which is considered the best available science. It looks to me that we are overfished because of the MRIP estimates. These estimates are not based on data from individual fishermen. Would we be better off to require every saltwater recreational fisherman to register?
- **Rusty Hudson (Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc., Other – FL):** Florida has increased its commercial landings in the recent past. Do not lose us in the next stock assessment because we have had a good signal. Status quo or 2a-5 to offer a reasonable allocation to the commercial sector.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **Thomas Newman (Commercial – NC):** Status quo across the board. I may not be well versed in it all, but I think the fishery has been managed well. Status quo for trigger and minimum default as well.
- **Michael Carotta (Commercial - MA/NC):** Status quo because I am not comfortable in the disparity in some of the proposed alternatives.

Rebuilding Plan

- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman’s Association, Commercial – NC):** 2006 MSA required recreational anglers to register. Why do we have to follow MSA under this rebuilding plan? Commercial landings in NC have decreased due to lack of access to the resource, because inlets have been closed which doesn’t allow boats to go out easily. We must comply with all requirements of MSA! The Council should have individual registration of recreational fishermen. When is management going to come up with something new to solve the problem? Would it be possible for the Council and ASMFC to have foreign scientists to come in and see if this stock is actually overfished?
- **Thomas Newman (Commercial - NC):** The commercial sector has a long history of understanding their harvest. Commercial limits should not change because we have not gone over limits and do have the ability to close when necessary. We need real time recreational data. I do not have a lot of faith in the MRIP data. We want to continue to harvest at the rate we are at now.
- **William Mandulak (Recreational – NC):** It is frustrating that we have been under our limits by transfers, but now we do not have that ability to transfer since we are overfished. As a recreational fisherman that wants to be fair to both sectors, I suggest alternative 4d. The longer-term plan allows for the stock to recover over more time and allows the fishery to get to a higher biomass level.

Sector Transfers

- **Thomas Newman (Commercial - NC):** 5a-1 and 5b-2. Status quo has been working very well for the commercial sector.

- **William Mandulak (Recreational – NC):** Why do we do transfers at all? If the stock is not overfished, I would support 5a-2 to allow bidirectionality.
- **Michael Carotta (Commercial - MA/NC):** As a commercial fisherman I am more and more aware of the place recreational bluefish holds in the culture. Family, kids, and fishermen are thrilled to go blue fishing. I am against any transfer that puts the recreational fishermen's quota at risk. Secondly, I was hoping more of this hearing to focus on abundance and how we can conserve the fishery. There are bigger and more important things to talk about to restore the fishery.

Management Uncertainty

- **Thomas Newman (Commercial - NC):** Each sector should be responsible for its own management uncertainty. I support 6b.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman's Association, Commercial – NC):** Why is fisheries management associated with so much uncertainty?
- **William Mandulak (Recreational):** There will always be management uncertainty since these fish are always on the move (chasing bait and different water temperatures). The best we will ever be able to do is to have a level of uncertainty we are able to deal with. If I had to vote, each sector should have their own uncertainty. Therefore, I support 6b.

De Minimis

- **Thomas Newman (Commercial - NC):** De minimis states should have the same regulations as the rest of the states (status quo – 7a). All states should have the same federal measures.

2.2 DELAWARE, MARYLAND, POTOMAC RIVER FISHERIES COMMISSION, AND VIRGINIA Thursday, March 25, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Attendees (24 excluding Council/Commission staff): Chris Batsavage, John Bello, Joan Berko, Alan Bianchi, Ellen Bolen, John Clark, Eric Durell, Michelle Duval, James Fletcher, John Ford, Martin Gary, Pat Geer, Sonny Gwin, Dewey Hemilright, Michael Luisi, Olivia Phillips, Michael Platt, Will Poston, Somers Smott, David Stormer, Jonathan Watson, Angel Willey, Roger B Wooleyhan Jr, Erik Zlokovitz

Summary: The meeting started with an introduction and briefing from the hearing officer Mike Luisi (MD). This hearing experienced low turnout and as a result there were only four individuals who provided a comment or question on the management issues. Three of the four people who spoke were Council members. The one member of the public who spoke at the hearing said that bluefish is currently not a priority commercial species for this region. While he was supportive of a lower commercial allocation to Delaware, he wanted to ensure that state to state transfers remain as an option to allow access to the resource should it become more abundant in the future. Staff were also asked several questions regarding when amendment changes would be implemented, the rebuilding timeline, and if rebuilding should be removed from the amendment.

Comments

FMP Goals and Objectives

No comment offered.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- **Roger Wooleyhan (Commercial – DE):** When will we know what the state specific quotas will be after you make these changes?
- **Sonny Gwin (Council Member – MD):** Have there been any problems with the transfer provisions? Is there a race to access quota transfers? In MD, we have been not catching our full quota and have been transferring it away. If through reallocation we lose quota, we may not have the ability to use excess quota or transfer it away.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **Roger Wooleyhan (Commercial - DE):** In the 1970s there were a lot of people who were catching bluefish. Nowadays bluefish isn't worth much and people fish for other species. There are only a few commercial fishermen targeting bluefish in our area. Larger bluefish are moving further offshore, and we do not go far enough out to target them. However, I am concerned that because we haven't been fishing for bluefish we could lose access to quota. I don't want a situation where bluefish become abundant again later on and we aren't be able to catch them. If state-to-state transfers are able to be used in the future to give us access to bluefish, I would be ok with smaller allocations since our current effort is so low.

Rebuilding Plan

- **Mike Luisi (Council Member - DE):** Do you think there is any chance that we will need to pull rebuilding out of this amendment to address it more quickly?
- **David Stormer (Council Member - DE):** Do you think the 7-year rebuilding plan will be able to be fully rebuilt within the 10-year MSA requirement given this started in 2019?

Sector Transfers

No comment offered.

Management Uncertainty

No comment offered.

De Minimis

No comment offered.

2.3 CONNECTICUT AND NEW YORK

Tuesday, March 30, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: (36 excluding Council/Commission staff): Chris Batsavage, Alan Bianchi, Christopher Borgatti, Colleen Bouffard, Gary Bowman, Ted Burdacki, Floyd Carrington, Maureen Davidson, Justin Davis, John DePersenaire, Anthony DiLernia, Sandra Dumais, Michelle Duval, Mark Ellis, Julie Evans, James Fletcher, Dan Farnham, Dan Farnham Jr., Cynthia Ferrio, Timothy Froelich, Tom Fuda, Matthew Gates, William Goeben, Kurt Gottschall, Emerson Hasbrouck, TJ Karbowski, James Monzoli, Jeff Moore, Jerry Morgan, Cheri Patterson, Mike Plaia, Will Poston, Paul Risi, Deri Williams, Steven Witthuhn, Erik Zlokovitz

Summary: The meeting started with an introduction and briefing from the hearing officers, Maureen Davidson (NY) and Justin Davis (CT). In total, eight people offered comments on the amendment alternative sets. Comments offered under the FMP goals and objectives section consisted of several on the water observations, but a few individuals commented on the fact that there is economic benefit to caught and released bluefish. Four people supported status quo commercial/recreational allocations. Of the comments received on commercial allocations to the states, two individuals supported using the hybrid time series that recognized historical landings and recent trends. One individual supported alternative 3a-3d-2, which would provide a minimum default allocation of 0.1% to every state. Regarding rebuilding, one person supported 4b, another 4d, and two others offered their thoughts on why the rebuilding options are problematic. When sector transfers were discussed, two people supported bi-directional transfers, one person supported the status quo process, and two people supported the status quo transfer cap. In regard to management uncertainty, two people spoke in favor of sector-specific management uncertainty (6b). Lastly, one individual supported *de minimis* alternative 7e, which would allow *de minimis* states to set recreational management measures equal to those that were in place in 2020.

Questions from the public covered a variety of topics including the overfished stock status, current quotas and management measures, the validity of the new MRIP estimates, and whether the transfer provisions can occur during rebuilding. Some were concerned about the probability of rebuilding within 10 years and the consequences of not rebuilding within the set timeframe. Others asked why the ten-year plan was not included in the alternative set and thought that ten years would be the best rebuilding duration. Many members of the public expressed frustration with the complexity of the alternatives. Individuals offered their perspective on aspects of the amendment they understood; however comments may have been limited because individuals did not want to comment on alternative sets they did not fully understand. Staff indicated they are happy to work with any members of the public offline to better understand all the alternatives.

Comments

FMP Goals and Objectives

- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** The goals and objectives talk about discard mortality. There is a recreational sector that practices catch and release. To this group, a released fish is not a wasted fish. The goals should consider the fact that there is economic benefit associated with released fish.
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** There is little retention for recreational anglers. Bag limits were 15 fish and now they are at 3 fish. Often, we do not keep too many fish. To put a rough estimate, out of 100 fish that hit the deck, we maybe only kept 10.

- **Timothy Froelich (Commercial - NY):** How and why are we now under strict management measures? The fishery was over managed to the point where we were not able to harvest enough fish. The larger fish ate the smaller fish and then the older fish died of old age. As water quality deteriorates the bluefish migrate further offshore to cleaner water. They are no longer where they once were.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman's Association, Commercial - NC):** I agree with the water clarity comment. Also, why are we using MRIP to manage these fish? Why do we still not have required recreational reporting? Why has management not mandated barbless hooks as a better release practice if this is a catch and release fishery? We need to go to an international party to assess stock status. NMFS says we are overfished, but we are not!
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** I do not know the specifics of the year classes. However, these fish spawn more offshore where we cannot keep tabs on them. It is a cyclical spawning issue. This is not a recreational or commercial fishing issue. In 2013, we had the last year of alligator bluefish in Long Island Sound, after that, the menhaden were basically gone. Besides the 2020 season, there were not many menhaden in recent years. The small harbor-sized bluefish eat bay anchovies. The larger bluefish are following bunker around. This past year we caught large bluefish and large stripers that were following the menhaden. When NC banned omega protein from their waters in 2014, they depleted the menhaden fishery farther north. Since then, we have problems with Omega protein exceeding their cap in our waters.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** In favor of status quo, no action.
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** Status quo unless there is a large increase in commercial demand. We have to pick and choose our battles. Ultimately, the recreational sector is not affecting these fish.
- **Dan Farnham Jr. (Silver Dollar Seafood Inc., Commercial - NY):** I know overfishing is not currently occurring, but how close are the recreational landings to the RHL? Also, what is the rate of dead discards? Why is there not an alternative that would readjust the historical allocation (1981-1989) using recalibrated MRIP estimates as we have done for black sea bass and scup? For the alternatives, I prefer status quo, but I would like to see the 1981-1989 data use the recalibrated estimates instead.
- **Mike Plaia (Commercial/Recreational - CT/RI):** Try to get the allocations in line with revised MRIP data. I prefer 2a-4 or 2a-5 with no phase-in.
- **Timothy Froelich (Commercial - NY):** Status quo for now. I agree with Dan Farnham that one side should not be restricted while the other sector has accountability measures. For NY the quota was 200,000 pounds, which is not large enough to have a fishery. Last year, we were constrained by our limits very early in the year. Bluefish are so abundant that we struggle to avoid them while fishing for other species.
- **Tony DiLernia (Council member - NY):** I want to give historical context to the amendment 1 decision and why I supported (at that time) the ability to transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. From 1981-1989 I was active on headboats. When fish were caught by headboats they were caught recreationally but often sold commercially. That is why I support the

transfer. While some of those fish were counted as recreational fish, they were sold as commercial fish.

- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman's Association, Commercial - NC):** Tony brings up a good point - If the recreational sector was selling fish we should see if that was illegal or not (at the time). ASMFC is not requiring saltwater anglers to register. Why are we enforcing the need to rebuild but not enforcing the 2009 saltwater registration requirement? We need to implement total retention and ban barbless hooks.
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** 99.99% of the time bluefish are caught right in the mouth and I do not see any reason to mandate the hooks for bluefish. Once you know how to use a de-hooker or pliers, there is little to no damage and it does not affect mortality.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **Timothy Froelich (Commercial - NY):** Even if NY doubles its allocation, the 200,000-pound quota doubled is still only 400,000 pounds, which is still not enough. The 200-pound trip limit is too restrictive. A 400-pound trip limit still needs to be increased. If we keep going back and using the wrong data, then this whole management action is misguided.
- **Tony DiLernia (Council member - NY):** Helping to clarify Tim's concerns - While many fish were caught in a recreational manner and were allocated to the rec community, many were shipped into the commercial market. With that in mind, 3a-2 gets an increase, but NJ gets a decrease. I cannot support this because it decreases NJ's allocation. This also happens for 3a-3. Therefore, I would support 3a-4 because it supports both NY and NJ (slight loss).
- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** State-to state transfers will still occur, correct? Then, select an option that uses more recent data. I have no strong preference because I am a recreational guy.
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** We need to ensure the recreational sector does not end up with a smaller bag limit.
- **Dan Farnham Jr. (Silver Dollar Seafood Inc., Commercial - NY):** These alternatives are quite convoluted. However, I support a minimum default allocation for states. In support of 0.1%, because it is the current minimum for other states. The reason I did not want to base com/rec allocation on an updated time series was because of the unrestricted angler phenomenon. But when it comes to commercial allocation, this is not an issue because we are not discussing recreational accountability. I'm in support of the hybrid approach 3a-4 which gives weight to recent landings trends while also respecting historical landings and allocation.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman's Association, Commercial - NC):** This does not address the conditions in NC with the problem of the inlet where sometimes commercial vessels have to land fish in VA. The organization I represent used to have 237 vessels, and all but 18 gave up their permits to NY. I'm dumbfounded why every species we are managing benefits NY; NY will not accept what they turned in on their records and NY does not trust their own data. I'm also frustrated that we are calling MRIP best scientific information available. All in all, agencies have not done their job.

Rebuilding Plan

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance - NJ):** Fishing mortality has a diminishing return on SSB. I assume that environmental factors are at play. Why do we not have 10-year plan? What happens if we do not make adequate progress towards rebuilding?
- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** These rebuilding plans use MRIP numbers and thus are not useable. I 100% agree with this chart in terms of what happened in 2014. The ecosystem in Long Island Sound “died” during this time. There was nothing going on in the spring (maybe road salt added to the problem). This was the same time Omega Protein got kicked out of NC.
- **Mike Plaia (Commercial/Recreational - CT/RI):** I support 4b because it gets us there quickly, but most importantly, within 10 years.
- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** What we are talking about is doubling the SSB (in regards to rebuilding to the target). How achievable is that? Menhaden are managed using ecological reference points and ecosystem-based management. The striped bass population is considered part of this process. How does this factor in Bluefish? I prefer 4d, the 7-year plan. I do not think the 4-year plan is good because it will keep catch low for 4 years and then greatly increase the limits, which will be an issue. I prefer a more gradual approach where catch is allowed to increase gradually as the stock rebuilds.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman’s Association, Commercial - NC):** What we miss by not including data prior to 1984 is the understanding that Russian’s were fishing dogfish, which allowed bluefish to reach a high population level. We are not managing any fishery right because of one predator. Is NMFS supporting the dogfish population to throw off management for all other species?

Sector Transfers

- **Mike Plaia (Commercial/Recreational - CT/RI):** Would these transfers occur during the rebuilding plan? I prefer status quo for both sets (5a-1 and 5b-1).
- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** 5a-2 because it would prevent transfers when the stock is overfished. I prefer 5b-1 for the transfer cap.
- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance – NJ):** 5a-2 makes sense from an equity standpoint. But I am opposed to transfers until we can get to reasonable regulations on the recreational side. The recreational regulations are too restrictive right now and transfers should not occur until they are fixed.

Management Uncertainty

- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** Does management uncertainty account for MRIP uncertainty? Having management uncertainty for MRIP needs to be included in management. New MRIP has to be factored into the decision.
- **Mike Plaia (Commercial/Recreational CT/RI):** I prefer 6b.
- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** I prefer 6b.

De Minimis

- **Tom Fuda (Recreational - CT):** I am in favor of 7e because it implements consistent regulations coastwide.

Other

- **TJ Karbowski (For-Hire - CT):** As an example, MRIP has us taking thousands of fish from shore, where there are no fish up here. For BSB they have us (CT) taking a ton of fish during the winter when no one is fishing. We have sat here for 2 hours, we have heard that commercial sector is not catching the fish, recreational sector is not catching fish, I conclude that we have a YOY survival rate problem. We need to focus on the root issue, which is the survival rate of bluefish, not the issues addressed here today.
- **James Fletcher (United National Fisherman's Association, Commercial - NC):** Maybe we need to look at our science differently. Can we pull regulations from bluefish entirely? See if the fishery manages ok on its own. I don't know of any fishery that has been fished to extinction.

2.4 MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS, AND RHODE ISLAND

Thursday, April 1, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: (46 excluding Council/Commission staff): Mike Andresino, Chris Batsavage, Owen Baute, Gerald Belastock, Rick Bellavance, Alan Bianchi, Kali Boghdan, Paul Caruso, Jack Creighton, James Cullen, Mike DeAnzeris, Michelle Duval, Dave Eisner, Peter Fallon, Dan Farnham, Jay Farris, Cynthia Ferrio, Kimberly Fine, Corey Gammill, Steven Grust, David Gullette, Dewey Hemilright, Raymond Kane, John LaFountain, Nicole Lengyel Costa, John Manteiga, Parker Mauck, Joe Mckenna, Nichola Meserve, Ethan Minichiello, David Monti, Anthony Nascimento, Dale Newton, William Nicholson, Cheri Patterson, Michael Pierdinock, Will Poston, Kermit Robinson, Sarah Schumann, Eric Summers, Lou Tirado, Sam Truesdell, Megan Ware, Anna Webb, Katie Perry, Keith Yocum

Summary: The meeting started with an introduction and briefing from the hearing officer Nicole Lengyel (RI). In total, eight members of the public offered comments on the amendment alternative sets. Several comments were made in regard to the FMP goals and objectives, but two reoccurring themes stood out. Two individuals said that "fair and equitable" should be better defined. Additionally, two individuals thought it important that the catch and release aspect of the recreational fishery be recognized. On the subject of the commercial/recreational allocation, three people supported alternative 2a-2, two people supported status quo, and one person supported 2a-3. Four individuals supported updating the state commercial allocations to alternative 3a-2. The three attendees who provided input on a preferred rebuilding alternative agreed that the stock should be rebuilt as quickly as possible and as such, supported alternative 4b. In regard to transfers, three people said that sector transfers should not be continued, but one individual supported the status quo transfer process, and another thought the transfer cap should be updated (5b-2). Lastly, one individual voiced support for sector specific management uncertainty and *de minimis* alternative 7e.

Staff received a lot of technical questions on the amendment, a few of the reoccurring and more substantive questions are included below. A few people asked how the commercial and recreational allocations were calculated and what data was used. Two individuals asked why there was no alternative that used the same base years with new MRIP data. Staff also received questions on the rebuilding plans including: why a ten year option was not included; if rebuilding to the target was considered realistic; and why the stock was considered overfished.

Comments:

FMP Goals and Objectives

- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** Overall, the amendment is a reset due to MRIP, more so than a reallocation. Like striped bass, we need to look at the value of the fish left in the water. The availability of fish is what drives the demand. This is largely a catch and release fishery. The value of bluefish to the recreational community is very high; bait and tackle shops, fuel, charter trips, generate a lot of economic activity. The commercial value is quite low. We support catch data over landings data. We support goals and objectives that recognize keeping this value of fish in the water as the highest economic concern. This is a key component of considering economic and social needs of all groups as is described in objective 2.2.
- **Rick Bellavance (Priority Charters, For-Hire/Commercial – RI):** The proposed goals are much better than the existing goals, and strongly recommends that the Commission and Council consider updating the FMP. In particular goal 2 is extremely important. However, “fair and equitable” is quite subjective, so if we can further define those terms it would improve the overall message. Goal 2 addresses the fact that many stakeholders utilize the bluefish resource. These goals support all stakeholders, regardless of whether you want to eat bluefish, harvest them yourself, or catch and release them.
- **Owen Baute (Recreational – RI):** How do you define stakeholder engagement? How do you plan to achieve that?
- **Mike Pierdinock (For-Hire - MA):** I would like to recommend that “equitable access to all user groups” be defined. At times, bluefish are used as bait, food, and catch-and-release and we want all user groups represented.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** Can you explain the difference between how catch vs landings data is allocated? In regard to the allocations, I would like to see catch data used so each fishery has their own sector specific discards. I support 2a-2 or 2a-3 because these alternatives use catch data and are based on more recent years, but I would like to see what the status quo option with updated MRIP estimates looks like. In regard to the phase-in, we support 2b-2.
- **John LaFountain (Fox Seafood Inc., Commercial – RI):** Why are there no alternatives higher than 17% for the commercial sector? Considering how low the other commercial allocations are, I support status quo. I am surprised there is not an option with a higher allocation for the commercial sector. We also feel that the MRIP data is highly inflated, and the fish are not coming as close to shore where the recreational guys are. The commercial fishery is quite healthy but has been restricted by a low quota. Bluefish is a food source that should be enjoyed by the public. This is a fishery which can be harvested by smaller boats which supports local fishermen. Small-scale commercial fishing operations rely on bluefish, and they have made investments that depend on access to the resource, we cannot decrease their access. Also, when I hear reports that recreational anglers are unable to catch three fish, I question the validity of MRIP data and think the estimates are inflated. Bluefish are migrating through, but they are staying offshore.
- **Mike Pierdinock (For-Hire – MA):** How did you come up with the phase-in time periods and why is there no 10-year option?

- **Rick Bellavance (Priority Charters, Recreational/Commercial – RI):** Why isn't there an alternative that uses the original base years with new MRIP information? I support using the catch-based approaches that you have proposed.
- **Eric Summers (Recreational - MA):** I support 2a-2 to increase the recreational allocation to 89%.
- **Mike DeAnzeris (Commercial – MA):** I support the comments proposed by John LaFountain. Status quo because the fish are most valuable to the smaller boats that bring catch to the local markets. The fishery is well suited to day-boat catch. Make sure the quota is accessible in a proper manner, so fresh fish can be distributed quickly. Bluefish should be caught and marketed within a day or so to economically benefit local communities.
- **Steven Grust (Recreational – NJ):** I support 2a-2 but I am concerned that there is not a minimum size limit to help conserve the stock. Many people harvest small bluefish for bait and that definitely affects the health of the stock.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **John LaFountain (Fox Seafood Inc., Commercial – RI):** I support 3a-2 because 5 years is a long enough period to know what the current trends in abundance are. In Rhode Island there are plenty of bluefish, and other states are not harvesting them. These fish seem to not spend much too time down south. The proposed goals and objectives support economic efficiency and fair access for fishermen. Rhode Island needs a larger quota so that their fishery isn't closed in the fall when the run of bluefish occurs.
- **Steven Grust (Recreational – NJ):** I support 3a-2. A 5-year time series is long enough to pick up on the migration patterns of bluefish. In NJ it's rare to see more than 3 fish caught a day.
- **Rick Bellavance (Priority Charters, Recreational/Commercial – RI):** The 5-year average is the smart way to go (3a-2). I also support a minimum default allocation to convert discards to landings (3d-3). I support a phase-in because some of the changes are significant.
- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** I support 3a-2 and a minimum default allocation (3d-3). The trigger approach is too complex. For phase-in, we support 3b-2 which phases in reallocation evenly over the duration of the rebuilding plan.
- **Eric Summers (Recreational – MA):** I support 3a-2 and 3d-2

Rebuilding Plan

- **Eric Summers (Recreational – MA):** Is the target a real value? We have never been at the target since 1985. Is there something being done differently this time that will make it more likely that biomass will hit the target? I recommend we be cautious; the target may not be too high, the threshold could be too low. I support 4b to have the stock be rebuilt as soon as possible. Maybe make the threshold 75% of the target instead of 50%.
- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** I support 4b as it rebuilds the stock quickest. The other options are remarkably unpleasant, with a lower chance of success.
- **Mike Pierdinock (For-Hire – MA):** He remembers back in 1980s when bluefish were abundant, and this is not the same fishery today. Is the reduction in estimates of biomass due to the fact that less people are targeting bluefish because they have moved offshore?

- **Rick Bellavance (Priority Charters, Recreational/Commercial – RI):** Spawning stock biomass and recruitment looks to be fairly stable. I think the Council’s risk policy has been vetted and is the appropriate alternative (4c). This alternative will get the job done, but won’t overly burden the fisheries.
- **Steven Grust (Recreational – NJ):** Does the biomass graph account for unreported caught fish?
- **John LaFountain (Fox Seafood Inc., Commercial – RI):** We support 4b, along with many of the fishermen I have spoken to.

Sector Transfers

- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** Earlier I pointed to the value of the catch and release aspect of the fishery. We feel the quota transfer provision is not reflective of the 65% of folks who practice catch and release in the fishery. Why practice catch and release if the unused quota is going to be transferred. The idea of catch release is to practice conservation in safe release practices so that there are fish tomorrow to catch. There is no benefit to the fishery if we transfer the fish and do not help them grow. We feel strongly that there should be no transfer at all in either direction. Given there are no options to that affect we support 5b-1 status quo in regard to the transfer cap.
- **Steven Grust (Recreational – NJ):** I support 5b-2.
- **John LaFountain (Fox Seafood Inc., Commercial – RI):** I support 5a-1 which will continue to allow quota going from the recreational to the commercial sector. It is important to support the commercial fishermen at the end of the season when the transfers typically occur.
- **Eric Summers (Recreational – MA):** I support no transfers.
- **Owen Baute (Recreational – RI):** I support no transfers. Catch and release is only worth it when the fish are going to stay there.

Management Uncertainty & De Minimis

- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** We support 6b, the post-sector split. Seems to be the fairest alternative.

De Minimis

- **David Monti (Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association, Recreational):** We support 7e, the 2020 management measures.

2.5 NEW JERSEY

Thursday, April 8, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: (37 excluding Council/Commission staff): Steven Avakian, Chris Batsavage, Bill Blanke, Bonnie Brady, Jeffrey Brust, Tony Campagna, Michael Celestino, Douglas Chase, Joe Cimino, Heather Corbett, John Dwyer, Jessica Daher, John DePersenaire, Michelle Duval, Cynthia Ferrio, Frank Florio, Thomas Fote, Paul Haertel, Ross Hartley, Stephen Hydock, Bob Keller, Tom Little, Wayne Maloney, Reel MaxLife, Steven Morey, Adam Nowalsky, Will Poston, Michael Purvin, Andrew Rigby, Lenny Rodriguez, Mark Taylor, John Toth, Mike Waine, Kevin Wark, Thomas Wayne, Harvey Yenkinson, Douglas Zemeckis,

Summary: The meeting started with an introduction and briefing from the hearing officer Joe Cimino. In total, six individuals offered comments on the amendment. Very few comments received at this hearing were in support of a specific alternative. The majority of the meeting was geared towards answering questions on the amendment and several suggestions were made that fall outside of the current range of alternatives.

Individuals offered several recommendations for the FMP goals and objectives including greater consideration of the following: the consumer user group; environmental stressors; the importance of forage fish; and differences in regional abundance. When asked about the commercial/recreational allocation alternatives, one individual voiced support for alternative 2a-1. No comments were provided on the state commercial allocations, but two commercial stakeholders said they thought the alternatives were too complex and expressed a preference to discuss the matter later offline with staff. On the subject of the rebuilding plan, three people thought that the stock is responding to environmental and ecological cues and that fishing mortality is not the cause for the stock's decline. Four people were in strong support of a ten-year rebuilding plan to give the stock adequate time to rebuild. In regard to the sector transfers, one person shared that they were never in support of this process and a second person said that they would prefer that no transfers occur until the recreational sector has a higher bag limit. Lastly, one person commented in support of sector specific management uncertainty (6b) and flexible recreational measures for *de minimis* states (7b).

Attendees asked several clarifying questions, a few of which are highlighted below. One person stated that prior to final action, the public will need clarification from NOAA Fisheries on what actually happens if adequate progress is not achieved during rebuilding. Another person asked about when transfers are allowed during the rebuilding plan. Staff explained that the newly proposed transfer process (5a-2), which would allow transfers during rebuilding so long as the stock was above the overfished threshold and overfishing is not occurring. Lastly, one person asked if a ten-year rebuilding plan could even be implemented if it was previously removed from the alternative set, to which a NJ commissioner responded that nothing is completely off the table until after final action.

Comments

FMP Goals and Objectives

- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association - NY):** I see that the FMP goals and objectives reference fair and equitable access to user groups along the coast, but what about consumers?
- **Kevin Wark (Viking Village, Commercial - NJ):** Bluefish are suffering from great environmental issues. I have watched this my entire life. Moving up and offshore and they have

now dwindled to a small population. I feel a lot of this work is in vain. Until we can learn why recruitment is low, we are going to struggle. I think the objectives need to be more focused on the stressors in the environment that caused changes in the fishery. Why are bluefish swimming at 100 fathoms when they used to be just a few miles off the beach? Collectively, we need to open our eyes and look at what is happening in the environment. I don't believe this is an overfishing issue. These fish used to look like schools of menhaden.

- **Tom Fote (Board Member - NJ):** In 1989 we put a 10 fish bag limit in it was not due to stock status. A few years later the stock declined, but it was due to sand eel populations declining. In the 1960s through the 1980s bluefish were feeding heavily on sand eels. In the 1990s bluefish were no longer looking healthy and well fed because of warming waters and less bait. The fish go further offshore to be in colder waters. We know these issues are environmental and bluefish have gone through these cycles. We are at about the 75-year average population. Now, we changed the limits again and its due to stock status. I see that we are going to put a lot of commercial and recreational fishermen through unnecessary suffering, because we know that the stock depends on forage species, and forage species are moving because the water is warm.
- **John Toth (Jersey Coast Anglers Association):** Sand mining has destroyed habitat on the inshore waters. When you lose habitat, it is less attractive for all species. We are dealing with climate change here and also had hurricane Sandy destroy much of the inshore environment. This is one of the major reasons we are not seeing bluefish in our waters.
- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association - NY):** On the eastern end of Long Island there has been some of the largest bluefish and most abundant schools we have seen in years. I know water temperature plays a role, but our experience has not been the same as the previous commentors.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance - NJ):** Can you show a time series of recreational landings relative to the RHL?
- **Mike Waine (American Sportfishing Association - NC):** Do recreational landings include dead discards? Does the document have discard information within it?
- **Kevin Wark (Viking Village, Commercial - NJ):** I represent Viking Village, we have 34 vessels and we were huge bluefish producers for many years, until we saw bluefish shift to the east. The epicenter of bluefish fishing has been moving northward over the years. However, if the fish return, we want to be able to fish for them. We are looking for opportunities to continue fishing in the Mid-Atlantic and keeping the infrastructure alive. I am just curious of what the historical percentages are to ensure we have opportunities moving forward. It costs a lot of money to keep the doors open. I support 2a-1. This is all about opportunity for these vessels if the fish present themselves.
- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association - NY):** Can you explain why the percentages change when we are using catch data?
- **Mike Waine (American Sportfishing Association - NC):** This bluefish fishery is absolutely different from the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries in that catch-and-release fishing is a large component of the bluefish fishery.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association – NY):** This is a very complicated set of alternatives. Would it be possible to talk offline to better understand the management implications?
- **Kevin Wark (Viking Village, Commercial - NJ):** I agree with Bonnie. This is too confusing for me to make any comment right now. We need to know what this truly means for individual states especially when I am representing the commercial sector.

Rebuilding Plan

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance – NJ):** I previously asked about the absence of a 10-year rebuilding plan option. It was explained that the MSA requires that the stock be rebuilt as soon as possible, and it was determined that the 10-year option was not appropriate. I do think that this is a significant concern from our standpoint. This stock is responding more to environmental and ecological cues as opposed to directed fishing mortality. By not having the 10-year option, we are setting managers up for failure. We are putting the burden of unnecessary pain on the fishermen. Section 304e in MSA allows for going up to 10 years. I really think that the 10-year option should be included. I also think the SSB rebuilding target is actually unattainable knowing that we have never been at that level before.
- **Mike Waine (American Sportfishing Association - NC):** The public hearing document states “if adequate progress is not made through the rebuilding plan, the regional office will immediately make revisions necessary to achieve adequate progress. NOAA Fisheries technical guidance on MSA National Standard 1 recommends that in these situations the rebuilding fishing mortality proxy (F) be set at 75% of the target F. This means that if the selected rebuilding plan is demonstrating difficulty in achieving the target on time, F may be further decreased to achieve a rebuilt stock.” Am I understanding correctly that if we do not rebuild on pace with the plan that we start lowering our target fishing mortality rate to 75% of the target to speed rebuilding? If this is the guidance, but we don't know for sure if that is what gets implemented, then that leaves quite a bit of uncertainty for the stakeholders. I continue to maintain that this is going to be a really frustrating moment if we are wrong about this ambitious timeline and MSA NS1 says we need to further constrain. There are many factors aside from fishing mortality that impact rebuilding. Prior to final action we will need clarification from NOAA Fisheries on what actually happens if we do not achieve adequate progress towards rebuilding.
- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association, NY):** There has to be a 10-year option. Midway through the rebuilding plan if new stock assessment information is made available and the research surveys are unable to catch bluefish, the quotas will be dropped and both fleets will be heavily restricted. Winter flounder was an interesting situation. In 2010 the NEFMC put a moratorium on winter flounder in southern New England because the trawl survey was unable to catch the fish and the assessment showed that there were no fish. The problem was that the net was about 6 inches off of the bottom and unable to catch flat fish. I highly recommend as a failsafe to have the ten-year option in the plan. If regionally there is an issue – tides, temperature, forage, EFH – the only people that are going to pay for it are the fishermen and you have to have the 10-year option as a buffer just in case.

- **John Toth (Jersey Coast Anglers Association):** The ten-year approach is the way to go. Right now, we are constrained to 3 fish. How much more can we do to help the stock? This is not a result of fishing mortality; this is an environmental issue and beyond our control. The last thing we need to do is to see the for-hire fleet go out of business. They are already struggling with low bag limits and the pandemic. Whatever we can do to help the for-hire fleet would be much appreciated.
- **Kevin Wark (Viking Village, Commercial - NJ):** Everyone on the call has been spot on. Bluefish are the next weakfish, where the bag limit is down to one and the species can't get a foothold back into the environment. We also used to have winter flounder in New Jersey and that fishery is almost nonexistent now. This adds to the long list of species we have lost. We need to be mindful of our infrastructure and provide the opportunities we can. We do not want our goals to be too high. I think bluefish are not going to be able to rebuild. We used to see them spawning inshore in the spring and summer and now we don't see that anymore in the Mid-Atlantic. This is the next grey trout – where nobody can pinpoint what happened. All the comments we have heard tonight are very good and accurate.
- **Mike Waine (American Sportfishing Association - NC):** When the Council and ASMFC developed this draft amendment, we asked them to keep the 10-year alternative in place. They removed it and we now can no longer have it added back in because it is outside of the current range of alternatives. Is that correct?
- **Tom Fote (Board Member, NJ):** Nothing is ever completely off the table. I have seen weirder things happen before. The real problem is looking at the public hearing attendance numbers. The small number of stakeholders do not represent the entire community. We used to have hearings with 100s of people. People are webinar-ed out. We are not getting enough public input.
- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association - NY):** I agree with Tom and think there is a fair amount of burnout from all the meetings we have had. If there was a way to add a few more types of public hearings, that could be very beneficial. I think people need a break and it has pretty much been non-stop for weeks. It would be helpful to ask Bob and Chris to see if additional hearings could be scheduled.

Sector Transfers

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance – NJ):** The recreational sector needs reasonable bag limits to entice people to pursue bluefish. We need that incentive. I would surmise that directed trips are down, just because of their change in distribution. Bluefish are very far offshore, and less people are targeting them. In fact, many of the bluefish fishing tournaments that would usually happen during the springtime in New Jersey have shut down. I have a hard time supporting transfers to the commercial sector until reasonable bag limits are restored. I am not opposed to transfers to the commercial side in general, just not until reasonable recreational measures are restored that incentive people to go on a head boat or steam 20 miles offshore to catch them.
- **Kevin Wark (Viking Village, Commercial - NJ):** I spoke against this quota transfer so many years ago when it was first implemented because I knew the day would come that it would no longer be feasible. We can't expect the recreational sector to transfer fish to the commercial sector. Many years ago, I spoke against this system where unused fish would be transferred

away. Back then, accounting was not very accurate for either sector, which made transfers an even bigger problem in his view. This was never a good system and I hope we have all learned from this. Transfers hasn't been a huge issue lately because the commercial sector hasn't been landing all their quota but moving forward, I do not see it likely that the recreational sector would transfer over fish. I do not see transfers working as an option moving forward.

- **Bonnie Brady (Long Island Commercial Fishermen's Association - NY):** When are transfers allowed and not allowed in regards to stock status and the rebuilding plan?

Management Uncertainty

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance – NJ):** We would support 6b. This position is consistent with the position we have taken for the recent summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass allocation amendment. There is value added to the catch-and-release component of the bluefish fishery. I think it is best to not share uncertainties across sectors. We need to revisit how we estimate average weight of discarded fish.
- **Mike Waine (American Sportfishing Association - NC):** It seems that switching to sector specific management uncertainty will just penalize the recreational sector for uncertainty associated MRIP estimates. The recreational reform initiative has been working to develop tools to better use MRIP data and for management to account for its inherent uncertainty. There is an effort to potentially base recreational measures on stock status. I wanted to provide greater context around this issue when these decisions are being made.

De Minimis

- **John DePersenaire (Recreational Fishing Alliance – NJ):** We would support 7b. I really do not think the impacts of fishing in a de minimis state are going to have any measurable impacts on the stock during rebuilding. Let those states take full advantage of any bluefish. In the broader scheme of things, de minimis states will have a very small impact.

3 WRITTEN COMMENTS

3.1 ONLINE COMMENT FORM

Steven Schnebly

Email

smddfsh@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Weakfish, flounder, fluke, striped bass, kingfish, blowfish, cod, mackeral. All a fraction of what they once were.

What do you guys do again?

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

02/20/2021

George Horvath

Email

georgerhorvath@yahoo.com

8. General Comments

I tagged 2,397 bluefish in NJ with American Littoral Society spaghetti tags. 29 were recaptured from the Cape Cod Canal to Atlantic Beach, NC. Last year I tagged 89 bluefish in Manasquan Inlet, and one was recaptured in the Point Pleasant Canal.

Upload File

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How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

02/22/2021

Aaron Uehara

Email

aaron.uehara@gmail.com

8. General Comments

Blue fish are disappearing. Drop the commercial quotas, populations are not what they were 20 years ago. You need to give them a chance to recover.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

02/23/2021

David Walt

Email

dwalt@bwh.harvard.edu

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Something drastic needs to be done. I am a recreational fisherman on Cape Ann. I haven't caught a bluefish in two years.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

02/23/2021

Alan Anderson

Email

alanblackpowderstuffer@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I believe that commercial fishing quotas on Striped Bass and Bluefish should be halved, or even a 2 year ban on commercial fishing for these species, to allow stocks to rebuild. As a recreational fisherman. I have not seen a bluefish, or caught a striped bass for many years, i believe, due to commercial over-harvesting by commercial fishers.

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Date Submitted

02/24/2021

Michael Toole

Email

toolemf@hotmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Objective 1.1 should clearly state maintain catch below Acceptable Biological Catch rather than "rate of fishing mortality".

Objective 2.2. should be deleted. This is commonly used as an excuse for not taking needed actions for the best protection of the fish. While this is something I think should play in the allocation of catch between user groups but not for weakening needed restrictions on catch numbers. Example being giving party/charter 5 fish limit verse others 3 fish. Both should have been 3.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Support 2a-2 89% Rec, 11% Commercial. I support this because I believe both the economic and social value of bluefish are much greater in recreational fishing.

Support 2b-1 No phase-in. I support this because with the current status of the bluefish stock this change should be immediate.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Support 3a-4 Half 1981-1989 and half 2009-2018. I support this because it recognizes historic landing before the stock level dropped so low that states like NH and Maine have seen very few bluefish while also recognizing we will not reach the level seen in the 80s.

Support 3b-2 allocation change spread evenly over same duration as rebuild plan. I support this since no reason to increase allocations to states that have limited access to them until stock is rebuilt.

4. Rebuilding Plan

Support 4b Constant harvest - 4-year rebuild plan. I support this because I think it is the most likely to succeed in rebuilding the stock with less risk. Since the stock is already over fished more drastic action is required.

5. Transfers

No transfer until stock levels reach target level, than 5a and 5b.

6. Management Uncertainty

Support 6b Post-sector split. Allows addressing differences between commercial and recreational fishing uncertainty.

7. De Minimis Provisions

Support 7c Recreational De Minimis - state selected management measures. I support this because it allows states to develop regulations that fit their need while maintaining less than 1% harvest threshold.

8. General Comments

For the recreational catch there should be no differences between for hire industry and individual recreational fishing limits.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

02/24/2021

MATTHEW QUAIL

Email

matthewquail@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

I fish Salem Sound often. I have not seen any bluefish in the Salem Sound area for 4+ years. Not sure if this is a migration nuance or an indicator of the health of the biomass.

Forwarding this to hopefully influence any decisions on bluefish catch limits

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

I fish Salem Sound often. I have not seen any bluefish in the Salem Sound area for 4+ years. Not sure if this is a migration nuance or an indicator of the health of the biomass.

Forwarding this to hopefully influence any decisions on bluefish catch limits

4. Rebuilding Plan

MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

I fish Salem Sound often. I have not seen any bluefish in the Salem Sound area for 4+ years. Not sure if this is a migration nuance or an indicator of the health of the biomass.

Forwarding this to hopefully influence any decisions on bluefish catch limits

6. Management Uncertainty

MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

I fish Salem Sound often. I have not seen any bluefish in the Salem Sound area for 4+ years. Not sure if this is a migration nuance or an indicator of the health of the biomass.

Forwarding this to hopefully influence any decisions on bluefish catch limits

8. General Comments

MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

I fish Salem Sound often. I have not seen any bluefish in the Salem Sound area for 4+ years. Not sure if this is a migration nuance or an indicator of the health of the biomass.

Forwarding this to hopefully influence any decisions on bluefish catch limits

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/03/2021

Dean Pesante

Email

dpesante@cox.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

The Bluefish stocks/fishery are very healthy here in Rhode Island. It is our primary fishery. Many fisherman and related businesses rely on it. We could not stay in business without it. Which ever management plan will allow us to continue making a living and provide for our families is the plan we would support.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

We support 2a-1: 83% Rec, 17% Comm (status quo)

We 2b-1: No phase in (status quo) from these alternatives.

We would like to see it return to 75% Rec, 25% Comm. as in past years. Not sure how they came up with the %/numbers given the fact that all recreational landings are voluntary and can be easily inflated and inaccurate.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

We support Alt. 3a-2: 5 year (2014-2018) This reflects the most current trend/data. 2019 and 2020 would also support this.

We support 3b-1: No phase in (status quo) Our fishery is healthy here in Rhode Island. We can't afford any reductions.

We support 3c-1 No Trigger (status quo)

WE support 3d-2 0.10% Minimum Default Allocation

4. Rebuilding Plan

We support 4b Constant harvest - 4 year rebuilding plan

5. Transfers

We support 5a-1 No Action/Status QUO

We support 5b-1 No Action/Status Quo

6. Management Uncertainty

We support 6b Post-Sector Split

7. De Minimis Provisions

We support 7d Recreational De Minimis-rollover management measures

8. General Comments

The Bluefish stocks and fishery in Rhode Island is healthy. We have always had an abundance of Bluefish in our waters and this is still true at the present time.

I'm not sure why Bluefish landings have dropped off in the states to the south. Possibly water temperature or water quality do to run off from rivers and estuaries with fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants. Also Beach Renovation (dredging) are all possibilities that may keep Bluefish away. Possibly further offshore waters.

I hope the appropriate changes can be made to reflect the CURRENT Bluefish trends when managing this resource and accommodate those who rely on this fishery. Than you.

Respectfully, Dean Pesante F/V Oceana

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Rhode Island

Gear type(s) used

Gillnet

Date Submitted

03/05/2021

Corey Gammill

Email

cmgammill@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I like the proposed goals to the FMP. The question I have, and this will be a theme of this document is how can ASMFC and NMFS stay with their finger on the pulse of what is happening.

The goal is simple: a fishery that is sustainable and enjoyed by ALL user groups.

I just think it is VERY important for regulators to understand why they failed in managing the fishery? The goals originally are good goals as well, but the bluefish bag limit was 10 fish per person for days for a VERY long time and no changes were made and not enough questions asked about whether measurement was correct?

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Bluefish and Striped Bass are the two key fish for the recreational fishery from Florida to Maine. These two fish get people on the water, using their boats, using fuel, buying bait, buying fishing gear. While I am incredibly supportive of commercial fishermen, Bluefish have very little value in price per pound and have much more value to recreational fishermen and the businesses that support them. I vote 2a-2

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Status quo or 3a-4...

3b-2

3c-1

3D-3

4. Rebuilding Plan

4B: For starters, I am very skeptical that the changes in bag limit alone in 2020 will lower the catch rate by 2/3rds. I don't know anyone who keeps 3 fish, so I don't see how lowering the bag limit will make a difference, but we will see. I wish the council had created a minimum size and had restricted treble hooks. I also wish the council would manage the fishery recognizing that the more bait we have the more fish we will have. This was seen clearly in the summer of 2020. This was the best bluefishing we have seen for LARGE fish and it is no coincidence that the commercial fishermen were not fishing for squid as there was no market.

The real cause of less bluefish in coastal waters is less bait and the fish we have have, have gotten smaller because most of the big bait is sitting offshore with the bigger bluefish. So what this means is the smaller fish come in and these are the bluefish that are targeted.

If you look at catch data over the last 5 years bluefish harvest size has gotten smaller as less big fish exist. It has been proven that the smaller the bluefish the higher the release mortality rate is. So the irony is that as we let our fishery fall apart we are only hurting it more because the release mortality rate increases.

How can we solve all this?

- 1) Minimum sizes. Let the fish grow and have a chance to reproduce. No one should keep a fish smaller than 3 pounds.
- 2) Adjust gear types: no treble hooks and no J hooks with bait.... Any sign of blood severely decreases a fishes chance of survival and both lead to more gut/gill hooks and multiple hooks.
- 3) Have closures to commercial bait fishermen when Migratory fish are present. For instance off Nantucket in the summer limit the squid fishermen and you will see the big fish inshore, reproducing inshore. *** I am sure this is true up and down the coastline...

LASTLY, the reason I think we should do 4B is that if we can rebuild the fishery slowly or quickly, why wouldn't we do it quickly? At least if we do it quickly we can see what is working and not, where if we take our time, it will take us longer to assess results, potentially pushing our fishery further into decline.

5. Transfers

No ACTION: Statust quo....

We do not currently collect data well enough to know what is happening right now with a fishery, so how can we expect to make educated decisions about Data Transfer if we don't have real time data? If we had more accurate data, I would say absolutely, but without it we would be making decisions on information from 1.5 years ago...

6. Management Uncertainty

While every part of me wants 6B, because I do think that the two should be separated as data is much easier gathered from the commercial fishermen than the recreational. If there is uncertainty about the recreational side, the commercial fishermen should not be penalized while regulators dig into where the issue is, and visa versa

This said, if uncertainty is HURTING the WHOLE FISHERY, decision makers need to act a lot more aggressively than they have in the past. It is easier to open a fishery than to rebuild it right? It is amazing how conservative ASMFC is being towards rebuilding the fishery. I think that any sign of overfishing should lead to aggressive management and rule changes.

So my vote would be 6A

7. De Minimis Provisions

No comment

8. General Comments

Below I am including a public comment submitted in 2020.

I want it noted again that I do not think the regulation changes in 2020 were strong enough to make a change in our fishery.

We need to do more than adjust the bag limit to make a difference in rebuilding the stock.

I also think that ASMFC and NMFC need to seriously consider ways to reduce the release mortality rate. In the study used to come up with the assumed 15% rate it is made VERY CLEAR that the presence of blood decreases the likelihood of survival by 9-11 times. If we could lower poor hookings this would make a monumental difference in survival rate of fish and lower the 15% assumed rate significantly. I firmly believe that eliminating treble hooks are a key to reducing this mortality rate and I highly suggest the council start a study to see if this is the case.

It is also very clear that the larger the fish targeted, the less likely that they will die. So with this information why is the ASMFC and NMFC encouraging targeting of small fish with no minimum size. Minimum size should be required.

Lastly, ASMFC should be looking at the vertical nature of an eco system. 2020 was the best blue fishing that Nantucket has seen in the last 5 years for large fish. This was NOT because of a smaller bag limit started in April 2020, but because of a lack of Squid boats south of Nantucket and the Vineyard. Limiting pressure on bait, led to more herring and squid in our waters, which brought back the LARGE bluefish. So a question that should be asked is WHETHER RECREATIONAL BLUEFISH ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN COMMERCIAL SQUID THIS IS KEY!!!!

WE HAVE DATA THAT SHOWS THAT MORE BAIT = MORE FISH. SO WHY CAN'T WE MANAGE FISHERIES AT THE SAME TIME? If the squid boats were moved 12 miles off and the bait had a chance to get in, than the commercial fishermen would still catch their squid, albeit with a bit more effort, but a recreational fishery for 3 months around Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod would be brought back. if this model were followed up and down the coast and comparisons made between bait fisheries and fin fish fisheries, I think ASMFC would find some different answers to how the bait fisheries should be managed.

Upload File

[bluefishcomment2021.docx](#)

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (for-hire)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/08/2021

Jeff Norton

Email

jeffnrtn@yahoo.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Make all NE states have the same regulations for all fish. For blues make it 1 fish per day per angler.

Not sure what the size should be or if a slot limit works for blue fish.

10 per day was way too many and even 3 is too many. Thank you.

Haven't seen a striper public comment box like this but they should shut it down altogether for a couple seasons. OR ban commercial fishing and fishing in the cape cod canal

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/11/2021

Ray West

Email

rrrwest@yahoo.com

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I recommend

2a-3 87% Rec, 13% Comm

4. Rebuilding Plan

recommend

4b Constant harvest – 4-year Rebuilding Plan

5. Transfers

no action

8. General Comments

please manage for abundance

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts, Rhode Island

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/11/2021

Dave Surdel

Email

dsurdel@wiley.com

8. General Comments

The fisheries management council needs to act quickly and aggressively to halt the decline of our Bluefish population and restore an abundant fishery. As I recreational angler that travels all over New England from Cape Ann to Montauk, I have witnessed the bluefish population crashing over the last 10 years. It has reached the point where the inshore recreational bluefish opportunity is nearly nonexistent. Long gone are the days when we could expect thousands of bluefish to be patrolling their traditional strongholds from Cotuit to Monomoy and Sankaty to Montauk. This fishery ran like clockwork for the better part of 20 years. But the bluefish are not there anymore. You can hardly find them in a boat, much less fishing from shore. The bluefish are gone and the commercial fleet that helped wipe them out has gone away. The years and years of greed and 'recremercial' charter captains wiping out the inshore fishery coupled with overly generous (and widely unenforced) bag limits have decimated our population. My friends used to brag about how many pounds of bluefish they could fill the boat with and still make it back to the ramp from Nantucket. Now the fishery is so decimated, it's hardly worth the trip.

The burden of responsibility for this mismanagement falls on the fishery councils. It's clear that councils have failed to maintain a healthy fishery. It's a pity it has come to this, particularly given the dire straits the Striped Bass are in for the exact same reasons: complete stock mismanagement coastwide, bickering between states over resource-grab and prioritizing a small special interest group of commercial and charter captains to the detriment of the overall resource. Too little action is being taken, too late. Please stop micromanaging the statistics, debating percentages, and rolling out stop-gap measures. Everyone can see through that at this point. Trivial changes make little impact. The fisheries councils need to take drastic measures to protect our bluefish stock before it's too late. If that means stopping commercial fishing and implementing a recreational moratorium, please do it. Commercial opportunity goes beyond a handful of commercial fisherman. It also impacts coastal communities through declining charter business. Fisherman that once that once traveled to Cape Cod to have fun, stay in our hotels and eat at our restaurants are disappearing quickly.

Please do the right thing and take immediate action to stop the overfishing by all sectors and restore this once-abundant fishery to it's former glory.

Thanks, Dave Surdel

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/12/2021

Andreas Sofronas

Email

asofronas@students.stonehill.edu

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I think that there should be more regulations for bluefish. Over the past few years bluefish have not arrived in the numbers that they have historically. They have not arrived in June and July when they are supposed to, rather they are showing up in my area in August and don't stay very long. When they did arrive, we didn't catch many of them but they are very fun fish to catch and pound for pound I think they put up a better fight than bass do. People will take the full bag limit of blues when they do not need all of that bluefish. I think that bluefish deserve just as much respect as bass do and should have similar regulations as the striped bass.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/17/2021

Josh Tanz

Email

jbtanz@gmail.com

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I am in support of reduced commercial limits and stricter recreational limits as well (size limits and bag limits) and for immediate implementation of any changes.

8. General Comments

Bluefish have been over-harvested and overfished. The goal should be reduced harvesting and stricter recreational rules implemented immediately in order to increase and then maintain bluefish populations at the highest levels possible

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/23/2021

Thomas Fuda

Email

tom.fuda@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Regarding proposed goals 1.2 and 2.1, 2.2: I feel the term "discard mortality" is somewhat misused at times. It basically sounds like it is not taking into consideration the fact there is a fairly large segment of the recreational sector that often catches and intentionally releases Bluefish as sport, and not in response to any regulation that mandates "discarding" the fish. Participants in this mode of fishing often have no intention of keeping fish, but rather they see value in the experiencing the thrill of catching the one of the most aggressive and strongest fish, on a pound per pound basis. I'm all in favor of promoting better handling to reduce "release mortality", but let's not underestimate the value these anglers place on the experience of fishing for Bluefish, nor the economic benefit seen by the money this sector spends. So, when crafting goals that seek to reduce release mortality, we don't reduce access to this sector of the recreational fishery.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I am in favor of the status quo option (2a-1) regarding commercial / recreational allocation.

4. Rebuilding Plan

Regarding the Rebuilding Plan: I am in favor of option 4c (5-year rebuilding plan). I feel this offers the best compromise between rebuilding the stock quickly, while reducing the socioeconomic impact to the commercial fishery and fishing communities.

5. Transfers

Regarding Sector Transfers: I am in favor of option 5a-1 (status quo). I'm more concerned with rebuilding the stock to abundant levels than I am with making unused commercial allocation available for recreational harvest.

6. Management Uncertainty

Regarding Management Uncertainty: I am in favor of option 6b (Post-sector split). I feel this provides for a more equitable application of management uncertainty.

7. De Minimis Provisions

Regarding De Minimis Provisions: I am in favor of option 7e (2020 management measures). This option provides for consistent coast-wide regulations.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Connecticut

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/29/2021

Craig Eldredge

Email

bubbaboards@bellsouth.net

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

As a recreational fisherman I would like you to reconsider the 3 fish limit to exclude snapper blues from the limit . Maybe a slot size is a better alternative.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

03/30/2021

David Cannistraro

Email

fastboat01@yahoo.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Stop the commercial fishery. They decimate whole schools of Bluefish.

The recreational fishery adds much more to the economy without destroying the gene pool.

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Date Submitted

03/31/2021

James Molinaro

Email

jim.m1@verizon.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I would like to support 2a-5 for shore anglers and charter boats .

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I support 3a-3 !

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

3D-3

4. Rebuilding Plan

4d

5. Transfers

5b-1

6. Management Uncertainty

6b

7. De Minimis Provisions

7b

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/01/2021

Preston Southwick

Email

prsouthwick123@yahoo.com

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

netting must be banned for the health of all species that call our United States waters home. It is an indiscriminate harvesting method that has no way of limiting bycatch.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/01/2021

William Doan

Email

doanbill@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Bluefish have been overfished. Both recreational and commercial fishing share the blame. I saw too many people keeping bluefish that they had no intention of eating. The former 15 fish limit really hurt their population. Bluefish are harder to find now and larger ones are harder to find as well. I release all bluefish I catch to try to help the population rebuild.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I favor the the 2a-2 option.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/03/2021

Paul Tokarz

Email

tok67@verizon.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Needs to be revised

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I would rather see the 5 year closure. To rebuild the stock.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

3A

4. Rebuilding Plan

4CC

5. Transfers

Closure

6. Management Uncertainty

Closure

7. De Minimis Provisions

7E

8. General Comments

Closure for 5 years

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Other

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/04/2021

Daniel Lester

Email

dannylester@optonline.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Status quo

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

2a-1 status quo

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

New york should get more quota.

4. Rebuilding Plan

Status quo

5. Transfers

Status quo

6. Management Uncertainty

Status quo

7. De Minimis Provisions

Status quo

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Gear type(s) used

Pound net

Date Submitted

04/07/2021

GRACE JORGE

Email

gracemjorge@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

4. Rebuilding Plan

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

5. Transfers

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

6. Management Uncertainty

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

7. De Minimis Provisions

REFER TO GENERAL COMMENT

8. General Comments

FORGIVE THE LACK OF FINESSE OR POLITICALLY CORRECTNESS MUMBO-JUMBO! THE JERSEY SHORE SUFFERS A SERIOUS INFLUX OF OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTS, WHICH SERIOUSLY TOLLS THE LIMITS OF RECREATIONAL CAPTURE. SUPPORT STATE RESIDENTS LIKE THEY SUPPORT YOU, AND IMPOSE THE SNAPPER LIMIT OF 3 PER PERSON ON OUTSIDERS...& INCREASE THE RCL FOR RESIDENTS FROM 3 TO 4 ON BLUEFISH (AVERAGE HOME HAS COUPLE & 2 CHILDREN), 3 TO 15 ON SNAPPERS & MANDATORY REGISTRY PROGRAM WHERE ADDRESS ON REGISTRATION CARD MATCHES A GVT ISSUED PICTURED ID! TIRED OF PAYING FOR THE BRAINLESS ACTS OF OTHERS AND BE LUMP-SUMMED WITH COMMERCIAL

BUSINESS, WHEN MOST OF US ARE NOT FISHING DURING THE WEEK OR EVEN ABLE TO FISH EVERY WEEKEND! YOU WILL NEVER CONVINCE ME THAT RECREATIONAL FISHING AND NJ RESIDENTS ARE THE PROBLEM AND SOMEONE SHOULD CONSIDER OUTSIDERS THAT COME HINDER OUR SHORT-SPAN SUMMER FUN, ESPECIALLY WHEN A SPECIES SUCH AS SNAPPERS IS AVAILABLE FOR SUCH A SHORT WINDOW.

ALTERNATIVE: MAKE REGISTRATION MANDATORY FOR A FEE, DOUBLE THE FEE FOR NON-RESIDENTS & PUT A STOCK FISHERY TO WORK...CREATES JOBS, MAINTAINS FUN AND KEEPS EVERYONE HAPPY!!!

GIVE INSTEAD OF TAKE...MAKE JOBS INSTEAD OF ROBBING US ALL THE FUN WHEN WEATHER AND WORK PERMITS US TO SPEND A COUPLE OF HOURS OF FUN AWAY FROM JOB AND HOME!

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/09/2021

Michael Rapoza

Email

rapdiver@comcast.net

8. General Comments

As usual the marine fishery council has failed to act in a timely fashion and another valuable(bluefish) resource is on the verge of collapse.

Commercial fishery is always put first and money is the motivation.As an avid recreational fisherman I see lack of real oversight by the council.

Striped bass ,tautog, and Squetague were once abundant and now have become a shadow of what they once were.

The council needs to have a backbone and regulate our Commercial and recreational fisheries in a sustainable way

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts, Rhode Island

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/17/2021

jean publiee

Email

jeanpublic1@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

again this agency has failed to protect the fish stocks by being captured by the commercial fishing industry! too many reps are on these councils from fishing councils when it should be populated by environmental representatives. the commercial fishing industry has a philosophy of take it all immediately and they sneak and take more than any quotas that this agency give them. they lie to take more as well. all quotas in this species should be cut by 75% to the commercial fishing industry. they are the ones who are stealing the fish. this comment is for the public record. the focus should be on sustainability, not rape the oceans so that nothing lives there anymore

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

all above should be cut by 75%

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

all allocations should be cut by 75% immediately

4. Rebuilding Plan

shut down all harvest of this species. all harvest should be shut down. that is the best plan

5. Transfers

i see no reason for any transfers from any other site

6. Management Uncertainty

this agency needs change within itself. the focus on members from the commercial fish industry is seriously prejudicing this agency in its deliberations and pronouncements. certainly action to cut takings and harvesting is immediately needed and necessary

7. De Minimis Provisions

management measures -the only ones i want are the ones i propose

8. General Comments

cut all takings and harvest

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Other

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Pound net

Date Submitted

04/19/2021

Richard Allebach

Email

rsallebach@verizon.net

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Any allocation changes need to be directed toward the idea that the current plan is not working and what can be done to bring about the most improvement the fastest while still being fair to both parties.

4. Rebuilding Plan

I think that the plan should be geared more to catch and release of bluefish than it has been because the resource has been abused by many "recreational " fishermen.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/20/2021

Robert Pride

Email

bobpride@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Support proposed objectives.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Support 2a-2 89% rec, 11% comm - Better reflects recent fishery dynamics

Support Phase in option 2b-2 - minimize commercial impact over time

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Support

3a-4 - rewards states with new entrants but give credit for long time players who developed the fishery

3b-2 - works to minimize impacts over time

3c-2 - no additional reward for recreational transfer

3d-3 - (reduce dead discards for incidental bycatch)

4. Rebuilding Plan

Support 4d - minimizes commercial impacts and allows time for participants to adapt and build better business strategies

5. Transfers

5a-2 - Why not?

5b-2 - seems more conservative for protecting windfall harvest and market gluts

6. Management Uncertainty

6b - less sector impact for both sectors

7. De Minimis Provisions

7e - consistent for all states, easier to implement and manage for the states

8. General Comments

Thank you for considering economic and social impacts that led to the longer phase in options. The biggest complaint from fishermen in all sectors (other than the general grumble about allocations and restrictions) is inconsistent rules from year to year. Perhaps a longer phase in period for changes will minimize year to year changes.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Virginia

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/20/2021

Tim Stroud

Email

timstroud@yahoo.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I propose a 12" minimum size limit with a 6 fish creel limit for recreational fishermen. Most people consider bluefish to be trash fish and do not keep them.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Currently, the 3 fish per day for rec, and 800 pound per day for commercial is inequitable. Gill netting should be banned as gill nets target all marine fishes, mammals, and reptiles indiscriminately. If a gill netter catches 1600 of bluefish, or any other regulated fish, they must discard the overages and waste 800 pounds of dead or dying fish.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/20/2021

John Redmond

Email

jredm10204@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Until North Carolina stops all shrimp trawls in the inshore waters. Nothing you do will help any fish recover and you all know it.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/20/2021

Stephen Hickman

Email

bigsteve1998@yahoo.com

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

There definitely does not need to be a shift in the allocations. The commercial sector does not need less than the 17% than they are getting. Taking any away will have a negative impact in NC.

4. Rebuilding Plan

There needs to be no action taken. Bluefish are abundant and most of the time its hard to avoid them while trying to catch other species of fish.

8. General Comments

This statement in the proposal is about the most asinine thing I've ever read.

" Relative to the status quo alternative, alternative 2a-2 would have positive impacts for recreational user groups, and in particular for those groups in communities that are highly engaged in and reliant upon recreational fisheries. The top fifteen communities in recreational fishing engagement and reliance are displayed in Figure 9 and Figure 11. Please note that the recreational fishing engagement and reliance scores are not bluefish specific, the metrics were based off of fishing engagement and reliance for all recreational species. For a more thorough introduction of community fishing engagement and social vulnerability indicators please reference Appendix A. These communities are likely to benefit from Alternative 2a-2, but some may see greater positive social impacts based on relative social vulnerabilities and reliance on the recreational industry. Communities in NC in particularly, such as Topsail Beach, Hatteras, and throughout the Outer Banks, have high reliance on recreational fisheries while at the same time moderate to high poverty, labor force vulnerability, and housing vulnerability. Increasing recreational allocations for bluefish could improve economic opportunities and result in positive social outcomes for these communities in particular. "

Apparently you don't realize the people you are talking about living in poverty are the commercial fisherman whom the government is trying to regulate out of business with the help of the CCA. The CCA sends me at least 2 emails a week with their objectives with one of the latest trying to ban all nets in the sound with a ballot referendum. Yes these communities rely a lot on recreational fishing but giving the recreational industry more quota will not improve the economic opportunities and positive social outcomes. I know this because I've called Hatteras home for my entire life. Taking fish away from the people who need it the most is not the answer. Prioritizing someone's fun over someone trying to make a living and reprehensible. The tackle shops and guides are doing great with the way things are now, there is no need for any change.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Other

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Date Submitted

04/21/2021

Christopher Hickman

Email

bouttimefishing@yahoo.com

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I believe that 2a-1 should stay in place until the recreational sector is brought into compliance because they go over their quota every year..

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

I believe the allocations to the states should stay the same until the recreational sector is brought into compliance with their quota. We can't reallocate until the recreational sector stops catching over their quota.

4. Rebuilding Plan

4a is the recommended action until both sector can be brought into compliance with the quota.

5. Transfers

5a-1 is recommended as it seems to be working as it should.

6. Management Uncertainty

Keep with the status quo.

7. De Minimis Provisions

Status quo.

Date Submitted

04/21/2021

Carroll Clayton

Email

carrollc@esinc.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

As a 35 year veteran recreational surf fisherman, I appreciate this action you are taking to bring back the bluefish population. I watched the opportunity to catch bluefish decline significantly once they started appearing on restaurant menus and heard they were being harvested commercially. We all face the situation where the ocean cannot support mankind's desire for a larger amount of all fish.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Obviously status quo is not working. The percentages are pretty even.

I like 2b-2

4. Rebuilding Plan

I support the 4-b plan.

5. Transfers

I support 5a-1

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Scot Calitri

Email

smcalitri@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I support alternative 1A, but we need to look at Optimum Yield rather than Maximum Sustainable Yield. Maximum Sustainable Yield brings us on the razor's edge of failure and especially with a fishery with a heavy non-commercial element, the economic elements outside of "selling meat" are better represented by Optimum Yield.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I support Alternative 2a-4 as we need immediate action and to best represent the baseline years most advantageous to the fishery!

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

I can't pretend to understand all of this, but we need to manage in favor of the fish. The Bluefish is not fueling anyone's full time commercial salary.

4. Rebuilding Plan

I support Alternative 4c, which is based on the Council's risk policy and projected to rebuild the stock within five years.

5. Transfers

Transfers are never good for the fishery. Transfers should not be allowed under the Bluefish Management / Rebuilding Plan.

6. Management Uncertainty

I support 6b as we need to protect this fishery and the economic value that the recreational sector produces. In all cases, a recreational fish is much more valuable than a commercial table fish.

7. De Minimis Provisions

7a needs to be the option as conservation equivalency cannot game this fishery too. Think and speak for the fish, not for those looking to cheat the system or find loopholes.

8. General Comments

Here's a great opportunity to speak for the fish in a less heated situation. Bluefish is not the key to any commercial incomes. Let's give them a chance and aggressively rebuild the stock.

A sincere thank you to those working to provide us with a sustainable, abundant stock. This is not easy work, but know that doing the right thing for the fish is always the way to lean. We're ruining so much as a species, Bluefish and other nearshore species are truly in our control to save.

The Bluefish need us.

Thank You.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (for-hire)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Andrew Bosco

Email

ndrwbosco@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

While we support the proposed goals and objectives, we would like to see “optimum yield” discussed as an objective.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Therefore, i support Alternative 2a-4 because it uses a combination approach of historic and recent data, all of which lead to the same result.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

No stance

4. Rebuilding Plan

I prefer Alternative 4c, a five-year rebuilding plan

5. Transfers

For these reasons, i support removing quota transfers from the Bluefish FMP.

6. Management Uncertainty

I support Alternative 6b, the post-sector split

7. De Minimis Provisions

I support Alternative 7a, the status quo.

8. General Comments

N/a

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

John LaFountain

Email

foxseafood@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Hello,

I stated most of my comments and what I supported via the online meeting . I just wanted add to # 2

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

As you know my smoked fish business in Narragansett RI purchases a lot of bluefish by from boats and dealers in Rhode Island and from dealers from the eastern states. Just wanted to emphasize that the commercial value of the fishery is not just in the amount paid to the boat.

Although that price has increased significantly. I heard the comment that the "highest value of the fish is to leave it in the water" as it is a lower value fish. I don't think it is considered a lower value fish anymore. I went through my numbers and after checking the retail prices being paid for smoked bluefish \$17.99 to \$22.99 a pound the retail value of just what I produce is over \$1.1 million . My fish is being sold predominantly at fish markets, farmers markets, smaller independent grocery and gourmet markets all up and down the east coast. These are small business many of which are family owned and operated. I have only 3 albeit well paid employees that receive \$18 to \$23 an hour and health benefits. I know a lot of these fish markets pay and treat their employees well as I do. We have developed the market for smoked bluefish over many years with these customers. From Portland Maine to Chatham MA to Martha's Vineyard , Long Island , the jersey shore , down into Maryland these customers rely on us for a steady year round supply of this local Atlantic shore fish.

If you think about the amount of individual servings and people experiencing this and the joy it brings not to mention healthy nourishment. 500,000 servings is what we make a year.

We cannot afford to give anymore of the commercial percentage to the recreational sector. Smoked Bluefish is a traditional culinary East Coast treat!! Very few recreational fisherman will actually take bluefish on a regular basis and eat it. And even fewer will do the work to smoke it. And if they do most don't do it again. The main way that people enjoy bluefish is by purchasing it either smoked or filleted with the blood lined removed from a local fish monger and that fish must be landed by a commercial vessel.

Side point:

If the recreational sector is mostly catch and release then I have know idea how the estimated numbers they are taking could possibly be that high

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Norm Staunton

Email

norm.staunton@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I support the proposed set of goals and an objectives, specifically Alternative 1(a). I would further add that optimum yield is not just the maximum harvest, or landings, or biomass. Particularly for a

predominantly catch-and-release fishery, the socioeconomic benefits of recreational C&R fishing should be included in this metric. I would further add that optimum yield should incorporate the highest possible ecological distribution of that yield over maximizing yield in a single state... by which I mean that restoration of the fishery in Maine in NH should count toward yield higher than poundage in a currently active fishery.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I support option 2a-5 because the data suggests the the bulk of the landings are already recreational and it has been established in many other fisheries that a fish in the water is worth more than a fish harvested. The bulk of the recreational fishery is catch and release, so lets maximize the benefit of that fishery and make bluefish slightly harder to get on the commercial market, but drive up its price as a result to offset the lost poundage to the commercial sector.

I support no phase in. Its more efficient and we need to act now.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

I am no fisheries scientist. What I do know is that Bluefish are a migratory fish which used to be abundant in New England waters. They are not now. And I cannot get past the idea that the states with the highest commercial allocations are also the states that make up the gauntlet that fish swim through to get to my home waters in Maine and Rhode Island. I cannot advocate for a specific allocation, but I would encourage the board to enact whatever allocations result in the greatest/widest geographic distribution of fish and economic benefit, not simply the highest harvests.

4. Rebuilding Plan

I support managing for abundance and geographic distribution of fish. As such, I support shortened Rebuilding times. I am not familiar enough with the alternatives to state a preference between 4b and 4c, but I would advocate for whatever alternative provides the fastest recovery, regardless of the impact on short-term harvest. I would prefer recovery over harvest at almost any cost.

5. Transfers

I am absolutely opposed to transferring unused recreational quota to the commercial quota. A fish in the water is worth much much more to the economy and to recreational fishermen (who largely release their catch to be caught again).

Released fish SHOULD NOT be counted as quota. They are not harvested and thus should not count.

I am fully supportive of commercial harvest and commercial fishermen. I was one at one time (in a different fishery). But the recreational sector has a much larger and more equitably distributed benefit than the commercial sector does, and the fishery should be managed (for abundance) as such.

I do not support any of these alternatives, but rather support an end to transfers and its removal from the BFMP.

6. Management Uncertainty

Frankly, I do not think there is sufficient data to support any of these alternatives. There are many challenges to monitoring all catch, all harvest, all mortality and we do not have enough information to be able to accurately predict any one- particularly in light of the fact that many of the bluefish caught by the recreational sector are released. I would support additional research, focused primarily on the

recreational and C&R sectors before supporting any of the stated alternatives. That said, if one must be picked, I would support 6b- Post Sector Split because it minimizes cross-sector impacts.

7. De Minimis Provisions

De Minimis catch is a very small portion of the total catch. As such, I would support option 7a but with the additional comment that this is a coastwide fishery. Abundance and greater distribution of benefit (ie increasing De Minimis catch) is actually preferable. Additionally, since De Minimis is calculated only using commercial landings, I would advocate for caution in this approach based on the ways that other fisheries have used conservation equivalency to manipulate their numbers.

8. General Comments

As stated in several sections above, I would support any measures that:

Increase abundance

Distribute fish and economic benefit across the greatest range (including restoration of abundance in states where it once was but is not anymore)

Value a fish in the water over fish harvested for both its social and economic value.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Robin Calitri

Email

csicagain@hotmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

As a Charter Captain I completely support the position advocated by the American Saltwater Guides Association to protect and restore a robust sport fishery for Bluefish.

5. Transfers

No transfers

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Hampshire

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Ralph Haddock

Email

ralphhaddock@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Use the new goals and objectives.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Support 2a

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Use 3a

4. Rebuilding Plan

4b

5. Transfers

5a-1 and 5b-1

6. Management Uncertainty

6b

7. De Minimis Provisions

7e

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Thomas Smith

Email

bluefish4@comcast.net

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I'm in favor of status quo, every single pound of commercial bluefish on the East Coast has been documented and are extremely accurate , recreational catch is to often randomly and inaccurately determined. I support 2a-1

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

I am in favor of 3a-2 or 3a-3 . Due to the natural cyclic nature of bluefish, New York , Massachusetts and Rhode Island has been the epicenter of Bluefish landings for the last 10 years . I feel like this is a trend and also some Southern states with large quota no longer allow certain types of gear types since the 1980s when they were originally given a generous percentage of the bluefish pie. Therefore it is unrealistic to keep the quota the same for those states going forward. Luckily here in Massachusetts we have been able to get a transfer of quota from other states the last 10 years to keep our local fisheries going through the fall instead of a closure in August.

5. Transfers

State to state transfers are extremely important to the cyclic nature of the Bluefish fishery. Bluefish are fickle and due to environmental circumstances some states will have an influx of fish some years and lean other years. it's very important to be able to receive or transfer quota to take full advantage of a particular season. I have been full-time commercial bluefishing for over 40 years, in the 60s Bluefish

were unheard of on Cape Cod and it was rare to catch one! by the early 1980s they were literally the most prolific fish off Cape Cod, this boom or bust nature has been going on forever whether they were being fished on or not. Massachusetts Has relied on transfers for many years to keep the local fishermen, restaurants and fish markets in fish through the fall.

8. General Comments

Having fished for Bluefish full-time for over 40 years I feel like I've seen almost every aspect of this fishery in New England. We've had lean years followed by incredible years, never been a rhyme or reason whether they are Fished on or not. I feel like the cyclic nature of the fishery is never discussed enough and too many people point fingers at user groups when we have a lean year, most probably due to poor spawning conditions offshore for those particular years that resulted in weak reproduction for that timeframe

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Gillnet

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Nick Martin

Email

nixstyx@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I support the current FMP goals.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

I support Alternative 2a-4.

4. Rebuilding Plan

I support alternative 4c.

5. Transfers

I do not support either alternative, and instead suggest transfers be removed from the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan.

6. Management Uncertainty

I support 6b, the post-sector split.

7. De Minimis Provisions

I support the status quo option, 7a.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Maine, New Hampshire

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Elmer Edwards

Email

gannet349@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Increase Northern Blue Fish quota, and leave Commercial and Recreational Allocations status quo.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Commercial and Recreational Allocations status quo

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Increase Northern quota

5. Transfers

Allow transfers both ways

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Gear type(s) used

Gillnet

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Sawyer Clark

Email

sawyerjclark12345@hotmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

No action/ status quo option

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Status quo, if possible more to commercial

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Status quo

4. Rebuilding Plan

No action/status quo

5. Transfers

No action/ status quo

6. Management Uncertainty

No action/status quo

7. De Minimis Provisions

No action/ status quo

8. General Comments

As a pound trap fisherman in New York, I would like to see more bluefish quota go to the commercial fishermen. I know it is unrealistic, but in this day and age the fishing industry is under a lot of pressure. With this, if you take more quota away from commercial fishermen you are increasing the financial strain and may force many people to leave the industry. Last year with plenty of blue fish around we were shut down and no quota was transferred from recreational to commercial, with this loss of fish my income suffered tremendously. In my eyes, if recreational fisherman lose a couple fish it won't have any impact on their day or year. While if we were to lose quota I may not be able to afford my mortgage or start a family.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Gear type(s) used

Pound net

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

Richard Rich

Email

rich18rich@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

a sustainable optimal yield should be up for discussion.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

2a-4 would be best, looking at the numbers.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

3a-3.

4. Rebuilding Plan

5 year risk policy would be my choice.

5. Transfers

quota transfers should be removed.

6. Management Uncertainty

post-sector.

7. De Minimis Provisions

7a status quo.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Maine

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/22/2021

John Toth

Email

tothjohn@verizon.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I attended this Webinar and hav the following comments to make:

This Webinar was poorly attended and I believe only a total of 15 people were on it which is not giving you the information you need to make a thoughtful decision on any option. Better posting of these meetings needs to be done or outreach!

Bluefish are not on our inshore waters as they used to be because of habitat issues caused by sandmining, Sandy and climate change which gives the impression that the stocks ar in trouble. Because of these issues also affecting the lack of bait, the bluefish have moved off to federal waters.

We are allowed to catch 3 fish from shore and 5 fish fro for-hire boats. How much more can you cut back from the recreational sector? Do more and you will put more tackle shops and for-hire boat out of business already struggling because of COVID-19! John Toth JCAA President

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New Jersey

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

Rick Sasser

Email

rick.sasser@hotmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

I am in favor of revised goals and objectives. It is a management travesty for bluefish to be overfished and overfishing occurring in all but one of the most recent years. Commercial harvest, although small, should be honestly reviewed. I hope we are not commercially harvesting bluefish for cat food like we did at a time weakfish. We know what happened to weakfish. Bluefish should be management for abundance.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Move immediately to a 89/11 split- options 2a-2 and 2b-1.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

3a-1

3b-1

3c-1

3d-1

4. Rebuilding Plan

4C meet the 5-year rebuilding plan.

5. Transfers

We need to stop the transfer of unused quota from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. We should be retaining unused recreational quota in the biomass to build abundance.

Choosing one it would be 5b-2.

6. Management Uncertainty

6a No Action

7. De Minimis Provisions

7c

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (private angler)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

North Carolina

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

Sarah Schumann

Email

schumannsarah@gmail.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

no comment

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Preferred option: 2a1, status quo

The reason we are recommending the status quo is that the commercial fleet cannot afford any major reductions to the commercial quota. If bluefish were a secondary species that we could live without,

this might be different. But for boats like the one I work on, it is our primary target. Any lowering of the ABC will already make it harder for us to keep generating the income to support ourselves, our families, and our businesses. To then further curtail the commercial quota by reallocating some of it to the recreational sector would only further the economic damage on the commercial fleet.

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Preferred options:

3a-3 (10-year) AND 3b-1 (no phase-in) OR 3a-2 (5-year) AND 3b-2 (allocation change spread over rebuilding plan)

Bringing allocations up to date with the current distribution of the fishery resource is really critical. There are arguments for doing this as fast as possible, for the sake of the fishermen in areas where the stock is increasing (like me). But there are also arguments for taking a more gradual pace, following a "just transitions" framework for those whose access to the stock is shrinking as the its center of biomass shifts.

Even though an immediate re-allocation based only on the most recent years is in my own self-interest as a Rhode Island fisherman, I see the wisdom in taking an approach that is more considerate of states to our south. Thus, I am recommending one of two combinations, both of which I believe present a compromise solution.

Moreover, in general, I tend to feel that a 10-year basis may be better for taking into account the effects of inter annual variability in stock distribution. But I will defer to the scientists on that.

4. Rebuilding Plan

Preferred option:

4c P* Council Risk Policy – 5-year Rebuilding Plan

5. Transfers

Preferred options:

5a-1 No Action/Status Quo

5b-1 No Action/Status Quo

6. Management Uncertainty

Preferred option:

6b Post-Sector Split

7. De Minimis Provisions

Preferred option:

7d Recreational De Minimis – rollover management measures

8. General Comments

I work as a deckhand on an inshore gill netter out of Point Judith, RI. Bluefish is our primary target species and it makes up the lion's share of our income. Our bluefish goes to the local smokehouse. From there, it is distributed to fish markets, farmers markets, smaller independent grocery and

gourmet markets all up and down the east coast. Fox Seafoods smoked bluefish is the finest smoked fish around!

There are not many commercial boats that make bluefish a key part of their fishing portfolio. But for those who do, like us, it's a really big deal.

According to my captain, who's been fishing them far longer than I have, there has not been any decrease in our catch of bluefish in recent years. Ever since I started working on this boat in 2019, we have been doing well. However, each year we have to ask our state to secure state-to-state quota transfers because the quota runs out long before the fish have departed our local waters each fall. Any drastic reductions in RI's bluefish quota would cause our season to end much earlier than it currently does, and would have serious impacts on our income.

In addition, we would like to recommend consistency in the minimum size for bluefish, bringing all states into alignment with Rhode Island's minimum size of 18". The market for small bluefish is limited and we believe it is preferable to allow them to mature before harvesting them.

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Rhode Island

Gear type(s) used

Gillnet

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

James Goodhart

Email

jgoodhart56@aol.com

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Bluefish management has been a failure for several decades. We used to have an abundant population until 20 years ago. Now catching any bluefish is a very rare occurrence. I haven't been able to take out clients to target bluefish for over ten years, because the population is so decimated. We need to take immediate and drastic action!

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

2a-2

4. Rebuilding Plan

4b

5. Transfers

5b-2

8. General Comments

Bluefish management has been a failure for several decades. We used to have an abundant population until 20 years ago. Now catching any bluefish here is a very rare occurrence. I haven't been able to take out clients to target bluefish for over ten years, because the population is so decimated. It concerns me that it has taken so long to accept and come to grips with the reality that this once abundant resource has been massively depleted. Immediate and decisive action is definitely needed and half measures should be unacceptable!

Capt. James Goodhart
Shadowcaster Charters

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Recreational (for-hire)

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

Massachusetts

Gear type(s) used

Hook and line or handline

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

Timothy Froelich

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing in regards to the bluefish allocation and rebuilding amendment. I feel as though, if the bluefish have not been rebuilt we need to re evaluate the goal. We are not even close. That is a red flag that something is very wrong. Maybe those standards are too high. Things are not what they were back then. They are not what they were back in the 80's when those standards were put into place. The spots where the bluefish would grow are developed now and the bluefish are not going there anymore. The little creeks all have houses on them and the meadows are built on. The water quality is not the same. The bluefish may never come back to that level.

Also, I feel they cannot take anymore from the commercial fisherman to give to the recreational. They can redistribute commercial quota from other states to give to New York so they don't have to transfer.

Timothy Froelich

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

Bonnie Brady

Email

greenfluke@optonline.net

1. FMP Goals and Objectives

Because of the historical overfishing by the recreational sector and limited discards in the commercial sector, it would be a plus for the overall sustainability of the fishery to make both sectors carry accountability measures, such as pound for pound payback.

Commercial fishermen should not suffer a loss to their sector's quota because of chronic overfishing of the stock by the recreational fishery.

These comments are on behalf of the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association.

2. Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations

Sector allocations.

We support 2A-1 status quo

Should 2A-1 not be chosen, then and only then do we support re phase in 2B-2

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

We support 3A-2 or 3A-3, 3B-2, and 3D-1

4. Rebuilding Plan

We support 4D

5. Transfers

We support 5A-1 and 5B-1

6. Management Uncertainty

We support 6B

How would you describe your primary role in the fishery?

Commercial

Primary state(s) you land bluefish in:

New York

Date Submitted

04/23/2021

3.2 EMAIL AND LETTER COMMENTS

From: Jean Public <jeanpublic1@yahoo.com>

Sent: Monday, February 22, 2021 2:52 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>; dleaning@mafmc.org; info@peta.org; info@pewtrusts.org; scoops@huffpost.com; contac@thedodo.com; info@oceana.org

Subject: Fw: MAFMC and ASMFC to Hold Public Hearings for Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment comment on bluefish

the fish profiteers steal as much as they admit catching. this agency has been notorious in doing nothing to stop the stealing and poaching that these men do. they pollute the ocean and need to be shut down. the fact that the stock needs rebuilding is a testament to your ineffectiveness and negligence in setting quotas that make sense and are sustainable. obviously you are nothing but a poseur for the fishing profiteers and you let them get away with murder. this comment is for the public record. cut the quota by 50% immediately. jean public1@yahoo.com

From: Dave Anderson <davez28327@yahoo.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 12:52 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Blue fish Striped Bass quotas.

You want to be serious about restoring these fish, STOP commercial harvesting of these species for a couple years. The sport fisherman is not the one damaging the survival of the fish. They are NOT taking them by the Metric Ton daily

From: Charles Foster <chcfsalar@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 12:55 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: BLUEFISH

Good day,

I am not a biologist, I am a fisherman and I principally FLY FISH in Massachusetts waters from shore. We have not seen Bluefish plentiful in Massachusetts waters for over ten years. .

Because I also conduct environmental work along the coastline and have done so many times in many states for the past 15 years,

What I see as a supplemental reason for the decline of the species is men with Bags. . Men out scooping up as many juvenile bluefish as they can carry. In New Jersey, In Long Island sound and in anyplace where they can to get a bunch of appetizers which I believe they call "Cocktail blues". Thousands upon thousands of juvenile 5 inch bluefish.

Adult Bluefish are a fantastic gamefish. There just are not enough of them The recreational captain's Charter boats used to slaughter them 10 per person every single day two trips per day and that Obviously lent itself to the huge reduction in adult blue fish.

Most everyone knows that Bluefish are not great table fare yet they GAFF MURDER and FILET them by the 10s of thousands along the entire eastern seaboard..NO GAFFING BLUEFISH FOR ANY REASON

Reduce the harvest to ONE fish per Trip just like striped Bass - Reduce the harvest for 5 years - give them a chance to comeback. Just like Striped Bass - Humans are the Problem and the answer,

ENFORCEMENT FINES and LICENSE CONFISCATION. . . .

CHCF

From: Harry Van Sciver <hbvwhitebriar@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 12:56 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Bluefish

2a-2 is best.

Moderate reduction in commercial, moderate increase in recreational.

And I'm OK reducing Bluefish recreational catch to 5 per day.

Harry Van Sciver
Marstons Mills, MA

From: joebrodsky <joebrodsky@comcast.net>

Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 2:43 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Bluefish and striped bass

I don't think the management of bluefish and striped bass around Cape Cod can be properly done without addressing the harvesting of squid in Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds. Though this is a political hot potato, if we don't limit the harvesting of the favorite food of these species, which also costs us the loss through by catch mortality of several other game fish species, then we are wasting our efforts to support the Bluefish and Striped Bass rebuilding.

Joseph Brodsky
Falmouth, Ma

From: peter erickson <cperickson48@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 3:12 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: END BLUEFISH TOURNAMENTS

M. Seeley:

Here on Ipswich Bay, through the mid 70's, a fishermen could not give bluefish away. The blues would commonly force schools of mackerel into our cove and up on the rocks, on a dark night one could see comets of bluefish chasing bait and the estuaries were full of "snapper blues" breaking the surface. Boats would approach with garbage cans full of bluefish trying to give them away. And now they are gone.

There was then a period of years when it suddenly occurred to saltwater fishermen that you could actually catch and release as size limits were imposed and the numbers, tho' diminished, began to even out. And as

the striped bass returned, the bluefish population began to stabilize, despite annual bluefish "tournaments" held by every club and marina all along the coast.

The last time I saw bluefish in any numbers was at Lane's Cove in Gloucester. There was a drunken bluefish tournament with blues piled head high on the wharf, in the hot sun.... killed and gone to waste. Unceremoniously dumped overboard. So why'd they have to kill them?

Despite so-called "catch-and-release" tournament rules (when they exist at all) bluefish, by their nature (and their teeth), are hard to release unharmed. Even if numbers could be stabilized through catch-and-release, this is not the way to rebuild stocks. **There will never be a sustainable fishery for bluefish unless it begins with a moratorium on all bluefish tournaments.**

Peter Erickson
Plum Island
><iii;>

From: n n <gentlemanofthecharcoal@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 3:43 PM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Amendment comment

I've lived in Massachusetts since 1973 and have actively fished salt water for much of that time....and my public comment is that the fishery for bluefish has COLLAPSED. This formerly reliable catch and healthy/high omega 3 fish for consumption is no longer a dinner offering at my table. It has VANISHED from all the inland waters that I have fished my entire life. The decline in both scup and bluefish has made my opinion of Massachusetts waters, particularly Buzzard's Bay...grow from a feeling of ecstasy that I was so lucky to live here...to outright despondency at the ruin of this once great fishery for the average citizen.

One bluefish in 2019...none in 2020...and no scup for the past three years. In 1986 they actually jumped in my canoe at times with the peanut bunker they would chase...what a horrible and devastating decline it has been.

From: Mark Mattson <mark.d.mattson@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 9:07 AM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish plan comments

Dear MAFMC,

I read the summary document and the brief 7 point options for management. While I have a degree in biology and a PhD in aquatic ecology from Cornell with coursework in population biology I am confused by your documents. It appears to be a deliberate attempt to obfuscate the science. Furthermore, the narrow range of options you present are not the options we would like to see. I can only assume you are doing this to stifle meaningful public comments so you can choose from a set of limited options that you prefer. The fact of the matter is that MAFMC has repeatedly allowed overfishing and that bluefish, along with the other fish stocks, are at a fraction of past numbers. I hope that someday you will develop the structure and discipline that would allow you to join members of the subphylum vertebrata that you propose to protect.

-Mark Mattson, PhD

From: Chris Cain <doskil@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 7:24 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Bluefish stocks in North and South Carolina are way down from when I was a kid in the 1980s.

They need to be rebuilt

I support 2a-2: 89% recreational, 11% commercial

Thank you

Chris Cain

From: Marc Lamothe <marcolamothe.keeper@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 7:25 PM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Comments

I have worked as a charter captain for ten years. My season starts the last week of June, and sometimes extends to the end of September. I primarily work as a school teacher.

In my inaugural charter season bluefish were prevalent in the waters of Saco Bay, Maine, just south of Portland. My first customers were excited and I had many repeat customers from that experience. Most of the fish were in the 8-12 pound category. Since that season I have not had a customer catch a bluefish.

I am not a fisheries biologist, so my knowledge of bluefish numbers on waters south of Saco bay is limited.

I understand that bluefish migrations into Maine have been sporadic historically. As a young fisherman (1972?), bluefish arrived for the "first time in forty years", was the quote from an old fishing friend. In that era (early 70's into 80's) we caught and wasted large, beautiful bluefish, as if the resource would never be depleted, no matter what we did. We showed them off, then buried them in the garden. Striped bass were our preferred table fare.

I believe catch limits and size limits should be implemented. My hope is that if bluefish numbers increase the probability of migrations returning to Maine will increase.

Capt. Marco Lamothe
Saco, Maine

From: Tony Saldutti <tsaldutti99@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 1, 2021 1:51 PM
To: Kiley Dancy <kdancy@mafmc.org>
Cc: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Ammendment Feedback

Thank you for allowing a surf fisherman's perspective to drive a better solution for the fish.

Your comments on quota transferring should be a red flag for us. It either tells us the allocation was wrong in the first place, or the fish are in greater trouble than we think, and greater restrictions are an order.

The categorization of boats, whether privately owned or for hire, in the same category as surf fisherman is unfair for the surf fishermen. The boats are hunting the huge schools of fish just like the commercial boats.

It sounds far fetched, but please consider no more new boats and a gradual boat reduction over time.

The surf fisherman are not the problem here. It is the predatory nature of all boats and the technology to find the fish in large numbers that I believe to be the problem.

The beach replenishment processes going on up and down the coast are decimating the habitat for the fish as well. The bait is no longer there to hold the larger fish. We should address this issue ASAP. If they refuse to stop pumping sand, they must be forced to establish structure in the water to reestablish the habitat for the fish. I can't believe all of the tree hugging environmentalists are not all over this!

As for what we can do now, I would suggest the following:

- impose lower overall seasonal limits now in one shot
- implement lower daily catch limits across the board (greater than or equal to one daily)
- institute a bonus system in exchange for a mandatory data log from fishermen
- have all states follow same rules
- institute a voluntary tag program to track migratory trends and mortality

From a heuristic point of view, something is seriously wrong with this fishery. We have not seen large bluefish or striped bass in 3 years on the beach, except a few days in the spring. The fall used to be a bonanza. The peanut bunker and mullet are gone. The sand eels are down significantly. Gannets are gone too. We have to do something drastically now or it will be too late to recover.

Thanks.

Tony Saldutti, CPIM
610-533-2711
tsaldutti99@gmail.com

From: Jean Public <jeanpublic1@yahoo.com>

Sent: Monday, March 8, 2021 4:44 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>; info@peta.org; info@seashepherd.org; information@sierraclub.org; info@pewtrusts.org

Cc: info@oceana.org

Subject: Fw: public comment on federal register

bluefish quotas have been overfished for years and this agency has allowed the species to be overfished. how can we now trust this agency which deliberately allowed this overfishing for years? i am in favor of cutting all quotas by 50% immediately. and no other factors except to start watching what the fishing boats come in with because they are taking 90% over what they are allowed. and you are allowing it by not catching them at

this robbery of our national species. this comentn is for the pubcli record please receipt. jean puboee
jeanpublic1@yahoo.com

From: Robert Severi <robert.severi@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 22, 2021 6:23 PM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Comments

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm providing anecdotal evidence for your consideration. I've been a boater fishing inshore around Long Beach Island since 1982. As you know, bluefish stocks, like most others are faltering. For the last two years, not one bluefish has been entered in the LBI Surf Classic. Almost 1,000 surf fisherman fish LBI for 10 weeks in the fall. Large bluefish no longer visit Great Bay in the Spring. I'm a recreational fisherman, not a marine biologist or scientist. Accordingly, I defer to the judgment of such subject matter experts. Please rely on science to determine how to ensure that the bluefish fishery thrives. If a moratorium is required, so be it.

Kind regards,
Captain Bob

From: Dustin C. Leaning <DLeaning@asmfc.org>
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2021 11:04 AM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: I just pulled TJ's email comment from our email chain

Good morning,

Looking at data based on "New MRIP" being frustrating is a pretty accurate description...
The biggest problem with the "scientific data" is that is not scientific. It is anything but. It is simply put- a totally overcomplicated math equation (based on guesses), favoring an environmental or political agenda to rid the world of recreational fishermen.

Harvest figures in such a small state as ours isn't complicated. Connecticut has only 6 target species, all of which are seasonal. You just need access to a small plane with EXPERIENCED fishermen in the passenger seat. After 2 or 3 seasons of figuring out the patterns of the fishermen and working the kinks out, you would find the New MRIP overshoots the figures by 75 -95% for "most" of the species the ASMFC manages.

Thank you,
Capt. TJ Karbowski
Rock & Roll Charters
Clinton, CT
203.314.3765
<https://rockandrollcharters.com/>

From: Frank Walsh <squidder329@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 1, 2021 11:31 AM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: "Bluefish Amendment"

I would be happy to see significant catch restrictions on bluefish from snappers to gators. Large bluefish are non-existent within five miles of the beach in Southern New Jersey. Two fish limits for adult fish as they don't freeze well and excess will end up in trash or garden.

Thank You
Frank Walsh

From: Vetcraft Sportfishing <vetcraft@aol.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 1, 2021 3:29 PM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: bluefish amendment comments

In light of the recent MRIP phone based survey showing a recreational catch 116% higher than the MRFSS data when the bluefish allocation was formed, I think the fairest option is 2a2. In light of the fact that the commercial sector has not utilized their quota (except 2020), can appreciate price increases with reduced quotas, and low price per pound of this fishery, I think the loss of quota to the sector would be minimal. The recreational sector in the Cape May, NJ area where I fish runs many charter trips to target bluefish out on the five fathom bank area. This is also an important fishery from shore sites and is often the first fish caught by the young generations.

I am not in favor of any quota transfers between sectors due to the uncertain nature of fish stock analytics and inaccuracy of MRIP data. Disallowing quota transfers will also help to build back the stock.

Capt Harv
Vetcraft Sportfishing
Cape May, New Jersey
Call or Text 610-742-3891
Email: vetcraft@aol.com
www.vetcraftsportfishing.com

From: William Nicholson <sirunick@comcast.net>
Sent: Thursday, April 1, 2021 8:04 PM
To: Leaning, Dustin Colson <dleaning@asmfc.org>; Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish management

Thank you for giving a good presentation of a complicated subject! I am a recreational fisherman from Massachusetts. My experience says that the blues are way overfished and should be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

I agree with the comment that the threshold should be raised. I would say at least to 125,000 mt and the target might as well be lowered some to 175,000 mt since we have never come close to the target on the chart. I see no benefit to the consumer by giving the commercial fleet a bigger % of the catch. The recreational fisherman enjoys the freshest fish and they deserve it after a long day on the water. The charter fleet depends on blues to keep their sports happy especially with the lack of stripers.

I am not sure how the catch is verified. I have never been checked in my many years of fishing. I understand that you use estimates but wonder how accurate they are. That said, I would support 4b. Allocation 2a-3 I would not support triggers. As the Navy Seals say "KISS".

Thank you for your work,

William "Nick" Nicholson
Member Cape Cod Salties

From: Dean Pesante <dpesante@cox.net>

Sent: Monday, April 5, 2021 7:12 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Re: Bluefish Management Letter for Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Council Meeting

The only other comment I would have right now is to increase the minimum size limit to 18" for both recreational and commercial. This is the size that the fish are 100 percent sexually mature. Common sense fisheries management. Don't harvest a fish until it has the opportunity to reproduce. We have already done this for the commercial sector here in Rhode Island.

From: Arthur D Smith <artsmith@rsnet.org>

Sent: Tuesday, April 6, 2021 5:44 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Cc: Hemilright Jr, Dewey <FVTARBABY@embarqmail.com>; bjseafood <bjseafood@earthlink.net>

Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Ammendment

MY NAME IS ART SMITH FROM BELHAVEN, NC. I CONSIDER MYSELF A RETIRED ADVOCATE FOR THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY IN NORTH CAROLINA. I AM DISAPPOINTED THAT THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE THAT WILL ALLOW FOR AN INCREASE IN THE COMMERCIAL ALLOCATION. THAT BEING SAID I CAN ONLY SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO ALTERNATIVE. I SUPPORT STATUS QUO FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS.

1. THE COMMERCIAL FISHERY HAS MINIMAL DISCARDS. THE REC FISHERY HAS A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF DISCARDS. I HAVE BEEN TOLD BY RELIABLE SOURCES THAT REC DISCARDS COULD BE AS MUCH AS NINE MILLION POUNDS PER YEAR. AN INCREASE IN REC ALLOCATION WILL RESULT IN AN INCREASE IN DISCARDS. AN INCREASE IN DISCARDS IS UN-ACCEPTABLE. THE COUNCIL MUST DO ALL IT CAN TO DECREASE DISCARDS.
2. ALTERNATIVES OTHER THAN STATUS QUO WILL RESULT IN COMMERCIAL DISCARDS WHERE NONE EXIST NOW. THE ALTERNATIVES INCREASE QUOTAS FOR STATES LIKE NEW YORK, RHODE ISLAND AND MASSACHUSETTS AND DECREASES FOR STATES LIKE VIRGINIA, MARYLAND AND NEW JERSEY. LOWERING QUOTAS FOR THESE STATES WILL RESULT IN INCIDENTAL CATCHES OF BLUEFISH BEING DISCARDED.
3. I AM RELUCTANT TO BRING THIS POINT UP BUT COMMERCIAL INTERESTS IN NEW YORK, RHODE ISLAND AND MASSACHUSETTS WOULD PROBABLY GO ALONG WITH ALTERNATIVES OTHER THAN STATUS QUO. THESE STATES WOULD BE RECEIVING A LARGER SLICE OF A SMALLER PIE BUT WOULD STILL BE GETTING MORE PIE THAN THEY HAVE NOW. I WOULD THINK THESE STATES WOULD ADVOCATE IN THEIR OWN INTERESTS. IF "FAIR AND EQUITABLE" IS ONE OF THE MANAGEMENT GOALS THIS REDISTRIBUTION OF QUOTA IS NOT FAIR AND EQUITABLE.
4. 83% FOR THE REC SECTOR IS GRACIOUS A PLENTY. THIS DOES NOT NEED TO BE CHANGED. FISH STOCKS MOVE CONTINUOUSLY SO EVEN A FIVE YEAR UPTICK FOR ONE STATE IS NOT INDICATIVE OF A SHIFT IN ABUNDANCE. STATE QUOTAS DO NOT NEED TO BE CHANGED.

5. SINCE I SUPPORT STATUS QUO THERE IS NO NEED FOR ME TO ADDRESS THE OTHER ISSUES SUCH AS "PHASE INS" OR "DE MINIMIS STATUS".

THANK YOU,

ART SMITH
BELHAVEN, NC

From: EDMUND PANZELLA <user@votervoice.net>
Sent: Tuesday, April 20, 2021 10:07 AM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Dear Mr. Seeley,

Sir, I can tell you that as a recreational fisherman for the last 50 years that bluefish stocks are being decimated, particularly in the last 6 years or so. Hard fighting and easy to catch, Bluefish are essential in introducing young people to fishing. Nothing turns a young fisherman off like a day without action. Do whatever you have to do to restore this vital fishery. Thank you,

Sincerely,

EDMUND PANZELLA
117 Dish Mill Rd
Higganum, CT 06441
epanzella@yahoo.com

From: Ken Redman <workkdog@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 8:06 AM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish amendment

I would like to see the recreational day quota rise from 3 fish/day. I've fished the coast 50 years and can't believe how few fish we as recreational fishermen can actually keep to eat given the financial input we contribute to the economy at the coast while fishing. It has decreased my visits to the coast definitely. Ken Redman, Chapel Hill

From: William Keith <user@votervoice.net>
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 1:15 PM
To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>
Subject: Bluefish Amendment

Dear Mr. Seeley,

As an angler that loves sportfishing, I understand the nature of power grabs and attempts to control with regard to management decisions to ensure the bluefish resource returns to a healthy status. The laws of nature work quite well without man kinds meddling. Therefore, I oppose adding any restrictions on the fishery. They will rebuild on their own without your/our interference or help just as they have for thousands of years.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

William Keith
PO Box 304
Gulf Hammock, FL 32639
princibill@icloud.com

From: Luis Tirado <captloutirado@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 8:19 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>; comments@asmfc.org

Subject: Bluefish Public Comment

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing this evening to voice my concern regarding the management of Bluefish. I live in Maine and the Bluefish has become more of a unicorn than a fish. I feel that this is how anglers felt during the Striped Bass crash in the 1980's. Bluefish were once common in our waters, and I can remember when the fishing was so good that this state held Bluefish Tournaments, I know Commissioner Keliher remembers them. It was commonality to see these fish in July and throughout the summer, sadly I have not seen a bluefish in eight years. While that may be somewhat common for other anglers this is alarming to me. I run a charter fishing business, and guide 75-90 days per season.

The bluefish has great value to the recreational community, they provide great sport, they get novice anglers out on the water due to their aggressive nature, they cause clients to book with charter captains, and their unruliness keeps tackle shops in the black. To piggyback on that, they are not exactly great on the table. It is my opinion that they are better off to be enjoyed and then put back.

I am in favor of option 2a-2. And I would like to see measures taken to rebuild the stock as fast as possible. I applaud the measures that were taken last year to decrease bag limits, but I think more needs to be done to bring these fish back to all the states, not just Maine, so that all anglers can enjoy them.

Please take aggressive measures to get this stock back to where it needs to be, not overfished. These fish are too valuable to be taken out of the water and killed.

Thank you for your time,

Captain Lou Tirado
Diamond Pass Outfitters
9 Delaware Ave
South Portland, ME 04016
04106

From: Victor Gano [<mailto:vgano@comcast.net>]

Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 9:40 AM

To: Comments <comments@asmfc.org>

Subject: [External] Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Hi,

I believe beach replenishment/beach nourishment is pushing bluefish further offshore. The army corps of engineers has destroyed fish habitat along the New Jersey coast from Long Beach island to Cape May Point. The army corps of engineers has done this year after year covering the jetties and covering the beaches with lifeless dead sand. Zero environmental impact is ever done and fish habitat continues to be destroyed year after year.

It is a billion dollar scam and the rich home owners and politicians are brain washed believing that moving sand from offshore to the coastal beaches will save a barrier island or peoples homes. It is a flat out lie. Follow the money trail and you will see the sea of lies behind beach replenishment. Environmental engineers have become environmental terrorists in my mind. I am sick of people like me being ignored year after year.

I have been fishing in South Jersey for over 40 years and I have never seen the fishing suck so bad along the South Jersey beaches.

Please help save fish habitat along our South New Jersey beaches.

From: Jeff Norton <user@votervoice.net>

Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 3:24 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Dear Mr. Seeley,

As an angler that loves sportfishing, I understand the responsibility of making tough management decisions to ensure the bluefish resource returns to a healthy status. Therefore, I support rebuilding the bluefish population using the following management actions.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations

I support Option 2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial. This option uses the most recent 20 years of catch data (1999-2018) as opposed to the current allocation

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Norton
16 Wellingsley Ave
Plymouth, MA 02360
jeffnrtn@yahoo.com

From: Wesley Phillips <wesley@markjupiter.com>

Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 3:54 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Cc: Leaning, Dustin Colson <dleaning@asmfc.org>; Davidson, Maureen <maureen.davidson@dec.ny.gov>

Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Dear Mr. Seeley,

I am a private recreational angler from NY writing to you regarding the Blue Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment because bluefish are an important part of not just my enjoyment of our coastline but of every anglers. They are fun to catch and on occasion, delicious to eat. It is important to me to see this fish stock rebuilt and maintained so they can continue to be enjoyed at sustainable levels for generations to come.

Fisheries Management Plans Goals and Objectives

I support the set of goals and objectives (**Alternative 1A**) but would like to see biennial analysis of the fishery to better understand the resource and the values that comprise it. This fishery is predominantly catch and release and depends heavily on the maximum sustainable amount of fish in the water. The socioeconomic effect should not be ignored.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations

I support **2a-4**. It represents data from higher biomass years as well as recent timeframes.
I support **2b-1** because there is no, slow, phase-in.

Rebuilding Plan

The most critical part! It must be rebuilt quickly with the opportunity to still harvest as well as protect. I support **Alternative 4c**.

Quota Transfer Provisions

The primary value of this fishery is the catch and release of bluefish and not the harvest. **I recommend transfers be removed from consideration.**

Management Uncertainty

I support **6b, the post sector split**.

De Minimis

I support **7a**

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments!

Sincerely,

Wesley Phillips

From: Parker Mauck <pgmauck@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 4:47 PM

To: Seeley, Matthew <mseeley@mafmc.org>

Subject: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

April 23, 2021

Dr. Christopher Moore, Executive Director Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council 800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Re: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Dear Dr. Moore,

I am a proud member of the American Saltwater Guides Association (ASGA) a coalition of recreational fishing guides, small businesses, and conservation-minded anglers who find greater value in long-term stock abundance rather than simply maximizing harvest. We are committed to the concept of “better business through conservation,” reflecting our belief that a precautionary approach to fisheries management based on the best available science provides higher-quality fishing opportunities that bolster the recreational fishing economy. Bluefish are a keystone species to recreational fishermen and our coalition, and we are thankful for the opportunity to comment on this amendment.

The bluefish fishery is predominantly recreational, as reflected by historic allocations and catch data. The 2018 revised Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data resulted in recreational catch and harvest estimates much greater than previously believed. In August 2019, bluefish were declared overfished, although overfishing was not occurring. The Council adopted management measures to constrain the recreational sector in December 2019, but to the best of our knowledge bluefish remain overfished, current mortality levels are near overfishing levels, and recreational landings continue to exceed limits.

It is important to note that the recreational bluefish fishery, which makes up roughly 80-90% of historic mortality, is mostly a catch-and-release fishery. From 2010-2019, even with the federal bag limit at 15 fish per person with no size limit, Atlantic coast recreational anglers released about two thirds of the bluefish they caught annually.¹ This demonstrates that the recreational sector values the opportunity to repeatedly encounter bluefish, often more than intentionally harvesting them. The bluefish fishery thus represents a prime example of the value of fish left in the water.

We understand the “ebb and flow” nature of the bluefish stock but believe that there is a great opportunity to improve bluefish management. As such, it is imperative that the stock be efficiently rebuilt to best realize the value and benefits of the fishery.

Below are my views and the views of the ASGA on each of the issues contained in this amendment:

Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

We support the proposed set of goals and objectives (Alternative 1a). However, we would like to suggest that the following objective be added: “Objective 2.3: perform biennial optimum yield analyses to better understand the resource and values therein.” MSA requires fisheries management measures to achieve optimum yield, which is defined as a fishery’s maximum sustainable yield “as reduced by any relevant economic, social, or ecological factor.”² Since catch-and-release fishing, which depends on lots of fish in the water, is such a major component of the recreational bluefish

fishery, its impact on optimum yield—namely, the socioeconomic benefits that come from reduced harvest and increased abundance—should not be ignored.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations

While we would normally support allocation based on catch rather than landings and one that solely uses baseline data from the most recent timeframes, **we support Alternative 2a-4 for the following reasons.**

At present, the bluefish stock is overfished, SSB has declined considerably since 2009, and there is a very strong possibility that overfishing occurred in 2019 and 2020. From a management perspective, we believe that base years should include timeframes when the stock was at historically abundant levels. The additional inclusion of recent timeframes will inform how the fishery is currently being utilized. The stock was at its largest in the early 1980s and experienced surges in 1999, 2003, and 2006. Alternative 2a-4 includes catch data from all of those high biomass years as well as landings data from more recent timeframes.

We do not support a phase in because the percentages included in the sub-alternatives would seem to have little real effect—**thus, for efficiency’s sake, we prefer Alternative 2b-1.**

Commercial Allocation to the State

We do not wish to offer opinions on the commercial fishery-focused alternatives within the document.

Rebuilding Plan

We strongly believe that the rebuilding plan is the most important component of this amendment. Legally, the Council must adopt a plan by November of this year and rebuild the stock by 2029. **We support Alternative 4c, which is based on the Council’s risk policy and projected to rebuild the stock within five years.** This alternative is precautionary to the resource while still providing some short-term opportunity for harvest. The bluefish fishery thrives when the stock is healthy, and rebuilding quickly is critical.

Quota Transfer Provisions

As highlighted above, the recreational bluefish fishery is a predominantly catch-and-release fishery that derives significant value from fish left in the water. We do not support the practice of transferring unused “quota” from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. Recreational anglers choose to release the majority of bluefish, indicating that the primary value of the recreational fishery is in encountering them and catching them—and more often than not, releasing them. Viewing intentionally released fish as unused quota and then transferring it to the commercial sector negates the conservation value of voluntary release practices and manifests a fundamental misunderstanding of the fishery. Additionally, the revised MRIP data tells us that many of the past recreational-to-commercial transfers should not have even occurred. Recreational anglers enjoy the opportunity to

encounter this fish and should not be punished for releasing them. We view transfers in this fishery as a form of dis-incentivizing the practice of catch and release that ignores the benefits it provides.

For these reasons, we do not support either alternative, but rather recommend transfers be removed from the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan.

Management Uncertainty Alternatives

We recognize the need for all fishery sectors to be held accountable, and while we understand the challenges in anticipating and monitoring recreational catch, the uncertainties that such challenges engender should not negatively impact the commercial sector. While we would like to learn more about the specifics of how recreational uncertainty will be considered in reducing recreational harvest limits, **we support 6b, the post-sector split.** In addition, we recommend that the Council support human-dimensions research concerning bluefish angler preferences and values, which could better inform future management decisions and more accurately predict recreational effort, an area of particular uncertainty.

De Minimis Provisions

De minimis states land less than 0.1% of the coastwide commercial landings for the year before, and the FMP does not subject these to recreational management measures. It is our view that these states contribute so minimally to the coastwide stock that additional measures are futile in practice. **Thus, we prefer the status quo option: 7a.** However, as currently written *de minimis* status is determined solely by commercial landings; we would be remiss to not highlight the opportunity for states to “game” this system as conservation equivalency has been used in other fisheries.

Thank you for providing all of the relevant information on this amendment and for considering our input. **I ask that you reflect on your responsibility and your opportunity to take actions that will MANAGE TO ABUNDANCE, which will help bluefish as a species, commercial anglers, recreational anglers, and the thousands of small businesses like mine that depend on the abundance of bluefish and other inshore fish species.**

Sincerely,

Parker G. Mauck
Owner
Westport Fly

Capt. Parker G. Mauck
PO Box 42
69 Masquesatch Road
Westport Point, MA 02791
pgmauck@gmail.com
(508) 496-8682
www.westportfly.com

277 identical or near-identical versions of the following comment were submitted. The names of the individuals who submitted this comment are listed below.

Dear Mr. Seeley,

As an angler that loves sportfishing, I understand the responsibility of making tough management decisions to ensure the bluefish resource returns to a healthy status. Therefore, I support rebuilding the bluefish population using the following management actions.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations

I support Option 2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial. This option uses the most recent 20 years of catch data (1999-2018) as opposed to the current allocation that uses outdated landings data from the 1980's.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation Phase In I support Option 2b-1: No Phase In. This allocation change does not need a phase in period because it differs by only 4% from the current allocation split. I also believe it is necessary to implement the allocation quickly to avoid any further recreational restrictions which could occur under a phased in approach.

Rebuilding Plan Alternatives

I support Option 4d: use constant fishing mortality to rebuild in a 7-year timeframe. It is uncertain whether fishing mortality or environmental conditions will have more of an impact on rebuilding the bluefish population. Scientists also think that recent changes in recreational catch data make it difficult to determine a rebuilding timeframe. All this uncertainty requires a longer rebuilding timeframe to provide the greatest opportunity to successfully rebuild bluefish.

Quota Transfers

I support Option 5a-2: allow for optional bi-directional transfers with Option 5B-2 a 10% transfer cap. Historically, transfers only occurred from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery. If transfers are to be allowed, they should be bi-directional; however, I do not support transfers out of the recreational fishery until stock size has increased to a level that allows for equal measures between the for-hire and private modes.

Management Uncertainty

I support Option 6a: no action/status quo. The recreational sector has no ability to address the uncertainty association with recreational catch. Therefore, I believe management uncertainty should not be specific to each sector.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Submitted by:

John Stillwagon, Jr., Jeff Miller, Phyllis Hamilton, Tony Sergi, Bruce Dana, Richard Terrazzino, Thomas Miloszewski, Dan Gallagher, Leoard McGill, Fred Johnson, Dave Beneway, Dennis Leon, John Higdon, Richard Lacafra, Ronald Lynch, Gary Johnson, William E. Burke, Andrew Roman, Thomas Wood, Alcides Vignolo, Paul Tomasura, Stanley Shenker, David Sams, Gary Harsel, Ken Allen, Rick Wakem, Ted Ring, Michael Avara, Al

Ristori, Perry Rease, George Ballard, Jim Reznik, Daniel McKee, Raymond Sales, Erik Nees, Nicholas Tinaro, Bryan Starke, Nicholas Passaretti, Anthony Cardwell, Ronald Audette, Steve Quigley, Robert Searles, Ben Yang, James Anderson, Scott Riddle, Richard Dowd, Vaughan Dize, Greg Lieb, Steven Fifer, Randy Sizemore, Roy Rhodes, Alex Gerus, Ronald Robichaud, George Fazio, Robert DeBonis, Tom West, Luis Sosa, Andrew King, Mike Piotrowski, Lewis Mitchell, Stephen Hiller, Claudio Ripoll, Joseph Vigorito, Ernest Mellon, Hayden Best, Leslie Hartman, Douglas Simms, Chris Carlson, Ronald Mazzarella, Allen Keith, Ron Broking, Kirk Fay, John Russell, Howard Smith, Charles Goins, Joseph Hughes, Emil Kolodi, Foyt Ralston, Michael Duclos, William Scitunno, Edward Richter, Michael Frybarger, Patrick Callahan, Robert Link, RJ Carl, Jerry Rau, William Byers, Bert Olmstead, Chris Edwards, Christopher Butler, Leo Sands, Bob Verge, German Forero, Daniel Kennedy, Christopher Detweiler, Keith Heiring, Warren Brown, Gary Coleman, Stephen Wuertz, David Anderson, Cy Pizam, John Gruber, Mark Vandebosch, Arthur Lewandowski, Jose Jaime, Philip Wrublewski, Frank DeCampra, Lynn Behler, John Peters, Richard Bielawiec, Mark Salopek, Joe Reustle, Carl Pearse, Robert Hawryluk, James Stauffer, Walter Fisher, Andrew Slousky, Brook Gabel, Richard Yates, Walter Everard, Tom Warman, Bradford Myers, Richard Pasko, Daniel Carney, Brian Toole, William Kazawic, Gary Akers, John Farrell, Gerald Clark, John Grida, Justice Rivera, Karen Gudzenski, Robert Haimelin, Martin Tait, Ben Speciale, Rick Holmberg, Russell Headley, David Nevin, Victor Regan, Enos Webster, Barry Moak, Joe Temple, Thomas Voltz, Dexter Grindstaff, Bill Bishop, Andrew Petersen, Thomas Gerrity, Michael Ebner, James Kiehne, Deborah London, Cindy Galvin, Bruce Lawson, Chris Skibinski, Willie McCall, John Chandley, Michael Avara, Michael Wallick, Eric Morrow, Lester Pastewski, Walter Dudek, James Sanders, Patrick Bike, Reed Riemer, Michael Kenney, Chris Buck, Michael Rousseau, Michael Dorich, Jeff Hill, Don Goebel, Joseph Florek, David Pianki, Thomas Duncan, Joe Somers, Christopher DeFoe, Michael Norinsky, Jerry Negron, Paul Cavallaro, Robert Delark, Steven Free, Ralph Williams, Jim Wilkerson, David McCarty, David Hennessey, Robert Klapproth, Aaron Isban, Mark Kaspar, Larry Obuchowski, Maureen Hunt, Larry Rodriguez, Henry Massicotte, Phil Everingham, George Harkness, Stephen Lassiter, Jason Grieco, James Gorel, Mark MacDonald, Richard Rohloff, David Barrows, Michael Hennessey, Dave Kerrigan, Tom Palchanes, Charles Spindelman, Charles Addis, Frank Gundlach, Daniel Lesniewski, Charles Medlock, Alex Fernandez, Stephen Molo, Ronald Rupert, Robert Burke, James Romeo, Howard Scheurenbrand, Theo Gionis, John Hooven, Robert Cuddy, Emil Borruso, Ronald Paffrath, Nick Fioravanti, Ed Giordano, Lou Di Bello, Emmett Luck, Steven Christensen, Thomas McGlynn, Debra McGlynn, Darryl Mosher, Michael Mascia, Chris Bartosh, John Lawson, Rob Kaluza, Joseph Gallinoto, Tibor Terek, John Davey, Jon Brunetti, Charles Seitzman, Gene Petit, Albert Conover, Eli Hamid, George Schnepf, Norman Hill, Todd McGonnell, Terence Glass, Doug McPherson, Paul Echavarria, Dennis O'Driscoll, Michael DeLuca, Joe Meyer, Jerry Kells, Henry Elsesser, Mike Blaskovich, John Nardi, Terry Langer, Sean Shay, Craig Austin, Nick Murphy, Dan Rapolla, Bill Wrubel, Gerard Galluccio, Cristoforo Pastore, Thomas C. Webster, Joseph Jordan, Howard Davis, Jim Foster, Michael Lambert, Matthew Anton, Robert Bennett, William Martin, Claudio Sala, Arthur Lewandowski, Charles Trowbridge, Ian Cochrane, Joel Huerta, Richard Trifone, Ed DeSanto, Robert Maynes, Rick Botoff, Paul Decoste, Francis Tierney, Howard Achilles, Chester Zegler

14 July 2020

To the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council,

My name is Dean Pesante, owner/operator of the F/V Oceana Inshore Gillnet Vessel based out of Point Judith, Rhode Island. I have been working as a commercial fisherman since 1984 and have captained my own vessel since 1991. On behalf of myself, other commercial fishermen, and shoreside dealerships and businesses throughout the state of Rhode Island, I am writing to you today to express my concern and request action be taken on issues pertaining to recent changes in Bluefish management. Specifically, I am referring to 1) quota distribution between commercial and recreational sectors and 2) commercial quota distributions between the Atlantic states. I am expressing my concerns because the new drastic cuts in quota for the commercial sector would create tremendous hardships for people in the Bluefish industry.

Adjustment of Recreational and Commercial Quota

Currently, Bluefish are in greater demand in the marketplace than they ever have been. More people are buying Bluefish every year, and they have become an extremely desirable fish to eat. The increasing demand for Bluefish has made the fishery more valuable and important to commercial fishermen and related businesses. Consequently, more commercial fishermen and related businesses have come to rely on this fishery and need an appropriate amount of quota to sustain their businesses.

Recent management measures have cut the commercial quota by more than 50%. These measures will create enormous financial and economic hardships for the commercial fishing industry. In keeping true to its mission of providing food to consumers, the commercial fishing industry is considered an essential business, and the reduction in quota will prevent the industry from operating sufficiently. It is important to understand that cutting the commercial Bluefish quota in half will have detrimental social and economic impacts as well as severely and directly hurt the livelihoods of Bluefish fishermen and associated businesses. In creating policies, please consider how you would feel if your income were cut in half.

The commercial fishery is managed with empirical data reported in a responsible manner under Federal and State Laws by both fishermen and dealers. ALL commercial fishermen provide accurate and realistic information to Federal and State entities. In contrast, recreational fishermen are not required by any law to report data nor any information. They only provide information voluntarily, and the data received from recreational fishermen is marginal at best. Because they are not regulated by Federal or State Laws, recreational fishermen that voluntarily report information have the ability to inflate data and exaggerate landings.

It is difficult to understand how such severe quota reductions to the commercial Bluefish industry were made with consideration to incredibly uncertain data from the recreational sector.

14 July 2020

For these reasons, we feel the Bluefish quota needs to be reallocated with a much higher percentage given back to the commercial industry.

Adjustment of Commercial Bluefish Quota between Atlantic States

The second issue I would like to discuss is the commercial Bluefish quota distribution between the Atlantic states. Evidence suggests the trend of both Bluefish populations and associated landings by commercial fishermen have changed immensely in recent years on the Atlantic coast. While the population of Bluefish and consequent landings have together increased significantly in northern Atlantic waters, the population and landings have decreased significantly in southern Atlantic waters. These changes are most likely due to climate change and water temperatures.

Southern states that currently have a larger percentage of Bluefish quota have consistently reported landings significantly below their allocation. The opposite is true in Northern states (New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts), who have consistently landed an amount of fish that exceeded their quotas. Consequently, northern States have had to request quota be transferred from the Southern states.

I believe an adjustment of quota allocation between the States should be made to accommodate the current state of the Bluefish population and landings. A more accurate and appropriate allocation of Bluefish quota is necessary.

Reductions in quota in the commercial Bluefish industry will have dire consequences for fishermen and related businesses. In this letter, I have proposed the following two solutions to resolve the current problems: 1) Reallocate quota from the recreational sector to the commercial sector and 2) Modify the percentage of commercial quota between Atlantic States to better represent the current trends in Bluefish populations and landings. Please consider these solutions and take prompt action.

Respectfully,

Dean Pesante

F/V Oceana



April 20, 2021

Dr. Christopher Moore, Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Re: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Dear Dr. Moore,

The American Saltwater Guides Association (ASGA) is a coalition of recreational fishing guides, small businesses, and conservation-minded anglers who find greater value in long-term stock abundance rather than simply maximizing harvest. We are committed to the concept of “better business through conservation,” reflecting our belief that a precautionary approach to fisheries management based on the best available science provides higher-quality fishing opportunities that bolster the recreational fishing economy. Bluefish are a keystone species to recreational fishermen and our coalition, and we are thankful for the opportunity to comment on this amendment.

The bluefish fishery is predominantly recreational, as reflected by historic allocations and catch data. The 2018 revised Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data resulted in recreational catch and harvest estimates much greater than previously believed. In August 2019, bluefish were declared overfished, although overfishing was not occurring. The Council adopted management measures to constrain the recreational sector in December 2019, but to the best of our knowledge bluefish remain overfished, current mortality levels are near overfishing levels, and recreational landings continue to exceed limits.

It is important to note that the recreational bluefish fishery, which makes up roughly 80-90% of historic mortality, is mostly a catch-and-release fishery. From 2010-2019, even with the federal bag limit at 15 fish per person with no size limit, Atlantic coast recreational anglers released about two thirds of the bluefish they caught annually.¹ This demonstrates that the recreational sector values the opportunity to repeatedly encounter bluefish, often more than intentionally harvesting them. The bluefish fishery thus represents a prime example of the value of fish left in the water.

We understand the “ebb and flow” nature of the bluefish stock but believe that there is a great opportunity to improve bluefish management. As such, it is imperative that the stock be efficiently rebuilt to best realize the value and benefits of the fishery.

Below are our views on each of the issues contained in this amendment:

Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

We support the proposed set of goals and objectives (Alternative 1a). However, we would like to suggest that the following objective be added: “Objective 2.3: perform biennial optimum yield analyses to better understand the resource and values therein.” MSA requires fisheries management measures to achieve optimum yield, which is defined as a fishery’s maximum sustainable yield “as

reduced by any relevant economic, social, or ecological factor.”² Since catch-and-release fishing, which depends on lots of fish in the water, is such a major component of the recreational bluefish fishery, its impact on optimum yield—namely, the socioeconomic benefits that come from reduced harvest and increased abundance—should not be ignored.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations

While we would normally support allocation based on catch rather than landings and one that solely uses baseline data from the most recent timeframes, we support **Alternative 2a-4** for the following reasons.

At present, the bluefish stock is overfished, SSB has declined considerably since 2009, and there is a very strong possibility that overfishing occurred in 2019 and 2020. From a management perspective, we believe that base years should include timeframes when the stock was at historically abundant levels. The additional inclusion of recent timeframes will inform how the fishery is currently being utilized. The stock was at its largest in the early 1980s and experienced surges in 1999, 2003, and 2006. Alternative 2a-4 includes catch data from all of those high biomass years as well as landings data from more recent timeframes.

We do not support a phase in because the percentages included in the sub-alternatives would seem to have little real effect—thus, for efficiency’s sake, we prefer **Alternative 2b-1**.

Commercial Allocation to the State

We do not wish to offer opinions on the commercial fishery-focused alternatives within the document.

Rebuilding Plan

We strongly believe that the rebuilding plan is the most important component of this amendment. Legally, the Council must adopt a plan by November of this year and rebuild the stock by 2029. We support **Alternative 4c**, which is based on the Council’s risk policy and projected to rebuild the stock within five years. This alternative is precautionary to the resource while still providing some short-term opportunity for harvest. The bluefish fishery thrives when the stock is healthy, and rebuilding quickly is critical.

Quota Transfer Provisions

As highlighted above, the recreational bluefish fishery is a predominantly catch-and-release fishery that derives significant value from fish left in the water. We do not support the practice of transferring unused “quota” from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. Recreational anglers choose to release the majority of bluefish, indicating that the primary value of the recreational fishery is in encountering them and catching them—and more often than not, releasing them. Viewing intentionally released fish as unused quota and then transferring it to the commercial sector negates the conservation value of voluntary release practices and manifests a fundamental misunderstanding of the fishery. Additionally, the revised MRIP data tells us that many of the past recreational-to-commercial transfers should not have even occurred.

Recreational anglers enjoy the opportunity to encounter this fish and should not be punished for releasing them. We view transfers in this fishery as a form of disincentivizing the practice of catch and release that ignores the benefits it provides.

For these reasons, we do not support either alternative, but rather recommend transfers be removed from the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan.

Management Uncertainty Alternatives

We recognize the need for all fishery sectors to be held accountable, and while we understand the challenges in anticipating and monitoring recreational catch, the uncertainties that such challenges engender should not negatively impact the commercial sector. While we would like to learn more about the specifics of how recreational uncertainty will be considered in reducing recreational harvest limits, we support 6b, the post-sector split. In addition, we recommend that the Council support human-dimensions research concerning bluefish angler preferences and values, which could better inform future management decisions and more accurately predict recreational effort, an area of particular uncertainty.

De Minimis Provisions

De minimis states land less than 0.1% of the coastwide commercial landings for the year before, and the FMP does not subject these to recreational management measures. It is our view that these states contribute so minimally to the coastwide stock that additional measures are futile in practice. Thus, we prefer the status quo option: 7a. However, as currently written *de minimis* status is determined solely by commercial landings; we would be remiss to not highlight the opportunity for states to “game” this system as conservation equivalency has been used in other fisheries.

Thank you for providing all of the relevant information on this amendment and for considering our input.

Sincerely,



Tony Friedrich
Vice President and Policy Director
American Saltwater Guides Association
tony@saltwaterguidesassociation.org
(202) 744-5013



Willy Goldsmith, Ph.D.
Executive Director
American Saltwater Guides Association
willy@saltwaterguidesassociation.org
(617) 763-3340

¹ Personal communication from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Fisheries Statistics Division, April 19, 2021.

² Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1802 (2012).



R.I. Party and Charter Boat Association
P.O. Box 171
Wakefield, RI 02880
401-741-5648
www.rifishing.com



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Capt. Andrew D'Angelo
Capt. Paul Johnson
Capt. Nick Butziger

April 22, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

RE: Bluefish Amendment

Dear Dr. Moore,

On behalf of the 60 members of the R.I. Party and Charter Boat Association, I would like to submit the following comments regarding the joint MAFMC/ASMFC Bluefish Amendment.

Regarding the Goals and Objectives, we support the proposed changes to the FMP goals and objectives. While we feel strongly that all user groups need to be treated with respect, we also "Fair and Equitable" should be clearly defined as it may mean different things to different people. Providing access to recreational fishermen who wish to fish home to eat is important for our businesses to survive and thrive.

Section 5.0 Commercial/Recreational Allocations:

Included within the alternatives of other commercial/recreational allocation actions has been an alternative that considers maintaining the current baseline years updated with new MRIP catch estimates. In this action, that alternative was not included, but we feel it should be a consideration for the council/board. In consulting with staff, we understand that an alternative using a catch-based approach with the baseline years of 1981-1989 would result in an allocation of approximately 90% recreational and 10% commercial. We would support that methodology and allocation formula if considered. As a second choice we would support Alternative 2a-2 as described in the public hearing document.

Section 5.2 Allocation Phase-In:

We support Alternative 2b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same time as the rebuilding plan.

Section 6.0 Commercial Allocation to the States:

Several RIPCBA members are dual permitted and hold both for-hire and commercial bluefish permits which allow them to prosecute a commercial blue fishery on days when they do not have a recreational for-hire trip scheduled. We support updating the timeseries used to determine state allocations. We support Alternative 3a-3 to accomplish this.

Section 6.2 Commercial Allocation Phase-In:

We support Alternative 3b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the rebuilding plan.

Section 6.3 Commercial Triggers:

We do not support using commercial allocation triggers due to unnecessary complexity created by triggers.

Section 6.4.1 Minimum Default Allocations:

We support Alternative 3d-2 0.10% Minimum Default Allocation

Section 7.1 Rebuilding Plan Alternatives:

We believe rebuilding of Bluefish should in accordance with the ABC Control Rule, guided by the Council's risk policy. We support Alternative 4c. In addition, we are opposed to Alternative 4b, a constant catch strategy that would rebuild in 4 years. The restrictive catch limits under this alternative are not worth the 1-year faster rebuilding schedule.

Section 8.0 Quota Transfer Alternatives:

Its hard for us to support transfers of quota while the stock is undergoing rebuilding. We recommend a pause on any transfers until rebuilding is complete. After that we would support a bi-directional transfer program of some type. A cap would be needed for transfers and a program would need to be developed that accounts for the variability in MRIP catch estimates. We recommend removing all transfers from the FMP and initiating an action to develop a transfer plan for implementation when rebuilding is complete.

Section 9.0 Management Uncertainty Alternatives:

Alternative 6b Post Sector Split allows for a targeted approach to accounting for management uncertainty. We believe this is the best and most fair way to go, potentially incentivizing each sector to address management uncertainty where it becomes problematic.

Respectfully Submitted,

Capt. Rick Bellavance

Capt. Rick Bellavance, President
RI Party and Charter Boat Association

Priority Fishing Charters, LLC

140 Jerry Lane
North Kingstown, RI 02852
401-741-5648
www.priorityfishingcharters.com



April 22, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

RE: Bluefish Amendment

Dear Dr. Moore,

I am the owner/operator of the FV Priority Too, which holds a GARFO issued commercial fishing permit for bluefish. I have participated in this fishery for many years. I would like to offer the following comments related to the Bluefish allocation and rebuilding amendment.

Section 6.0 Commercial Allocation to the States:

I support updating the timeseries used to determine state allocations. I support Alternative 3a-3 as an appropriate way to allocate between states.

Section 6.2 Commercial Allocation Phase-In:

I support Alternative 3b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the rebuilding plan.

Section 6.3 Commercial Triggers:

I do not support using commercial allocation triggers due to unnecessary complexity created by triggers. They have not been used in this FMP in the past and I don't see a reason to start now.

Section 6.4.1 Minimum Default Allocations:

I support Alternative 3d-2 0.10% Minimum Default Allocation. If a fisherman from a state without allocation, harvests a few bluefish that fisherman should be able to bring them in and avoid discarding them. This alternative would give every state at least a little bit of allocation.

Section 7.1 Rebuilding Plan Alternatives:

I support rebuilding of Bluefish should in accordance with the ABC Control Rule, guided by the Council's risk policy. I support Alternative 4c. I do not support Alternative 4b, a constant catch strategy

Priority Fishing Charters, LLC

140 Jerry Lane

North Kingstown, RI 02852

401-741-5648

www.priorityfishingcharters.com



that would rebuild in 4 years. The restrictive catch limits under this alternative are not worth the 1-year faster rebuilding schedule.

Section 8.0 Quota Transfer Alternatives:

I support pausing any transfer of quota from one sector to another until the stock is rebuilt. During rebuilding, time should be given to develop a bi-directional transfer plan that meets the fisheries needs once stocks are rebuilt.

Section 9.0 Management Uncertainty Alternatives:

I support Alternative 6b Post Sector Split allows for a targeted approach to accounting for management uncertainty.

Respectfully Submitted,
Capt. Rick Bellavance

Priority Fishing Charters
35 State Street
Narragansett RI 02880
401-741-5648
rickbellavance@gmail.com

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CONSERVATION & PROTECTION OF MARINE LIFE

6919 Portwest Drive, Suite 100 | Houston, Texas 77024

p 713.626.4234 | f 713.626.5852 | www.JoinCCA.org

April 23, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Dr. Moore,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. Coastal Conservation Association is the nation's largest marine conservation group, with over 100,000 members in 19 state chapters.

Bluefish are a popular species whose often vicious strike have saved many a fishing trip. While not favored for their dining quality, they are prized for their fighting abilities. They are typically abundant, which increases the encounter rate, and indiscriminate feeders, which increases the strike rate. In short, they are a prototypical recreational species and should be managed as such. Many are released alive to strike and fight another day.

We have always had a serious concern over the arbitrary transfer of unused recreational quota to the commercial bluefish fishery. The original bluefish allocation was 87% recreational to 13% commercial, which was not adhered to very often. It was set based on past catch history and clearly shows the predominance of recreational catch in the fishery. We are opposed to the concept of transferring quota, especially for bluefish which, as mentioned earlier, are primarily a recreational species. As such, fish left in the water have value, possibly more value than dead in a cooler.

There should be some economic analysis that compares the value of bluefish to the commercial fishery and to the recreational fishery, including the value of released fish, as another metric to help with allocation. Past catch history should not be the primary, let alone sole, metric to decide allocations.

If the Council and Commission believe the commercial fishery should have more fish, then they should make the case for a change in allocation.

4.0 FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

We are in favor of the revised goals and objectives, though we would prefer language acknowledging the bluefish's importance to the recreational fishery and managing for abundance.

5.0 COMMERCIAL/RECREATIONAL ALLOCATION ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We are in favor of option 2a-2, 89% recreational to 11% commercial, simply because the additional fish available to the fishery were generated from the new effort estimation – the Fishery Effort Survey.

We are also in favor of 2b-1 – the No Phase in option.

6.0 COMMERCIAL ALLOCATIONS TO THE STATES ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We have no comment on the state-by-state commercial allocations.

7.0 REBUILDING PLAN ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

Due to the uncertainty with factors affecting rebuilding, either fishing mortality, environmental factors or a combination of the two. When coupled with the recent changes in MRIP, rebuilding may take longer than expected. We are in favor of 4d – Constant Fishing Mortality – 7-year rebuilding.

8.0 QUOTA TRANSFER ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We are in favor of removing this Alternative from consideration. While we know this is nigh impossible, we are in favor of changing the current status quo to eliminate the possibility of in season quota transfers from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery.

9.0 MANAGEMENT UNCERTAINTY ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

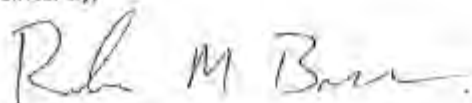
We are in favor of 5a – No Action. The recreational sector has very limited ability to address the uncertainty associated with recreational catch. Management uncertainty should not be specific to each sector.

10.0 DE MINIMIS PROVISIONS ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We are in favor of 7c – letting the state decide recreational management measures.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich M Brame".

Richen Brame
CCA Atlantic Fisheries Director

April 23, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Dr. Moore,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. The Coastal Conservation Association North Carolina the largest marine conservation group in North Carolina with over 10,000 members and supporters across the state. We would like to add our support for comments already submitted by the CCA National office.

Bluefish are a popular species among recreational fishermen in North Carolina. Recent statistics from the NC DMF indicate it was the second most harvested fish by recreational anglers with over 2.7 million fish harvested in 2019. Many more were released alive to be encountered by anglers again another day. In short, they are a prototypical recreational species and should be managed as such.

We have always had a serious concern over the arbitrary transfer of unused recreational quota to the commercial bluefish fishery. The original bluefish allocation was 87% recreational to 13% commercial, which was not adhered to very often. It was set based on past catch history and clearly shows the predominance of recreational catch in the fishery. We are opposed to the concept of transferring quota, especially for bluefish which, as mentioned earlier, are primarily a recreational species. As such, fish left in the water have value, possibly more value than dead in a cooler.

There should be some economic analysis that compares the value of bluefish to the commercial fishery and to the recreational fishery, including the value of released fish, as another metric to help with allocation. Past catch history should not be the primary, let alone sole, metric to decide allocations.

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We are in favor of removing this Alternative from consideration. While we know this is nigh impossible, we are in favor of changing the current status quo to eliminate the possibility of in season quota transfers from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery

9.0 MANAGEMENT UNCERTAINTY ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We are in favor of 6a – No Action. The recreational sector has very limited ability to address the uncertainty associated with recreational catch. Management uncertainty should not be specific to each sector.

10.0 DE MINIMIS PROVISIONS ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

We are in favor of 7c – letting the state decide recreational management measures.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on these issues.

Sincerely,

David A. Sneed, Executive Director
Coastal Conservation Association North Carolina
4809 Hargrove Road, Suite 123
Raleigh, NC 27616



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

April 22, 2021

Dr Christopher Moore

The North Carolina Watermen United is submitting these comments regarding the bluefish fishery.

We believe that, though the statistics for the Charter/Headboat Sector are accurate because they are now being sent electronically, and the Commercial statistics are accurately recorded at the fish houses where the catch is sold, the Recreational numbers are incomplete.

The information from the Recreational Sector is not valid because neither the surveys nor the mail-in forms completely show the true number of fishermen on private boats, the true number of on-shore anglers or the accurate number of fish that have been caught. Although the Marine Recreational Intercept Program (MRIP) has been in place for a few years, and is highly touted by Recreational fishing magazines, the program needs refinement and much better distribution, so that the actual number of fishermen and their catches is included.

Until we have better accounting from the Recreational Sector, including private boat catches and much more reliable surveys of the private on-shore anglers, it is just an arbitrary exercise to "make up" rules and regulations that effect all three Sectors of fishermen.

We are asking that MAFMC and ASFMC address this problem immediately so we can get accurate an accounting for the bluefish fishery.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours truly,

Perry Wood Beasley

Perry Wood Beasley
President, NCWU
252-706-0184

PWB: mm

cc: NC Division of Marine Fisheries

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DIRECTED SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES, INC.

A SALTWATER FISHERIES CONSULTING COMPANY

23 APR 2021

Re: BLUEFISH Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment Comment

To: Matt Seeley (mseeley@mafmc.org)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on behalf of Directed Sustainable Fisheries, (DSF) clients concerned about current Bluefish Amendment Actions

Below is an image of the Bluefish Amendment Proposed Actions Overview, and the proposed actions, following that will be the intent of the DSF Bluefish written Comment;

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) are seeking public comment on management options under consideration in the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. This amendment contains alternatives to:

- Revise the fishery management plan (FMP) goals and objectives;
- Modify the bluefish allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors;
- Modify the commercial allocations to the states;
- Initiate a rebuilding plan;
- Revise the quota transfer processes;
- Revise how the FMP accounts for management uncertainty; and
- Revise the *de minimis* provisions in the Commission's FMP.

Comments may be provided at any of 5 virtual public hearings to be held between **March 24** and **April 8, 2021** or via written comment until **April 23, 2021**.

DSF provided oral comment on behalf of the Florida Atlantic Bluefish Fishery on 24 March 2021. Below will be DSF comments with the proposed actions, and maybe some general comment besides supporting the Florida Atlantic Bluefish fishery.

FMP Goals and Objectives Action 1.

DSF unfortunately agrees that the Bluefish FMP process has now tasked the two fishing sectors with probable allocation changes through these proposed management actions, using these current projections, since Status Quo does not seem to be a real option anymore for the present commercial sector allocations by States. This is after the past year or more of the public process of the commercial sector pushing against the new MRIP FES "currency" data shift from the old MRFSS "currency" that now inflates the previously already massive recreational sector estimated catch and mortality rates.

This current action of replacing the historic assessment inputs by changing current allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors has unfortunate consequences overall for the commercial sector of Florida, and elsewhere on the Atlantic coast for commercial interests due to

PO BOX 9351

DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA 32120-9351

386-239-0948

DSF2009@AOL.COM

1

the new "MRIP FES currency" that we do not entirely agree with the estimated and inflated past catches by the recreational sector, yet it will take several years to verify or deny the veracity of the new method MRIP FES methods (currency) of estimating recreational catch of Bluefish. Meanwhile the commercial Bluefish seafood clients are denied past access, and the recreational "fishing public" gets to play with their Bluefish seafood, and release the majority of the greatly expanded estimated catch, many to die and become a modeled dead discard input in the future Bluefish stock assessments. For two years we have opposed the MRIP FES for various reasons, especially since it is not a real census of the catch like commercial fishing has been, it is only an estimate, albeit a greatly expanded recreational mortality going into the future that will always be a year to two years behind as to final annual catch, landings and release mortality. Even the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation leadership does not trust the results from the MRIP FES for many of the Florida fish stocks.

Sector (Commercial/Recreational) Allocations Action 2.

For sector allocation Set 2a, we would prefer to stay with Alternative 2a-1, Status Quo 83% Recreational and 17% Commercial. With that said managers do not seemed incline to help the commercial maintain the percentage previously allocated, so our secondary choice will be Alternative 2a-5, 84% Recreational and 16% Commercial.

Alternative Set 2b is the Allocation Change Phase-In as worded in the Bluefish public hearing document, then as long as Action 1 unfolds as we desire, then no-phase in, Alternative 2b-1, Status Quo should be okay. Some of this will depend on the future allocations and which rebuilding plan duration choice is implemented.

Commercial Allocations to the States Action 3.

Florida Bluefish interests would prefer Alternative 3a-1 of Status Quo, (1981-1989) that maintains the Florida current commercial percentage of 10.04%. Since managers will probably not agree to that choice, then our back up will be Alternative 3a-4 that uses half of 1981-1989 and half of 2009-2018 to achieve 8.59% that keeps Florida commercial Bluefish allocation closest to the past allocation of Status Quo.

Alternative Set 3b-1 No phase-in Status Quo is the best commercial choice as long as the maximum two allocations can be available to Florida commercial fishermen.

Alternative Set 3c-1 of no Quota trigger, Status Quo has been the Bluefish FMP norm, and we support the continued status quo.

Alternative Set 3d-1 of No Minimum Default Allocation Status Quo for Bluefish is probably the best choice, unless one of the two other allocations work out best for states like Georgia and South Carolina that doesn't harvest much commercial Bluefish historically.

Rebuilding Plan Action 4.

Alternative Set 4-d for Constant Fishing Mortality for a 7-year Rebuilding Plan is the favored choice by the Florida Atlantic Bluefish fishing industry. This will reveal how well the Bluefish population status is unfolding for both fishing sectors.

DIRECTED SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES, INC.

A SALTWATER FISHERIES CONSULTING COMPANY

Transfers Action 5.

We support the continued inclusion of Sector Transfer Provisions as a tool to keep in the FMP for potential future use. Alternative Set 5a-1 No Action/Status Quo is the Florida choice, though in our commercial history, we have never required a transfer to Florida, but Florida did benefit northern states in the past by giving transfers to help their fishing interests.

Management Uncertainty Action 6.

Since Figure # 21 in the public hearing document illustrates some of the new FMP choices, with suggestions including the transfers that could in the future get activated in both directions for commercial and recreational potential utilization. Also, developing types of a census approach for the for-hire and private recreational fisheries in all the states that catch and land Bluefish. We can support Alternative Set 6-b for Post-Sector split, and we can only hope that Scientific, Commercial and Recreational Uncertainties can be reduced in the future with better data collection.

De Minimis Provisions Action 7.

Atlantic Florida Recreational fishing interests for Bluefish have a robust fishery in state and federal waters that depends on certain migrations based on available food sources for the Blues usually affected by water temperatures and the weather patterns that sometimes have Bluefish being pulled further or closer to the beach creates some variations on annual catch & landings. Particularly the past two falls and winters have impacted a lot of fishing efforts from all sectors since 2019. We cannot control the effects of Mother Nature on Bluefish, only the catch. Managers are in charge, and for now we will simply choose Alternative Set 7-a No Action/Status Quo, and let management make these final choices after recreational inputs.

General.

It is still our desire to see ultimately a census gathering effort for both the for-hire and private recreational sectors to provide these data, instead of depending only on a MRIP FES that is an estimate of an estimate that hurts the commercial sector with these actions of this proposed FMP.

Thank you, again, and we hope you help the Florida commercial Bluefish fishery, and not harm its recent positive growth over the past decade.

Rusty

Russell Howard Hudson, President
Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc. (DSF)

PO BOX 9351

DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA 32120-9351

386-239-0948

DSF2009@AOL.COM

PO Box 9351
Daytona Beach, Florida 32120-9351

(386) 239-0948 Office
(386) 290-8443 Cellular

DSF2009@aol.com

Saltwater Fisheries Consultant, Shark Specialist
Deep-Sea Fishing Expert and Shrimp Boat Captain
Retired 100-ton United States Coast Guard (USCG) Licensed Sea Captain
Recreational, For-Hire & Commercial Fishing Life Experience, 1958-2021
Sixth Generation Waterman from Central Florida (FL) East Coast
Seafood Coalition (SFC) member
American Elasmobranch Society (AES) member 2004-2021
Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Advisory Committee FL member
ACCSP Biological Review Panel (BRP) member
ACCSP Bycatch Prioritization Committee (BPC) member
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Coastal Shark (CS) Advisory Panel (AP) FL Commercial & For-hire recreational member [former Chair of CS AP]
ASMFC Bluefish AP FL Commercial member
IWMC World Conservation Trust Vice-President – Marine Fish Species, especially Sharks
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Highly Migratory Species (HMS) AP Commercial Shark member 2019-2021
NMFS HMS SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) AP Pool member 2021-2026
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) SEDAR AP Pool member no term limits
SAFMC Fisheries Citizen Science Program Participant 2016-2021
SAFMC Mackerel-Cobia AP FL Commercial member 2018-2021
SAFMC Snapper-Grouper (SG) AP FL Commercial member 2015-2021
SAFMC System Management Plan (SMP) Workgroup FL Commercial member 2018-2021
SAFMC Marine Protected Area (MPA) Expert Work Group (EWG) participant 2012-2013
Former SAFMC MPA AP FL Commercial member
Former NMFS Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team FL participant (ALWTRT)
Former NMFS Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team FL participant (BDTRT)
Participant, observer and/or contributor to US coastal shark stock assessments during 1992, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010-2015, 2017 & 2019-2021.
Participant, observer and/or contributor SEDAR 11 (Large Coastal Sharks), 13 (Small Coastal Sharks), 16 (King Mackerel), 19 (Red Grouper/Black Grouper), 21 (Large Coastal Sharks/Small Coastal Sharks), 24 (Red Snapper), 25 (Black Sea Bass/Golden Tilefish), 28 (Spanish Mackerel/Cobia), 29 (Gulf Blacktip Sharks), 32 (Gray Triggerfish/Blueline Tilefish), 34 (Atlantic Sharpnose Sharks/Bonnethead Sharks), 36 (Snowy Grouper), 38 (King Mackerel), 39 (Smoothhound Sharks), 41 (Atlantic Red Snapper/Gray Triggerfish), 50 (Blueline Tilefish), 53 (Red Grouper), 54 (Sandbar Sharks), 56 (Black Sea Bass), 65 (Atlantic Blacktip Sharks), 66 (Golden Tilefish) 73 (Atlantic Red Snapper) and SEDAR 78 (Atlantic Spanish Mackerel).



April 23, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Dr. Moore,

On behalf of the recreational fishing industry, and east coast anglers, we submit the following comments to the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment.

Recreational anglers and the sportfishing industry recognize that a healthy bluefish population and fishery is critical to the east coast outdoor economy and is a significant driver of angler engagement and participation in coastal states from Maine through Florida. As a sportfish, bluefish provide fishing opportunities across all modes of the recreational sector making it an important target for a diverse and growing population of recreational anglers.

Historically, management of the bluefish fishery has been exceptionally stable until the 2019 operational assessment concluded that bluefish were overfished and experiencing overfishing during a significant part of the time series. These results were based mainly on the inclusion of updated MRIP catch data and represent a significant shift from the previous understanding of stock status. Unfortunately, this means that a rebuilding plan is now needed to return the bluefish population to a healthy status.

Furthermore, managers are currently using the new MRIP data in every aspect of fisheries management except for allocation. National standard 2 guides the use of best scientific information available in management decisions. Therefore, we recommend the MAFMC and ASMFC adjust the recreational and commercial allocation splits for the bluefish fishery using the new MRIP data which has been deemed best scientific information available.

To help assist the MAFMC and ASMFC in responding to these substantial changes in stock status and the need to revisit allocation, we submit the following comments on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding amendment.

Goals and Objectives

We support the revised goals and objectives but recommend adding an objective under Goal 1 about the importance of maintaining management stability in the bluefish fishery.

Commercial/Recreational Allocations:

We support Option 2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial.

Justification: This option uses the most recent 20 years of catch data (1999-2018) which is a broad timeframe that better reflects ongoing changes in the overall fishery. Using catch data as the basis for

allocation will correct the current mismatch that exists where landings data are used for allocation, but catch data are used for accounting. Additionally, the recreational sector remained within its recreational harvest limit over the entire 20-year timeframe (1999-2018) providing a fair and equitable basis for using these years in the allocation calculation.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation Phase In

We support Option 2b-1: No Phase In.

Justification: The 87% recreational, 13% commercial allocation change does not need a phase in period because it differs by only 4% from the current allocation split. We also believe it is necessary to implement the allocation change quickly to avoid any further recreational restrictions which could occur under a phased in approach.

Rebuilding Plan Alternatives

We support Option 4d: use constant fishing mortality to rebuild in a 7-year timeframe.

Justification: It is uncertain whether fishing mortality or environmental conditions will have more of an impact on rebuilding the bluefish population. Although maintaining fishing mortality at the target level will be of paramount importance, even the stock assessment scientists expressed concern with the recent changes in recreational catch data making it difficult to determine a rebuilding timeframe with certainty. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand that over the entire time series (1985-2018), bluefish spawning stock biomass (SSB) has never reached the SSB target. We value the health of the bluefish stock and understand that rebuilding it has measurable benefits to our industry, but express continued concern regarding choosing an overly ambitious rebuilding timeframe that requires rebuilding to a level that has never been achieved.

Also, the Draft Amendment states that if the stock is unable to rebuild in a chosen timeframe that NOAA Fisheries technical guidance on MSA National Standard 1 recommends that the rebuilding fishing mortality proxy (F) be set at 75% of the target F. This means that if the selected rebuilding plan is demonstrating difficulty in achieving the target on time, F may be further decreased to achieve a rebuilt stock.

Given the uncertainty associated with the rebuilding timeframe projections and the potential for further restrictions if the projections are inaccurate, we strongly recommend a longer rebuilding timeframe to provide the greatest opportunity to successfully rebuild bluefish.

Quota Transfers

We support Option 5a-2: allow for optional bi-directional transfers with Option 5B-2 a 10% transfer cap.

Justification: We do not support quota transfers between sectors while the population is under a rebuilding plan. Additionally, we do not support quota transfers between sectors until both the for hire and private modes have equal management measures. Because eliminating quota transfers is not a management alternative in the document, if quota transfers are allowed, they need to be bi-directional with a 10% transfer cap.

Management Uncertainty

We support Option 6a: no action/status quo.

Justification: The recreational sector has no ability to address the uncertainty associated with MRIP catch estimates, but we continue to advocate for better catch reporting systems. Additionally, the public hearing document does not provide any information on the level of uncertainty that may be applied through Alternative 6b or how such an application of management uncertainty would impact recreational regulations for this fishery. Therefore, we believe management uncertainty, which is controlled by the managers not the stakeholders, should not be specific to each sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Michael Waine
Atlantic Fisheries Policy Director
American Sportfishing Association

Jeff Angers
President
Center for Sportfishing Policy

Chris Horton
Senior Director of Fisheries Policy
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Clay Crabtree
Director of Federal Government Relations
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Jim Donofrio
President
Recreational Fishing Alliance



P.O. Box 1230
Marshfield, MA 02050
www.stellwagenbank.org

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April 23, 2021

Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, Delaware 19901

RE: Bluefish Amendment

Dear Dr. Moore:

On behalf of the Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association (SBCBA) whose membership includes the for hire fleet, recreational anglers and commercial fisherman that fish the state and federal waters off the coast of Massachusetts and abutting states, we offer the following comments to the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment.

A healthy bluefish population and fishery is critical to anglers and the entire blue economy of Massachusetts and the east coast. Bluefish provide fishing opportunities across a cross section of the recreational community making it an important target for a diverse and growing population of anglers.

The management of the bluefish fishery has been stable until the 2019 operational assessment concluded that bluefish were overfished and experiencing overfishing. This is primarily a result of updated MRIP data. Consistent with National Standard 2, the use of the best scientific information available and/or updated MRIP data is required to manage the fishery. As a result, the SBCBA recommends that the MAFMC and ASMFC adjust the recreational and commercial allocation for the bluefish fishery using the new MRIP data consistent with the recommendations summarized below.

Commercial Recreational Allocations:

Recommend Option 2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial.

This option uses the most recent 20 years of catch data (1999-2018) that reflects the ongoing change in the overall fishery over time. Using catch



P.O. Box 1230
Marshfield, MA 02050
www.stellwagenbank.org

data as the basis for allocation will correct the current mismatch that exists where landings data are used for allocation, but catch data are used for accounting. It should also be noted that the recreational sector has remained within its recreational harvest limit over the entire 20-year timeframe (1999-2018) providing a fair and equitable basis for using these years in the allocation calculation.

Commercial/Recreational Allocation Phase In
Recommend Option 2b-1: No Phase In.

A phase in period is not recommended since the 87% recreational and 13% commercial allocation differs by only 4% from the current allocation split. The SBCBA believes it is necessary to implement the allocation change quickly to avoid any further recreational restrictions which could occur under a phased in approach.

Rebuilding Plan Alternatives

Recommend Option 4d: use constant fishing mortality to rebuild in a 7-year timeframe.

MSA section 304(e)4 details the requirements for rebuilding overfished fisheries and allows for exemptions to the "as short as possible" requirement to account for the *"interaction of the overfished stock of fish within the marine ecosystem."* As a result, the SBCBA is disappointed that a 10-year rebuilding option was not selected to rebuild the fishery. It is uncertain whether fishing mortality or environmental conditions will have more of an impact on rebuilding the bluefish population. Maintaining fishing mortality at the target level will be very important. It should be noted that during the entire time series (1985-2018), the bluefish spawning stock biomass (SSB) has never reached the SSB target. The SBCBA has continued concern associated with selecting an overly ambitious rebuilding timeframe that requires rebuilding to a level that has never been achieved.

As a result of the uncertainty associated with the rebuilding timeframe projections and the potential for further restrictions if the projections are inaccurate, the SBCBA strongly recommends a longer rebuilding timeframe to provide the greatest opportunity to successfully rebuild bluefish.



P.O. Box 1230
Marshfield, MA 02050
www.stellwagenbank.org

Quota Transfers

Recommend Option 5a-2: allow for optional bi-directional transfers with Option 5B-2 a 10% transfer cap.

The SBCBA does not support quota transfers between sectors while the population is under a rebuilding plan. If quota transfers are allowed, the SBCBA recommends a bi-directional transfer with a 10% transfer cap.

Management Uncertainty

Recommend Option 6a: no action/status quo.

The recreational sector has no ability to address the uncertainty associated with MRIP catch estimates. The greatest proportion of uncertainty in the recreational bluefish fishery is associated with the estimates of discarded fish. Estimates of discards rely on angler recall which inherently contains more uncertainty.

The public hearing document does not provide information on the level of uncertainty that maybe applied through Alternative 6b or how such an application of management uncertainty would impact recreational regulations. As a result, the SBCBA recommends that the management of uncertainty be conducted by the fishery managers not the stakeholders across all sectors.

If you have any questions or comments please email or give me a call.

Very truly yours,

Capt. Mike Pierdinock

Capt. Mike Pierdinock
SBCBA, President
sbcamp@gmail.com

Cc: Dan McKiernan, MassDMF
Ron Amidon, MassF&G

Atlantic Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

PUBLIC HEARING DOCUMENT



February 2021

(Revised in May 2021)

Prepared by the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC or Council)
and the
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC or Commission)



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2.0 INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROVIDING PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC or Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC or Commission) will collect public comments on the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment during 5 public hearings to be held from March 24th through April 8th, and during a written public comment period extending until April 23rd. Written comments may be sent by any of the following methods:

1. **Online** at <https://www.mafmc.org/comments/bluefish-allocation-rebuilding-amendment>
2. **Email** to the following address: mseeley@mafmc.org
3. **Mail or Fax** to:
Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901
FAX: 302.674.5399

If sending comments through the mail, please write “Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment” on the outside of the envelope. If sending comments through email or fax, please write “Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment” in the subject line.

All comments, regardless of submission method, will be compiled for review and consideration by both the Council and Commission. **It is not necessary to separately submit comments to the Council and Commission or submit the same comments through multiple channels.**

Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend any of the following 5 public hearings and to provide oral or written comments at these hearings.

Date and Time	State or Regional Grouping	
Wednesday, March 24 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida	Chris Batsavage (NC), 252-241-2995 Mel Bell (SC), 843-953-9007 Doug Haymans (GA), 912-264-7218 Hannah Hart (FL), 321-861-5058
Thursday, March 25 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Delaware, Maryland, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and Virginia	John Clark (DE), 302-739-9914 Michael Luisi (MD), 443-758-6547 Martin Gary (PRFC), 804-456-6935 Ellen Bolen (VA), 757-247-2269
Tuesday, March 30 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Connecticut and New York	Justin Davis (CT), 860-447-4322 Maureen Davidson (NY), 631-444-0483
Thursday, April 1 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island	Megan Ware (ME), 207-446-0932 Cheri Patterson (NH), 603-868-1095 Nichola Meserve (MA), 617-626-1531 Nicole Lengyel (RI), 401-423-1940

Date and Time	State or Regional Grouping	
Thursday, April 8 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	New Jersey	Joseph Cimino (NJ), 609-748-2020

For additional information and updates, please visit: <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>. If you have any questions, please contact either:

Council contact

Matthew Seeley, Mid-Atlantic Fishery
Management Council
mseeley@mafmc.org
302-526-5262

Commission contact

Dustin Colson Leaning, Atlantic States
Marine Fisheries Commission
dleaning@asmfc.org
703-842-0714

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND AMENDMENT PURPOSE

3.1 Amendment Purpose, Next Steps, and Decision Trees

The purpose of this amendment is to consider modifications to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) goals and objectives, current allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors, current commercial allocations to the states, initiate a rebuilding plan, revise the quota transfer processes, revise how the FMP accounts for management uncertainty, and revise *de minimis* provisions in the Commission's plan.

The current sector-based and commercial state-to-state allocations were set in 2000 using data from 1981-1989 and have not been revised since that time. Recreational catch and harvest data are provided by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). In July 2018, MRIP released revisions to their time series of catch and harvest estimates based on adjustments for a revised angler intercept methodology (used to estimate catch rates) and a new effort estimation methodology (namely, a transition from a telephone-based effort survey to a mail-based effort survey). These revisions resulted in much higher recreational catch estimates compared to previous estimates, affecting the entire time series of data going back to 1981. These data revisions have management implications due to the fixed commercial/recreational allocation percentages defined in the FMP. These allocation percentages do not reflect the current understanding of the recent and historic proportions of catch and landings from the two sectors. Since these allocation percentages are defined in the Council and Commission FMPs, they cannot be modified without an FMP amendment. This amendment will consider whether the allocations are still appropriate and meeting the objectives of the FMP. In reviewing/adjusting the allocations, the need for transfers may be reduced, however, improvements to the transfer processes will also be reviewed.

Bluefish was deemed overfished with overfishing not occurring as a result of the 2019 Operational Assessment. Therefore, the Council is mandated to initiate a rebuilding plan within two years of notice by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Regional Administrator. Under a rebuilding plan, the stock will be considered rebuilt once spawning stock biomass reaches the target biomass (spawning stock biomass maximum sustainable yield proxy) of 198,717 mt. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires the overfished stock to be rebuilt within ten years once the regional office notifies the Council of the overfished

state. Under the current amendment timeline, the rebuilding plan would be implemented at the beginning of 2022.

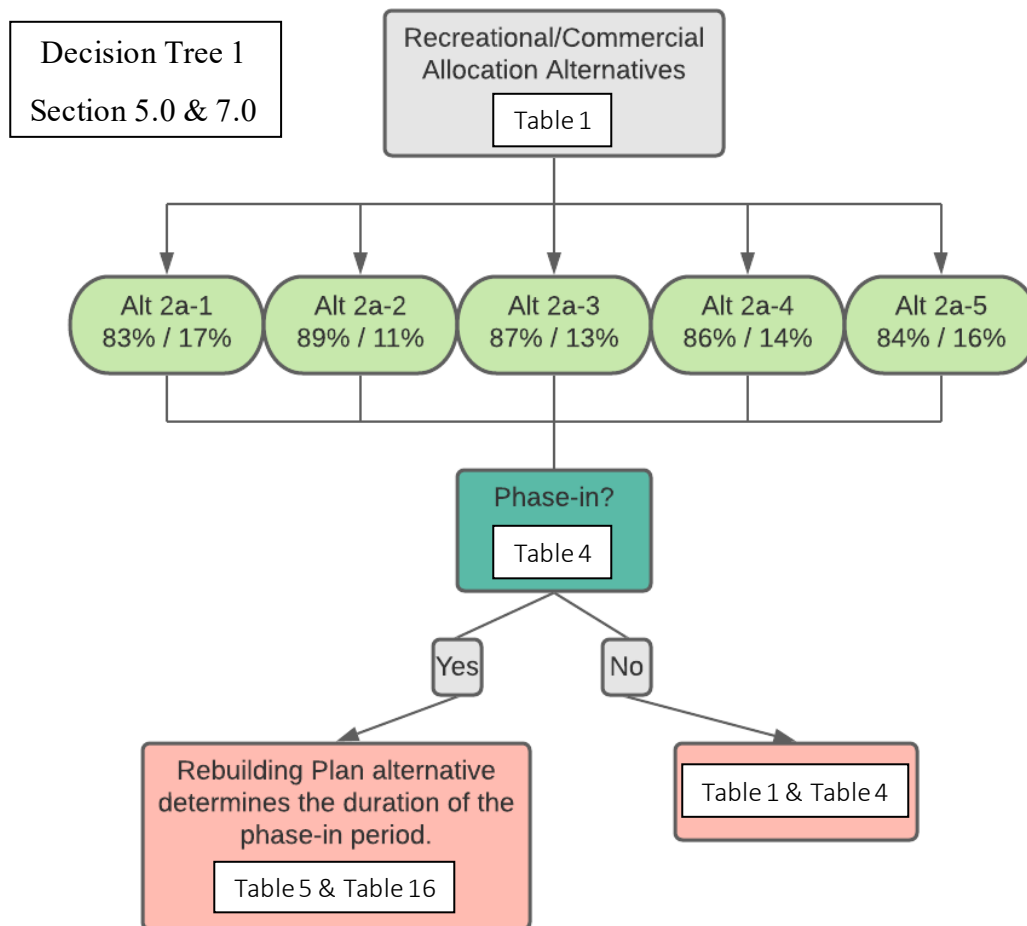
Several other issues identified during scoping for this action were considered by the Council and Board for inclusion in this amendment but have since been removed. Some of those issues will be taken up through other initiatives or actions. More information on removed issues is available in past meeting documents and meeting summaries for this amendment, available at: <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>.

What Happens Next?

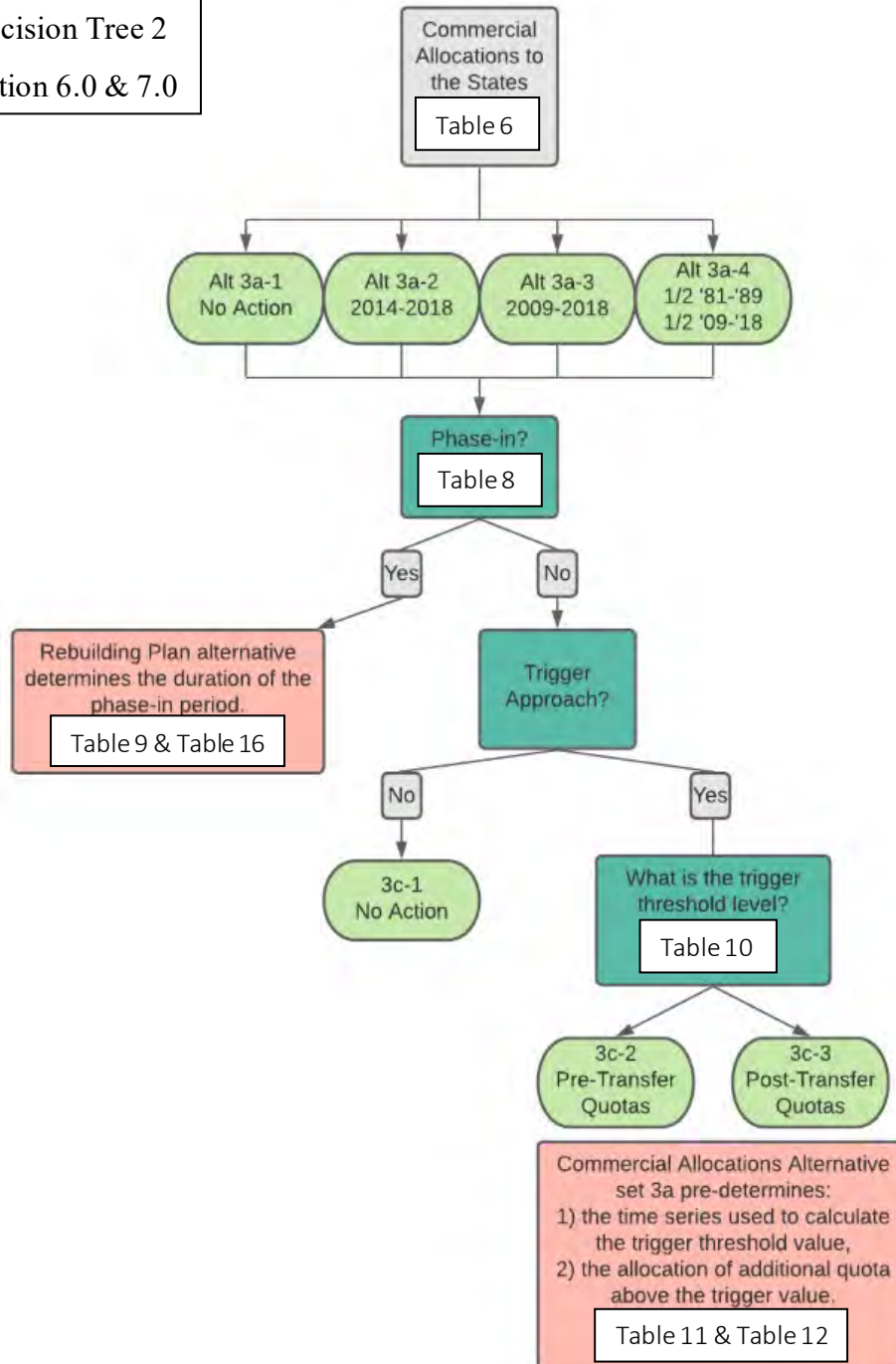
This document supports a series of public hearings and a public comment period scheduled to take place during [March/April 2021]. Following public hearings, written and oral comments will be compiled and provided to the Council and Board for review. These comments will be considered prior to taking final action on the amendment, which is tentatively scheduled for May/June 2021. The Council's recommendations are not final until they are approved by the Secretary of Commerce through the National Marine Fisheries Service, so the timing of full implementation of this action will depend on the federal rulemaking timeline. This rulemaking process is expected to occur in 2021, with the intent for revised measures (if applicable) to be effective at the start of the 2022 fishing year.

Decision Trees

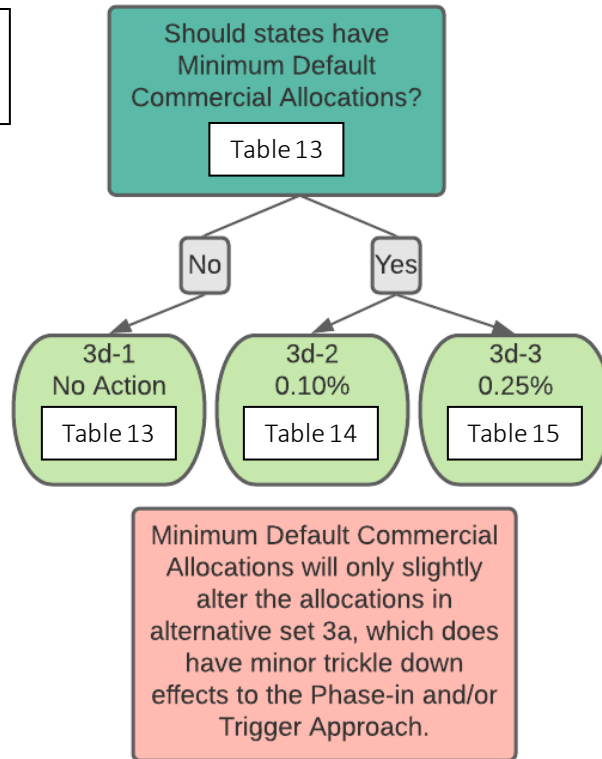
In some instances, decisions in one section will dictate how other alternative sets should be interpreted. Decision trees 1-3 are included to help guide public comment on those sections that are tied together (i.e., Sections 5, 6, and 7). For example, the preferred rebuilding alternative will have a specified duration. That duration will dictate the amount of years allocation changes will be phased-in, should phase-in alternatives be a preferred alternative. **Note: Click the table number to jump to that table.**



Decision Tree 2
Section 6.0 & 7.0



Decision Tree 3
Section 6.4



4.0 FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Council and Board are considering revisions to the existing FMP goals and objectives for bluefish through this amendment. The no action/status quo option keeps the existing FMP goals and objectives that were developed in 1991. The proposed FMP goals and objectives include revisions based on input provided by the public, bluefish advisory panel members, and Council and Board members.

Please note: While these revisions are not included as an explicit alternative within this amendment, the proposed revisions are not final until approved by the Council and Board. **The Council and Board are seeking feedback from the public on the proposed revisions during the public hearing process.**

4.1.1 Current Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

Goal: Conserve the bluefish resource along the Atlantic coast.

Objective 1: Increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery.

Objective 2: Provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish.

Objective 3: 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.

Objective 4: Prevent recruitment overfishing.

Objective 5: Reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

4.1.2 Impacts of Maintaining Current Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

Under the status quo option, the Bluefish FMP goals and objectives would remain unchanged. According to the summary of public comments submitted during the scoping hearing process, only 10% of submitted comments were in support of the status quo. More than half (55%) of submitted comments were in favor of re-evaluating and/or revising the FMP goals and objectives. About 13% of comments did support maintaining one or more of the current goals and objectives, but not the entirety of those listed under the status quo option.

4.2.1 Proposed Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

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

Objective 1.1: Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.

Objective 1.2: Promote practices that reduce discard mortality within the recreational and commercial fishery.

Objective 1.3: Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states by promoting compliance and to support the development and implementation of management measures.

Objective 1.4: Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.

Objective 1.5: Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource.

Goal 2: Provide fair and equitable access to the fishery across all user groups throughout the management unit.

Objective 2.1: Ensure the implementation of management measures provides fair and equitable access to the resource across to all groups along the coast.

Objective 2.2: Consider the economic and social needs and priorities of all groups that access the bluefish resource in the development of new management measures.

Objective 2.3: Maintain effective coordination with stakeholder groups to ensure optimization of economic and social benefits.

4.2.2 Impacts of Revising the Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

The proposed changes and additions to the Bluefish FMP goals and objectives are anticipated to have neutral to positive social impacts ¹ to bluefish fishery stakeholders. The majority of comments submitted during the scoping process were in support of revising the goals and objectives altogether and an even larger majority supported revising at least some of the current goals and objectives. The proposed Goal 1 commits to stakeholder engagement in the interest of maintaining sustainable recreational fishing and commercial harvest. A commitment to stakeholder engagement is likely to improve attitudes about the FMP among bluefish fishery stakeholders. The proposed Goal 2 ensures fair and equitable access to the fishery across all user groups. According to Crew Survey results in 2012 and 2018, the majority of commercial crew and hired captains reported that they believe the regulations in their primary fishery are too restrictive and fewer than half agree that the fines associated with breaking the rules are fair. For at least the commercial harvest user group, the proposed Goal 2, ensuring fair and equitable access, would likely have positive impacts on their attitudes towards the FMP and its objectives. There may be positive or negative social impacts to the various recreational angling sectors as the Council and Board consider mode-specific regulations.

5.0 COMMERCIAL/RECREATIONAL ALLOCATION ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

Section 5.1 describes the alternatives for commercial and recreational allocations for bluefish, along with their expected impacts. The range of allocation alternatives includes options that would maintain the current allocations, as well as options to revise allocations based on updated data using modified base years. Section 5.2 describes options to phase in any allocation changes over multiple years, and the expected impacts of these phase-in provisions.

Under the current FMP for bluefish, the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) equals the fishery level Annual Catch Limit (ACL), which is then divided into a commercial and recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) based on the allocation percentages defined in the FMP. Sector-specific expected discards are subtracted from the sector-specific ACTs to derive a commercial quota and a Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL).

Commercial discards are considered negligible within the bluefish fishery (NEFSC 2015). Recreational discards are estimates based on the MRIP B2s (released alive). Managers assume a 15% mortality rate on the released alive fish (NEFSC 2015). The number of fish are converted to

¹ Social impacts are impacts that directly affect the human communities with focus outside of the economics (Appendix A).

weight by multiplying by the average weight of landed fish coastwide in a given year. This approach assumes that the weight of released fish is equal to the weight of landed fish.

Aside from the status quo option (alternative 2a-1), the following approaches revise the allocation percentages based on modified base years or different data sets.

5.1 Commercial/Recreational Allocations

5.1.1 Commercial/Recreational Allocation Alternatives

Table 1 lists the alternatives under consideration for the commercial and recreational bluefish allocation percentages based on both catch and landings data. The current allocations for bluefish are based on commercial and recreational landings data from 1981-1989 that have not been updated with a renewed understanding of historic fishery performance. The current allocations for bluefish are represented by the no action/status quo alternative (alternative 2a-1, highlighted in green in Table 1).

Table 1: Bluefish commercial/recreational allocation alternatives. The current allocations are highlighted in green.

Allocation Percentages	
Alternative	Basis
2a-1: 83% recreational, 17% commercial	No action/status quo (1981-1989 landings data)
2a-2: 89% recreational, 11% commercial	Multiple approaches: 2014-2018 and 2009-2018 catch data
2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial	1999-2018 catch data
2a-4: 86% recreational, 14% commercial	Multiple approaches: 1981-2018 catch data; 2014-2018 and 2009-2018 landings data
2a-5: 84% recreational, 16% commercial	Multiple approaches: 1981-2018 and 1999-2018 landings data

5.1.2 Impacts of Commercial/Recreational Allocation Alternatives

Alternatives 2a-2 through 2a-5 result in lower commercial allocations and higher recreational allocations compared to the no action/status quo alternative (2a-1). Table 2 compares the commercial and recreational allocation alternatives by displaying the percent change in allocation share from the status quo alternative. The relative percent change to each sector's allocation differs notably. Since the commercial sector's share of the fishery-level ACL is much smaller by comparison to the recreational sector's share, any changes to the allocation percentages have a larger impact on the commercial sector relative to the impact on the recreational sector.

Table 2: Percent change (in green and red) of commercial and recreational allocations for each alternative relative to status quo. The grey boxes refer to the status quo alternative.

Alternative	2a-1	2a-2	2a-3	2a-4	2a-5
Proposed Recreational Allocation	83%	89%	87%	86%	84%
% Change from Status Quo	0%	+7%	+5%	+4%	+1%
Proposed Commercial Allocation	17%	11%	13%	14%	16%
% Change from Status Quo	0%	-35%	-24%	-18%	-6%

An increase in the recreational allocation would result in increased RHLs compared to the current allocations. RHLs are tied to recreational measures such as possession limits, fish size restrictions, and open/closed seasons. These measures are adjusted as needed to allow the RHL to be achieved, but not exceeded. Depending on the magnitude of the increase, an increased recreational allocation may not allow for liberalized recreational management measures compared to recent years in all cases. In some cases, recreational restrictions may still be needed if the allocation increase is not enough to account for recent increases in the MRIP harvest estimates.

Liberalizing or restricting recreational measures can impact angler access to bluefish. Increased access could take the form of more fish to take home (under higher possession limits and/or lower minimum fish sizes) and more opportunities to target the species (under longer open seasons), while decreased access could mean the ability to retain fewer fish and reduced opportunities to target the species. This can affect angler satisfaction, revenues for for-hire businesses (e.g., by impacting demand for for-hire trips), and revenues for support businesses such as bait and tackle shops.

With respect to the commercial sector, alternatives other than status quo will result in lower quotas relative to status quo with impacts described below.

Social Impacts

Alternative 2a-1 is anticipated to have positive social impacts for commercial stakeholders in general due in part to the support for the status quo from written and oral comments received during the amendment scoping process. The plurality of comments (41%) supported the status quo on Issue 2: Commercial/Recreational Allocation (MAFMC et al 2020). Moreover, the majority of commercial crew surveyed in both the 2012 and 2018 Crew Surveys reported that the rules and regulations change so quickly that it can be hard to keep up. While these results are not necessarily representative of bluefish commercial crew in general, they do align with the overall sentiment supporting the status quo among those who provided comment during the scoping process.

Alternative 2a-2 would increase the recreational fishery allocation by 6 percentage points and reduce the commercial allocation by the same amount using 2014-2018 and 2009-2018 catch data. Results from the Commercial Crew Survey indicate that the majority of crew and hired captains believe the rules and regulations in their respective commercial fisheries are too restrictive. An increase in allocation to the recreational sector could allow for a liberalization of measures, potentially providing positive social impacts. Further reducing the commercial allocation could lead to negative impacts with respect to commercial fishers' attitudes towards management, as

well as detrimental impacts on the ability of some fishers to continue to participate in the fishery. According to the Social Performance Indicators², the five most highly engaged communities in the commercial bluefish fishery from 2009 to 2019 are: 1) Wanchese, NC; 2) Montauk, NY; 3) Narragansett/Point Judith, RI; 4) Hampton Bays/Shinnecock, NY; and 5) New Bedford, MA (Figure 1). For commercial bluefish stakeholders located in these ports, the reduction in allocation to the commercial fishery may have the most substantial negative social impacts.

Relative to the status quo alternative, alternative 2a-2 would have positive impacts for recreational user groups, and in particular for those groups in communities that are highly engaged in and reliant upon recreational fisheries. The top fifteen communities in recreational fishing engagement and reliance are displayed in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Please note that the recreational fishing engagement and reliance scores are not bluefish specific, the metrics were based off of fishing engagement and reliance for all recreational species. For a more thorough introduction of community fishing engagement and social vulnerability indicators please reference Appendix A.

These communities are likely to benefit from Alternative 2a-2, but some may see greater positive social impacts based on relative social vulnerabilities and reliance on the recreational industry. Communities in NC in particular, such as Topsail Beach, Hatteras, and throughout the Outer Banks, have high reliance on recreational fisheries while at the same time moderate to high poverty, labor force vulnerability, and housing vulnerability. Increasing recreational allocations for bluefish could improve economic opportunities and result in positive social outcomes for these communities in particular.

Alternative 2a-3 proposes to set the recreational allocation at 87% and adjust the commercial allocation down to 13%, based on the 1999 to 2018 catch data. Under alternative 2a-4, the recreational allocation would be set to 86% and the commercial allocation would be 14%, based on multiple approaches including 1981-2018 catch data, 2014-2018 landings data, and 2009-2018 landings data. The commercial and recreational impacts described for alternative 2a-2 likely apply to a lesser degree to alternatives 2a-3 and 2a-4 considering that the shifts in allocation from the commercial to the recreational sector are smaller than what is proposed in alternative 2a-2.

Under alternative 2a-5, the recreational allocation would increase slightly from the status quo to 84% and the commercial allocation would correspondingly decrease slightly to 16%. These allocation determinations would be based on multiple approaches using the 1981-2018 and 1999-2018 landings data. Alternative 2a-5 is expected to have neutral to low positive social impacts on the recreational bluefish fishery relative to the status quo, whereas 2a-5 would likely produce neutral to low negative impacts on the commercial fishery as compared to the status quo. While the allocations would change, the increases and decreases for each user group are comparatively minimal to alternatives 2a-2, 2a-3, or 2a-4.

At the community level, impacts may be greatest for communities with or near recreational fishing sites, communities where for-hire businesses are based, and communities with tourism that is impacted by recreational fishing.

² <https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/socialsci/pm/index.php>.

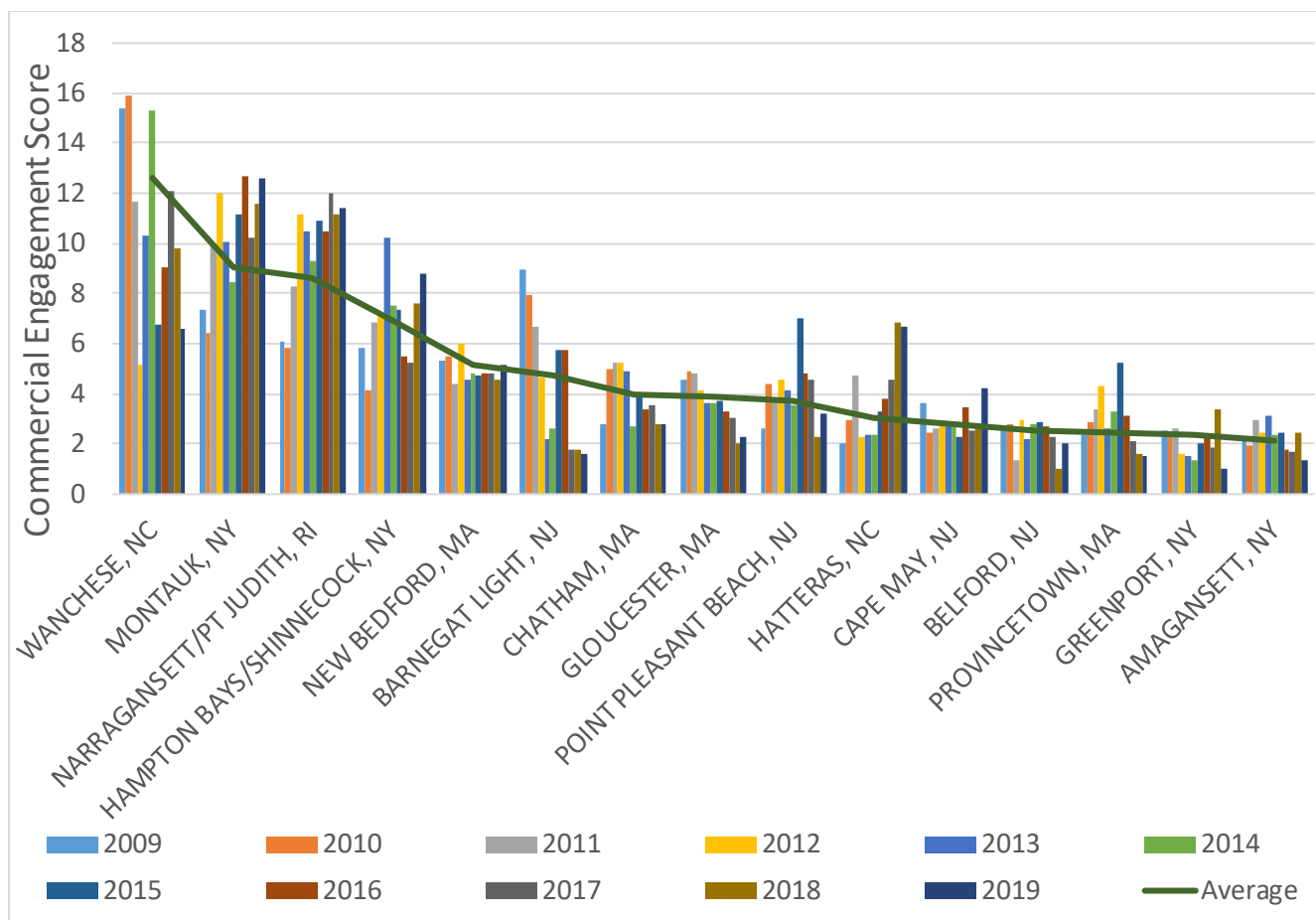


Figure 1: Commercial Bluefish Engagement Scores by Community: Top Fifteen Communities in Average Engagement from 2009-2019.

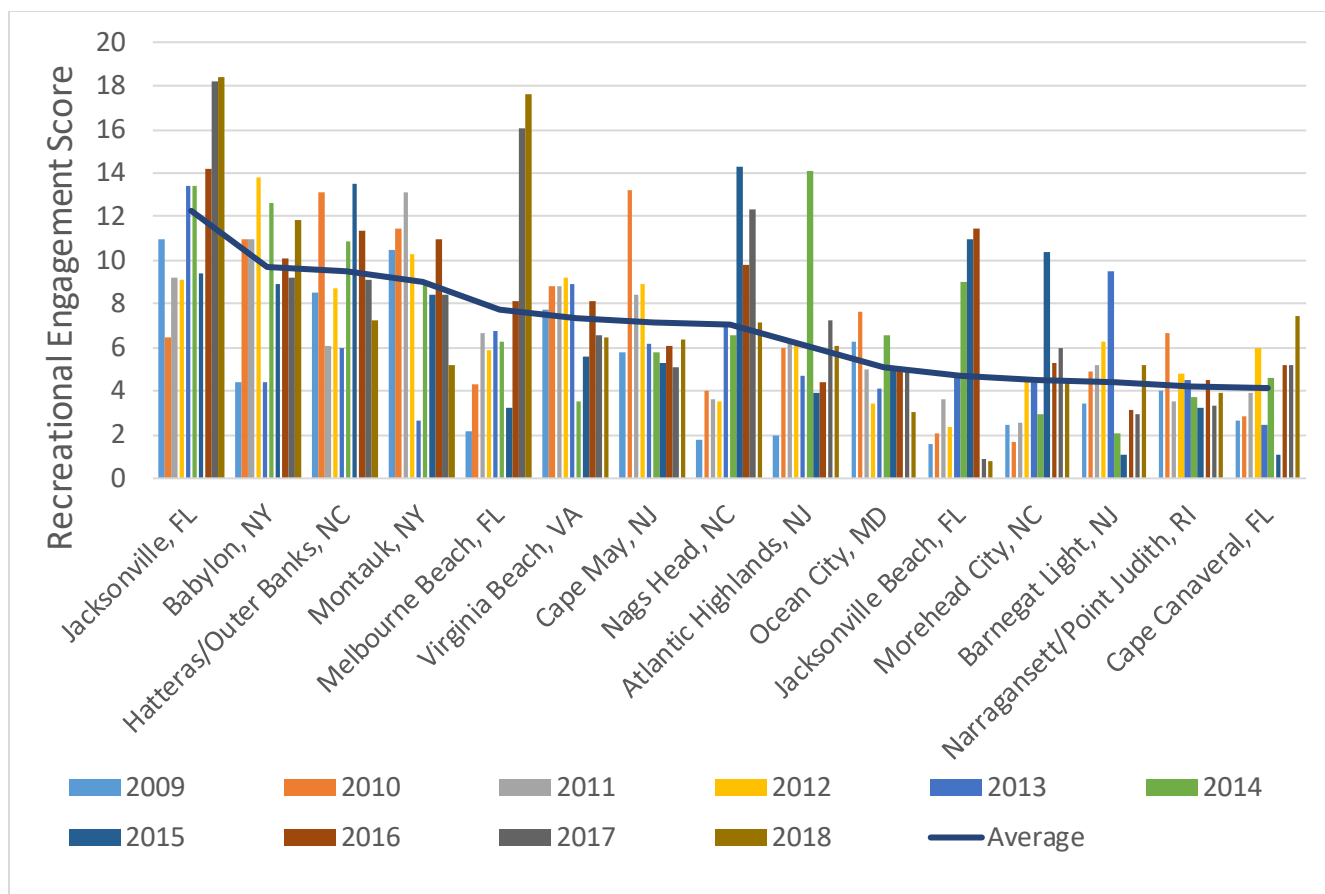


Figure 2: Recreational Fishing Engagement Scores by Community: Top Fifteen Communities in Average Engagement from 2009-2018.

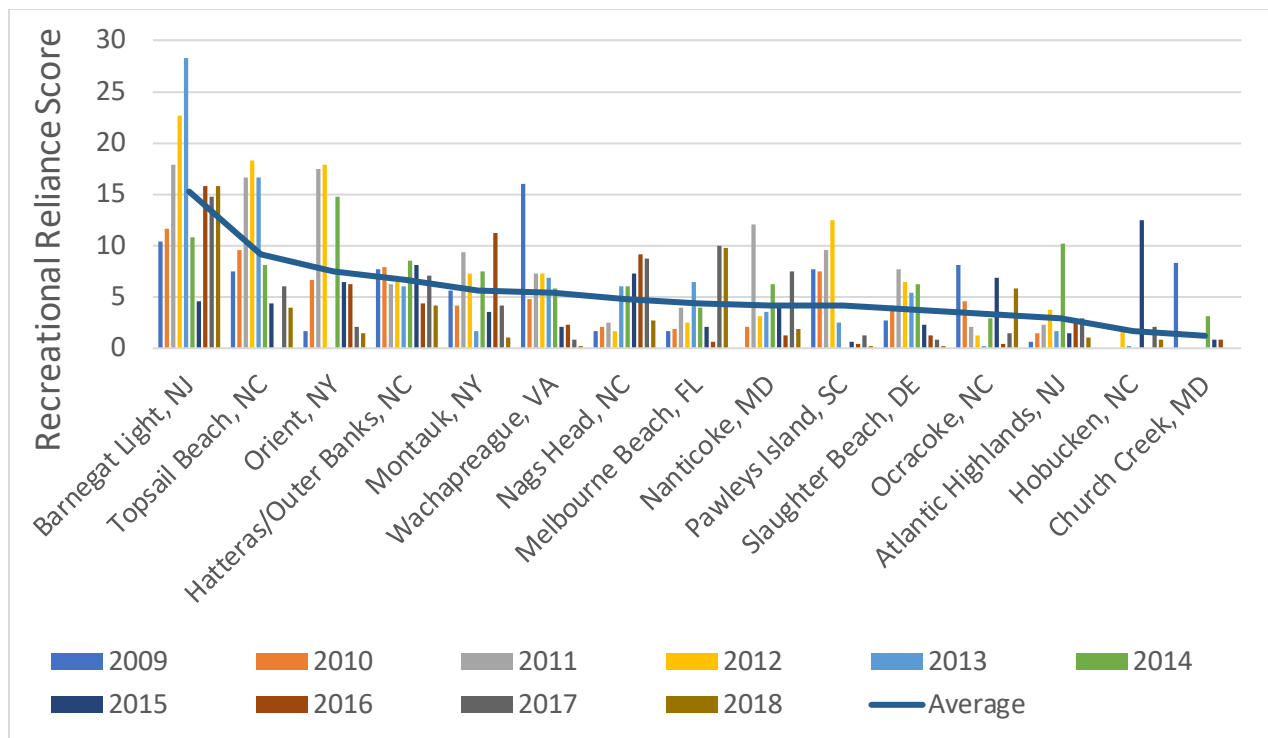


Figure 3: Recreational Fishing Reliance Scores by Community: Top Fifteen Communities in Average Reliance from 2009-2018.

Economic Impacts

Aside from the no action/status quo alternatives, all alternatives result in a reduced allocation to the commercial sector, which is expected to decrease commercial quotas compared to the current allocations. The commercial sector could experience a loss in revenue due to corresponding decreased quotas and a reduction in potential landings of bluefish. However, with the exception of 2020, the commercial sector has not fully utilized its post transfer quota in over a decade, so a decrease in allocation may not necessarily lead to a decrease in commercial landings or revenues in the long term. The economic analysis discussed below looks at historical landings to inform the potential future economic impacts of a reduction in the commercial allocation.

The economic impacts stemming from alterations in the commercial pre-transfer bluefish allocations were assessed using historical realized and predicted bluefish landings for the commercial sector. The time series used spans from 1999-2019³ where realized landings are compared to pre-transfer quota across the various proposed sub-alternatives, allocating 17% (i.e., the status quo), 11%, 13%, 14%, or 16% of the ACL to the commercial sector (sub-components 2a-1 to 2a-5, respectively) (Figure 4). A key assumption of this analysis is that all the allocated quota is landed. When comparing the pre-transfer allocated quota to the total realized landings, there are 14 of 95 cases where the pre-transfer quotas exceed the realized landings quantities. Each allocation sub-alternative (2a-1 to 2a-5) contains at least one year in which the pre-transfer

³ Regulations and catch limits for this fishery are not clearly defined until Amendment 1 (approved in 1999). The year of 2019 was the last full year of data on record when this economic assessment was drafted.

commercial allocation exceeds the realized annual commercial landings, suggesting that in these years, the pre-transfer allocation would not have been a limiting factor in landing bluefish. Ultimately, losses in landings resulting from smaller pre-transfer quota allocations relative to realized landings becomes relevant if transfers from the recreational sector to the commercial sector are discontinued.

Post transfer, projected quotas exceed the realized commercial landings for all alternatives each year except in for 2a-2 and 2a-3 in 2001, 2015 (2a-2 only) and 2016. However, if MRIP recalibration was factored into these years when transfers occurred, the commercial sector may not have actually received any transfers (or the transfers may have been much smaller). Ultimately, if sector transfers are to continue and are not substantially lower than previous years, changes in landings stemming from the pre-sector transfer quota allocations are expected to be minimal.

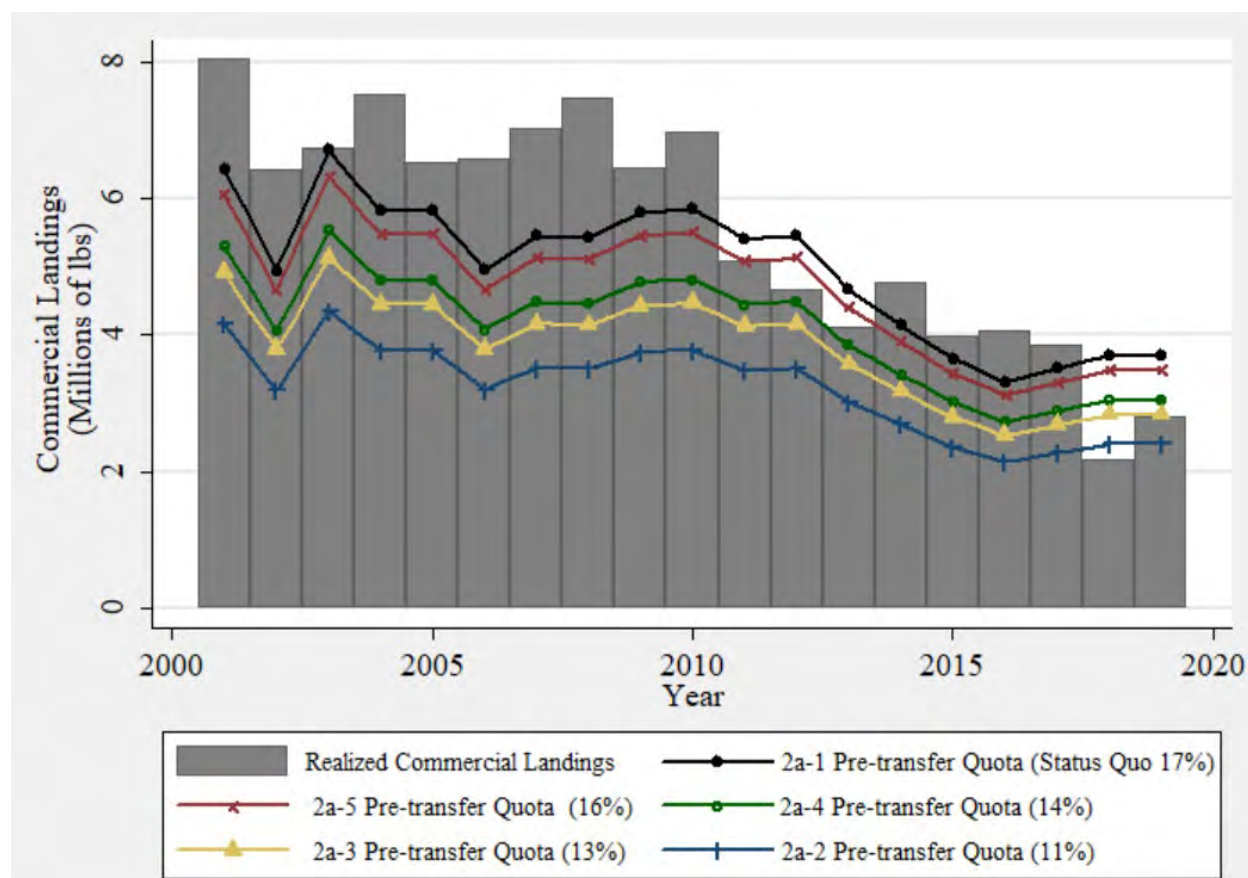


Figure 4: Realized commercial bluefish landings and proposed pre-transfer commercial landings (Millions of lbs.) by sub-allocation alternative and year (2001-2019).

For this analysis, commercial revenues are estimated for allocations under the status quo of pre-transfer quota (i.e., 17% of the ACL) and are compared to revenues estimated under the four additional proposed allocation sub-alternatives (2a-2–2a-5, 11%, 13%, 14%, and 16% of the ACL) to provide insight into how allocation changes could impact revenue. Revenues are estimated using the allocated pre-transfer quota percentage and all quota is assumed to be landed. The price model

described in Appendix B is used to generate average annual ex-vessel bluefish prices at the various landings levels. The pre-transfer landings are multiplied by the predicted price and presented in 2020 constant dollars as the estimated revenue. Average differences in revenues between the status quo (17% of the ACL) and the additional proposed allocation percentages are presented in Table 3. Over 1999-2019, annual revenues decrease by an average of \$200K (6%), \$590K (18%), \$790K (29%) and \$1.19M (35%) under the 16%, 14%, 13% and 11% commercial allocations relative to the 17% allocation, respectively. Average differences in annual revenues decrease in magnitude when averaged over the last 10 years and further decrease when compared to the 5-year average annual revenue differences driven by relatively lower historical ABC's from 2010-2019. This analysis is informative in the potential average reduction in revenue that may be experienced under each allocation alternative. However, it is important to remember that this analysis assumes that the entire commercial quota be landed, which may not always be the case, especially when considering that commercial quotas will increase substantially as the stock rebuilds back to the biomass target.

Table 3: Average differences in estimated commercial bluefish revenues by pre-transfer alternative relative to the pre-transfer quota status quo (2a-1 vs. 2a-2-5).

Time Series	Average Differences in Estimated Revenues (Millions of 2020 Constant Dollars)			
	11% Commercial Quota (2a-2) vs 17% Status Quo (2a-1)	13% Commercial Quota (2a-3) vs 17% Status Quo (2a-1)	14% Commercial Quota (2a-4) vs 17% Status Quo (2a-1)	16% Commercial Quota (2a-5) vs 17% Status Quo (2a-1)
Averaged over Entire Time Series (1999-2019)	-\$1.19M	-\$0.79M	-\$0.59M	-\$0.20M
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>0.14</i>	<i>0.09</i>	<i>0.07</i>	<i>0.02</i>
Averaged over Past 10 Years (2010-2019)	-\$1.09M	-\$0.72M	-\$0.54M	-\$0.18M
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>0.08</i>	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.02</i>
Averaged over Past 5 Years (2015-2019)	-\$0.98M	-\$0.65M	-\$0.49M	-\$0.16M
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>0.03</i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<i>0.00</i>
Average Percent Decrease Relative to Annual Status Quo Revenues (1999-2019)	35%	24%	18%	6%

Note: This calculation does not consider transfers from the recreational sector and is based solely on the full utilization of the pre-transfer quota.

Impacts from a reduction in commercial quota will not be uniform across all states and commercial industry participants. Commercial fishermen from states that fully utilize quota are more likely to experience losses in revenue, restrictive trip limits, and seasonal closures to account for the reduced commercial quota. States that have historically underutilized their quota may still be impacted in the medium- to long-term; reduced access to quota may inhibit the ability for market expansion in the future. These states could also be impacted in the near-term depending on the magnitude of allocation reduction. If the commercial allocation is reduced substantially, quotas in some states may drop below what is currently being utilized. Again, the impacts across states are also dependent upon the state commercial allocation alternative selected in section 6.

Ultimately, alternatives 2a-2 through 2a-5 may limit the potential for market expansion and future increases in landings and ex-vessel revenue compared to the status quo alternative (2a-1).

Currently, accountability measures (AM)⁴ are implemented when the fishery-level ACL is exceeded, and a transfer was deemed not the cause of the overage. When there has been a sector transfer to the commercial fishery that is larger than the overage, there will be no transfer allowed in the following fishing year unless the transfer amount is smaller than the overage. However, given the bluefish stock is currently overfished, a combination of management measures and a pound for pound payback may be implemented.

Under section 9, management uncertainty is discussed. If alternative 6b is selected, which creates sector-specific ACLs, AMs will be modified to ensure overages by one sector do not affect the other sector, unless a transfer has occurred and was the cause of an overage.

It is difficult to identify and quantify the economic impacts stemming from increases in recreational bluefish quota. Without a demand model, it is impossible to estimate the changes in angler effort and expenditures resulting from quota increases. Qualitatively, increases in recreational bluefish quota is expected to have neutral or slightly positive economic impacts which may result from increases in recreational sector quota. Increases in bag limits might increase angler satisfaction as well as recreational for-hire and independent angler trips which would result in increased expenditures and effort. However, the economic impacts resulting from increases in recreational quota could be neutral given the high catch and release nature of the sector—where the same number of trips may occur despite the changes in quota.

Biological Impacts

As described above, all but the no action/status quo alternatives would reduce the commercial allocations, which would in turn result in lower commercial quotas than the no action/status quo alternatives.

Depending on the scale of the change, a decrease in the commercial quota or additional restrictions on the recreational fishery could lead to altered fishing behavior and increased regulatory discards compared to recent levels. Actual changes will depend on many factors such as weather, availability of other target species, and market demand. Discards are also influenced by availability of bluefish, both overall abundance and by size class. For example, a new large year class can lead to high availability of fish smaller than some states' minimum size for a few years, which can lead to increased regulatory discards. Lower availability of legal-sized fish can lead to decreased

⁴ Current accountability measures for bluefish can be found in Amendment 4: [Bluefish Accountability Measures](#).

discards. For these reasons, it is challenging to predict future discards based on changes in allocations.

In all cases, total dead catch will continue to be constrained by the overall ABC, which is set based on the best scientific information available and is intended to prevent overfishing. In this way, none of the alternatives are expected to change patterns in landings, discards, or fishing effort in such a way that they negatively impact stock status.

In 2019, the operational stock assessment indicated that the bluefish stock was at 46% of the biomass target level. The stock will begin a rebuilding program in 2022 with the goal of reaching the biomass target within ten years or less.

5.2 Allocation Change Phase-In

5.2.1 Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives

The alternatives listed in Table 4 consider if any changes to the allocation percentages considered through alternative sets 2a should occur in a single year (alternative 2b-1, no phase-in) or if the change should be spread out over 4, 5, or 7 years (alternatives 2b-2). The Council and Board agreed that if alternative 2b-2 is selected, the duration over which new allocations will be phased in will match the duration of the selected rebuilding plan (alternatives 4a-4d). The choice of whether to use a phase-in approach, and the phase-in approach duration, may depend on the magnitude of allocation change proposed. *A phase-in period may not be desired if the overall allocation change is relatively small.* However, larger allocation changes may be less disruptive to fishing communities if they are phased in over several years (Table 5).

Table 4: Bluefish commercial/recreational allocation change phase-in alternatives.

Phase-in Alternatives
2b-1: No phase-in
2b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the selected rebuilding plan

Table 5: Percent shift in bluefish commercial/recreational allocation per year for 4, 5, and 7-year phase-in options for all allocation change alternatives.

Bluefish Commercial/Recreational Allocation Change Phase-In			
Current allocation (2a-1): 83% recreational, 17% commercial			
Allocation Alternatives	4-year phase-in	5-year phase-in	7-year phase-in
2a-2: 89% Rec., 11% Comm.	1.5% change per year	1.2% change per year	0.86% change per year
2a-3: 87% Rec., 13% Comm.	1% change per year	0.8% change per year	0.57% change per year
2a-4: 86% Rec., 14% Comm.	0.75% change per year	0.6% change per year	0.43% change per year
2a-5: 84% Rec., 16% Comm.	0.25% change per year	0.2% change per year	0.14% change per year

5.2.2 Impacts of Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives

The biological, social, and economic impacts of the phase-in alternatives under consideration in this amendment are dependent on two main factors: 1) the difference between the status quo allocation percentage and the allocation percentage selected, and 2) the duration of the phase-in

period, which will be the same duration as the preferred rebuilding plan. Based on the range of allocation percentages for bluefish (Section 5.2.1), the commercial and recreational sector allocations could shift by as much as 1.5% per year, or as little as 0.2% per year under the above phase-in timeframes of 4-7 years. Ideally, minimal transfers will occur while phasing-in allocations considering reallocation will reflect more up-to-date landings history.

Considering the small range that the phased-in allocations would change over 4-7 years, minimal impacts are expected for the recreational fishery, which already holds the larger share of the ACL. However, a 1.5% shift in allocation away from the commercial sector is a much larger annual impact to the commercial sector relative to its smaller initial allocation. As such, a phase-in approach may slightly reduce the economic burden on commercial stakeholders. A phase-in would most likely have short-term economic benefits in the form of increased landings and revenues over the non-phase in alternative if all else was held constant.

Under Alternative 2b-1, the preferred allocation selected from the 2a set of alternatives will occur in a single year upon implementation. This will likely have a range of social impacts depending upon the alternative selected from the 2a allocation set. Alternative 2b-1 will likely have neutral to low negative impacts on the commercial fishery if alternatives 2a-4 or 2a-5 are selected, but the negative impacts increase substantially if alternatives 2a-2 or 2a-3 are selected due to the abrupt and sizeable change in allocations to the commercial fishery. However, this remains contingent on the continuation of sector transfers and if the transfers decrease in relation to historical transfers given the MRIP update.

By contrast, an abrupt shift from alternative 2b-1 in concert with 2a-2 or 2a-3 could have substantial short-term positive social impacts on the recreational fishery user group. A single year increase of 4-6% in the recreational allocation could provide additional employment and income opportunities, especially in communities most highly engaged in and/or reliant upon recreational fisheries in general (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Under alternative 2b-2, the new allocation selected from the 2a set of alternatives will be phased in over the period of time that matches the selected rebuilding plan. The phase-in approach of alternative 2b-2 will likely have the most substantial social impacts if alternative 2a-2 is selected, with diminishing impacts across the other alternatives with smaller percent changes in allocations. The 7-year phase-in approach may reduce the negative impacts to the commercial industry the most, with less than a one percent reduction in the commercial allocation per year. For communities that are the most highly engaged in commercial bluefish (Figure 1) a prolonged phase-in approach may buffer against negative social impacts that accompany abrupt employment and income losses that result from the allocation reductions associated with alternatives 2a-2 through 2a-5.

6.0 COMMERCIAL ALLOCATIONS TO THE STATES ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

The sections below describe alternatives for commercial allocations of bluefish to the states, along with their expected impacts. The range of allocation alternatives includes options that would maintain the current allocations as well as options to revise them based on updated data using modified base years. Only landings data were used to develop allocation alternatives since commercial discards are considered negligible. Section 6.2 describes options to phase in any

allocation changes over multiple years, and the expected impacts of these phase-in provisions. Section 6.3 describes options to implement quota-based triggers that would reallocate any commercial quota that exceeds a specified threshold, and the expected impacts of those trigger provisions. Section 6.4 describes options to implement minimum default allocations, and the expected impacts of these provisions.

The alternatives in section 6 are mutually exclusive, meaning the Council and Board can only choose one of the alternatives from set 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d. Considering section 6 contains multiple moving parts, the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) recommends that the Council and Board select either a trigger approach or minimum default allocation, but not both. Using too many management tools at once can overcomplicate the process and reduce the benefits associated with just using one approach.

6.1 Commercial Allocations to the States

6.1.1 Commercial Allocations to the States Alternatives

Table 6 lists the alternatives under consideration for the bluefish commercial allocations to the states using only landings data since commercial discards are considered negligible. The percent allocations represent the share of coastwide quota that is annually allocated to each state. The current allocations are represented by the no action/status quo alternative (alternative 3a-1, highlighted in green in Table 6), which was set through Amendment 1 using General Canvass Data.

Table 6: State-by-state commercial bluefish allocations along the U.S. Atlantic coast using different proposed time series. Percentages sum to > 100% due to rounding; actual allocations will not exceed 100% of quota.

Landings-Based Allocation Alternatives				
State	3a-1	3a-2	3a-3	3a-4
	No action/ Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)	10 year (2009-2018)	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.67%	0.00%	0.01%	0.49%
NH	0.41%	0.03%	0.12%	0.33%
MA	6.72%	10.64%	10.16%	7.66%
RI	6.81%	11.81%	9.64%	7.59%
CT	1.27%	1.18%	1.00%	1.19%
NY	10.39%	20.31%	19.94%	13.01%
NJ	14.82%	11.23%	13.94%	14.57%
DE	1.88%	0.58%	0.40%	1.47%
MD	3.00%	1.50%	1.84%	2.68%
VA	11.88%	4.62%	5.85%	10.26%
NC	32.06%	32.06%	32.38%	32.13%
SC	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%
GA	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%
FL	10.06%	6.07%	4.75%	8.59%
Total	100.02%	100.01%	100.03%	100.00%

6.1.2 Impacts of Commercial Allocations to the States Alternatives

Under alternative 3a-1, no changes to the commercial allocations would be made, meaning this alternative would result in impacts to the bluefish stock, non-target species, habitat, protected resources, and human communities that are generally similar to conditions in recent years. Bluefish landings and effort would continue to be constrained by the annual quotas and associated management measures. States would continue to be constrained to their existing state allocation, and the distribution of landings by state would remain similar to the generally stable levels observed since allocations were implemented in 2000 (Figure 5). Typically, landings by state as a percentage of coastwide landings do not fluctuate much from year to year since allocations are constant and most states land or come close to landing their quota. Exceptions do occur, as bluefish often display an idiosyncratic nature in movements into deeper waters offshore and up the coast, and states often receive transfers of quota from other states. Commercial landings from ME, NH, SC, and GA are minimal if they occur at all, since directed fisheries for bluefish do not exist in these states. The majority of landings in these states are incidental.

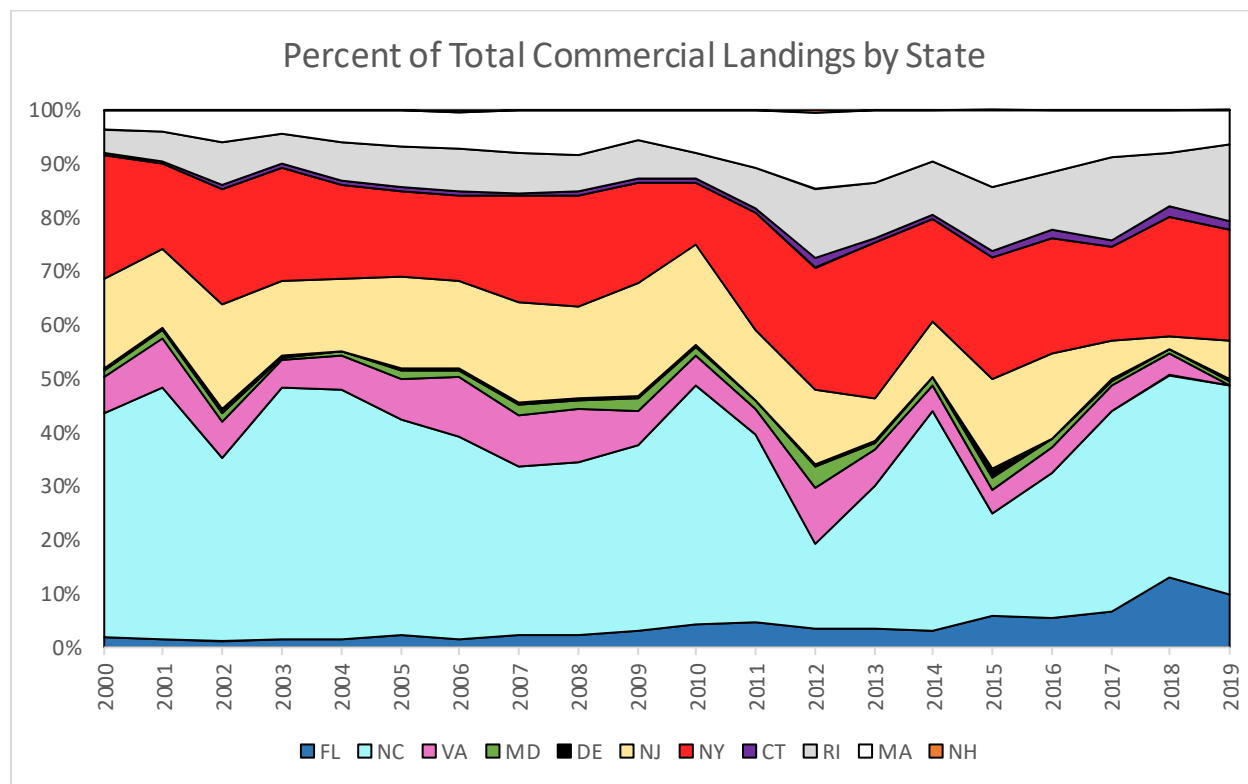


Figure 5: Percentage of coastwide landings by state from 2000-2019 (Atlantic coast excluding ME, SC and GA). ME, SC, and GA each account for less than 0.1% of landings each year.

Alternatives 3a-2 and 3a-3 are both based on recent time series (most recent 5 and 10-year time series, respectively) Therefore, the allocations are relatively similar given both time series reflect more recent landings. In contrast, alternative 3a-4 is based on the average of one recent time series (2009-2018) and one historic time series (1981-1989) to encompass the recent state of the commercial fishery as well as historical fishery performance. In capturing recent and historical fishery performance, the allocations associated with alternative 3a-4 equally weigh both time series

resulting in allocations that are closer to the status quo (3a-1) alternative than alternatives 3a-2 and 3a-3. Table 7 displays the four alternatives and the resulting percentage increase (blue) or decrease (red) relative to the current allocations (3a-1) for each state.

Table 7: State-by-state commercial bluefish allocations along the U.S. Atlantic coast including the percent change (negative in red; positive in blue) from status quo for each alternative.

Allocation Alternatives Based on Landings Data							
	3a-1	3a-2		3a-3		3a-4	
State	Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)		10 year (2009-2018)		1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18	
ME	0.67%	0.00%	-100%	0.01%	-99%	0.49%	-27%
NH	0.41%	0.03%	-93%	0.12%	-71%	0.33%	-20%
MA	6.72%	10.64%	58%	10.16%	51%	7.66%	14%
RI	6.81%	11.81%	73%	9.64%	42%	7.59%	11%
CT	1.27%	1.18%	-7%	1.00%	-21%	1.19%	-6%
NY	10.39%	20.31%	95%	19.94%	92%	13.01%	25%
NJ	14.82%	11.23%	-24%	13.94%	-6%	14.57%	-2%
DE	1.88%	0.58%	-69%	0.40%	-79%	1.47%	-22%
MD	3.00%	1.50%	-50%	1.84%	-39%	2.68%	-11%
VA	11.88%	4.62%	-61%	5.85%	-51%	10.26%	-14%
NC	32.06%	32.06%	0%	32.38%	1%	32.13%	0%
SC	0.04%	0.00%	-100%	0.00%	-100%	0.03%	-25%
GA	0.01%	0.00%	-100%	0.00%	-100%	0.01%	0%
FL	10.06%	6.07%	-40%	4.75%	-53%	8.59%	-15%
Total	100.02%	100.01% ⁵		100.03%		100.00%	

Social Impacts

The socioeconomic impacts of the existing allocations vary from state to state. Some states report negative economic impacts associated with current allocations due to a mismatch between their current allocation and their fishery capacity and/or bluefish availability in their waters. Commercial fishermen that land bluefish within a state that consistently harvests less than its quota have the benefit of operating within an unconstrained fishery. Future fluctuations in stock size are less likely to restrict fishing effort and mitigate revenue losses within that state. Each state manages their fishery differently in terms of total number of participants, trip limits, seasons, and other measures. A restriction in one or more of these measures is the driver of the social and economic impacts to industry participants. For example, a restriction in the daily trip limit will likely have an outsized impact on larger vessels compared to smaller vessels which may already harvest bluefish under the newly imposed daily trip limit.

The proposed allocation alternatives incorporate more recent data that are reflective of current state-specific performance and have the potential to increase economic efficiency. Nonetheless, any reduction in allocation may limit a state's potential for market expansion and future increases

⁵ Some percentages exceed 100% due to rounding but will be adjusted by the regional office upon implementation.

in landings and ex-vessel revenue compared to the no action alternative. Revenue is also variable in nature and is influenced by fluctuations in costs and prices.

Under alternative 3a-1, impacts are likely negative for commercial fishery stakeholders located in states with smaller proportions of allocations relative to what commercial stakeholders believe should be their states' allocations. The submitted scoping comments were divided roughly in half, with 52% of commenters supporting status quo and 48% in favor of altering the commercial allocations to the states. Among the commercial stakeholders who submitted comments opposed to altering the state allocations were those from NJ (and other states where reductions would take place) who were opposed to reductions in the NJ allocation. Others supported the status quo so long as flexibility remained to transfer quotas between states when necessary. On the other hand, roughly half of the submitted comments were in favor of revisiting state commercial allocations.

Alternative 3a-2 would set allocations using a five-year time series of landings data (2014-2018). MA, RI, and NY would see the most substantial increases in allocations using this approach, whereas NJ, VA, and FL would see the largest reductions in commercial allocations under this approach. NY has two of the top five (Montauk and Hampton Bays/Shinnecock) and four of the fifteen most highly engaged communities in the commercial bluefish fishery (Figure 3). Relative to status quo, alternative 3a-2 would likely result in positive social impacts for these NY communities given the substantial increase in allocations to the state. While FL and VA do not have any communities among the top fifteen in commercial bluefish engagement, four of the fifteen highest in engagement are located in NJ. Therefore, while FL and VA may not experience substantial negative impacts from the reductions in commercial allocations, NJ communities and user groups will likely experience negative social impacts from alternative 3a-2.

Under alternative 3a-3, a 10-year time series of landings data would inform the distribution of state allocations of commercial bluefish. This scenario would increase the allocations for RI (~3%), MA (~3%), and NY (~9%) considerably, but reduce allocations for VA and FL by a similarly substantial amount (~6%). Unlike alternative 3a-2, however, this alternative would only reduce the NJ allocation by less than one percent. Relative to the status quo, alternative 3a-3 would likely result in positive social impacts for commercial stakeholders in MA, RI, and NY, while at the same time limiting the negative impacts of reducing the allocation to NJ. As discussed under alternative 3a-2, communities in FL and VA do not feature among the most highly engaged in commercial bluefish activity (Figure 3), whereas MA, RI, NY, and NJ all have several communities with relatively high engagement in commercial bluefish fishery activities. Alternative 3a-3 provides relative benefits to most of the north Mid-Atlantic and New England user groups without affecting stakeholders in NJ as dramatically as alternative 3a-2.

Under alternative 3a-4, state allocations would be redistributed based partially on landings data from the 1981-1989 time series and partially on the 2009-2018 time series. This approach provides the most limited change in state allocations among other alternatives to the status quo. Northern states such as MA, RI, and NY would see modest increases in allocations (under 3%), while southern states such as NJ, VA, and FL would only see minor decreases in allocations (~2% or less). Alternative 3a-4 would likely result in neutral to low positive social impacts for the northern states and neutral to low negative impacts for the southern states relative to the status quo alternative. Among all state allocation alternatives, alternative 3a-4 would likely produce the least impactful changes to the social factors among commercial bluefish fishery stakeholders and communities.

Economic Impacts

The current state-level commercial allocations consider landings data from 1981-1989. Through transfers, states which predict to land bluefish quantities above their allocated quota can request additional quota from states which are not expected to land their allocation. This transfer increases the requesting state's landings and revenues, overall. In addition, no incentives are given to the state transferring out quota. In theory, this transaction could be classified as a Pareto improvement, where the transfer of quota does not negatively impact either participating party. Given that these state-to-state transfer channels exist, the economic impacts of the proposed reallocations at the state-level are expected to be marginal during years of higher bluefish population levels given that 1) allocations are based on realized landings/catch data and 2) states can transfer quota depending on their predicted performance in any given year. However, in years when the coastwide commercial quota is low resulting from an overfished stock, there may not be a sufficient number of states with additional quota available to cover other states' needs. During these years, states with a small allocation relative to their share of recent coastwide landings are likely to be negatively impacted the most. In addition, there is opportunity cost in the form of time and effort associated with transfers. There is a decrease in economic efficiency linked with the processing and approving of transfer requests. If transfers continue, the maximum economic benefits are associated with the reallocation plan which accurately captures each states' quota needs and minimizes the need for quota transfers.

To highlight how each allocation alternative relates to decreases in state quota transfers, both realized landings and average reallocation quantities by sub-alternative are depicted in Figure 6. Here, the distribution of each state's annual bluefish landings are summarized by box and whisker plots. The interquartile range of state-level bluefish landings are portrayed by the gray boxes and the whiskers, which indicate the maximum and minimum annual bluefish landing quantity for each state from 1999-2019.⁶ Average annual allocations are calculated using the percentages presented in 3a-1 to 3a-4 which include the status quo of allocations determined using the 1981-1989 time series of landings data, allocations based on the previous five years of state landings, allocations based on landings from the previous 10 years, and allocations based on landings from 1981-89 and 2009-18. State allocations by sub-alternative are calculated using the historical commercial sector quota and each allocation plan's corresponding quota percentage from 1999-2019. The average allocations by state and plan are plotted against realized bluefish landings for comparison.

There is no consistent trend in impacts stemming from each reallocation sub-alternative when compared across states. For example, under status-quo, quota allocations for FL would be much greater than the state's median landings value (above the state's maximum annual landings value); however, for NY, quota allocated under the status quo alternative would be much less than the state's median realized landings. When comparing which sub-alternative is closest in value to the median realized landings of each state, plan 3a-3 (ten-year) performs the best, with landings predictions closest to 38% of state median landings values and furthest from only 8% of state median landings.⁷ The 3a-2 plan (five-year) is second in performance based on this metric, which is closest to the median landings for 31% of states but furthest from the median value for 25% of states. The status quo (3a-1) plan had average allocations most similar to the median landings

⁶ The 1999-2019 time series is used to show how the proposed allocations align with realized landings over the past two decades.

⁷ This analysis excludes Georgia and South Carolina because each plan had an equal average allocation estimate.

values for 23% of states but is furthest from the median landings value for 67% of states. Lastly, 3a-4 (1989-91 & 2009-18 based allocations) is nearest to 8% of state median landings values but furthest from the median value of 0% of the states. It should be reiterated that landings and revenues may not be impacted by the state-level reallocations if transfer requests continue to be issued and approved. However, by determining the plan which best predicts state landings, the need for transfers will decrease—increasing efficiency within the commercial sector. A slight economic advantage is expected for states which are allocated quota above their historic median landings value, as these states will have the ability to land above their expected median landings without requesting additional quota from another state, while states which are allocated a quota slightly below their annual median may need to request quota on an annual basis.

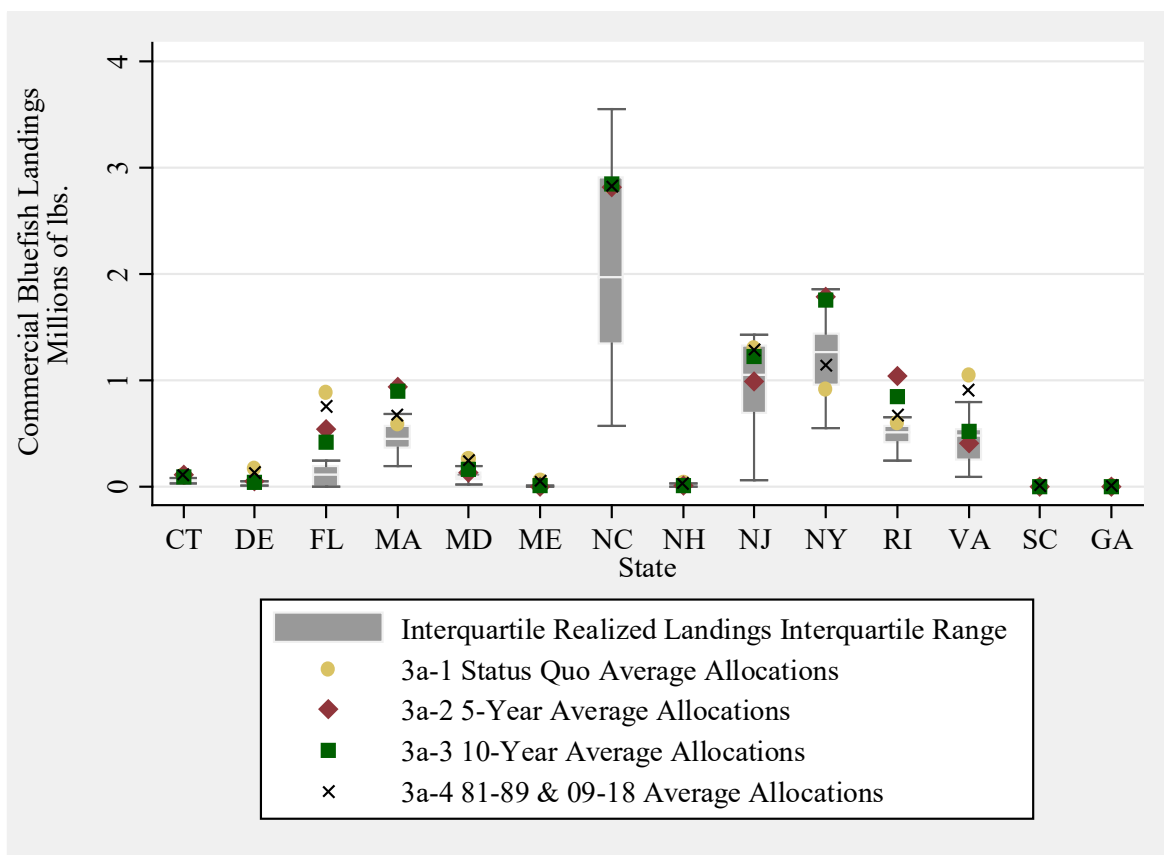


Figure 6: Realized annual commercial bluefish landings box and whisker plots (1999-2019) and average annual allocations (1999-2019) by proposed state-level allocation sub-alternative by state. Median landings represented by white horizontal line within box and whisker.

Biological Impacts

Currently, bluefish discards in the commercial fishery are considered negligible. Depending on the scale of the allocation change, a decrease in the commercial quota or additional restrictions on the commercial fishery could lead to increased regulatory discards compared to recent levels. Actual changes in discards will depend on many factors such as fishing behavior, weather, availability of other target species, and market demand. Discards are also influenced by availability of bluefish,

both overall abundance and by size class. Therefore, it is challenging to predict future discards based on changes in allocations.

6.2 Commercial Allocation Change Phase-In

6.2.1 Commercial Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives

The alternatives listed in Table 8 consider if any changes to the allocation percentages considered through alternative set 3a should occur in a single year (alternative 3b-1, no phase-in) or if the change should be spread out over 4, 5, or 7 years (alternative 3b-2). The Council and Board agreed that if alternative 3b-2 is selected, the duration over which new allocations will be phased in will match the duration of the selected rebuilding plan (section 7). The choice of whether to use a phase-in approach may depend on the magnitude of allocation change proposed. Larger allocation changes may be less disruptive to fishing communities if they are phased in over several years as identified by the percent point change (Table 9).

Table 8: Bluefish state commercial allocation change phase-in alternatives

Phase-in Alternatives
3b-1: No phase-in
3b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the selected rebuilding plan

Table 9: Percentage point shifts in bluefish state commercial allocation per year for 4, 5, and 7-year phase-in options for all allocation change alternatives

		5 year (2014-2018) See 3a-2			10 year (2009-2018) See 3a-3			1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18 See 3a-4		
State	Current Allocations	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year
ME	0.67%	-0.17%	-0.13%	-0.10%	-0.17%	-0.13%	-0.09%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.03%
NH	0.41%	-0.10%	-0.08%	-0.05%	-0.07%	-0.06%	-0.04%	-0.02%	-0.02%	-0.01%
MA	6.72%	0.98%	0.78%	0.56%	0.86%	0.69%	0.49%	0.23%	0.19%	0.13%
RI	6.81%	1.25%	1.00%	0.71%	0.71%	0.57%	0.40%	0.19%	0.16%	0.11%
CT	1.27%	-0.02%	-0.02%	-0.01%	-0.07%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.02%	-0.02%	-0.01%
NY	10.39%	2.48%	1.98%	1.42%	2.39%	1.91%	1.36%	0.65%	0.52%	0.37%
NJ	14.82%	-0.90%	-0.72%	-0.51%	-0.22%	-0.18%	-0.13%	-0.06%	-0.05%	-0.04%
DE	1.88%	-0.33%	-0.26%	-0.19%	-0.37%	-0.30%	-0.21%	-0.10%	-0.08%	-0.06%
MD	3.00%	-0.38%	-0.30%	-0.21%	-0.29%	-0.23%	-0.17%	-0.08%	-0.06%	-0.05%
VA	11.88%	-1.82%	-1.45%	-1.04%	-1.51%	-1.21%	-0.86%	-0.41%	-0.32%	-0.23%
NC	32.06%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.08%	0.06%	0.05%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%
SC	0.04%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%
GA	0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	<0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
FL	10.06%	-1.00%	-0.80%	-0.57%	-1.33%	-1.06%	-0.76%	-0.37%	-0.29%	-0.21%

Section 6.3 discusses alternatives related to the trigger approach. The trigger approach requires baseline quotas to determine the allocation of the quota greater than the trigger threshold. By

design, the phase-in approach alters each state's baseline quota on a yearly basis, which greatly complicates the calculation of each state's additional quota. The various combinations of phase-in and trigger alternatives would require numerous tables to display each state's allocation for each year during the phase-in period. *As such, examples are not included in this document and the combination of these approaches is not recommended.*

Section 6.4 discusses alternatives related to minimum default allocations. If the Council and Board decide to select both phase-in and a minimum default allocation, the percentage point shifts in Table 9 will be slightly smaller (see Appendix C).

6.2.2 Impacts of Commercial Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives

The impacts described in section 5.2.2 largely apply here to the commercial allocations to the states. The biological, social, and economic impacts of the phase-in alternatives for the commercial allocations to the states under consideration in this amendment are dependent on three main factors: 1) the difference between the status quo allocation percentage and the allocation percentage selected, 2) the duration of the phase-in period, which will be the same duration as the preferred rebuilding plan (section 7), and 3) the continuation of state-to-state transfers (section 8). Based on the range of allocation percentages in Section 5.1.1, the commercial allocations to the states could shift by as much as 2.48 percentage points per year (NY), or as little as 0.01 percentage points (NH, SC, GA) per year under the above phase-in timeframes of 4-7 years. Table 7 (red/blue showing change in section 6.1.2) presents the percent change that would be associated with each alternative.

In summary, under alternative 3b-1, the state allocations selected from among the 3a set of alternatives would occur in a single year upon implementation. The social impacts of alternative 3b-1 will align with whichever 3a alternative is selected for determining the future of state allocations of commercial bluefish.

Under alternative 3b-2, both the positive and negative social impacts discussed in section 6.1.2 would still apply, but they would be phased in over time. This could mitigate to an extent the negative social impacts by providing a buffer through smaller percentage changes over time, but also slow the realization of some states' increases in quota and their associated positive social impacts.

6.3 Commercial Quota Triggers

6.3.1 Commercial Quota Trigger Alternatives

This alternative set would create state allocations that vary with overall stock abundance and resulting coastwide commercial quotas (Table 10). Options are provided to implement quota-based triggers that would reallocate any commercial quota that exceeds a specified threshold. The selection of alternative 3c-1 would implement no trigger, which is consistent with the current FMP. Alternative 3c-2 would implement a trigger level equal to the average of the initial commercial quota for each time series associated with alternative set 3a that do not include transfers from the recreational to commercial fishery. Alternative 3c-3 would implement a trigger level equal to the average of the final commercial quota that includes transfers from the recreational to the commercial fishery. Ultimately, the commercial quota time series selected will correspond with the time series associated with the alternative selected in section 6.1.1.

Please note, no trigger threshold was developed under the status quo state commercial allocations because no formal commercial quotas existed prior to the implementation of Amendment 1 in 2000. As such, the trigger approach is not able to be implemented under status quo commercial allocations to the states (alternative 3a-1).

Table 10: Trigger threshold levels for additional quota allocations.

Commercial Quota Time Series	No Trigger Alternative: 3c-1	Pre-Transfer Alternative: 3c-2	Post-Transfer Alternative: 3c-3
No Action/Status quo [3a-1]	No trigger approach implemented	N/A	N/A
5-year (2014-2018) [3a-2]		3.67 M lbs	6.67 M lbs
10-year (2009-2018) [3a-3]		4.31 M lbs	8.21 M lbs
½ 1981-1989 and ½ 2009-2018 [3a-4]		4.31 M lbs*	8.21 M lbs*

*No formal commercial quota existed before the implementation of Amendment 1 in 2000; the average represents the quota for available years only.

For all years when the annual commercial quota is at or below a specified annual commercial quota trigger level, the state allocations would be specified by the selected option from alternative set 3a. In years when the annual coastwide quota exceeds the specified trigger level, quota up to the trigger amount would be distributed according to the chosen allocation alternative from alternative set 3a, and the distribution of quota over the trigger would be set according to the allocations listed in Table 11.

Table 11: Bluefish commercial state allocations applying a trigger threshold for all commercial allocation time series.

Allocation of additional quota greater than the trigger threshold.				
State	Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)	10 year (2009-2018)	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
NH	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
MA	7.50%	16.60%	19.60%	7.50%
RI	7.50%	16.60%	7.50%	7.50%
CT	3.00%	3.00%	0.10%	3.00%
NY	15.12%	16.60%	19.60%	17.03%
NJ	15.12%	16.60%	19.60%	17.03%
DE	3.00%	0.10%	0.10%	3.00%
MD	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
VA	15.12%	3.00%	7.50%	17.03%
NC	15.12%	16.60%	19.60%	17.03%
SC	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
GA	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
FL	15.12%	7.50%	3.00%	7.50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The allocations in Table 11 were developed by using the tiered approach displayed in Table 12 where the baseline quota allocations selected from alternative set 3a determine how the quota greater than the trigger will be allocated to each state. In summary, the trigger threshold level and the associated additional quota allocation are all informed by the time series selected in alternative set 3a.

Table 12: Range of baseline quotas and the associated additional quota allocation once a trigger threshold is surpassed.

Range of Baseline Quota Tiers	Associated Additional Quota Allocations
<=1%	0.10%
>1-5%	3.00%
>5-10%	7.50%
>10%	Remainder

Section 6.4 discusses alternatives related to minimum default allocations. If the Council and Board decide to select both a trigger approach and minimum default allocations, the percentages in Table 11 will shift slightly. On occasion, specific state allocations in the proposed time series will cross a threshold into a different percentage of associated additional quota (see Appendix C).

6.3.2 Impacts of Commercial Quota Trigger Alternatives

Between alternatives 3c-2 and 3c-3, the trigger thresholds associated with 3c-2 are more likely to be exceeded given the thresholds are much lower. These thresholds are approximately half those associated with alternative 3c-3 because they account for the commercial quotas prior to incorporating historical transfers from the recreational to commercial fishery. Figure 7 displays the four potential trigger thresholds and the post-transfer commercial quotas as well as total coastwide commercial landings for the years 2000-2018. Both of the potential pre-transfer trigger thresholds associated with alternative 3c-2 would have been exceeded by the commercial quota every year going back to 2000. By comparison, both of the potential post-transfer trigger thresholds associated with alternative 3c-3 would have been exceeded by the commercial quota for every year except 2015 and 2016 when the commercial quota was much lower. The trigger approach only impacts states directly in years when the trigger threshold level is exceeded. Following this logic, the impacts discussed in the economic impacts section are experienced to a greater degree under the lower pre-transfer trigger (3c-2) compared to the higher post-transfer trigger (3c-3).

The trigger approach could also provide additional beneficial social impacts or buffers against negative impacts, for states that are either receiving increased allocations or having allocations reduced. Therefore, alternatives 3c-2 and 3c-3 are likely to have a range of social impacts from neutral to low positive varying state-to-state, depending upon the alternative selected from the 3a set. Ultimately, the impacts are difficult to ascertain because of the number of combinations that can arise under the trigger option. Some states will experience neutral to positive impacts, others neutral to negative, and those impacts might change when quotas are below the trigger vs above the trigger. In summary, it is difficult to know what the impacts are, and the impacts will depend on other decisions made in this document.

Considering the bluefish FMP will be going through rebuilding starting at the end of this year, the FMAT concluded that it is unlikely the initial ABCs will be large enough to exceed the trigger threshold.

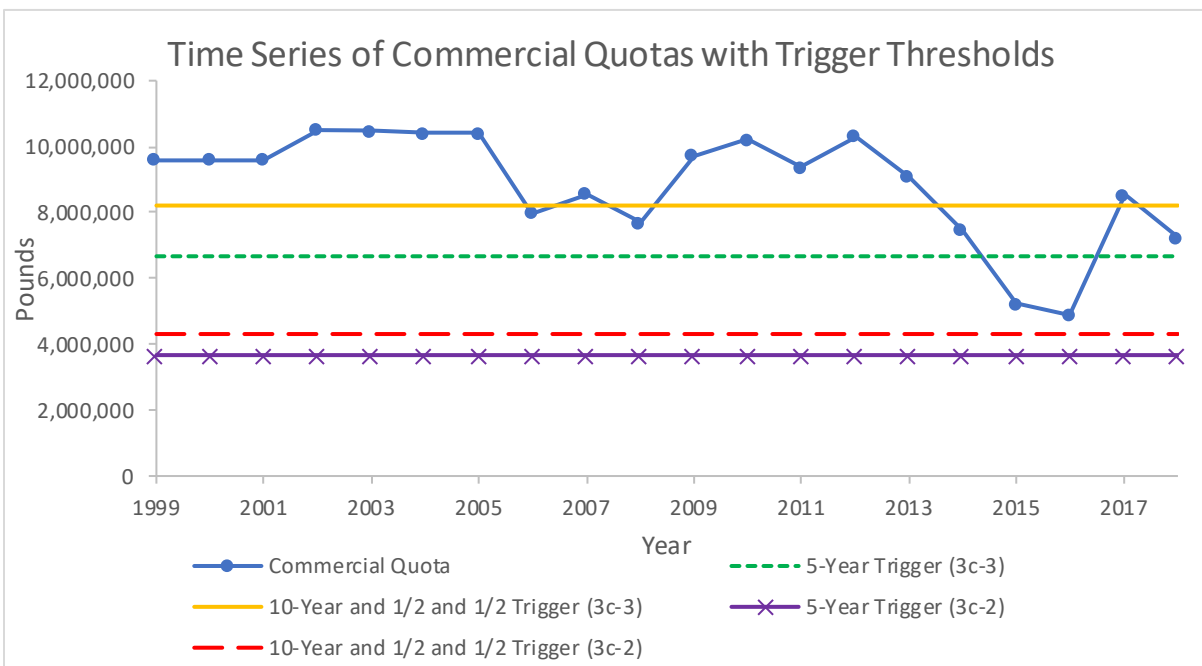


Figure 7: Trigger thresholds for additional quota compared to commercial quotas.

Economic Impacts

Section 6.3 would allocate quota differently above a specified pre- or post-transfer threshold (i.e., the trigger) than the allocation method described in section 6.1.1. To analyze the economic impacts of this difference in allocation, a commercial quota 100,000 lbs. above both the pre- and post-transfer threshold levels is used.⁸ Revenues are calculated at the state-level using allocations under the trigger scheme. The revenues generated from the trigger-allocated quota are compared to revenues generated under a no-trigger allocation scenario across the various commercial sector allocations proposed in section 6.3 (i.e., 3a-1 through 3a-4). Since ex-vessel bluefish prices are needed at the state-level and a state-level price model has yet to be developed, annual state ex-vessel bluefish prices, averaged over 1996-2019, are used for the calculation of revenues and reported in 2020 constant dollars. One limitation of this analysis is that average state prices omit the inverse relationship between ex-vessel prices and estimated landing quantities. Average state prices reflect landing quantities closer to that of the pre-transfer trigger threshold amounts, as bluefish landings have never reached the proposed post-transfer trigger threshold levels.

⁸ Average total realized bluefish landings from 1999-2019 equal 5.68 M lbs. which also informs the average price data used calculate revenues. Given that the post-transfer trigger quantities exceed the average realized landings, a minimum overage quantity of 100,000 lbs. was chosen to highlight the possible economic impacts of the trigger-induced allocation process of additional quota.

Conceptually, when the trigger is activated, states will receive greater quantities of quota if they are grouped into an allocation category which results in higher allocations than the non-trigger alternative allocation method. The opposite is true for a state that is allocated a higher percentage of quota under the non-trigger allocation but is grouped in an allocation bracket lower than its original allocation. For example, ME is allocated 0.67% under the status quo (i.e., 17% of the ABC for commercial sector pre-transfer allocations) with no trigger. With a trigger, the allocation of additional quota to ME would be set at 0.1% given that it falls in the $\leq 1\%$ allocation range, resulting in less allocated quota than would be received under the state's baseline allocation percentage. The state of MA, on the other hand, would be allocated 6.72% of the additional quota under the status quo with no trigger, but quota allocation after the trigger threshold would increase to 7.50% under the trigger sub-alternative.

When an additional 100,000 lbs. is allocated under the trigger vs. the non-trigger status quo, average revenues decrease for NC, ME and NH, when averaged across all state allocation alternatives (Figure 8). On average, NC revenues would decrease by \$7,912, ME by \$167, and NH by \$101. It should be noted, however, that whether a state earns increases or decreases in revenues varies across the allocation alternatives. For example, RI would earn a revenue increase of \$2,854 under 3a-2 (i.e., the five-year allocation) but a decrease in revenues (-\$1,275) under 3a-3 (i.e., the ten-year allocation). The highest increases in revenues when averaged across the alternatives are earned by MA, NJ and VA with increases of \$3,430, \$2,508, and \$1,378, respectively.

This analysis highlights the variation in economic outcomes and their dependence on the allocation sub-alternatives proposed in section 6.3. Though triggers would impact the initial allocation of the quota, this analysis assumes that each state will fully utilize their allocated quota with no state-to-state transfers. If additional allocations resulting from the trigger method are not utilized and transfers are to continue, there may be little change in landings/revenues and the burden of transfers will be the main economic consequence of this sub-alternative.

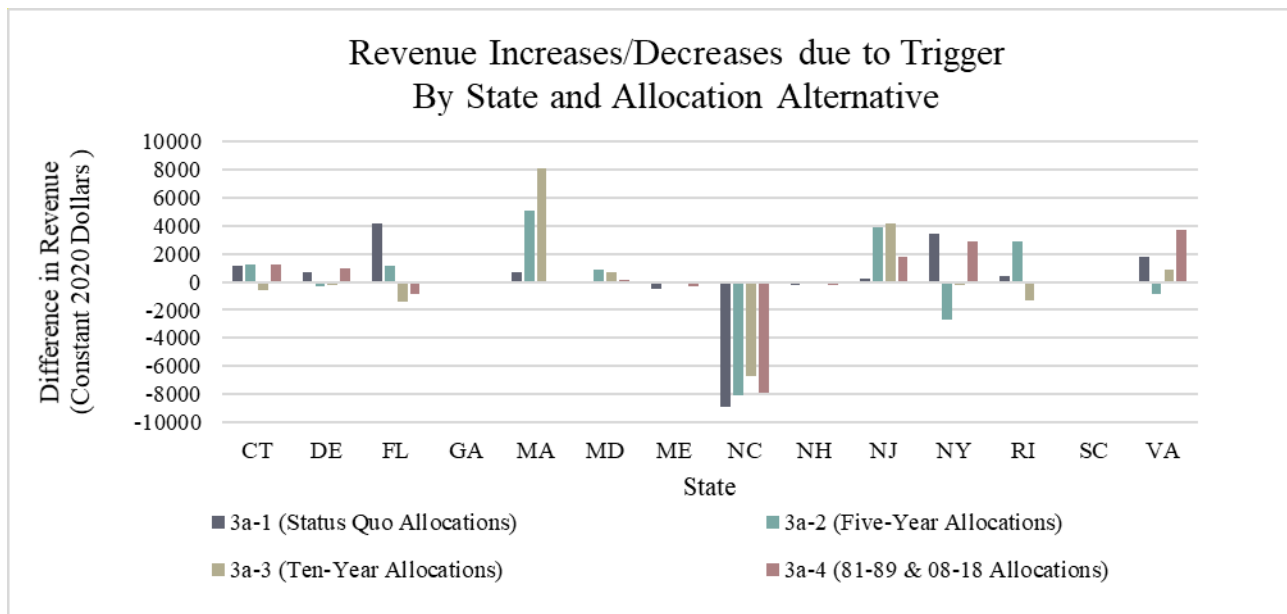


Figure 8: Differences in commercial bluefish revenues (2020 constant dollars) resulting from trigger-induced allocations by state and state-level allocation sub-alternative.

6.4 Minimum Default Allocations

6.4.1 Minimum Default Allocation Alternatives

This alternative set would establish minimum default commercial quota allocations for each state within the bluefish management unit. A minimum default allocation provides each state with a fixed minimum percentage allocation of the coastwide commercial quota, and the remainder would be allocated based on the commercial allocation alternative selected from section 6.1.1. The minimum default allocation alternatives are presented in Table 13. If 0.1% (3d-2) is selected, 1.4% of the allocation would be evenly distributed amongst the 14 states within the bluefish management unit. Then, the remaining 98.6% of the commercial quota would be distributed in accordance with the preferred alternative in section 6.1.1. If 0.25% (3d-3) is selected, 3.5% of the allocation would be evenly distributed to the 14 states. Then, the remaining 96.5% of the commercial quota would be distributed following the preferred alternative in section 6.1.1. Table 14 and Table 15 present the final state allocations with the incorporated minimum default allocations of 0.10% and 0.25%, respectively.

Table 13: Minimum default allocation alternatives.

Minimum Default Allocation Alternatives	
3d-1	No Action/Status quo: No Minimum Default Allocation
3d-2	0.10% Minimum Default Allocation
3d-3	0.25% Minimum Default Allocation

Table 14: State-by-state commercial bluefish allocations along the U.S. Atlantic coast using different proposed time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.10%.

3d-2		0.10% Minimum Default Allocation			
State	No Action 1981-1989	Status quo 1981-1989	5-year 2014-2018	10-year 2009-2018	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.67%	0.76%	0.10%	0.11%	0.58%
NH	0.41%	0.50%	0.13%	0.22%	0.42%
MA	6.72%	6.73%	10.59%	10.12%	7.65%
RI	6.81%	6.81%	11.74%	9.61%	7.58%
CT	1.27%	1.35%	1.26%	1.09%	1.28%
NY	10.39%	10.34%	20.12%	19.76%	12.93%
NJ	14.82%	14.71%	11.17%	13.85%	14.46%
DE	1.88%	1.95%	0.67%	0.49%	1.55%
MD	3.00%	3.06%	1.57%	1.92%	2.75%
VA	11.88%	11.81%	4.65%	5.87%	10.22%
NC	32.06%	31.71%	31.71%	32.03%	31.78%
SC	0.04%	0.14%	0.10%	0.10%	0.13%
GA	0.01%	0.11%	0.10%	0.10%	0.11%
FL	10.06%	10.02%	6.08%	4.78%	8.57%

Table 15: State-by-state commercial bluefish allocations along the U.S. Atlantic coast using different proposed time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.25%.

3d-3		0.25% Minimum Default Allocation			
State	No Action 1981-1989	Status quo 1981-1989	5-year 2014-2018	10-year 2009-2018	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.67%	0.90%	0.25%	0.26%	0.72%
NH	0.41%	0.65%	0.28%	0.36%	0.56%
MA	6.72%	6.73%	10.52%	10.05%	7.64%
RI	6.81%	6.82%	11.65%	9.56%	7.57%
CT	1.27%	1.48%	1.39%	1.22%	1.40%
NY	10.39%	10.28%	19.85%	19.49%	12.80%
NJ	14.82%	14.55%	11.09%	13.70%	14.31%
DE	1.88%	2.06%	0.81%	0.64%	1.67%
MD	3.00%	3.15%	1.69%	2.03%	2.84%
VA	11.88%	11.71%	4.71%	5.89%	10.16%
NC	32.06%	31.19%	31.19%	31.50%	31.25%
SC	0.04%	0.29%	0.25%	0.25%	0.28%
GA	0.01%	0.26%	0.25%	0.25%	0.26%
FL	10.06%	9.96%	6.10%	4.83%	8.54%

6.4.2 Impacts of Minimum Default Allocation Alternatives

Minimum default allocations were proposed to ensure states currently allocated a small share of the coastwide commercial quota do not lose their entire allocation through the re-allocation process. ME, NH, SC, and GA stand to benefit most from the implementation of a minimum default commercial allocation. All four of these states are currently allocated less than 1% of the coastwide quota. Furthermore, the allocation alternatives under consideration in Section 6.1.1 would provide these states with allocations close to 0%. The commercial fisheries in these states are quite small, but bluefish are still occasionally landed. Without a sufficient share of the commercial quota, fishermen operating within ME, NH, SC, and GA waters may be forced to discard incidental bluefish catch or travel further to offload landings in another state. The adoption of a minimum default allocation may reduce these negative biological and economic impacts. In addition, bluefish are historically a cyclical species and highly migratory. States like Maine and New Hampshire may encounter bluefish more in the future due to distribution shifts in the bluefish population. If this occurs, these two northern states would be afforded a small allocation that would allow some harvest of bluefish.

Alternatives 3d-2 and 3d-3 provide for minimum default allocations to states of 0.10% and 0.25%, respectively. Relative to the status quo/no action alternative, 3d-1, these minimum default allocations may result in neutral to low positive social impacts on state commercial bluefish stakeholders, depending upon the alternative selected from the 3a set. The difference between 3d-2 and 3d-3, however, is relatively small in terms of default percentages and thus the difference in social impacts between these two alternatives is anticipated to be neutral or negligible.

Economic Impacts

Differences in state bluefish revenues resulting from allocations with minimum defaults vs. allocations without the minimum defaults are calculated across the various state-allocation alternatives proposed (3a-1 through 4). Revenues are estimated and compared across both of the proposed minimum defaults (0.10% and 0.25%). Landings for each allocation series (3a-1 to 3a-4) are simulated using historic pre-sector transfer quota quantities given that pre-sector transfer allocations are closer to realized landings relative to post-transfer quantities (1999-2019) and the assumption that all allocated quota is landed is necessary for the analysis. The simulated allocated quota, and therefore estimated landings, for each series is multiplied by the average state ex-vessel bluefish price. Average annual state bluefish prices (\$/lb) are used rather than an econometric model as a peer-reviewed state-level annual price model has yet to be developed. The use of average state bluefish prices omits the inverse relationship between price and quantity of bluefish landed, which is a limitation of this specific analysis. The average difference in revenues under minimum default allocations and their non-minimum default counterparts are presented in Figure 9.

In terms of revenue gains or losses, NC's revenues decrease the most under the minimum default allocation, with average losses of \$55K and \$137K for the 0.10% and 0.25% minimum defaults, respectively (Figure 9). This is followed by NY and NJ where revenues decrease **on average** by **\$29K** and \$19K under the 0.10% minimum default and **\$66K** and **\$49K** under the 0.25% minimum default for NY and NJ, respectively. The states with the highest increases in revenues are NH, ME, GA and SC. This is not surprising given that these states have the lowest allocations across all of the state-level reallocation plans, all of which are allocated under 1% of the commercial quota on when averaged across the non-minimum default allocations. SC, GA, ME and NH earn average annual revenue increases of **\$21K**, \$21K, \$25K and **\$25K** under the 0.10% minimum default and \$52K, \$52K, **\$62K** and **\$62K** under the 0.25% minimum default, respectively. Revenues for the states not mentioned previously range from an average decrease of **\$8K** to average increase of **\$17K** for the 0.10% minimum default and an average decrease of **\$15K** to average gain of **\$41K** under the 0.25% minimum default when summarized across all proposed state-level allocation alternatives. Lastly, if transfers are to occur and if the states receiving minimum allocations are not projected to land their quota, it is possible for quota transfers to counteract the decreases in revenue stemming from minimum default allocations.

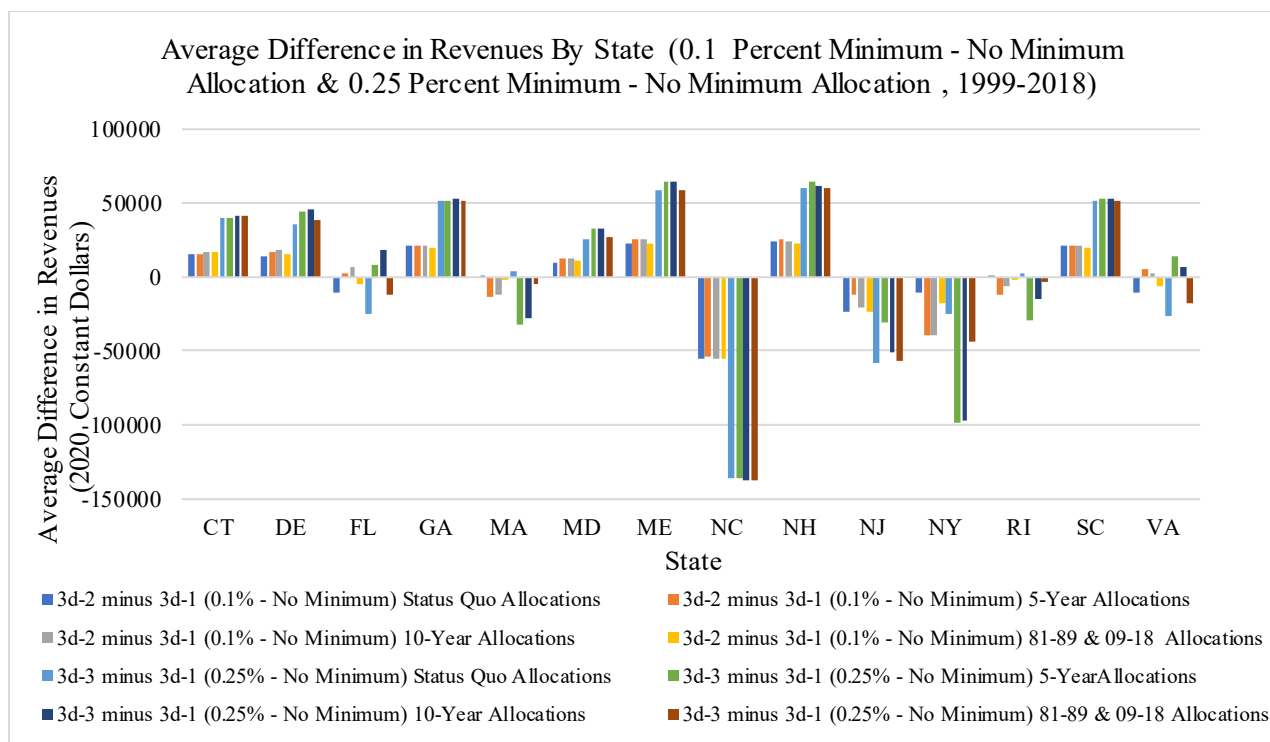


Figure 9: Average difference in commercial bluefish revenues under minimum default allocations and no minimum default allocations (1999-2019) by commercial allocation alternative and state.

7.0 REBUILDING PLAN ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

The 2019 operational stock assessment indicates that the bluefish stock is overfished, but overfishing was not occurring in 2019 ⁹. Section 304(e)(3) of the MSA states: “Within 2 years after...notification...the appropriate Council...shall prepare and implement a fishery management plan, plan amendment, or proposed regulations...to end overfishing immediately in the fishery and to rebuild affected stocks of fish...” Furthermore, the MSA states that FMPs shall “contain the conservation and management measures... necessary and appropriate for the conservation and management of the fishery to prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks, and to protect, restore, and promote the long-term health and stability of the fishery.” If adequate progress is not made through the rebuilding plan, the regional office will immediately make revisions necessary to achieve adequate progress. NOAA Fisheries technical guidance on MSA National Standard 1 recommends that in these situations the rebuilding fishing mortality proxy (F) be set at 75% of the target F. This means that if the selected rebuilding plan is demonstrating difficulty in achieving the target on time, F may be further decreased to achieve a rebuilt stock.

Spawning stock biomass (SSB) was estimated to be 91,041 metric tons in 2018, or 46% of the SSB target. The biomass target is the SSB associated with the F that achieves maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or SSB_{MSY} proxy. Under a rebuilding plan, the stock will be considered rebuilt once SSB reaches the SSB_{MSY} proxy equal to 198,717 mt (Figure 10). Once rebuilt, the MSY proxy is

⁹ [2019 Bluefish Operational Stock Assessment Report](#)

estimated to be 26,677 mt. Total fishing mortality is also available for reference (Figure 11). Again, MSA requires the overfished stock to be rebuilt within 10 years once the regional office notifies the Council of the overfished state. Under the current amendment timeline, the rebuilding plan would be implemented at the beginning of 2022.

In mid-2021, a management track assessment will be conducted to re-assess the bluefish stock. As a result of this assessment, the biological reference points may shift. Moreover, rebuilding projections will be rerun to reflect the updated status of the stock. Then, Council and Commission staff will work with the NOAA Fisheries regional office and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to identify how these new projections will be translated into future specifications.

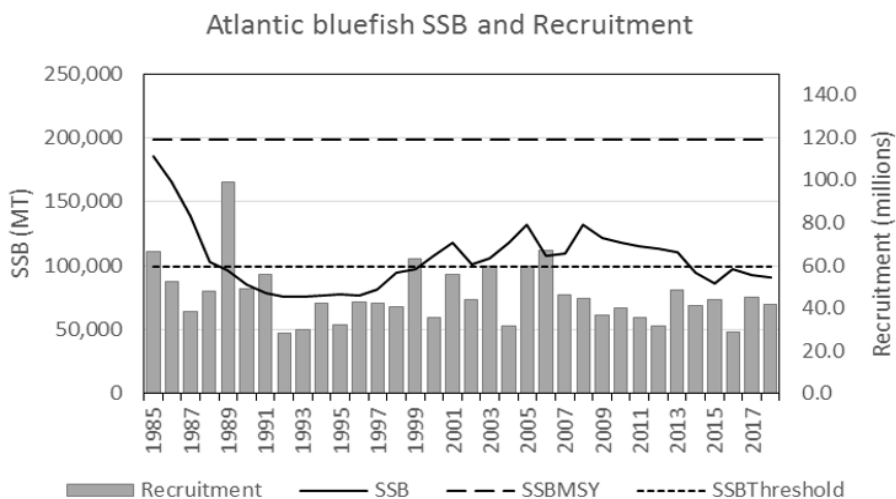


Figure 10: Atlantic bluefish SSB and recruitment at age 0 (R; gray vertical bars) by calendar year. The horizontal dashed line is the updated SSBMSY proxy = SSB40% = 198,717 mt.

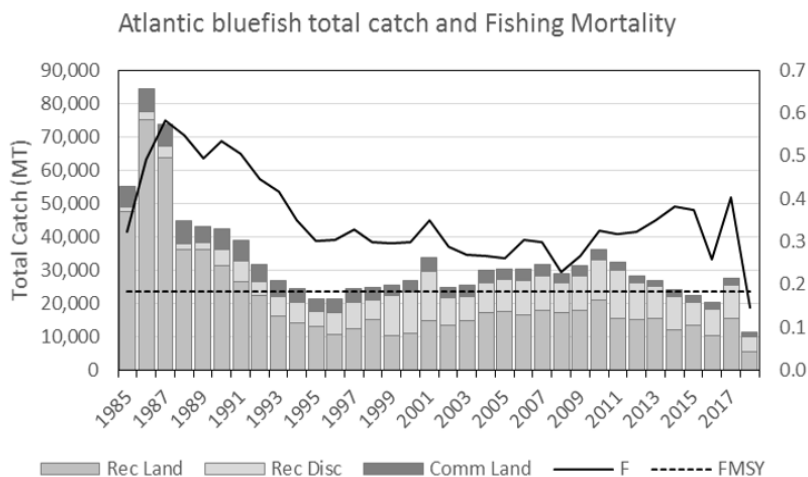


Figure 11: Total fishery catch (metric tons; mt; solid line) and fishing mortality (F, peak at age 3; squares) for Atlantic bluefish. The horizontal dashed line is the updated FMSY proxy = F35% = 0.183.

7.1 Rebuilding Plan Alternatives

This section introduces the four rebuilding plan alternatives under consideration, including status quo (Table 16). SSB values and catch projections are provided for reference for each of the three rebuilding plans. The proposed rebuilding plans assume all the projected catch will be caught. Regardless of which alternative is selected, the stock assessment scientist will perform assessment updates and rerun projections every two years. Each projection is based on current stock status information, meaning the catch values are subject to change depending upon the latest assessment. The SSC will then use the projections to develop recommendations for the specification packages that remain in line with the goals of the rebuilding plan.

Table 16: Rebuilding projection alternatives and the duration until rebuilt.

Alternative	Rebuilding Plan	Duration	Adjustment to Council Risk Policy
4a	No Action/ Status Quo	N/A	N/A
4b	Constant Harvest	4 years	No
4c	P* (Council Risk Policy)	5 years	N/A
4d	Constant Fishing Mortality	7 years	Yes

All rebuilding alternative sections contain tables detailing the biomass levels, fishing mortality, catch, SSB_{MSY} proxy, and $SSB_{Threshold}$. The P* approach includes all the same metrics, but in terms of the projected ABCs. Table 17, Table 18, and Table 19 all begin in 2019 despite the rebuilding plans beginning in 2022. These data are presented for reference to display the assumed catch values when the projection was run in 2020.

7.1.1 No Action/Status quo (Alternative 4a)

The no action/status quo alternative would not initiate a rebuilding plan, no changes to the current risk policy would occur, and the current specifications would remain in place, as described in the proposed rule for the 2021 specifications package¹⁰. The Council is legally bound to develop a rebuilding plan and this alternative is included as a formality.

7.1.2 Constant Harvest – 4-year Rebuilding Plan (Alternative 4b)

The 4-year constant harvest rebuilding alternative specifies that the stock be rebuilt by the end of 2025. The rebuilding plan projection presented in Table 17 and Figure 12 demonstrates that the projected catch and SSB values remains constant across the four years. However, as previously mentioned, the stock assessment scientist will conduct assessment updates and rerun projections every 2 years, which means the catch values may be adjusted up or down depending upon the assessment results. This alternative does not require an adjustment to the Council's risk policy because the catches are less than those described under the P* approach. In 2022, fishing mortality rates peak at $F=0.064$, but still remains below the overfishing threshold (MSY Proxy above 0.183). Rebuilding projections indicate that this alternative would be expected to rebuild bluefish to slightly above the SSB_{MSY} proxy as defined in the recent bluefish operational assessment (198,717 mt) by 2025.

¹⁰ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/11/05/2020-24364/fisheries-of-the-northeastern-united-states-atlantic-bluefish-fishery-2021-bluefish-specifications>.

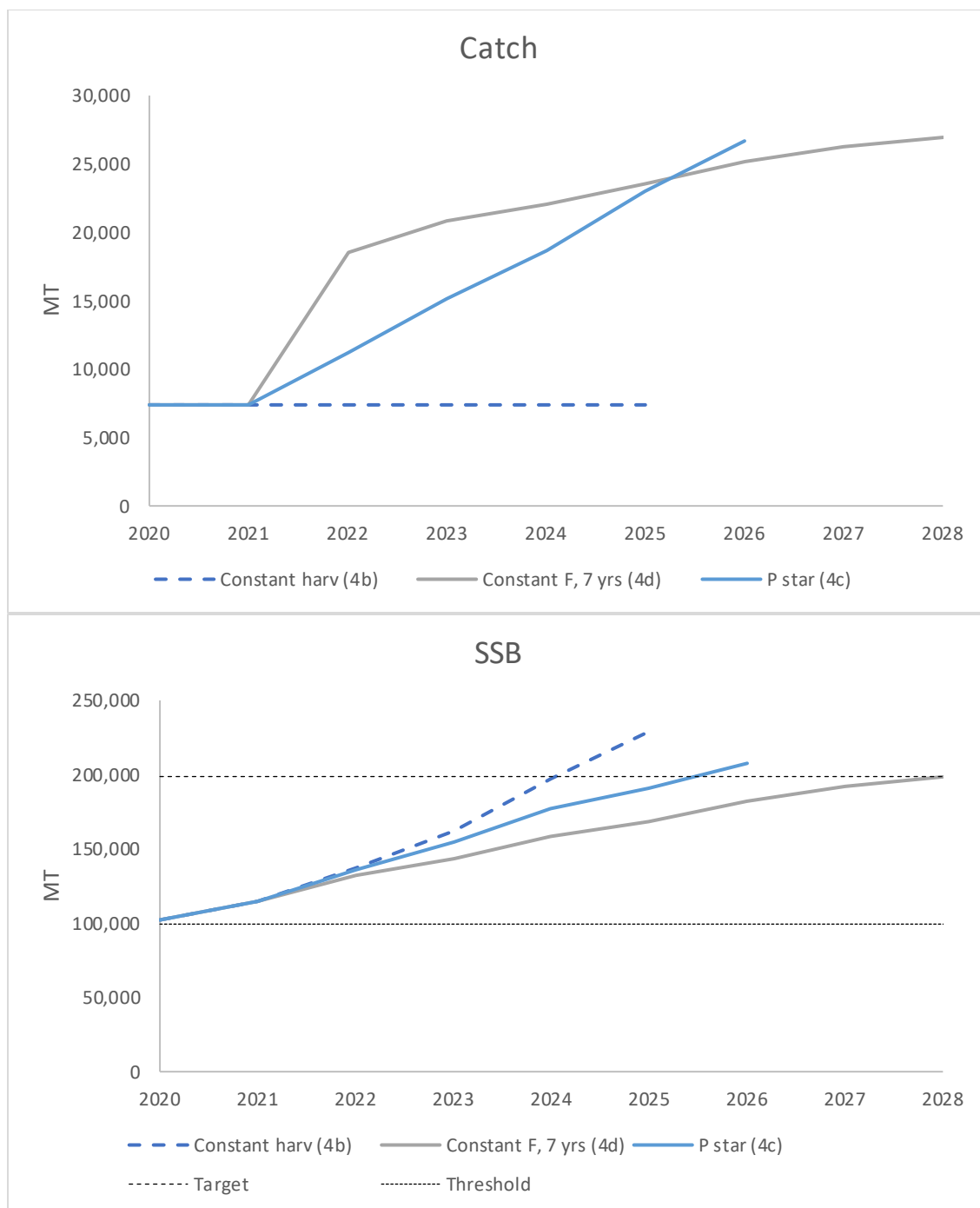


Figure 12: Rebuilding plan projections including catch (top) and SSB (bottom) for alternatives 4b, 4c, and 4d.

Table 17: Constant harvest projection to rebuild over 4 years.

Year	SSB (MT)	Recruits (000s)	F	Catch (MT)	SSBMSY (MT)	SSBthreshold (MT)
2019	92,779	43,282	0.279	22,614	198,717	99,359
2020	102,165	43,455	0.087	7,385	198,717	99,359
2021	115,085	43,428	0.075	7,385	198,717	99,359
2022	137,450	43,460	0.064	7,385	198,717	99,359
2023	162,495	43,353	0.052	7,385	198,717	99,359
2024	197,141	43,239	0.045	7,385	198,717	99,359
2025	229,121	43,379	0.039	7,385	198,717	99,359

7.1.3 P* Council Risk Policy – 5-year Rebuilding Plan (Alternative 4c)

The 5-year P* Council risk policy rebuilding alternative specifies that the stock be rebuilt by the end of 2026. The catch values shown in Table 18 are in accordance with the ABC control, which is guided by the Council's risk policy. Figure 12 provides a visual of catch and SSB rebuilding over the 5-year period. In 2022, the probability of overfishing is 29%. This coincides with a projected fishing mortality rate of $F=0.098$, which remains below the overfishing threshold ($F_{MSY} \text{ proxy} = F_{35\%} = 0.183$). Rebuilding projections indicate that this alternative would be expected to rebuild bluefish to slightly above the SSB_{MSY} proxy as defined in the recent bluefish operational assessment (198,717 mt) by 2026. As previously stated, the ABC values presented in Table 18 are based on the 2019 operational assessment and are subject to revision following each stock assessment update.

Table 18: Rebuilding projection based on P* using the Council's risk policy to rebuild over 5-years.

Year	OFL Total Catch (MT)	ABC Total Catch (MT)	ABC F	ABC Pstar	ABC SSB (MT)	SSBMSY (MT)	SSBthreshold (MT)
2019	15,368	22,614	0.280	0.183	92,732	198,717	99,359
2020	16,212	7,385	0.087	0.207	102,174	198,717	99,359
2021	17,205	7,385	0.075	0.239	115,012	198,717	99,359
2022	20,237	11,222	0.098	0.291	135,586	198,717	99,359
2023	23,998	15,181	0.113	0.338	154,257	198,717	99,359
2024	26,408	18,653	0.127	0.394	176,619	198,717	99,359
2025	28,807	23,048	0.144	0.431	191,063	198,717	99,359
2026	30,848	26,677	0.157	0.450	207,619	198,717	99,359

7.1.4 Constant Fishing Mortality – 7-year Rebuilding Plan (Alternative 4d)

The 7-year constant fishing mortality rebuilding plan alternative specifies that the fishing mortality rate be set constant across the duration of the rebuilding period with a rebuilt date set for 2028. Table 19 presents the project catch and SSB values associated with the rebuilding plan and Figure 12 presents catch and SSB over time. Starting in 2022 and for the duration of the rebuilding plan,

the fishing mortality rate is projected to be at $F=0.166$, which remains below the overfishing threshold. However, because these catches are higher than the P^* catches described in 4c, the Council would also adjust its risk policy for this rebuilding plan. The Council's current risk policy states that the SSC should provide ABCs that are the lesser of rebuilding ABCs or standard risk policy (P^*) ABCs (4c follows the current P^* approach). The P^* catches in 4c are lower than 4d. In absence of a risk policy adjustment, ABCs prescribed under alternative 4c would override those in 4d. The adjustment to the Council risk policy would be limited to only bluefish for this specific rebuilding alternative. Approval of this adjustment to the risk policy is necessary for the implementation of any rebuilding plan exceeding five years with the associated higher catches. Rebuilding projections indicate that this alternative would be expected to rebuild bluefish to slightly above the SSB_{MSY} proxy as defined in the recent bluefish operational assessment (198,717 mt) by 2028. As previously discussed, the catch values produced by the projection are subject to change following new stock assessment information.

Table 19: Constant 7-year F rebuilding projection.

Year	SSB (MT)	Recruits (000s)	F	Catch (MT)	SSB _{MSY} (MT)	SSB _{threshold} (MT)
2019	92,755	43,320	0.279	22,614	198,717	99,359
2020	102,186	43,531	0.087	7,385	198,717	99,359
2021	115,073	43,310	0.075	7,385	198,717	99,359
2022	132,150	43,390	0.166	18,477	198,717	99,359
2023	143,271	43,292	0.166	20,813	198,717	99,359
2024	158,152	43,272	0.166	22,033	198,717	99,359
2025	168,006	43,395	0.166	23,532	198,717	99,359
2026	182,311	43,336	0.166	25,121	198,717	99,359
2027	191,855	43,578	0.166	26,191	198,717	99,359
2028	198,520	43,411	0.166	26,939	198,717	99,359

7.2 Impacts of Rebuilding Plan Alternatives

All proposed alternatives, with the exception of no action, are projected to rebuild the stock to the SSB_{MSY} proxy biomass target of 198,717 by 2028 or earlier. The catch values associated with each rebuilding plan scale up with the duration of the rebuilding period. The recreational and commercial sectors are likely to experience significantly different impacts from each rebuilding plan considering the varied duration and projected catch values.

When comparing impacts of the three rebuilding plans, individuals need to consider how a longer rebuilding timeline will affect ABCs, fishing mortality rates, and the resulting ACL, which may be constrained with various management measures, if necessary.

Social Impacts

Alternative 4a is the status quo alternative under which no action would be taken to initiate a rebuilding plan and therefore the bluefish stock would remain in an overfished state. It is likely that there would be negative social impacts from the no action alternative due to the negligence of the MAFMC to comply with its legal obligation to develop a rebuilding plan when a stock is overfished. This would likely lead to an erosion of trust and confidence among stakeholders across

user groups in the ability of the MAFMC to handle its responsibilities to ensure the equitable sustainability of the bluefish resource. According to the written and oral comments provided during the scoping process, about 40% of commenters supported some type of rebuilding plan. By contrast, about 21% doubted the overfished status of the stock or viewed the stock status as “cyclical,” and 17% reported that they believed the stock to be affected by environmental factors and more research is needed on those issues. These stakeholder perspectives indicate that a plurality of resource users would prefer the MAFMC take action on rebuilding the stock, but the approach in doing so would need to be carefully considered in terms of its impacts and equitability for stakeholders across user groups.

Under alternative 4b, a constant harvest approach would be utilized until the stock is rebuilt. The projected date for the stock to be rebuilt under this scenario is the end of 2025 (4 years). This approach applies perhaps the most constraining rebuilding plan given that catch would be set at a constant level of 7,385 mt over the four-year period. Relative to the no action alternative, alternative 4b would have positive social impacts due to the MAFMC implementing a rebuilding plan as it is legally required to do, but this approach may have neutral to negative social impacts relative to the other rebuilding plan alternatives under consideration. Most commercial crew and hired captains reported through Crew Survey results that they believed the rules and regulations in their primary fisheries have been too restrictive. If the projection holds and the stock is rebuilt in four years, however, the potential negative impacts may be offset by an improved stock status and likely increases in catch thereafter, subject to constraining fishing mortality below the threshold.

Alternative 4c would utilize the MAFMC risk policy (P^*) to rebuild the stock. This approach is projected to rebuild the stock by the end of 2026 (i.e., a 5-year rebuilding plan). Under this alternative, there would likely be positive social impacts relative to the no action alternative and positive impacts relative to alternative 4b, the four-year rebuilding plan. Alternative 4c provides for more catch over the course of the rebuilding plan, thus allowing more flexibility for stakeholders across user groups to continue to access the resource and potentially preserve employment and income opportunities in the short term as the stock is being rebuilt.

Under alternative 4d, the rebuilding plan would follow a constant fishing mortality approach through which the stock is projected to be rebuilt by the end of the year in 2028 (i.e., a 7-year rebuilding plan). This alternative would likely produce positive social impacts relative to the no action alternative and alternative 4b but might result in only neutral to low positive impacts relative to alternative 4c. While the amount of allowable catch is higher in the short term than under alternative 4c, the additional time to rebuild the stock might reduce the opportunities for employment and income from the bluefish resource over the longer-term relative to a shorter rebuilding plan target. However, if alternative 4d provides the greatest probability of rebuilding the stock then the potential negative impacts relative to alternative 4c might be negated by the benefits of a rebuilt stock for stakeholders to utilize across the spectrum of resource user groups. Additionally, most crew and hired captains interviewed through the Crew Surveys reported that the rules and regulations change so quickly that it can be hard to keep up. A longer rebuilding period with more gradual changes to allowable catch might reduce the amount of uncertainty in fishing business decisions and thus mitigate potential negative social impacts of a rebuilding plan.

Economic Impacts

Forecasted bluefish commercial landings and revenues are compared across the 4-year (alternative 4b), 5-year (alternative 4c), and 7-year (alternative 4d) rebuilding schedules. Landings and

revenues are estimated from 2019 to 2028 for each rebuilding plan with the expectation that each plan will be implemented in 2022. Landings and revenues for 2019 and 2020 in this analysis were based off of the values used in the projections and likely differ from 2019 and 2020 realized values because the projections were conducted before final data for these years were made available. Moreover, rebuilding projections will continue to be revised every two years as the assessment is updated. For plans which indicate the stock will be rebuilt in less than 7 years, the ABC upon rebuilding the stock is assumed to equal 26,677 mt (58.8 M lbs.)¹¹ for the remaining years in the time series, allowing for meaningful comparison between rebuilding schedules. For each plan, a minimum and maximum commercial allocation percentage was used to simulate allocations (11% and 17%, respectively, as proposed by alternatives 2a-1 and 2a-2). This analysis assumes that all allocated commercial quota is landed in each forecasted year. Revenue streams are estimated using the predicted landings and ex-vessel bluefish prices are predicted using the modeling methods and parameters specified in Appendix B. Once estimated, future revenues streams are discounted to obtain present values for each rebuilding plan. Discounting revenue streams accounts for the time value of money when assessing future benefits. We present three different discount rates (0%, 3% and 7%) which are applied to the forecasted revenue streams.¹² The 0% discount rate serves as a baseline, while the 3% and 7% discount rates are suggested by NOAA's Social Rate of Time Preference (NOAA 1999) and the Executive Branch's Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-94 discounting recommendations, respectively.

Trends in landings by rebuilding plan are shown in Figure 13 while average landings are summarized in Figure 14, where A and B represents the 11% and 17% commercial allocations for each figure, respectively. Alternative 4b (i.e., the 4-year plan) had the lowest overall landings in terms of average landings (3.6 M lbs and 5.5 M lbs under the 11% and 17% commercial allocations, respectively). Alternative 4d had the highest average annual landings with averages of 4.9 M lbs and 7.5 M lbs under the 11% and 17% commercial allocations, respectively.

Discounted revenue streams across the various rebuilding timelines are shown in Figure 15, where the three discount rates (0%, 3% and 7%) are applied to the 11% commercial quota allocations for panels A-C and to the 17% commercial allocations in panels D-F. Additionally, average revenues by plan are presented in Figure 16 where panels A and B refer to the 11% and 17% commercial quota allocations, respectively. The highest average annual revenues by rebuilding plan follow trends similar to those of the landings results. Average annual revenues for alternative 4b range from \$1.8 M-\$2.7 M and \$2.8 M-\$4.2 M across the discounted revenue streams under the 11% and 17% commercial allocations, respectively. The highest average annual revenues range from \$2.2 M-\$3.3 M and \$3.5 M-\$5.1 M across the three discount rates under the 11% and 17% commercial allocations, respectively. Overall, alternative 4d (i.e., 7-year schedule) has the highest economic benefits and alternative 4b (i.e., 4-year schedule) the lowest, in terms of average annual bluefish landings and revenues.

Without a demand model, it is unclear how the proposed rebuilding plans will impact recreational bluefish fishing effort. However, given the high catch and release nature of the fishery, there is likely to be little shift in the demand for recreational fishing given the changes in proposed ABCs

¹¹ The 26,677 MT quantity is the terminus year of the 5-year rebuilding projection based on P* using the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's rebuilding risk policy.

¹² The discount rate is a highly disputed topic in the field of economics. The discount rates presented are used to ensure that a low and high discount rate is accounted for when presenting results.

by the rebuilding plans. Any increases in recreational TAL may have a slight positive economic impact in possibly more for-hire trips which may have higher value on catching and retaining fish. It is overall unclear to what degree recreational effort and angler expenditures will be impacted by the proposed rebuilding plans.

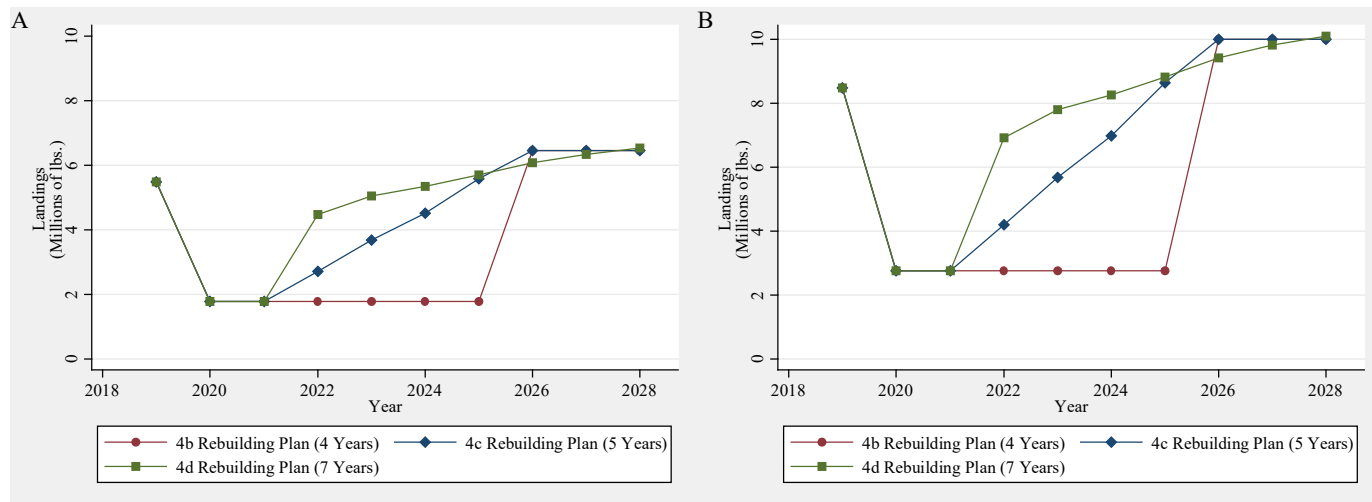


Figure 13: Projected commercial bluefish landings under an 11% and 17% commercial sector allocation (A and B, respectively) by rebuilding plan for years 2019-2028.

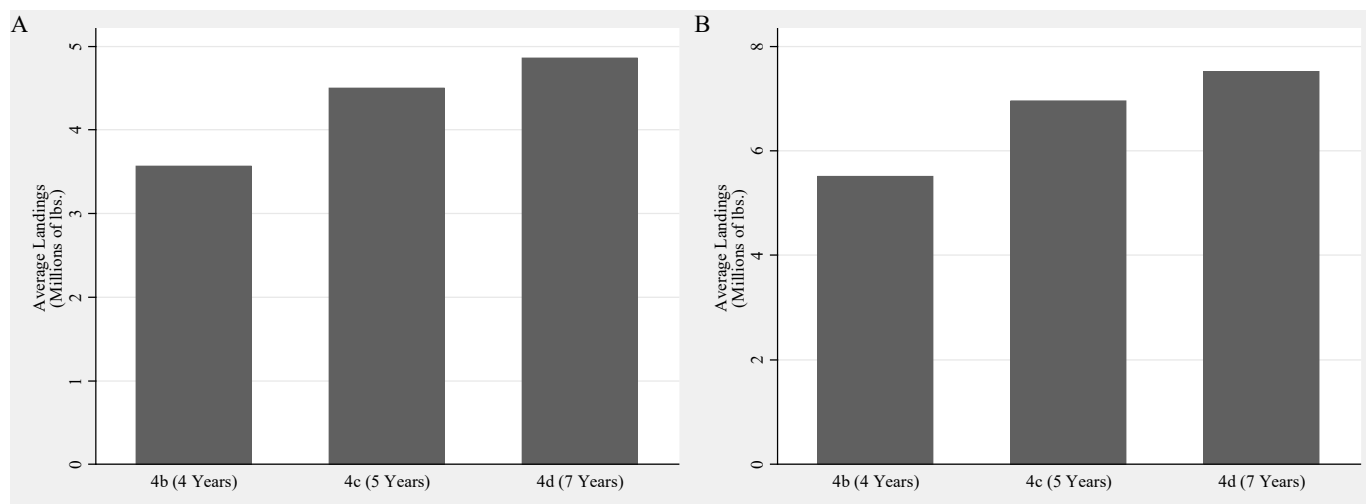


Figure 14: Average projected commercial bluefish landings (2019-2028) under an 11% and 17% commercial sector allocation (A and B, respectively) by rebuilding plan.

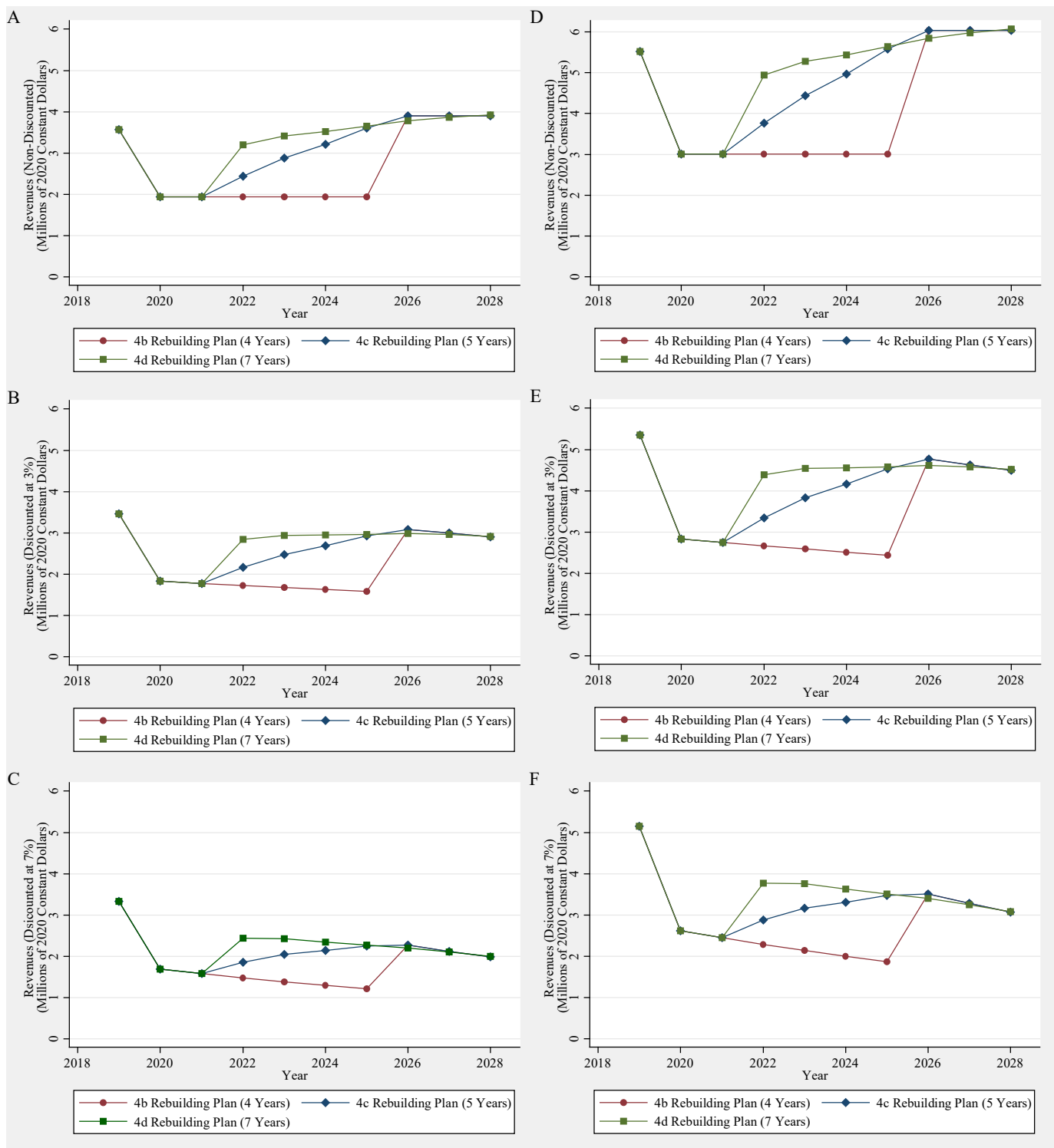


Figure 15: Estimated commercial bluefish revenues under 11% (A-C) and 17% (D-F) commercial allocations and discounted at 0%, 3%, and 7% by rebuilding plan and year (2019-2028).

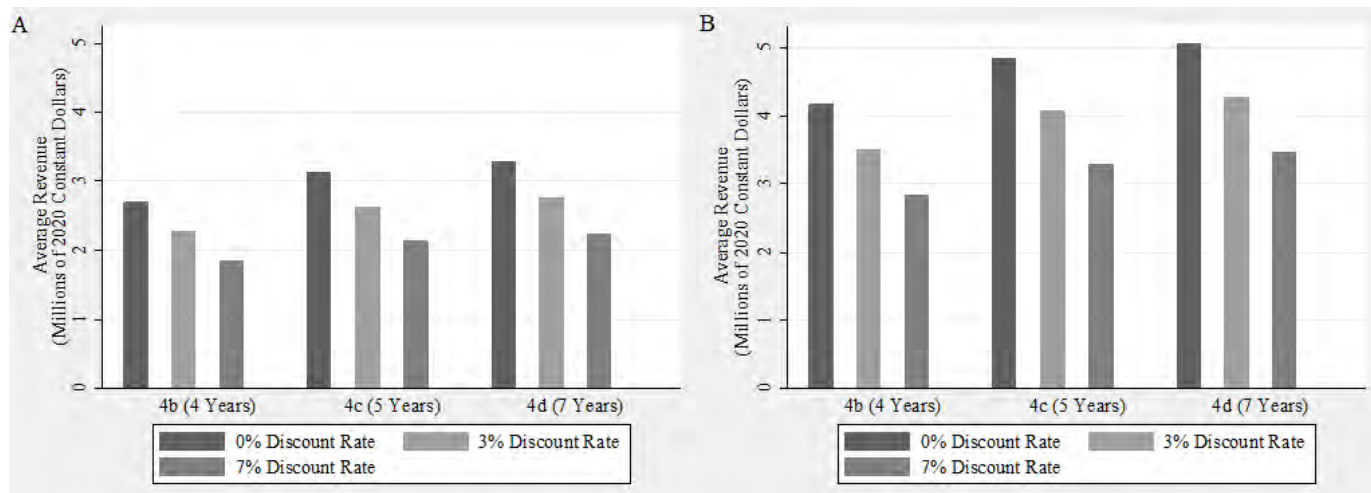


Figure 16: Average annual commercial bluefish revenues (2019-2028) discounted at 0%, 3% and 7% by rebuilding alternative and under 11% (A) and 17% (B) commercial quota allocations.

8.0 QUOTA TRANSFER ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

The following alternatives describe options for allowing annual transfer of quota between the commercial and recreational sectors as part of the specifications setting process (i.e., the annual process of setting or reviewing catch and landings limits for the upcoming fishing year). Section 8.1 discusses quota transfer process alternatives while Section 8.2 addresses options for a cap on the total amount of a transfer.

8.1 Sector Transfer Provision Alternatives

8.1.1 Sector Transfer Provision Alternatives

Alternatives under consideration for quota transfer provisions are presented in Table 20.

Table 20: Alternatives for annual transfer of quota between the commercial and recreational sectors.

Alternatives	Annual Quota Transfer Alternatives
5a-1	No Action/Status Quo
5a-2	Allow for optional bi-directional transfers through the annual specifications process with pre-defined guidelines and process. The transfer would consist of a portion of the total ABC in the form of a landings limit (i.e., commercial quota and RHL) transfer. Transfers would not occur if the stock is overfished or overfishing is occurring.

Under alternative 5a-1, transfers from the recreational to the commercial sector could continue but transfers from the commercial to the recreational sector would not be included as an option in the FMP.

Under alternative 5a-2, each year during the setting or review of annual catch limits, the Council and Board would have the ability to recommend a transfer of quota between the recreational and commercial sectors, affecting the final commercial quota and RHL. The Council and Board could recommend a transfer from the commercial fishery to the recreational fishery or from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery. The transfer amount would not exceed the cap adopted via one of the sub-alternatives under alternative set 5b. Table 21 describes how the process of transfers works within the Council and Board’s current specifications process under alternative 5a-1 and would work under alternative 5a-2.

Table 21: Quota transfer process during a typical specifications cycle under alternative 5a-1. The quota transfer process would differ slightly under alternative 5a-2 as described in the green shaded rows.

July: Assess the need for a transfer	<p>Staff and the Monitoring Committee (MC) assesses the potential need for a transfer and develop recommendations to the Council and Board as part of the specifications setting or review process. The MC considers the expected commercial quota and RHL (pending Council and Board review/approval) in the coming year, and each sector’s performance relative to landings limits in recent years. The MC has very limited data for the current year and is not able to develop precise current year projections of landings for each sector. The MC also considers factors including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projected changes in stock size, availability, or year class strength; • Recent or expected changes in management measures; • Recent or expected changes in fishing effort; <p>The MC considers how these factors might have different impacts on the commercial and recreational sectors. The effects of these considerations are largely difficult to quantify and there is currently no methodology that allows the MC to quantitatively determine the need for a transfer with a high degree of precision. The MC uses their best judgement to recommend whether a transfer furthers the Council and Board’s policy objectives, using mostly recent trends by sector.</p>
August: Council and Board consider whether to recommend a transfer	The Council and Board considers MC recommendations on transfers while setting or reviewing annual catch and landings limits. Similar to the process for jointly setting catch limits, the Council and Board needs to jointly agree on the transfer amount.
August: Alternative 5a-2	In addition to the steps described in the row above, the Council and Board would also need to jointly consider the direction of transfer if alternative 5b-2 were to be adopted.
October: Council staff submits specifications package to NOAA Fisheries	Council staff prepares and submits supporting documents if needed to modify catch limits or implement transfers.

<i>Mid-December: Recreational measures adopted*</i>	The Council and Board would adopt federal waters recreational measures and a general strategy for coastwide recreational management including any reductions or liberalizations needed in state waters. These recommendations are based on the expected post-transfer RHL which are not always implemented via final rule but have usually been recommended by the Council and Board and proposed to the public.
<i>Late December: Final specifications published</i>	NOAA Fisheries approves and publishes the final rule for the following year's catch and landings limits (if new or modified limits are needed), including any transfers.
<i>January 1: Fishing year specifications effective, including any transfers</i>	Fishing year specifications including any transfers would be effective January 1.
<i>February: NOAA Fisheries post-implementation review and adjustment</i>	NOAA Fisheries compares the estimate of recreational landings for the previous year to the RHL to make any necessary adjustments before finalizing the amount of quota transferred. The adjustment notice with final specifications is usually published in March/April.
<i>February: Alternative 5a-2</i>	No post-implementation reviews and adjustments to the transfer amount would occur given the final rule would recently have published, and recreational measures would have already been considered based on expected post-transfer RHLs.

*While this step is not directly part of the quota transfer process, the timing of the recreational measures setting process influences the necessary timeline of transfer-related decisions.

If transfer provisions under alternative 5a-2 are adopted, some changes to the AMs may need to be considered. The AMs indicate that if the MC determines that a transfer from the recreational to commercial sector caused the fishery-level ACL to be exceeded, the transfer amount could be deducted from the receiving fishery in a subsequent year. The Council and Board could consider whether to include these changes in this amendment or develop a follow-up action.

8.1.2 Impacts of Sector Transfer Alternatives

The impacts of transfers depend on the frequency of transfer, the amount transferred in each year, the direction of transfer between sectors, and to what extent each sector has been or is expected to achieve their limits. The impacts of a transfer are also dependent on the marginal economic value of additional allowable landings for each sector (in terms of commercial and for-hire revenues and revenues for associated commercial and recreational businesses), as well as the positive or negative impacts on angler satisfaction that may arise from modifying or maintaining recreational measures. As described below, many additional factors can influence how the commercial and recreational fisheries may be impacted by a transfer, including market conditions, overall availability of the species, availability of substitute species, and trends in effort driven by external factors.

Commercial to Recreational Transfers

If the recreational fishery receives a transfer, they will experience positive socioeconomic impacts due to outcomes such as the potential for liberalized measures, the ability to maintain measures when a reduction may otherwise be needed, and a reduced risk of an RHL or ACL overage that

may impose negative consequences in a future year. These outcomes are likely to result in maintained or increased revenues for recreational businesses as well as improved or maintained levels of angler satisfaction, compared to if no commercial to recreational transfer occurred.

In this scenario, the commercial sector would give up quota that is not expected to be fully utilized. In theory, if the decision to transfer is based on a pattern of underutilization in the commercial sector, the economic impacts to the commercial sector from such a transfer would be neutral. However, the commercial sector could experience a loss in revenue if the potential for underutilization is incorrectly evaluated. This could be due to a disconnect in the data used to evaluate the transfer and conditions in the relevant fishing year, possibly driven by changes in market conditions or fishery participation and effort.

Impacts to the commercial fisheries are not likely to be felt equally across states given different commercial quota management systems and differing quota utilizations by state. While coastwide commercial landings can frequently fall short of the total commercial quota, individual states vary considerably in utilizing or underutilizing their individual quotas. A coastwide projected underutilization could occur even if one or more states would be expected to fully utilize their quota in the upcoming year. This could have negative economic impacts to the commercial industries in states that regularly achieve their quotas.

Recreational to Commercial Transfers

If the commercial fishery receives a transfer, they will experience positive social and economic impacts in the year of the transfer due to increased revenue earning potential associated with higher potential landings. In general, quota increases tend to result in higher revenues, although some of these benefits may be partially offset by decreases in price per pound that can be associated with higher quotas. All else held constant, transfers from the recreational to commercial sector would lead to positive impacts for the commercial sector.

In theory, if the decision to transfer is based on a pattern of underutilization by the recreational sector, negative socioeconomic impacts to the recreational sector from such a transfer may not be realized. However, this would limit the potential for liberalizing recreational management measures. Since recreational harvest is more difficult to predict and control than commercial harvest, recreational management measures are frequently adjusted in order to strike an appropriate balance between conservation and angler satisfaction.

Impacts of Transfers in Either Direction

The impacts of transfers should be considered in combination with the short-term and long-term impacts associated with commercial/recreational allocation modifications under alternative set 2. However, it is difficult to do so quantitatively given the uncertainties about allocation changes as well as the uncertainties in the frequency, amount, and direction of potential transfers. In general, any annual transfers away from a sector can compound the negative impacts experienced due to a reduction in that sector's total allocation, or in the short term could partially offset the positive impacts of an increase in allocation. Annual transfers to a sector can simultaneously create additional positive impacts on top of the positive impacts of reallocation from the perspective of the receiving sector, and also exacerbate negative impacts of a loss in allocation for the donating sector.

The impacts of transfers would also be influenced by annual reductions or increases in the overall ABC based on changes in projected stock biomass and the application of the Council's risk policy. The recipient of a transfer could have some negative socioeconomic impacts from ABC reductions mitigated by receiving a transfer, while the transferring sector may experience exacerbated negative economic impacts from ABC reductions. Conversely, if the ABC were increasing, this could offset negative impacts to the transferring sector and provide additional benefits to the sector receiving the transfer.

The impacts of transfers can also be impacted by the availability and management of substitute species for a particular sector. High availability and access to recreational or commercial substitute species would help mitigate negative impacts of a transfer away from a given sector, while lower availability and access would compound these negative effects.

Social Impacts

Under alternative 5a-1, the status quo would remain, and no action would be taken to allow for bi-directional sector quota transfers. This might result in neutral to low-negative social impacts. Some stakeholders may desire and could benefit from the flexibility to transfer unused quota across sectors in both directions whenever the need or oversupply might arise.

Under alternative 5a-2, bi-directional transfers of quota across sectors would be permissible. This alternative is anticipated to have low positive social impacts relative to the no action alternative. Allowing for bi-directional transfers across sectors might improve flexibility for stakeholders throughout the fluid and changing quota needs of various stakeholders across user groups, sectors, and state lines. This may be especially helpful for some stakeholders in light of new rebuilding plans and allocation changes, which might have disparate impacts on stakeholders depending upon their initial positions and access to the resource prior to the change in allocations and implementation of a rebuilding plan.

Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of 5a-1 (status quo, recreational to commercial sector transfers, only) are expected to continue to be more or less neutral for the recreational sector and positive for the commercial sector. The commercial sector has historically utilized a portion of the additional transferred quota by increasing landings above the initial pre-transfer commercial allocation. The additional quota transferred from the recreational sector to the commercial sector may also contribute to increases in job opportunities and/or higher paying trips for crew members along with increases in revenues. A bi-directional transfer, suggested by alternative 5a-2, would only provide positive economic impacts to the recreational sector if a future quota transfer were large enough to allow for a liberalization of recreational measures. In the absence of an increase in the bag limit resulting from a higher post-transfer RHL, the recreational sector is likely to experience negligible economic impacts. Within the commercial sector, there is a slight negative economic impact associated with a bi-directional transfer which could result from miscalculations in projected commercial landings which could limit the quantity landed by the commercial sector.

8.2 Transfer Caps

8.2.1 Transfer Cap Alternatives

The no action/status quo transfer cap alternative 5b-1 keeps the existing commercial sector transfer cap in place. If the pre-transfer commercial share of the ACL is less than 10.5 million and the Council and Board determines the need for a transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector, the commercial quota may be allocated up to 10.5 million lb as its quota. If the Council and Board selects alternative 5b-1 along with alternative 5a-2, which allows for bi-directional transfers, no transfer cap would be implemented for the recreational sector. Specifically, if the Council and Board determines the need for a transfer from the commercial sector to the recreational sector, the transfer amount and the RHL would not be subject to any cap.

Under alternative 5b-2, any transfer from one sector to the other would be capped at 10% of the ABC (Table 22). This approach allows quota transfers to scale with biomass. The size of the transfer cap will increase and decrease with changes in the acceptable biological catch that are associated with changes in the stock size. Unlike 5b-1, transfers could still occur even when the commercial quota is above 10.5 million pounds.

Table 22: Proposed transfer caps for sector-based transfers.

Alternatives	Transfer Cap
5b-1	No Action/Status Quo
5b-2	Up to 10% of the ABC

8.2.2 Impacts of Transfer Cap Alternatives

Alternative 5b-1 10.5 million lb cap was set through Amendment 1 and was based on the average commercial landings for the period 1990-1997. The existing transfer cap was specifically designed for one-way transfers, and as such, selecting bi-directional transfers with no action on the transfer cap does not cap transfers from the commercial sector to the recreational sector. However, due to the smaller commercial allocation it is highly unlikely that the commercial sector would ever transfer more than 10.5 million lb to the recreational sector, meaning a 10.5 million lb cap on commercial to recreational transfers would not be restrictive anyway.

Alternative 5b-2 would implement a maximum transfer cap of up to 10% of the ABC. Considering a recent time series of ABCs (Table 23), 10% of the average of ABCs from 2000-2019 would result in a sector transfer of 2.97 M lbs. This estimate is smaller than the average transfer over the same time period (4.30 M lbs). However, since alternative 5b-2 is a percentage of the total ABC, future transfer amounts would scale with biomass as bluefish continues through the rebuilding plan. By comparison, the status quo alternative will result in no transfers if the commercial quota exceeds 10.5 M lbs.

Table 23: Recreational to commercial sector transfer amounts, ABCs in million lb, and estimates of retroactive 10% transfer caps from 2000-2019.

Year	Sector Transfer Amount	ABC	10% Transfer Cap
2000	0	36.840	3.684
2001	3.150	37.840	3.784
2002	5.933	29.100	2.910
2003	4.161	39.500	3.950
2004	5.085	34.215	3.422
2005	5.254	34.215	3.422
2006	5.367	29.150	2.915
2007	4.780	32.033	3.203
2008	4.088	31.887	3.189
2009	4.838	34.081	3.408
2010	5.387	34.376	3.438
2011	4.772	31.744	3.174
2012	5.052	32.044	3.204
2013	4.686	27.472	2.747
2014	3.340	24.432	2.443
2015	1.579	21.544	2.154
2016	1.577	19.456	1.946
2017	5.033	20.642	2.064
2018	3.535	21.815	2.182
2019	4.000	21.820	2.182

Economic Impacts

The economic impact of sector transfer caps on the commercial bluefish sector are investigated by comparing realized landings data to predicted landings under a 10% ABC cap transfer scenario over 2001-2019.¹³ Revenues are also estimated under these two scenarios. Ex-vessel bluefish prices are estimated using the price model and methods described in Appendix B. Revenues are estimated as opposed to incorporating realized revenues in order to establish an equal comparison between the status quo transfer cap alternative (5b-1) and the 10% ABC transfer cap alternative (5b-2) and their economic implications. Quotas under alternative 5b-2 are estimated using the historic ABC's for each year and for each of the sector allocation sub-alternatives presented in section 5.1.1 (i.e., 2a-1 to 2a-5). Then 10% of the ABC is added to the pre-transfer quantities to produce the post-transfer values. Similar to previous economic analyses, it is assumed that all allocated quota is landed when comparing the projected commercial quotas under alternative 5b-2 to the realized landings. It should be noted that in every year in the time series, realized landings have been less than the full allocation generated under the 5b-2 scenario (Figure 17). If the proposed transfer cap had been implemented over the time series, and all else was held constant, landings would not have been restricted by the transfer cap. Further, in some years (2001, 2015, and 2016) the realized post-transfer quantities are less than the 5b-2 scenario¹⁴ such that a transfer

¹³ Sector transfers occurred on an annual basis from 2001-2019.

¹⁴ The realized sector transfer was less than 10% of the ABC.

cap equal to 10% of the ABC would not have impacted landings in these years even if the full historic post transfer landings had been fully utilized.

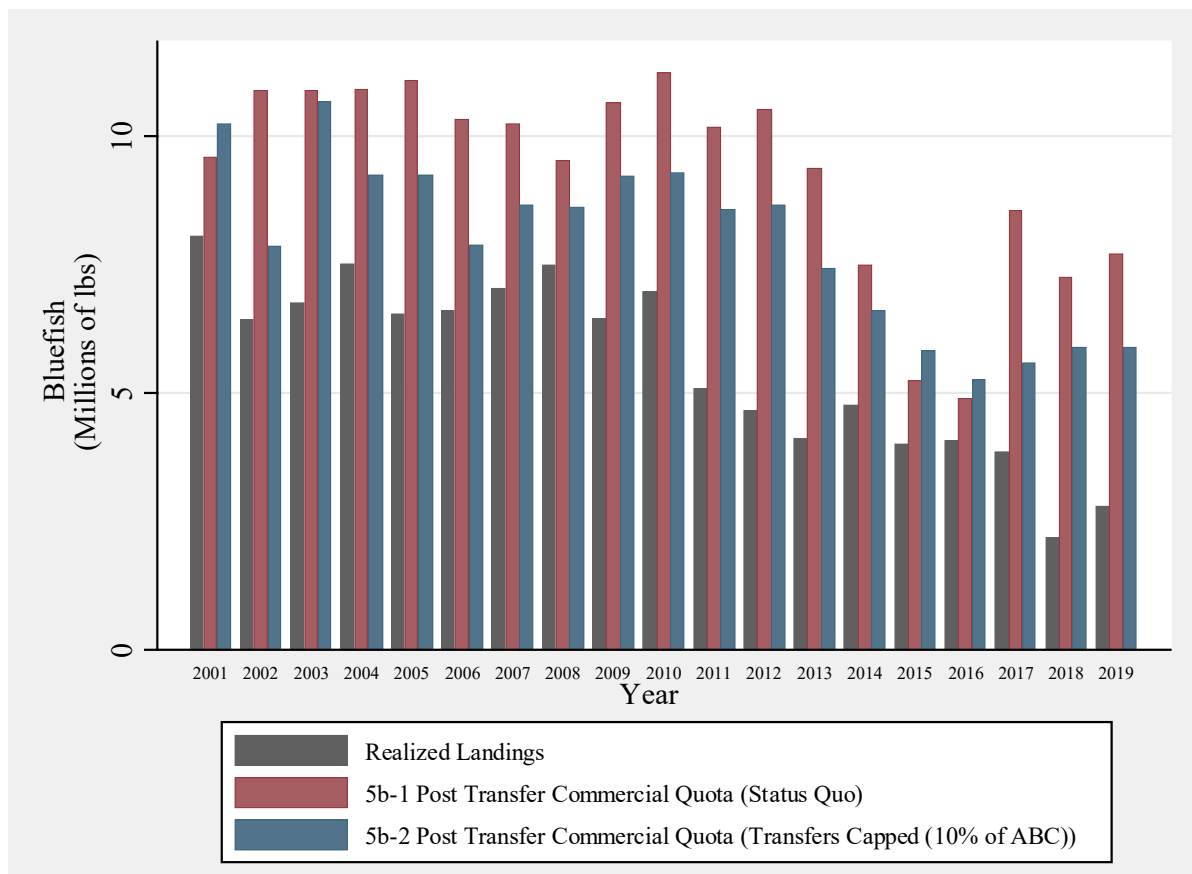


Figure 17: Realized bluefish landings, historical post-transfer commercial bluefish quotas under the status quo alternative 5b-1, and post-transfer commercial bluefish quota with a transfer cap of 10% of the ABC (5b-2) applied over 2001 to 2019.

There are only a handful of years where predicted landings under the 5b-2 transfer scenario are less than realized landings when investigated across the proposed commercial allocations described in section 5.1.1 (Figure 18). Specifically, there are only six years where predicted landings are less than realized landings, all occurring under the 2a-2 (11% commercial allocation) alternative.

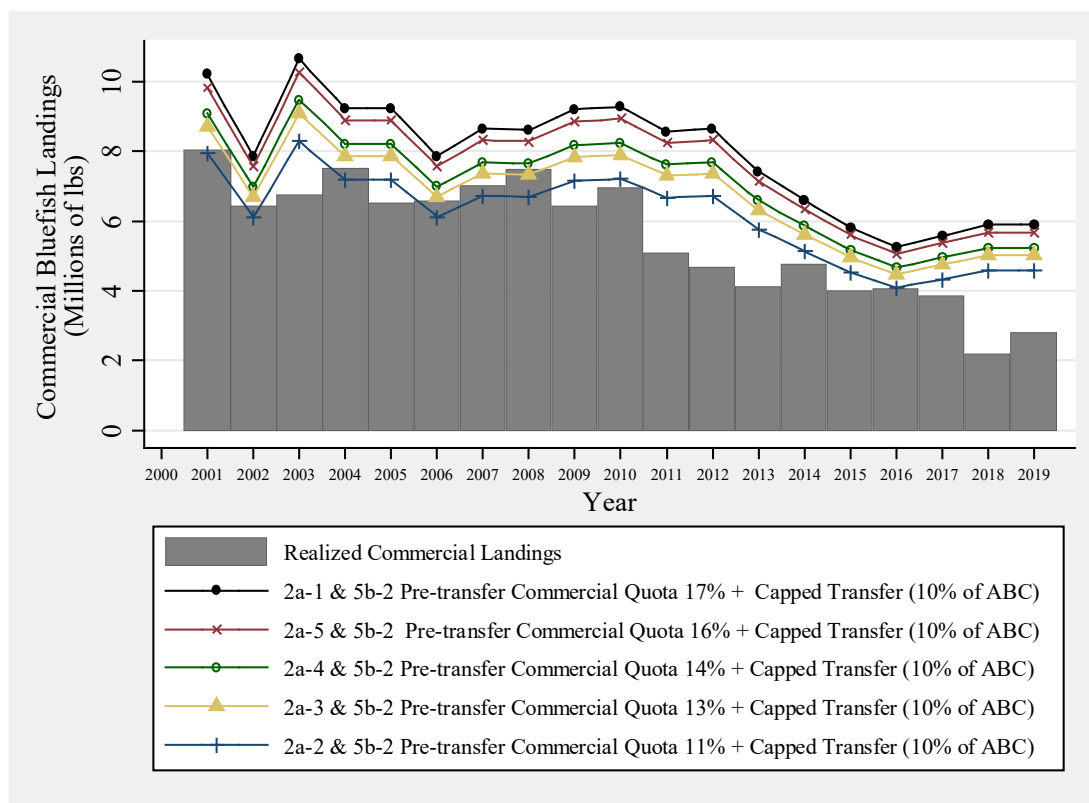


Figure 18: Realized commercial bluefish landings and predicted commercial landings under the 10% ABC cap transfer scenario across proposed commercial allocation alternatives from 2001-2019.

Despite the few instances where realized landings are less than landings predicted under the 5b-2 scenario, estimated revenues are higher under all 5b-2 landings scenarios relative to revenues estimated under the realized landings scenario (Figure 19). This result is driven by the inverse relationship between ex-vessel price and landings (described further in Appendix B). However, higher revenues under the 5b-2 transfer scenario are heavily reliant on the price model which only describes about 68% of the variability in annual prices and is informed by a limited sample size.

In summary, realized commercial bluefish landings are almost always less than the possible landings under the 5b-2 transfer scenario. In the six cases where realized landings *do* exceed landings from the capped transfer scenarios, the differences in revenue are marginal. Overall, there are few cases where bluefish landings/revenues are expected to be impacted by the implementation of a sector transfer cap of 10% of the ABC.

The economic impacts of implementing a 10% cap on sector transfers on the recreational sector of the bluefish fishery are expected to be negligible. Although, these caps would limit the transfer quantities from the commercial sector to the recreational sector, recreational harvest, effort, and expenditures are not expected to be impacted by this sub-alternative unless a sector transfer resulted in the need to adjust recreational measures. In reverse, transfers from the recreational to the commercial sector only occur when the recreational sector is predicted to harvest quantities below the recreational RHL, such that the existence of a transfer cap should not impact recreational harvest, effort, or expenditures.

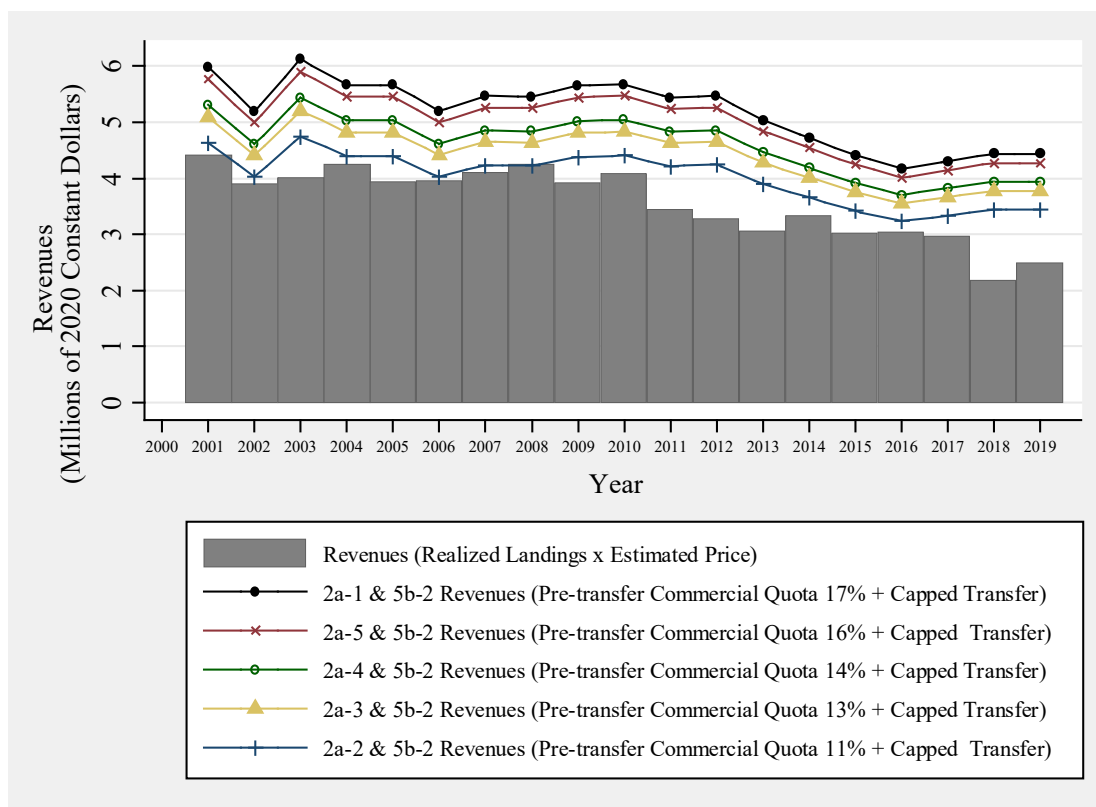


Figure 19: Estimated commercial bluefish revenues (realized landings multiplied by estimated ex-vessel bluefish price) and estimated commercial revenues under the 10% ABC cap sector transfer scenarios across proposed sector allocation alternatives from 2001-2019.

9.0 MANAGEMENT UNCERTAINTY ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

9.1 Management Uncertainty Alternatives

This alternative set is included to modify how the Monitoring Committee accounts for management uncertainty (Table 24). In the current FMP, the fishery-level ACL may be reduced by a buffer to account for sources of management uncertainty. The ACL minus the management uncertainty buffer equals the ACT as displayed in the bluefish flowchart (Figure 20). The Monitoring Committee annually identifies and reviews the relevant sources of management uncertainty to recommend ACTs for the commercial and recreational fishing sectors as part of the bluefish specification process. The status quo option (alternative 6a) would maintain the bluefish flowchart as displayed in Figure 20, which demonstrates that any uncertainty buffer applied to the fishery-level ACL applies to both sector specific ACTs equally. Alternative 6b would provide greater flexibility by establishing ACLs and ACTs for each sector as displayed in the bluefish flow chart in Figure 21. Specifically, the proposed flowchart allows for management uncertainty to be

accounted for within each sector. This targeted approach would allow for the identification of sources of management uncertainty that are specific to one sector and are not present in the other.

Table 24: Proposed management uncertainty alternatives.

Alternatives	Management Uncertainty Alternatives
6a	No Action/Status Quo
6b	Post-Sector Split

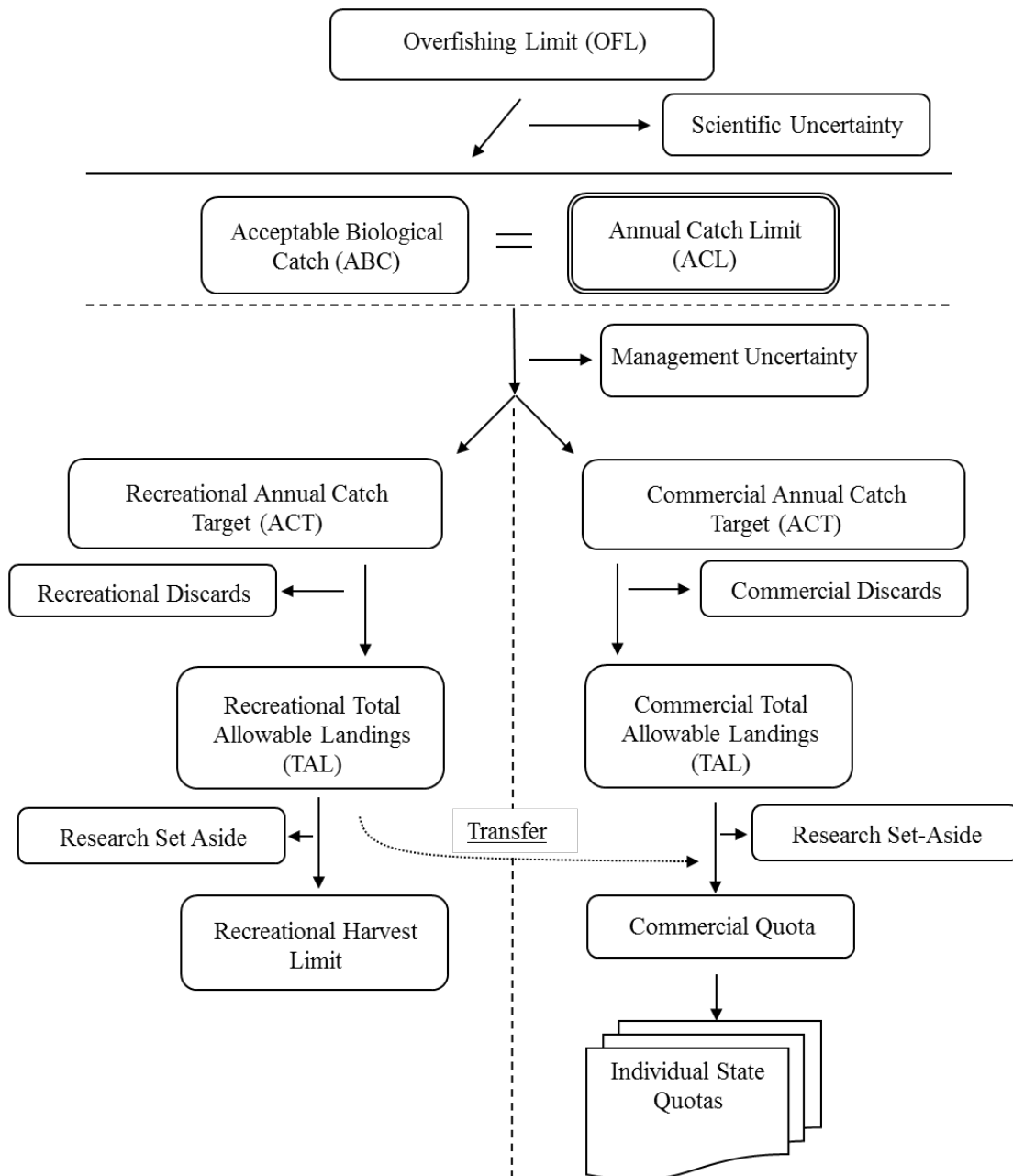


Figure 20: Current bluefish flow chart representing a reduction for management uncertainty prior to the sector split.

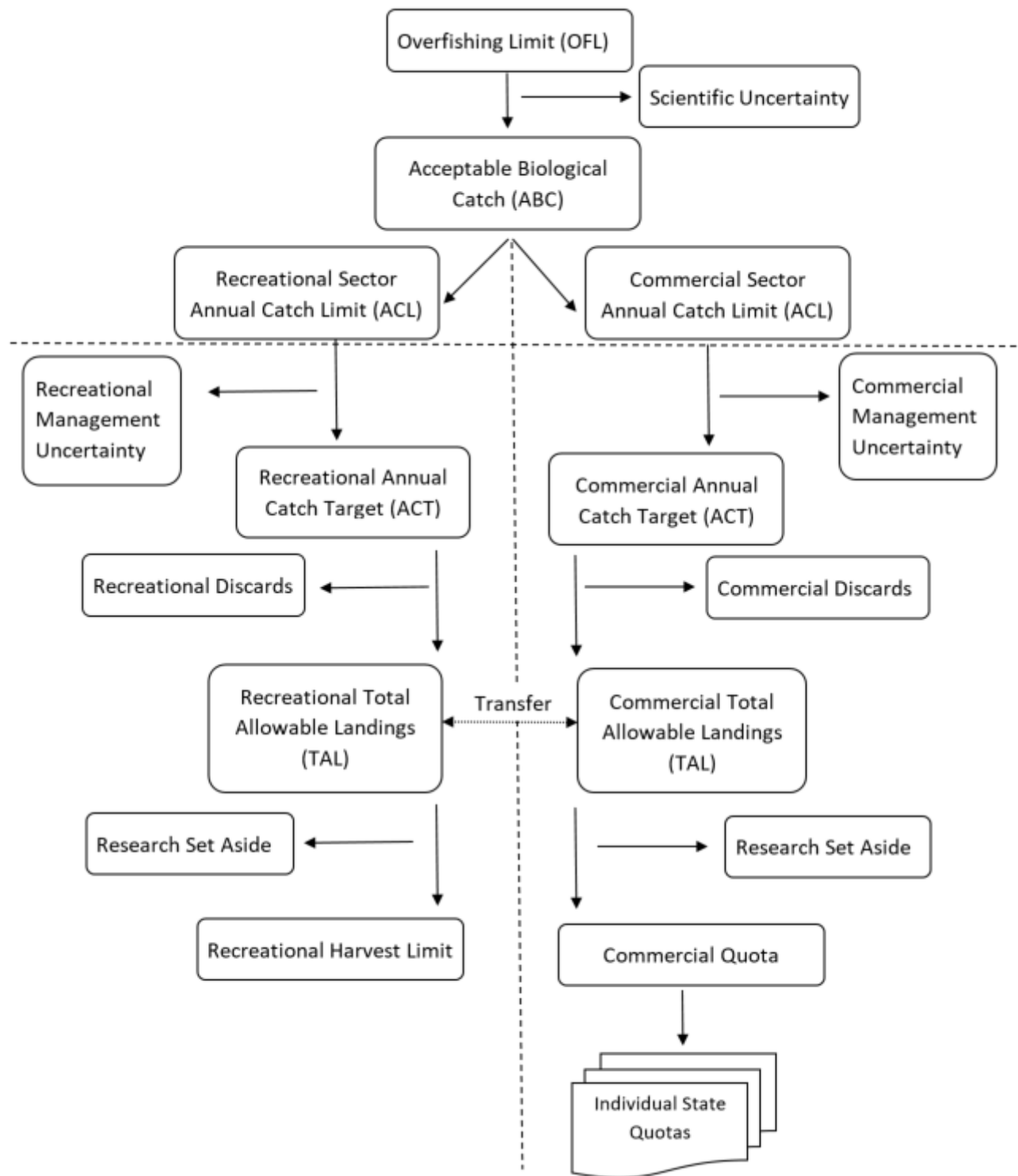


Figure 21: Proposed bluefish flow chart including sector specific management uncertainty.

9.2 Impacts of Management Uncertainty Alternatives

Identifying sources of management uncertainty and applying a buffer to reduce the probability of exceeding an ACL is a helpful tool in the management toolkit. However, the status quo alternative (6a) is lacking in its inability to specifically target sources of uncertainty that are present in one sector and not the other. In the current FMP, the management uncertainty buffer is applied to the fishery-level ACL prior to the sector split and as such has the unintended consequence of reducing both sector's ACLs regardless of the source of management uncertainty. Alternative 6b allows for a more targeted approach, where management uncertainty can be addressed by reducing one sector's ACL to the ACT while leaving the other sector unaffected.

The following example is used for demonstrative purposes only. Under alternative 6a, if the Council and Board are concerned about the lack of data on commercial discards and believe this to be a source of management uncertainty, the fishery-level ACL may be reduced by an agreed upon buffer. According to the flowchart in Figure 20, this reduction trickles down to both the commercial and recreational sectors' ACTs. This negatively impacts the recreational sector's catch and landings limits despite the fact that the source of the management uncertainty was the commercial sector. To avoid these cascading effects, the Council and Board could decide to not implement management uncertainty despite the associated greater potential risk of exceeding the ABC. Using this same example under alternative 6b, the Council and Board has the ability to reduce the commercial sector's ACT through the application of a management uncertainty buffer to the commercial sector ACL. This would leave the recreational sector's ACL unaffected and would not negatively impact the recreational sector's catch or landings limits.

Without the ability to apply sector specific management uncertainty buffers, Council and Board members are faced with the difficult decision of applying management uncertainty to both sectors indiscriminately, or not applying management uncertainty at all and risking potential overages in the fishery-level ACL or ABC.

Ultimately, alternative 6b might have neutral to low positive impacts for resource user groups. If management uncertainty disproportionately affects one sector over another, keeping the process in its current order could continue to frustrate and constrain some stakeholders who might otherwise benefit from determining uncertainties after dividing out sector catch targets. Furthermore, alternative 6b is expected to have minimal to no economic impacts on the commercial and recreational bluefish sectors.

The adoption of alternative 6b would require adjustments to the AMs as currently written. The evaluation of catch overages would transition from the fishery-level ACL to sector specific ACLs. The adoption of sector specific ACLs also has implications for the transfer process. For the purpose of maintaining accurate accounting and accountability of the ACL, both sector's ACLs would be adjusted to reflect the transfer at the landings limit level. If alternative 6b is selected by the Council and Board, the AM regulations would be updated through the federal rule making process for this amendment.

10.0 *DE MINIMIS* PROVISIONS ALTERNATIVES AND IMPACTS

Under the Commission's current FMP, states which land less than 0.1% of the coastwide commercial landings in the year prior are exempt from fishery independent monitoring

requirements for the following year. However, the federal plan does not require states to submit fishery independent monitoring reports, and as such has no *de minimis* provision.

10.1 *De Minimis* Provision Alternatives

The *de minimis* alternative set is presented in Table 25. Under the no action/status quo alternative 7a, *de minimis* status would remain excluded from the Federal Bluefish Amendment and maintain the status quo *de minimis* provision in the Commission Amendment.

Alternatives 7b, 7c, 7d, and 7e all expand upon the Commission's current *de minimis* provision, and the existing exemption of the requirement to conduct fishery independent monitoring remains. A state's three-year average of combined recreational and commercial landings compared against coastwide landings for the same period with a 1% threshold would be used to determine status for alternatives 7b, 7c, 7d, and 7e. The key distinction between the four alternatives is the different recreational management measures that *de minimis* states may adopt. Under all alternatives a *de minimis* state has the option to implement the coastwide measures if the state is only requesting *de minimis* status for the purposes of the fishery independent monitoring exemption.

Under alternative 7b, a *de minimis* determination would exempt the state from recreational measures. Since *de minimis* states would be exempt from coastwide recreational measures in state waters, there is potential for recreational effort to shift to *de minimis* states and for landings to become substantial before adequate action can be taken. To mitigate this, *de minimis* states are encouraged to implement recreational bag limits which would deter shifts in effort to their state.

Under alternative 7c, a *de minimis* determination would exempt the state from the coastwide measures. However, a *de minimis* state would still be required to implement recreational management measures of its choosing, which would deter shifts in effort from other states. *De minimis* states would be required to design measures that maintain harvest at levels below the 1% coastwide harvest threshold.

Under alternative 7d, a *de minimis* determination would allow a state to maintain the measures that were in place when the state first requested and qualified for *de minimis* status. The intent of this alternative would be to maintain low levels of harvest with consistent regulations. Please note that the base year of reference would be measures implemented in 2019, which was prior to the most recent change in coastwide measures. For example, Georgia has requested and qualified for *de minimis* status for the years 2019-2021. Upon implementation of this Amendment in 2022, Georgia would be allowed to adopt recreational measures consistent with those in place during the 2019 fishing year, assuming Georgia maintains its *de minimis* status for the 2022 fishing year. North Carolina on the other hand, has not qualified for *de minimis* status for any of the years 2019-2021. If North Carolina requested and qualified for *de minimis* status in 2022, North Carolina would be able to implement recreational measures consistent with what were in place for 2021.

Under alternative 7e, a *de minimis* determination would allow a state to maintain a set of minimum default recreational measures. At the October 2020 meeting, the Board and Council agreed that the fixed set of minimum default measures would consist of a bag limit of 3 fish for anglers fishing from shore or private vessels and 5 fish for anglers fishing on a for-hire trip, no minimum size, and an open season all year. These measures are consistent with the coastwide measures that were implemented in 2020.

Table 25 Proposed *de minimis* provision alternatives.

Alternatives	<i>De Minimis</i> Alternatives
7a	No Action/Status Quo
7b	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – no management measures
7c	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – state-selected management measures
7d	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – rollover management measures
7e	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – 2020 management measures

10.2 Impacts of *De Minimis* Provision Alternatives

Alternative 7a is anticipated to have neutral social impacts to the majority of stakeholders to the bluefish resource across user groups and sectors. Taking no action on the *de minimis* provision is expected to have low negative social impacts to recreational anglers that fish within state waters of *de minimis* states. These anglers would be subject to the coastwide recreational measures, which as of winter 2021 consist of a 3-fish bag limit for private anglers and a 5-fish bag limit for for-hire party and charter vessels. During the scoping process, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources provided a written request to alter the *de minimis* provision to allow for an exemption of restrictive recreational measures. GA, along with SC and ME have historically qualified for *de minimis* status. In the short term, alternatives 7b, 7c, and 7d would likely provide more liberalized recreational measures for anglers operating within these states' waters as well as any states that meet the requirements of *de minimis* status in the future.

Alternatives 7b, 7c, 7d and 7e complicate coastwide management of bluefish from an enforcement perspective. Anglers will need to be cognizant of the differing regulations between state and federal waters, as well as differing regulations when crossing state lines from a non *de minimis* state to a *de minimis* state. However, these concerns are already at play when states implement recreational measures within state lines under the Commission's conservation equivalency policy that differ from the coastwide measures. Alternatives 7b, 7c, and 7d would allow for a greater variety of state measures compared to alternative 7e, which would maintain just one default set of *de minimis* measures.

From a catch accounting perspective, the proposed *de minimis* provision in alternatives 7b, 7c, and 7d would reduce a state's accountability for its recreational harvest in the short term. Currently, the plan ensures that all states are held accountable by annually evaluating the need to adjust recreational measures to insure coastwide recreational catch does not exceed the RHL. A state that meets the *de minimis* criteria would not be held accountable in the same way, which raises questions about fairness and equity across state user groups. However, if a *de minimis* states' recreational landings increase significantly due to an unforeseen increase in angler effort, the state may exceed the 1% coastwide landings threshold and no longer be afforded *de minimis* status in the coming year. As such, that state will be held accountable and be required to implement recreational measures through the standard specifications process. Thus, *de minimis* states are incentivized under each of the proposed alternatives to implement measures that would prevent large increases in recreational landings. By comparison to incentivizing restrictive measures, alternative 7e requires more restrictive measures, which has a greater likelihood of constraining *de minimis* states to low levels of catch, but restricts flexibility.

Ultimately, the *de minimis* alternatives 7b, 7c, and 7d would result in minor economic benefits for states that meet the *de minimis* criteria. Currently, there is an opportunity cost associated with abiding to the coastwide bluefish recreational regulations, such that relieving a state from adhering to these regulations would give a slight economic advantage to these low-landing states. Alternatives 7b, 7c, and 7d also have the potential to relieve *de minimis* states of the administrative burden of implementing new and changing recreational measures.

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12.0 APPENDIX A SUPPLEMENTAL SOCIAL IMPACTS

Social Impacts

National Standard 8 (NS8) requires the Council to consider the importance of fishery resources to affected communities and provide those communities with continuing access to fishery resources, but it does not allow the Council to compromise the conservation objectives of the management measures. Thus, continued overall access to fishery resources is a consideration, but not a guarantee that fishermen would be able to use a particular gear type, harvest a particular species of fish, fish in a particular area, or fish during a certain time of the year.

A fundamental difficulty exists in forecasting social change relative to management alternatives, since communities or other societal groups are constantly evolving in response to external factors (e.g., market conditions, technology, alternate uses of waterfront, tourism). Certainly, fishery regulations influence the direction and magnitude of social change, but attribution is difficult with the tools and data available.

While the focus here is on the social impacts of the alternatives, external factors may also influence change, both positive and negative, in the affected communities. External factors may also lead to unanticipated consequences of a regulation, due to cumulative impacts. These factors contribute to a community's ability to adapt to new regulations. When examining potential social impacts of management measures, it is important to consider impacts on the following: the fishing fleet (vessels grouped by fishery, primary gear type, and/or size); vessel owners and employees (captains and crew); bluefish dealers and processors; final users of bluefish; community cooperatives; fishing industry associations; cultural components of the community; and fishing families. While some management measures may have a short-term negative impact on some communities, these should be weighed against potential long-term benefits to all communities which can be derived from a sustainable bluefish fishery.

Social Impact Factors

The social impact factors outlined below can be used to describe the Atlantic bluefish fishery, its sociocultural and community context, and its participants. These factors or variables are considered relative to the management alternatives and used as a basis for comparison between alternatives. Use of these kinds of factors in social impact assessment is based on NOAA Fisheries guidance (NMFS 2007) and other texts (e.g., Burdge 1998). Longitudinal data describing these social factors region-wide and in comparable terms is limited. Qualitative discussion of the potential changes to the factors characterizes the likely direction and magnitude of the impacts.

The social impact factors fit into five categories:

1. *Size and Demographic Characteristics* of the fishery-related workforce residing in the area; these determine demographic, income, and employment effects in relation to the workforce as a whole, by community and region.
2. The *Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values* of fishermen, fishery-related workers, other stakeholders and their communities; these are central to understanding the behavior of fishermen on the fishing grounds and in their communities.
3. The *Social Structure and Organization*; that is, changes in the fishery's ability to provide necessary social support and services to families and communities, as well as effects on the community's social structure, politics, etc.

4. The *Non-Economic Social Aspects* of the fishery; these include lifestyle, health, and safety issues, and the non-consumptive and recreational uses of living marine resources and their habitats.
5. The *Historical Dependence on and Participation in* the fishery by fishermen and communities, reflected in the structure of fishing practices, income distribution, and rights (NMFS 2007).

Community Fishing Engagement and Social Vulnerability Indicators

In addition to traditional economic indicators such as landings and revenue, fishing communities can also be understood in terms of overall engagement in the commercial and recreational fishery and other social and economic community conditions. NOAA Fisheries social scientists produce indicators of commercial and recreational fishing engagement, reliance, and other community characteristics for virtually all fishing communities throughout the United States, referred to as the Social Indicators of Fishing Community Vulnerability and Resilience (Colburn and Jepson 2012). The Social Indicators are composite indices of factors that comprise community-level latent constructs, such as commercial fishing engagement or social vulnerability. The strength of these indicators is that they provide greater depth and contextualization to our understanding of fishing communities than the more commonly utilized landings and revenue statistics. The Social Indicators provide a more comprehensive view of fishing communities by including social and economic conditions that can influence the viability of commercial and recreational fishing activities, such as gentrification pressure, poverty, and housing characteristics, among other factors.

2009-2018 Recreational Engagement and Reliance

The Recreational Engagement Indicator is a numerical index that reflects the level of a community's engagement in recreational fisheries relative to other communities in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. This index was generated using a principal components factor analysis (PCFA) of variables related to recreational fishing activity from the NOAA Fisheries MRIP datasets. PCFA is a common statistical technique used to identify factors that are related, yet linearly independent, and likely represent a latent or unobservable concept when considered together, such as factors that contribute to the level of a community's social vulnerability or engagement in commercial fishing. The variables that were identified to best reflect community engagement in recreational fisheries included; 1) the total number of shore trips per community for each year; 2) the total number of charter trips per community for each year; and 3) the total number of private recreational trips per community for each year. The Recreational Reliance Indicator is calculated by dividing these three variables by the total community population obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). It should be noted that a high engagement score does not necessarily mean that a community or its fishery participants are solely dependent upon recreational fishing activities. There may be other fishing or economic activities that may sustain the livelihoods of individuals or entities within these communities that have relied on recreational fishing historically.

Figure 2 displays the factor scores for the Recreational Engagement Indicator for the fifteen communities that have the highest average recreational engagement between 2009 and 2018. The index factor scores are commonly categorized from low to high based on the number of standard deviations from the mean, which is set at zero. Categories rank from 0.00 or below as "low", 0.00 – 0.49 as "medium," and 0.50 – 0.99 as "medium-high," and 1 standard deviation or above as

“high.” All of the ports displayed in Figure 1 have “high” recreational engagement. However, there has also been substantial year-to-year variability in recreational engagement for many of these ports. For example, communities in Florida with high average engagement have seen large increases in engagement in recent years relative to the earlier part of the time series, whereas communities in New York and New Jersey have experienced wide fluctuations over time in their extent of recreational fishing engagement.

Figure 3 shows the factor scores for the Recreational Reliance Indicator for the fifteen communities that have the highest average recreational reliance between 2009 and 2018. A comparison of Figure 2 and Figure 3 reveals that some highly engaged communities may not be as highly reliant on recreational fisheries due to the size of those communities and the accompanying opportunities for other social and economic activities. Among the five most highly reliant communities on recreational fisheries over the period of 2009 to 2018 were Barnegat Light, NJ, Topsail Beach, NC, Orient, NY, Hatteras (and all other communities throughout the Outer Banks), NC, and Montauk, NY. In recent years, Nags Head, NC, and Melbourne Beach, FL, have increased considerably in their reliance on recreational fisheries.

Community Social Vulnerability Indicators

The Community Social Vulnerability Indicators (CSVI) include indices of labor force structure, housing characteristics, poverty, population composition, and personal disruption. The labor force structure index measures the makeup of the labor force and is reversed scored so that a higher factor score represents fewer employment opportunities and greater labor force vulnerability. The housing characteristics index measures vulnerability related to infrastructure and home and rental values. It is also reversed score so that a higher score represents more vulnerable housing infrastructure. The poverty index captures multiple different factors that contribute to an overall level of poverty in a given area. A higher poverty index score would indicate a greater level of vulnerability due to a higher proportion of residents receiving public assistance and below federal poverty limits. The population composition index measures the presence of vulnerable populations (i.e., children, racial/ethnic minorities, and/or single-parent, female-headed households) and a higher score would indicate that a community’s population is composed of more vulnerable individuals. Finally, the personal disruption index considers variables that affect individual-level vulnerability primarily and include factors such as low individual-level educational attainment or unemployment. Higher scores of personal disruption likely indicate greater levels of individual vulnerability within a community, which can in turn impact the overall level of community social vulnerability.

Gentrification Pressure Indicators include housing disruption, urban sprawl, and retiree migration. The Housing Disruption Index combines factors that correspond to unstable or shifting housing markets in which home values and rental prices may cause residents to become displaced. The Urban Sprawl Index indicates the extent of population increase due to migration from urban centers to suburban and rural areas, which often results in cost of living increases and gentrification in the destination communities. The Retiree Migration Index characterizes communities by the concentration of retirees or individuals above retirement age whose presence often raises the home values and rental rates, as well as increase the need for health care and other services. These

components of gentrification pressure influence the degree to which the current residents, communities, and local economies can remain in place, generally, and the extent to which those in the fishing industry in these communities are able to withstand or overcome changes to fisheries conditions and management, specifically. As places go through the process of gentrification, housing becomes less available and/or unaffordable for the existing population and the historically significant local fishing businesses and industries that had once thrived become displaced or replaced by new and emerging industries, such as tourism, finance, real estate, and service.

Data used to develop these indices come from multiple secondary data sources, but primarily the U.S. Census ACS at the place level (Census Designated Place and Minor Civil Division). More information about the data sources, methods, and other background details can be found online at <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/humandimensions/social-indicators/>. Table 26A displays the CSVI categorical scores for all of the highly engaged and/or reliant communities on recreational fishing activities. Table 27A displays CSVI categorical scores for all highly engaged communities in commercial bluefish fishery activities.

Socio-Economic Survey of Hired Captains and Crew in New England and Mid-Atlantic Commercial Fisheries (Crew Survey)

The Socio-Economic Survey of Hired Captains and Crew in New England and Mid-Atlantic Commercial Fisheries (hereafter referred to as the Crew Survey) is an ongoing effort conducted by the Social Sciences Branch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center intended to gather general information about the characteristics and experiences of commercial fishing crew members (including hired captains) because little is known about this critical segment of the commercial fishing industry. Information collected by the survey include demographic information, wage calculations systems, well-being, fishing practices, job satisfaction, job opportunities, and attitudes towards fisheries management, among other subjects. There have been two waves of Crew Survey data collection thus far – Wave 1 in 2012-13 and Wave 2 in 2018-19.

Table 26A: 2018 Community Social Vulnerability Indicator Categorical Scores for Recreational Fishing Communities.

Community	Poverty	Labor Force	Housing Characteristics	Population Composition	Personal Disruption	Housing Disruption	Retiree Migration	Urban Sprawl
Slaughter Beach, DE	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Low
Cape Canaveral, FL	Low	Med-High	Med-High	Low	Low	Med-High	Med-High	Low
Jacksonville, FL	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Jacksonville Beach, FL	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
Melbourne Beach, FL	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Med-High	Low
Church Creek, MD	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Nanticoke, MD	Low	Med-High	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low
Ocean City, MD	Low	Medium	Med-High	Low	Low	Med-High	Med-High	Low
Hatteras/Outer Banks, NC	Med-High	Low	Medium	Low	Med-High	Med-High	Medium	Low
Hobucken, NC	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Med-High	Low
Morehead City, NC	Medium	Medium	Med-High	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Nags Head, NC	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
Ocracoke, NC	Med-High	Med-High	Low	Medium	High	Low	Med-High	Low
Topsail Beach, NC	Medium	Med-High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Med-High	Low
Atlantic Highlands, NJ	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
Barnegat Light, NJ	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Med-High
Cape May, NJ	Low	Med-High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Medium
Babylon, NY	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Med-High	Low	High
Montauk, NY	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	High	Med-High	Med-High
Orient, NY	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Med-High
Narragansett/Point Judith, RI	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Med-High	Medium	Low
Pawleys Island, SC	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High	Low
Virginia Beach, VA	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Wachapreague, VA	Low	Med-High	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Med-High	Low

Table 27A: 2018 Community Social Vulnerability Indicator Categorical Scores for Commercial Bluefish Fishing Communities.

Community	Poverty	Labor Force	Housing Characteristics	Population Composition	Personal Disruption	Housing Disruption	Retiree Migration	Urban Sprawl
Chatham, MA	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Medium
Gloucester, MA	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
New Bedford, MA	High	Low	Medium	Med-High	Med-High	Medium	Low	Med-High
Provincetown, MA	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	High	Med-High	Med-High
Hatteras, NC	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low
Wanchese, NC	Low	Low	Med-High	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Barnegat Light, NJ	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Med-High
Belford, NJ	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	Medium
Cape May, NJ	Low	Med-High	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Medium
Point Pleasant Beach, NJ	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	High	Medium	Med-High
Amagansett, NY	Low	Med-High	Low	Low	Low	High	Med-High	High
Greenport, NY	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Med-High
Hampton Bays/Shinnecock, NY	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Med-High
Montauk, NY	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	High	Med-High	Med-High
Narragansett/Pt Judith, RI	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Med-High	Medium	Low

13.0 APPENDIX B PRICE MODEL

To assess the economic impacts of the various rebuilding alternatives as well as estimation of revenues under various landing scenarios, ex-vessel bluefish prices require estimation. In lieu of well-developed market supply and demand models, an inverse-demand based price model is used to estimate ex-vessel bluefish prices. Though price and quantity demanded are jointly determined such that Gauss Markov assumptions of exogeneity are violated, here, we assume harvest is weakly exogenous to ex-vessel price given the quota allocations and seasonal constraints which cause fishermen to maximize catch in order to maximize profits (Gordon 2020). This specification implies that the decision to fish is independent of ex-vessel prices. This assumption, as well as ex-vessel price models, are not uncommon in fishery economics literature.¹⁵

The Generalized Least Squares bluefish price model is given as:

$$(\log)\text{Ex-vessel Price}_t = \alpha + \beta_1 (\log)\text{Landings}_t + \text{AR}_t \quad (\text{Equation A})$$

where the dependent variable is the natural logarithm of average annual ex-vessel bluefish price¹⁶ (\$/lb.) and the independent variable is the natural log of total annual bluefish landings, t is time (i.e., years) and AR is an autoregressive error term. The dependent and independent variables are logged because the relationship between ex-vessel prices and landings is not expected to be strictly linear such that the slope of the regression is not assumed to be constant. The logged GLS model was implemented in place of a logged OLS model as the error term is suggested to be serially correlated over time with a Durbin-Watson d statistic of 0.72. After the implementation of the Prais–Winsten GLS estimator, the Durbin-Watson statistic was transformed to 1.67. It should be noted that additional models were taken into consideration after autocorrelation was detected, including a Cochrane-Orcutt AR(1) regression, linear autoregressive integrated moving-average (ARIMA) specified models with AR(2-5), an OLS regression with the inclusion of a lagged ex-vessel price, and a separate OLS regression with a lagged landings variable. Given the dependence of the lagged OLS regression on the previous year's price, the lack of significance on the AR(n) coefficients when the lag is greater than one¹⁷, along with the consideration of RMSE's, the Prais-Winsten GLS with an AR(1) error term was chosen. The Prais-Winsten was selected over the Cochrane-Orcutt given a lower RMSE and a Durbin-Watson statistic closer to 2. The Prais-Winsten GLS model parameters and results are shown in Table 29B.

¹⁵ Gordon (2020), Bloznelis (2018) and Tai (2017) offer thorough reviews of various price models and their respective methods.

¹⁶ Prices were adjusted to 2020 constant dollars using the Annual, Seasonally Adjusted, Gross Domestic Implicit Price Deflator (2012=100) <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPDEF>.

¹⁷ $\alpha = 0.01$

Table 28B: Prais-Winsten Generalized Least Squares (GLS) logged ex-vessel bluefish price model results.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t	P>t	95% Confidence Interval	
Ln Landings	-0.543	0.0951	-5.71	0	-0.74	-0.35
Constant	7.753	1.435	5.40	0	4.78	10.73
ρ	0.688	Durbin-Watson Statistic (original)				0.72
R-squared	0.68	Durbin-Watson Statistic (transformed)				1.67
Number of Obs.	24	Root Mean Square Error				0.08

Both price and landings data were retrieved from the Commercial Fisheries Database (CFDERS) from 1996 to 2019. About 68% of the variability in logged average ex-vessel bluefish prices are explained by logged total annual landings. Modeling the inverse relationship between prices and landings aids in more precisely estimating revenues given various expected landing quantities. The logged price variables are retransformed using Duan's smearing method to avoid inciting heteroskedastic errors. Average realized ex-vessel prices and estimated prices by year are shown in Figure 24B. Average annual predicted ex-vessel prices range from \$0.55 to \$0.98 per lb with an average price of \$0.66/lb. Average realized prices range from \$0.46 to \$1.03/lb and average \$0.66/lb across the time series.

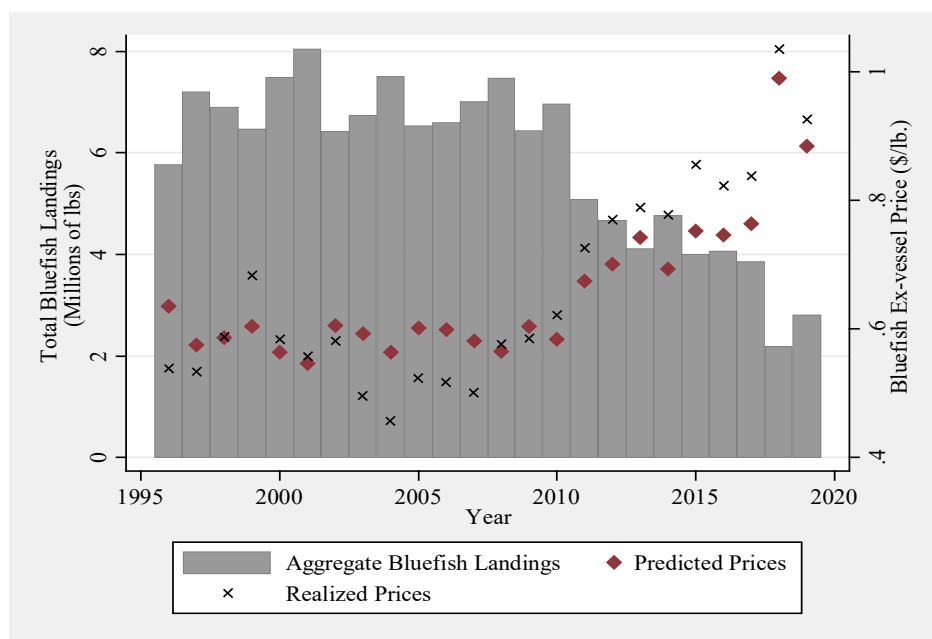


Figure 22B: Realized and predicted ex-vessel bluefish prices and realized commercial bluefish landings by year (1996-2019).

14.0 APPENDIX C SUPPLEMENTAL MINIMUM DEFAULT TABLES

Table 29C: Bluefish state-by-state allocation percentage point shift along the U.S. Atlantic coast using different proposed time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.10% while incorporating a phase-in approach.

0.1% Minimum Default Allocation		Min. Def. Status quo			5 year (2014-2018) - 3a-2			10 year (2009-2018) - 3a-3			1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18 - 3a-4		
State	Current Allocations	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year
ME	0.67%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	-0.14%	-0.11%	-0.08%	-0.14%	-0.11%	-0.08%	-0.02%	-0.02%	-0.01%
NH	0.41%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	-0.07%	-0.06%	-0.04%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
MA	6.72%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.97%	0.77%	0.55%	0.85%	0.68%	0.49%	0.23%	0.19%	0.13%
RI	6.81%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.23%	0.99%	0.70%	0.70%	0.56%	0.40%	0.19%	0.15%	0.11%
CT	1.27%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
NY	10.39%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	2.43%	1.95%	1.39%	2.34%	1.87%	1.34%	0.63%	0.51%	0.36%
NJ	14.82%	-0.03%	-0.02%	-0.02%	-0.91%	-0.73%	-0.52%	-0.24%	-0.19%	-0.14%	-0.09%	-0.07%	-0.05%
DE	1.88%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	-0.30%	-0.24%	-0.17%	-0.35%	-0.28%	-0.20%	-0.08%	-0.07%	-0.05%
MD	3.00%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	-0.36%	-0.29%	-0.20%	-0.27%	-0.22%	-0.15%	-0.06%	-0.05%	-0.04%
VA	11.88%	-0.02%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-1.81%	-1.45%	-1.03%	-1.50%	-1.20%	-0.86%	-0.41%	-0.33%	-0.24%
NC	32.06%	-0.09%	-0.07%	-0.05%	-0.09%	-0.07%	-0.05%	-0.01%	-0.01%	0.00%	-0.07%	-0.06%	-0.04%
SC	0.04%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%
GA	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%
FL	10.06%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.99%	-0.80%	-0.57%	-1.32%	-1.06%	-0.75%	-0.37%	-0.30%	-0.21%

Table 30C: Bluefish state-by-state allocation percentage point shift along the U.S. Atlantic coast using different proposed time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.25% while incorporating a phase-in approach.

0.25% Minimum Default Allocation		Min. Def. Status quo			5 year (2014-2018) - 3a-2			10 year (2009-2018) - 3a-3			1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18 - 3a-4		
State	Current Allocations	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year	4-year	5-year	7-year
ME	0.67%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%	-0.10%	-0.08%	-0.06%	-0.10%	-0.08%	-0.06%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%
NH	0.41%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%	-0.03%	-0.03%	-0.02%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	0.04%	0.03%	0.02%
MA	6.72%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.95%	0.76%	0.54%	0.83%	0.67%	0.48%	0.23%	0.18%	0.13%
RI	6.81%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.21%	0.97%	0.69%	0.69%	0.55%	0.39%	0.19%	0.15%	0.11%
CT	1.27%	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	-0.01%	-0.01%	-0.01%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%
NY	10.39%	-0.03%	-0.02%	-0.02%	2.36%	1.89%	1.35%	2.27%	1.82%	1.30%	0.60%	0.48%	0.34%
NJ	14.82%	-0.07%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.93%	-0.75%	-0.53%	-0.28%	-0.22%	-0.16%	-0.13%	-0.10%	-0.07%
DE	1.88%	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	-0.27%	-0.21%	-0.15%	-0.31%	-0.25%	-0.18%	-0.05%	-0.04%	-0.03%
MD	3.00%	0.04%	0.03%	0.02%	-0.33%	-0.26%	-0.19%	-0.24%	-0.19%	-0.14%	-0.04%	-0.03%	-0.02%
VA	11.88%	-0.04%	-0.03%	-0.02%	-1.79%	-1.43%	-1.02%	-1.50%	-1.20%	-0.86%	-0.43%	-0.34%	-0.25%
NC	32.06%	-0.22%	-0.17%	-0.12%	-0.22%	-0.17%	-0.12%	-0.14%	-0.11%	-0.08%	-0.20%	-0.16%	-0.12%
SC	0.04%	0.06%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%
GA	0.01%	0.06%	0.05%	0.04%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%	0.06%	0.05%	0.04%
FL	10.06%	-0.03%	-0.02%	-0.01%	-0.99%	-0.79%	-0.57%	-1.31%	-1.05%	-0.75%	-0.38%	-0.30%	-0.22%

Table 31C: Bluefish state allocations above a trigger threshold for all commercial allocation time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.10%.

Allocation of <u>additional</u> quota beyond the trigger threshold with a Minimum Default Allocation of 0.10%.				
State	Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)	10 year (2009-2018)	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
NH	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
MA	7.50%	16.60%	18.88%	7.50%
RI	7.50%	16.60%	7.50%	7.50%
CT	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
NY	15.12%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
NJ	15.12%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
DE	3.00%	0.10%	0.10%	3.00%
MD	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
VA	15.12%	3.00%	7.50%	17.03%
NC	15.12%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
SC	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
GA	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
FL	15.12%	7.50%	3.00%	7.50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 32C: Bluefish state allocations above a trigger threshold for all commercial allocation time series and a minimum default allocation of 0.25%.

Allocation of <u>additional</u> quota beyond the trigger threshold with a Minimum Default Allocation of 0.25%.				
State	Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)	10 year (2009-2018)	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
NH	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
MA	7.50%	16.60%	18.88%	7.50%
RI	7.50%	16.60%	7.50%	7.50%
CT	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
NY	17.03%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
NJ	17.03%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
DE	3.00%	0.10%	0.10%	3.00%
MD	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
VA	17.03%	3.00%	7.50%	17.03%
NC	17.03%	16.60%	18.88%	17.03%
SC	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
GA	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%
FL	7.50%	7.50%	3.00%	7.50%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

15.0 APPENDIX D ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Acceptable Biological Catch
ACL	Annual Catch Limit
ACS	American Community Survey
ACT	Annual Catch Target
AM	Accountability Measure
Board	The Commission's Bluefish Management Board
Commission	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Council	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
CSVI	Community Social Vulnerability Indicators
F	Fishing Mortality Rate
FMAT	Fishery Management Action Team
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
GARFO	Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
MC	Monitoring Committee
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
MSA	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NEFSC	Northeast Fisheries Science Center
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
PCFA	Principal Components Factor Analysis
RHL	Recreational Harvest Limit
SSB	Spawning Stock Biomass
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
TAL	Total Allowable Landings



**Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission & Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Joint Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel
Meeting Summary**

April 27, 2021

ASMFC Advisory Panel members in attendance:

- ***Frank Blount** – RI (for hire)
- **Rusty Hudson** – FL (commercial)
- **TJ Karbowski** – CT (for hire)
- **John LaFountain** – RI (commercial)
- **Robert Lorenz** – NC (recreational)

MAFMC Advisory Panel members in attendance:

- ***Frank Blount** – RI (for hire)
- **Captain Victor Hartley III** – NJ (for hire)
- **Michael Pirri** – CT (for hire)

Additional attendees:

- **Chris Batsavage** (MAFMC & ASMFC, NC)
- **Emilie Franke** (ASMFC)
- **Stephen Pearson** (MAFMC)
- **Mike Waive** (American Sportfishing Association)

Staff: Dustin Colson Leaning (ASMFC Staff), **Matt Seeley** (MAFMC Staff)

* Indicates member of both Council and Commission APs

Meeting Summary

The Advisory Panels of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met jointly via webinar on April 27, 2021 to review the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment Public Comment Summary and provide recommendations on the alternatives being considered in the amendment.

In February 2021, the Council and the Commission released the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment Public Hearing Document and Draft Amendment to consider: (1) revisions to the fishery management plan (FMP) goals and objectives; (2) modifying the current allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors; (3) modifying the current

commercial allocations to the states; (4) initiation of a rebuilding plan; (5) revisions to the quota transfer process (6) revisions to how the FMP accounts for management uncertainty; and (7) revisions to the *de minimis* provisions in the Commission's FMP. Commission and Council staff hosted 5 public hearings via webinar in March and April to gather public comment on the document. The Board and Council received written and in-person comments from 378 individuals and organizations during the public comment period.

Council and Commission Staff briefly presented on each of the alternative sets under consideration followed by an overview of the range of comments received by the Board and Council. Advisors provided comments of their own on which alternatives they supported from the documents. Advisor comments submitted by email are appended at the end of this summary.

FMP Goals and Objectives

- **John LaFountain:** The current objective 2 is to provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish. I feel this objective supports commercial fishing and harvest of bluefish. I'm scared that the proposed objectives are leaning toward managing the fish for abundance to more support the recreational fishery. I'm afraid the recreational advocates want the fish to be managed more like striped bass. If they had it their way all the bluefish would be kept in the ocean to be caught and released based on the comments I have heard at the public meetings. Also, is the proposed objective 1.1 saying in other words: allow the maximum harvest of bluefish while maintaining a sustainable stock biomass? I would like the language to include something about managing to allow the "maximum harvest" or "highest availability" to fisherman as the current objective 2 included.
- **TJ Karbowski:** You can change language as much as you want, but there needs to be something in here that is tied to ecosystem-based management. All the large fish disappeared in 2013 when the bunker left. Promote objective 1.5 to 1.1.
- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** I support separating the different user groups into their own sectors. This should happen in all fisheries. We need sector separation with the for-hire sector having its own allocation.

Sector Allocations

- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** I support 2a-3 and do not believe we need a phase-in.
- **John LaFountain:** 2a-5 considers the most amount of data. I originally preferred status quo; however, I think we should use as much data as possible and thus the longest time series. Also, why are we considering reallocating when we are initiating a rebuilding plan, how is this relevant?
- **TJ Karbowski:** I still support status quo even though it hurts me a little bit. I do not think we need to take money from any of the commercial guys. I also think we will be

throwing out the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) numbers in a few years. Keeping things status quo will make the whole process much easier.

- **Rusty Hudson:** In Florida, we have had the worst weather the past few years. You have my choices in my letter – Spanish and king mackerel, and bluefish are all farther offshore. We are hoping for sufficient allocation to allow the food producing community to continue operating.
- **Frank Blount:** I do not necessarily discount the form letter, but I like using catch data. Either 2a-2 or 2a-3. The support for those when summed almost matches the other alternatives. I am curious if this support for these alternatives is because catch data is being used or whether the public simply prefers the percentages.

Commercial Allocations to the States

- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** Stay with status quo and use a 0.25% minimum default allocation.
- **Robert Lorenz:** I am a recreational fishermen in North Carolina. The commercial catch is interesting because Hatteras-north has very large bluefish. South of Hatteras, the fish are much smaller. Sometimes the larger ones are available south but farther offshore. These fish are persistently cyclical. For that reason, I believe this fishery will recover on its own. Fishing may not be the biggest influence that causes this cyclical nature. Therefore, I am in favor of keeping things as simple and fair as possible. Use status quo and a 0.25% minimum default allocation. No trigger or phase-in and keep it as simple as you can.
- **John LaFountain:** How often will allocations be reviewed? *Staff responded: allocations will be reviewed at least within every 10 years according to the Council's new policy.* Therefore, go with 3a-2 using the most recent data.
- **Frank Blount:** Any of the alternatives other than status quo. I also support a 0.25% minimum default allocation. I am assuming transfers between states will still occur.
- **Rusty Hudson:** Since the pandemic, MRIP recalibration seems to be inflated. It takes so long to get these numbers with lag in reporting, do we have 2020 data yet? How reliable are these 2020 estimates and what will be incorporated into the 2021 stock assessment? *Staff responded: there was a 3–4-month period during the spring/summer of 2020 where intercepts were halted, and as they were phased back they were still limited. Frequency of intercepts also varied state by state. The 2021 assessment will only use data through 2019.*
- **Mike Waine (member of the public):** What was the terminal year of the 2019 operational assessment? *Staff responded: 2018.*

Rebuilding Plan

- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** We should go with the 7-year rebuilding plan. For Jersey, bluefish is a big part of our business. I do not want folks to experience a reduced bag limit.

- **TJ Karbowski:** Forage fish are a major issue here. Whatever math is being conducted, the MRIP numbers need to be thrown out. For 2019, in Connecticut from shore, over 2000 fish were harvested per day – this is not realistic.
- **John LaFountain:** Have the rebuilding plans already started? *Staff responded: After a rebuilding plan is selected it will be implemented starting in 2022. I would support 4d to reduce the impact to the commercial quotas.*
- **Robert Lorenz:** I support the p^* approach. In southeast North Carolina, I hear reports that bluefish are biting in the surf and from their boats. I know a few folks that are very happy with this at the moment.
- **Rusty Hudson:** I support the constant fishing mortality approach 4d. The lion share of fishing mortality is attributed to the recreational sector – my concerns regarding MRIP and intercepts still apply here.

Sector transfers

- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** Go with 5a-2. The comment that transfers should be not allowed is not a good idea. We should use transfers to ensure both sectors do not go over their limits. If one sector needs quota and the other sector has the ability to transfer some, then this should happen. We need to ensure we don't exceed the quotas and also support all sectors.
- **John LaFountain:** When do transfers occur? *Staff responded: transfers for the coming year (2022) are first considered in July 2021 by the Monitoring Committee based on catch and landings projections. The Board and Council then make their decision on the size of the transfer at their annual August 2021 specifications meeting.* I would like to support 5a-2, but it's hard to trust the recreational data. Therefore, I support 5a-1 until recreational catch accounting can be done more accurately.
- **Rusty Hudson:** I support 5a-2 as a tool in the toolbox. If MRIP recalibration explodes the recreational catch, you would not know that until the next year. This would kick in accountability measures. If this was the case, the recreational sector could benefit from transfers to avoid being penalized. Commercially, Florida typically transfers quota to northern states when they need it.
- **Frank Blount:** I agree with 5a-2 because I am interested in having transfers go both ways.
- **Mike Waine (member of the public):** A lot of people supported no transfers. Is that outside of the range of alternatives or can the Council and Board address that? *Staff responded: technically, this is outside of the current range of alternatives, however, this standpoint is helpful information that will be conveyed to the Board and Council for their consideration.*

Management Uncertainty

- **TJ Karbowski:** Where does recreational reform fit into this? *Staff responded: management certainty is already incorporated into management as a tool in the toolbox. One aspect of the recreational reform initiative is looking at how to best use MRIP estimates and the application to management. The uncertainty around MRIP apply to both management tools, but are definitely separate and only management uncertainty is being considered through this amendment.* Why is management uncertainty only applied as a reduction to the commercial and recreational landings limits? Shouldn't management uncertainty go both ways? I think it is ridiculous that we know MRIP numbers are overinflated and the only tool we have to address that is to reduce landings limits further. Management uncertainty should also account for inflated MRIP estimates.
- **John LaFountain:** I am in support of 6b.
- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** If you do a post-sector split, this needs to be really looked at hard. The commercial guys report so well and know what is going on. So do the party boats. I would support 6b because this heads towards a sector separation direction that we prefer.

De Minimis

- **Capt. Victor Hartley:** I would keep this at 7b, which is the least restrictive. This allows states' constituents to have hope moving forward. They already catch so few fish that they should be allowed to have measures that encourage people to go out and fish. If this leads to much more catch, there is still the *de minimis* threshold that will prevent this from occurring the next year.
- **Robert Lorenz:** I support 7c. Things are changing right now with an explosion of recreational boating. In looking into the future, 7c allows states to think about their own management measures and what fits best. They need to look into the potential that species need to be managed on a tighter and tighter basis. Reporting of recreational catch is also becoming more important.

Comments Received by Email

From: PAUL CARUSO [mailto:pkcaruso@comcast.net]

Sent: Tuesday, April 27, 2021 7:53 AM

To: Dustin C. Leaning <DLeaning@asmfc.org>

Cc: nichola.meserve@mass.gov

Subject: [External] Re: Reminder: Bluefish Addendum Comments

Reallocation: I support a more contemporary data set but one that will incorporate some of the prior distribution patterns 1999 to 2018 87/13 split, 2a-3 with a 5-year phase in.



Commercial allocation to states: 2009 to 2018, similar reasons as above 3a-3, phased over 5 year.

I am opposed to state-by-state transfers, fish do not come with quota, local availability can drive catch rates and not indicative of distribution over wider area, this causes conflicts with the recreational fishery and can result in localized depletion.

I support a minimum commercial allocation to states with no allocated quota.

I support a constant catch rebuilding strategy or P^* , for the quickest recovery.

I do not support sector transfers. Leave the unused landings in the water to support robust stocks.

Sincerely, Paul G. Caruso

Massachusetts Recreational Advisor

From: John LaFountain [mailto:foxseafood@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 12:05 PM

To: Dustin C. Leaning <DLeaning@asmfc.org>

Subject: [External] Re: Bluefish AP Summary - please review by 5-5-21

Hi Dustin,

-If you could include some of my written comment about the economic and social impacts. I know you said that is on a separate document. That is fine I just want to make sure that my comment is on that document.

-I think we are missing a chance here to set a federal size limit. In the last 10 years I have purchased fish from North Carolina and Virginia probably every time there is a run of fish. In the last 3-4 years 50% of the time the fish is under 2 lbs and often times under 1 lb. These are not mature sized fish. They do land a lot of 3-4 lb fish as well and I don't have a problem with that. But if they are landing 500,000 lbs a year of fish that don't have a chance to reproduce it's going to be hard to rebuild.

- Every year in the past I purchased bluefish in the spring particularly the month of April. The fish are racing up the coast from down south. We call them "racers" because they are so skinny. The big boats in New Jersey would just crush them catch tons of them and freeze them whole to be sold later. Whether I bought them fresh or frozen in April there was no meat on them and they were full of roe. The large egg masses. Always without exception the spring time April bluefish racers or runners were always caught before they reached where they were headed to lay their eggs. We can't have this happening if we are to rebuild the stock.

I don't know where you can include these comments but I think they need to be seen and thought about in this amendment.

Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

Alternatives Reference Guide

How to Use This Reference Guide

This reference guide provides a quick overview of the alternatives under consideration in this amendment. This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment [Public Hearing Document](#), which provides more detail on the alternatives and their basis as well as possible impacts. The tables, sections, and appendices referenced throughout this document are all contained in the Public Hearing Document. **We strongly encourage all interested individuals to review the full Public Hearing Document before submitting comments.** Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the Public Hearing Document.

The final section on page 5 includes several decision trees. These decision trees are intended to guide the flow of selecting alternatives as decisions in one section will dictate how other alternative sets should be interpreted. Decision trees 1-3 are included to help guide public comment on those sections that are tied together (i.e., Sections 5, 6, and 7).

Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) are jointly developing the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. This amendment considers:

1. Revisions to the fishery management plan (FMP) goals and objectives;
2. Modifying the current allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors;
3. Modifying the current commercial allocations to the states;
4. Initiation of a rebuilding plan;
5. Revisions to the quota transfer process;
6. Revisions to how the FMP accounts for management uncertainty; and
7. Revisions to the *de minimis* provisions in the Commission's FMP.

How to Provide Comments

Comments may be submitted at any of five virtual public hearings to be held between March 24 and April 8, 2021 or via written comment through April 23, 2021. Please visit <https://www.mafmc.org/bluefish-amendment> for a hearing schedule and instructions for submitting comments.

To be most effective, we request that you identify which alternative you support in each of the categories. It is helpful to include specific details as to why you support or oppose a particular alternative.

This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment [Public Hearing Document](#), which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the [Public Hearing Document](#).

SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

Note: Table numbers referenced throughout this section refer to the table numbers in the [Public Hearing Document](#).

1. Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives

Public Hearing Document Section 4.0

This amendment considers revisions to the FMP goals and objectives. While these revisions are not included as an explicit alternative, the Council and Board will need to approve the revised goals and objectives through this amendment. The current and proposed FMP goals and objectives can be found in the [Public Hearing Document](#).

2. Commercial/Recreational Allocations

Public Hearing Document Section 5.0

Commercial/Recreational Allocation Alternatives (Table 1)

This alternative set considers changes to the allocation of bluefish between the commercial and recreational sectors. The current allocations are highlighted in green. Alternatives 2a-2 through 2a-5 would revise allocations based on updated data using modified base years. It is important to note that while the proposed allocation percentages directly affect the annual commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits, these limits are also influenced by total catch limits, recent discard trends, and other factors.

Allocation Percentages	
Alternative	Basis
2a-1: 83% recreational, 17% commercial	No action/status quo (1981-1989 landings data)
2a-2: 89% recreational, 11% commercial	Multiple approaches: 2014-2018 and 2009-2018 catch data
2a-3: 87% recreational, 13% commercial	1999-2018 catch data
2a-4: 86% recreational, 14% commercial	Multiple approaches: 1981-2018 catch data; 2014-2018 and 2009-2018 landings data
2a-5: 84% recreational, 16% commercial	Multiple approaches: 1981-2018 and 1999-2018 landings data

Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives (Table 4)

This alternative set considers whether any changes to the allocation percentages should occur in a single year or if the change should be spread over multiple years.

Phase-in Alternatives
2b-1: No phase-in
2b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the selected rebuilding plan

3. Commercial Allocations to the States

Public Hearing Document Section 6.0

This section contains four alternative sets related to commercial bluefish allocations to the states.

Commercial Allocations to the States Alternatives (Table 6)

The table below lists the alternatives under consideration for the bluefish commercial allocations to the states using only landings data since commercial discards are considered negligible. The percent allocations represent the share of coastwide quota that is annually allocated to each state. The current allocations are represented by

This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment [Public Hearing Document](#), which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the [Public Hearing Document](#).

the no action/status quo alternative (alternative 3a-1, highlighted in green in Table 6). Alternatives 3a-2 through 3a-4 propose modifications to state allocations based on updated data using modified base years.

Landings-Based Allocation Alternatives				
State	3a-1	3a-2	3a-3	3a-4
	No action/ Status quo (1981-1989)	5 year (2014-2018)	10 year (2009-2018)	1/2 '81-'89 1/2 '09-'18
ME	0.67%	0.00%	0.01%	0.49%
NH	0.41%	0.03%	0.12%	0.33%
MA	6.72%	10.64%	10.16%	7.66%
RI	6.81%	11.81%	9.64%	7.59%
CT	1.27%	1.18%	1.00%	1.19%
NY	10.39%	20.31%	19.94%	13.01%
NJ	14.82%	11.23%	13.94%	14.57%
DE	1.88%	0.58%	0.40%	1.47%
MD	3.00%	1.50%	1.84%	2.68%
VA	11.88%	4.62%	5.85%	10.26%
NC	32.06%	32.06%	32.38%	32.13%
SC	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.03%
GA	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%
FL	10.06%	6.07%	4.75%	8.59%
Total	100.02%	100.01%	100.03%	100.00%

Commercial Allocation Change Phase-In Alternatives (Table 8)

This alternative set considers if any changes to the allocation percentages considered through alternative set 3a should occur in a single year (alternative 3b-1, no phase-in) or if the change should be spread out over 4, 5, or 7 years (alternative 3b-2). The Council and Board agreed that if alternative 3b-2 is selected, the duration over which new allocations will be phased in will match the duration of the selected rebuilding plan (section 7).

Phase-in Alternatives
3b-1: No phase-in
3b-2: Allocation change spread evenly over the same duration as the selected rebuilding plan

Commercial Quota Trigger Alternatives (Table 10)

This alternative set describes options to implement quota-based triggers that would reallocate any commercial quota that exceeds a specified threshold. This alternative set could allow state allocations to vary with overall stock abundance and resulting coastwide commercial quotas.

Commercial Quota Time Series	No Trigger Alternative: 3c-1	Pre-Transfer Alternative: 3c-2	Post-Transfer Alternative: 3c-3
No Action/Status quo [3a-1]	No trigger approach implemented	N/A	N/A
5-year (2014-2018) [3a-2]		3.67 M lbs	6.67 M lbs
10-year (2009-2018) [3a-3]		4.31 M lbs	8.21 M lbs
½ 1981-1989 and ½ 2009-2018 [3a-4]		4.31 M lbs*	8.21 M lbs*

This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment [Public Hearing Document](#), which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the [Public Hearing Document](#).

Commercial Minimum Default Allocation Alternatives (Table 13)

This alternative set considers whether to establish minimum default commercial quota allocations for each state within the bluefish management unit. A minimum default allocation provides each state with a fixed minimum percentage allocation of the coastwide commercial quota, and the remainder would be allocated based on the commercial allocation alternative selected from alternative set 3a.

Minimum Default Allocation Alternatives	
3d-1	No Action/Status quo: No Minimum Default Allocation
3d-2	0.10% Minimum Default Allocation
3d-3	0.25% Minimum Default Allocation

4. Rebuilding Plan

Public Hearing Document Section 7.0

This section contains four rebuilding plan alternatives. The no action option (4a) is included only as a formality, as the Council is legally bound to develop a rebuilding plan.

Rebuilding Plan Alternatives (Table 16)

Alternative	Rebuilding Plan	Duration	Adjustment to Council Risk Policy
4a	No Action/ Status Quo	N/A	N/A
4b	Constant Harvest	4 years	No
4c	P* (Council Risk Policy)	5 years	N/A
4d	Constant Fishing Mortality	7 years	Yes

5. Quota Transfer Provisions

Public Hearing Document Section 8.0

The following alternatives describe options for allowing annual transfers of quota between the commercial and recreational sectors as part of the specifications setting process (i.e., the annual process of setting or reviewing catch and landings limits for the upcoming fishing year).

Sector Transfer Provisions Alternatives (Table 20)

This alternative set offers the ability for transfers to occur bi-directionally between the commercial and recreational sectors (alternative 5a-2). The status quo alternative (5a-1) only allows for quota transfers from the recreational to commercial fishery.

Alternatives	Annual Quota Transfer Alternatives
5a-1	No Action/Status Quo
5a-2	Allow for optional bi-directional transfers through the annual specifications process with pre-defined guidelines and process. The transfer would consist of a portion of the total ABC in the form of a landings limit (i.e., commercial quota and RHL) transfer. Transfers would not occur if the stock is overfished or overfishing is occurring.

This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment [Public Hearing Document](#), which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the Public Hearing Document.

Transfer Cap Alternatives (Table 22)

This alternative set considers whether to establish a cap on the amount that can be transferred between sectors.

Alternatives	Transfer Cap
5b-1	No Action/Status Quo
5b-2	Up to 10% of the ABC

6. Management Uncertainty Alternatives

Public Hearing Document Section 9.0

This alternative set considers modifications to the process for accounting for management uncertainty in the specification setting process. Under the status quo alternative (6a), a single management uncertainty buffer is applied to the commercial and recreational sectors equally. Alternative 6b would allow for management uncertainty to be accounted for within each sector.

Management Uncertainty Alternatives (Table 24)

Alternatives	Management Uncertainty Alternatives
6a	No Action/Status Quo
6b	Post-Sector Split

7. De Minimis Provisions

Public Hearing Document Section 10.0

This section considers modifications to the *de minimis* provisions contained in the Commission's FMP. For a more detailed description of each *de minimis* alternative, please reference Section 10 of the Public Hearing Document.

De Minimis Provisions Alternatives (Table 25)

Alternatives	<i>De Minimis</i> Alternatives
7a	No Action/Status Quo
7b	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – no management measures
7c	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – state-selected management measures
7d	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – rollover management measures
7e	Recreational <i>De Minimis</i> – 2020 management measures

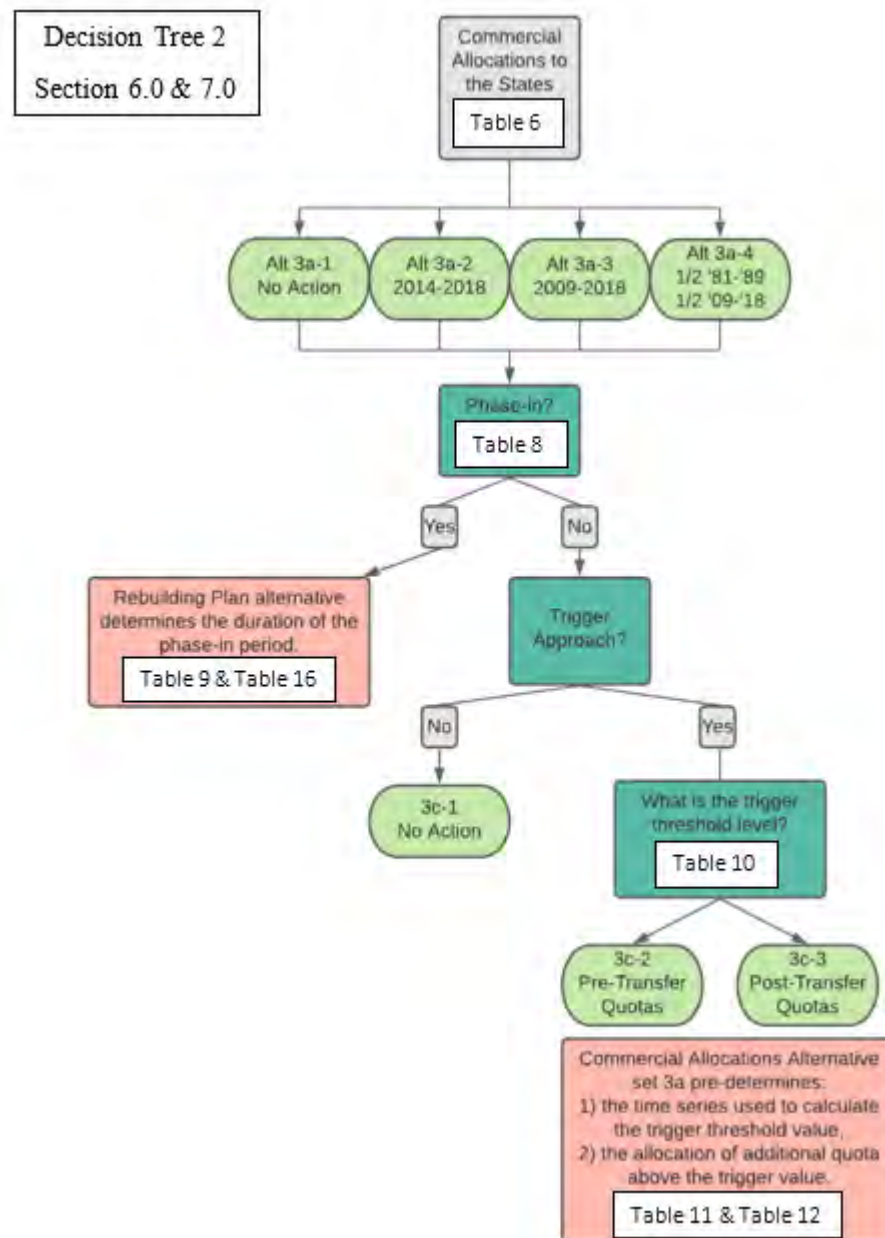
This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment Public Hearing Document, which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the Public Hearing Document.

Decision Trees

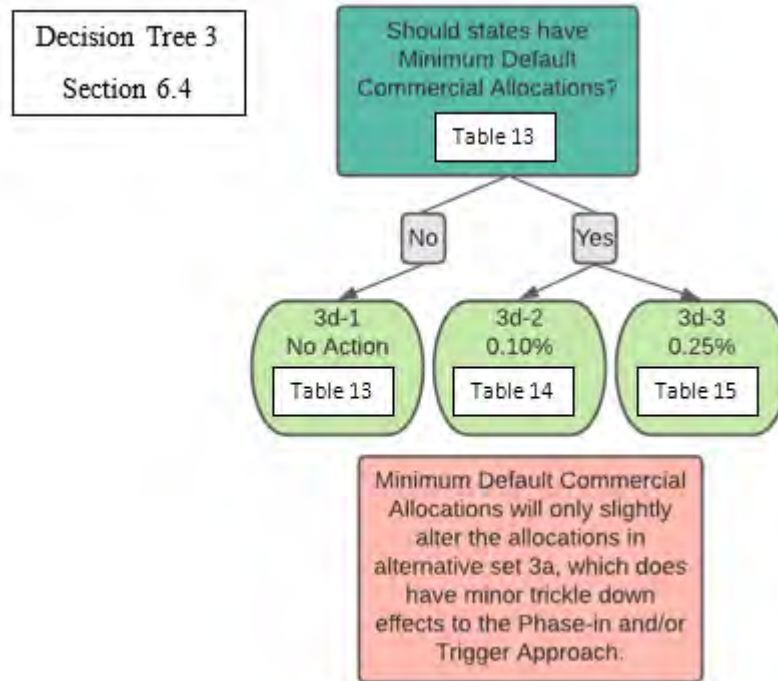
Decision trees are included to help guide the flow of commenting on alternatives as some decisions may impact the alternatives that will be selected in different alternative sets. For example, if a phase-in alternative is selected in either the sector allocations or commercial allocations to the states alternative set, the duration as to how long the allocations will be phased-in will match the durations of the preferred rebuilding alternative. **Note:** The tables listed in the decision trees directly reference the tables within the Public Hearing Document.



This reference guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the amendment Public Hearing Document, which provides more detail on the alternatives and their possible impacts. Informed comments on these alternatives cannot be made based on this document alone without also considering the background and implications described in the Public Hearing Document.



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Recreational Reform Initiative Harvest Control Rule

Progress Update for June 2021 Joint Council and Policy Board Meeting

Introduction

The Recreational Reform Initiative (Initiative) considers improvements to the management of recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The Initiative is a joint effort between the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission). It will address a range of recreational management issues through an anticipated technical guidance document, framework/addendum, and amendment.

This document provides an update on progress made on the Initiative in recent months. All topics summarized below will be further discussed by the Recreational Reform Initiative Fisheries Management Action Team (FMAT)/Plan Development Team (PDT).

The goals of the Initiative are to provide greater stability in recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits), develop strategies to increase management flexibility, and achieve accessibility aligned with availability/stock status for all four species. In October 2020, the Council and the Commission's Interstate Fishery Management Plan Policy Board (Policy Board) passed a motion initiating two management actions to achieve these goals by further developing the following topics:

1. Better incorporation of MRIP uncertainty into the management process,
2. Guidelines for maintaining status quo recreational management measures,
3. Setting multi-year recreational measures,
4. Considering changes to the timing of state and federal waters measures recommendations,
5. A Harvest Control Rule (HCR) proposal put forward by six recreational fishing organizations (described in more detail below),
6. Recreational sector separation, and
7. Recreational catch accounting.

In February 2021, the Council and Policy Board agreed to prioritize further development of the HCR as an immediate next step. The other Recreational Reform topics will be further developed after additional progress is made on the HCR. This memo focuses on the HCR, given its high priority. The other Initiative topics are described in more detail in [a January 2021 staff memo](#).

An informal staff working group met several times between February and May 2021 to further consider how the HCR could be developed within the constraints of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson Act) and other guiding management documents. In late May, the group transitioned to a joint FMAT/PDT (see membership list in appendix).

While the group has made significant progress, several topics require further development, as described in more detail below.

Harvest Control Rule (HCR) Summary and Working Group Recommendations

The HCR was put forward in March 2020 by six recreational fishing organizations as a suggested alternative in the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment. The Council and Board agreed not to move forward with the HCR within the allocation amendment and instead to further consider the components of the proposal addressing recreational management measures through the Recreational Reform Initiative. A broader discussion of the initial proposal can be found in [a January 2021 staff memo](#).

The overarching goal of the HCR is to rely less on expected fishery performance compared to a catch or harvest limit (e.g., expected harvest compared to the recreational harvest limit), and instead to use a more holistic approach that places greater emphasis on traditional and non-traditional stock status indicators and trends.

The HCR would use predetermined recreational management measure “steps” associated with different biomass levels and stock indicators. An example of how this approach could be structured is illustrated in the figure below. The intent of the original proposal was for the most liberal measures (Step A in the figure) to be the most liberal that anglers feel they would need and anything more liberal would not have additional socioeconomic benefits. These measures would be used when the indicators suggest a very healthy stock status. The most restrictive measures (Step D in the figure) would be used when the indicators suggest poor stock status and would promote conservation of the stocks while providing some access to anglers and helping businesses that rely on recreational fishing (e.g., for-hire vessels, bait and tackle shops) to stay in business. Stakeholder input will be important for selecting the appropriate management measures for each step, especially for the most and least restrictive steps.

Given the requirements of the Magnuson Act and the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), it is not possible to pre-determine the most restrictive measures that could ever be used. Therefore, the most restrictive measures in the HCR should be thought of as a goal, rather than a strict threshold. Potential use of HCR for stocks under a rebuilding plan requires further discussion by the FMAT/PDT.

The intended benefits of the HCR approach, compared to the current process for setting management measures, include greater predictability in future management measures and a more clear linkage between the measures and stock status. By incorporating trend information, the management system could respond to changes in stock status in a more measured way, with the intention of minimizing fluctuations in management measures.

Moving forward, updated stock assessment information for all four species is expected to be available every other year. This will provide a mechanism to closely monitor stock status and provide a feedback loop for evaluating if the management measures are set appropriately.

Accountability measures will still be required under the HCR. The FMAT/PDT will consider if changes are needed to the current accountability measures under the HCR.

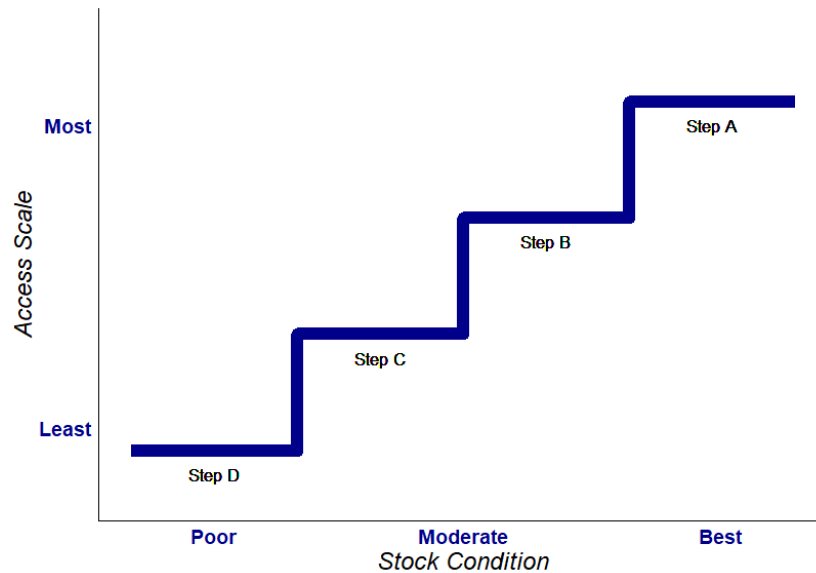


Figure 1: Example of a potential Harvest Control Rule structure. Each step would have associated recreational bag, size, and season limits. The number of steps, the measures associated with each step, and the indicators used to define stock condition have yet to be defined and will be further developed by the FMAT/PDT.

Stock Status Indicators

The working group agreed that the management measures used in a given year should be based on multiple stock status indicators; however, further consideration is needed regarding the most appropriate indicators. The group recommends further evaluation of biomass compared to the target level, recruitment trends, and harvest as potential indicators to guide selection of the appropriate management measure step. The approach can incorporate other indices if data are available in the future (e.g., environmental trends, socioeconomic information, or data on angler behavior). The group recommends development of a decision tree to guide managers to the appropriate management step based on multiple stock status indicators, including considerations related to data reliability and uncertainty.

The FMAT/PDT will further consider if and how catch and harvest trends, in addition to stock status indicators, may be incorporated into the HCR. They will also consider how the HCR will comply with the Magnuson Act requirements for annual catch limits set at a level such that overfishing does not occur, including measures to ensure accountability.

Number of and Boundaries Between Management Measure Steps

The working group agreed that in order to provide greater stability and to most appropriately use the data, the HCR should include a limited number of management measure steps and the boundaries between the steps should be clearly defined. The appropriate number of steps and the boundaries between the steps should be based on data considerations - especially those related to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) catch and harvest estimates. For example, past experience has shown harvest estimates can vary significantly across years despite status quo management measures. Harvest is influenced by a number of factors, including management measures, availability of target species, weather, economic conditions, and other factors. For

these reasons, future harvest can be challenging to predict with accuracy. The HCR management measure steps should be expected to have meaningfully different outcomes for harvest, given the associated uncertainty and variability in the harvest data.

The working group suggests consideration of the Council's risk policy as one piece of information to define the boundaries between the management measure steps. Under the risk policy, the appropriate probability of overfishing for stocks not under a rebuilding plan is defined differently when biomass is at or below 10% of the target level, when it is between 10% and 100% of the target level, when it is greater than 100% but less than 150% of the target level, and when it is at least 150% of the target level (50 CFR 648.21). Similar bins based on stock status and other considerations could be used to define the HCR management measure steps. This will be further considered by the FMAT/PDT.

Determining the Management Measures Associated with Each Step

A significant amount of quantitative analysis will be required to determine and evaluate the management measures associated with each step in the HCR. The working group agreed that an empirical method should be used to produce initial management measures for each step. These measures could then be reviewed by managers and stakeholders and modified through an empirical model based on their input, if needed.

The working group is exploring the use of an existing empirical model which emulates a fishery response to regulation changes, along with the uncertainty around that estimate, making it a valuable tool for developing management measures and analyzing the HCR. This model was initially developed for summer flounder with funding from the Council. A black sea bass version of the model is currently in development. Given timing and workload constraints, it is not likely that a scup or bluefish version of the model can be developed within the next year.

The working group noted that the intent is not to require use of this model for determining management measures in the future. Rather, it is a useful tool to help define management measures and to carry out the significant amount of analysis required to further develop the HCR. Council leadership have begun planning for a sub-group of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to peer review this model in late summer 2021.

The original HCR proposal would allow state waters measures to differ from federal waters measures and would allow states and/or regional groupings of states to have different management measures. The working group agreed it would be beneficial to ultimately move towards more consistency in measures across states, especially when possible to do so without restricting access in any states. They recommend further expert consideration and evaluation of coastwide measures compared to regional and/or state by state measures. In addition, further consideration is needed regarding appropriate use of the data when separated into different recreational fishing modes (e.g., for-hire, private, and shore modes). The precision of the MRIP data when broken down to the state, wave, and mode level poses challenges for predicting fishery performance under measures that vary by state and/or mode. This issue will be further discussed by the FMAT/PDT and will likely also be considered through the planned SSC sub-group peer review of the empirical model.

Potential Timeline of Next Steps

A draft timeline is provided below with potential next steps for the Recreational Reform Initiative and other intersecting management actions (e.g., ongoing allocation amendments for all four species and development of a rebuilding plan for bluefish).¹ This timeline assumes that the HCR will not require a framework/addendum or amendment, which has yet to be determined.

As previously stated, in February 2021, the Council and Policy Board agreed to prioritize the HCR over the remaining Recreational Reform Initiative topics as an immediate next step. Given other ongoing actions for these species, it is not possible to simultaneously develop all Recreational Reform Initiative topics. The timeline below suggests that further development of the remaining Initiative topics will not occur until early 2022; however, some topics may be partially developed as part of the HCR (e.g., better incorporating uncertainty in the MRIP data into management).

The working group has discussed potential use of the HCR for 2022 recreational management measures; however, there are several considerations and tasks that need to be addressed prior to implementation. Depending on the final details, the HCR may be within the scope of current regulations and may not require a framework/addendum or amendment for implementation as the FMP already allows considerable flexibility in developing recreational management measures. However, at this point in time, it is not possible to conclusively determine if a management action would be needed to use the HCR for 2022 management measures.

- May 2021
 - Staff working group transitions to an FMAT/PDT.
- June 2021:
 - Recreational Reform Initiative update at joint Council/Policy Board meeting.
 - FMAT/PDT continues to develop the HCR.
 - Anticipated final action on Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment.
 - Expected 2022 implementation of rebuilding plan and any changes to the commercial/recreational and commercial state allocations.
- July 2021
 - SSC meeting to recommend 2022-2023 ABCs for all four species.
 - Monitoring Committee meetings to recommend 2022-2023 annual catch limits, annual catch targets, commercial quotas, and recreational harvest limits for all four species.
 - Advisory Panel meetings to provide input on 2022-2023 commercial and recreational catch and landings limits and commercial management measures for all four species.
 - FMAT/PDT continues to develop the HCR.

(Continued on next page)

¹ In April 2021, the Council and the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board agreed to postpone final action on the Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment for those species until December 2021 to allow for further development of the HCR and additional consideration of how it may intersect with the commercial/recreational allocations.

- August 2021
 - Council and Policy Board review of progress on HCR.
 - Tentative SSC sub-group review of summer flounder and black sea bass empirical model.
 - FMAT/PDT continues to develop the HCR.
- September - October 2021
 - Workshops and/or other methods of gathering stakeholder input on HCR management measure steps, including input regarding the most liberal and most restrictive management measures.
 - FMAT/PDT continues to develop the HCR.
- November 2021
 - Monitoring Committee and Advisory Panel meetings to consider 2022 recreational management measures.
 - Depending on progress made and additional details to be determined, the HCR may be considered for 2022 management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.
 - 2022 management measures for bluefish will need to comply with the rebuilding plan, which is currently in development.
- December 2021
 - Target date for near complete development of the HCR by the FMAT/PDT (assuming a framework/addendum or amendment is not needed).
 - Council and Management Boards adopt 2022 federal waters recreational management measures for all four species.
 - Depending on progress made and additional details to be determined, the Council and Management Board may consider use of the HCR for 2022 management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.
 - 2022 management measures for bluefish will need to comply with the rebuilding plan.
 - Final action on the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment.
 - Any changes to the allocations will not be implemented until 2023 at the earliest and therefore will not be used to set 2022 recreational management measures.
- February 2022
 - Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and Bluefish Management Board meetings to consider 2022 state waters recreational management measures, potentially using HCR.
 - Joint Council/Policy Board consideration of next steps for and prioritization of remaining Recreational Reform Initiative topics

Additional Information

- Recreational Reform Initiative web page: <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/recreational-reform-initiative>
- More details on all Recreational Reform Initiative topics can be found in a January 2021 staff memo, available [here](#).
- Additional information on the empirical model described above is available in the briefing materials and recordings from the August 2019 Council meeting (available [here](#), see Tab 8). However, it should be noted that some changes to the model have been made since that time.
- The current accountability measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass are summarized [here](#).
- More information on the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment is available [here](#).
- More information on the Bluefish Rebuilding and Allocation Amendment is available [here](#).
- Additional summary information on the fisheries is available in annual Fishery Information Documents, which can be found [here](#).

Appendix: FMAT/PDT Membership

Name	Agency	Role/Expertise
Julia Beaty	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council	FMAT/PDT Co-Chair
Savannah Lewis	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission	FMAT/PDT Co-Chair
Mike Celestino	New Jersey DEP	Technical analysis and state management
Dustin Colson Leaning	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission	FMP coordinator for summer flounder, scup, and bluefish
Emily Keiley	NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office	Fisheries policy and legal requirements
John Maniscalco	New York DEC	Technical analysis and state management
Scott Steinback	NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center	Recreational fisheries economist
Greg Wojcik	Connecticut DEEP	Technical analysis and state management
Anthony Wood	NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center	Stock assessment

Although not formal members of the FMAT/PDT, other Council, Commission, and NOAA Fisheries staff, as well as other experts, will be consulted with and brought into the process as needed.



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: May 25, 2021
To: Council
From: Jessica Coakley, Staff
Subject: Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog 2022 Specifications Review

As part of the 2021-2026 multi-year specification process for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted.

The following is included for Council consideration on this subject:

- 1) Report of the May 2021 SSC Meeting – See Committee Reports Tab
- 2) Staff Recommendations Memo (dated May 4, 2021)
- 3) Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report (April 2021)
- 4) Surfclam Fishery Information Document (April 2021)
- 5) Ocean Quahog Fishery Information Document (April 2021)

Neither staff nor the SSC recommended any changes to the 2022 specifications for surfclam and ocean quahog.

In order to maintain status quo measures for 2022, the Council would need a motion from the Council recommending the surfclam minimum size be suspended by the Regional Administrator (i.e., an annual requirement in the regulations). The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office has reviewed the landings information and biological sampling data for surfclams since the previous size analysis was conducted (August 2019 through July 2020), and determined the proportion of surfclams in the fishery smaller than 4.75 inches did not exceed the 30 percent trigger for the minimum size requirement. The data from August 2020 to July 2021 will be reviewed by the Regional Administrator prior to suspending the minimum size for 2022.

After the specifications review is completed, the Council will also receive updates from staff on other projects and activities related to surfclam and ocean quahog.



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Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 4, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jessica Coakley, Staff
Subject: 2022 Specifications Review for Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

As part of the 2021-2026 multi-year specification process for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted. The NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center provided an update of the commercial fishery data for surfclam and ocean quahog to support this review. Due to COVID-19, the 2020 clam survey was not conducted, therefore no survey data was available for review this year. The survey is scheduled to be conducted in 2021.

Based on a review of the information provided, staff recommends no change to the 2022 fishing year specifications. In order to maintain status quo measures for 2022, the Council would need a motion recommending the surfclam minimum size be suspended by the Regional Administrator (i.e., an annual requirement in the regulations). The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office reviewed the landings information and biological sampling data for surfclams since the previous size analysis (August 2019 through July 2020), and determined the proportion of surfclams in the fishery smaller than 4.75 inches does not exceed the 30 percent trigger for the minimum size requirement.

In 2022, the Council will again review available information and may consider modifications to the 2023 specifications, if warranted.



Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Performance Report

April 2021

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog (SCOQ) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on April 22, 2021 to review the Fishery Information Documents and develop the following Fishery Performance Report. The primary purpose of this report is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. A series of trigger questions listed below were posed to the AP to generate discussion of observations in these fisheries. Please note: Advisor comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements; in those cases, the differences in opinions are noted.

Advisory Panel members present: Thomas Dameron, Peter Himchak, Samuel Martin, Jeff Pike, and David Wallace.

Others present: Jessica Coakley and José Montañez (Council staff), Doug Potts (GARFO), Peter Hughes (Council member), Wendy Gabriel and Ed Houde (SSC Members), Ron Larsen (Sea Risk Solutions LLC), and Guy Simmons (Sea Watch International).

Trigger questions:

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets/economy, environment, regulations, other factors)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

Critical Issues (not in any priority order)

COVID-19: Sales to restaurants (foodservice) was very low year-on-year for 2020 and the first quarter of 2021; with the expectation that the effects of this may be ongoing and/or longer lasting. Seventy-five (75) percent of all seafood is sold in restaurants in the U.S. Because of the pandemic landings and sales have been reduced. All processors are continuing to operate to protect jobs within their organizations, causing inventories to rise dramatically. Inventory is being built without much in additional sales. This causes additional storage costs as well as other expenses, which cannot continue in perpetuity without increased demand and sales. If this continues, it will continue to result in lower/reduced landings. If retail starts opening back up this will help relieve some of these added expenses. Distribution is starting to increase in anticipation of the opening up, and many are preparing for improved sales, but at this point it hasn't helped the bottom line.

Research: It is important that the Mid-Atlantic Council, and their representatives on the Habitat Committee and Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT), continue to support any research projects that would increase harvest opportunities within the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (GSCHMA). Research should support a structure of ongoing Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)/HMA review that is responsive to new data collection, regardless of the source, and climate-driven species distributional changes. The development of a question driven process to periodically review EFH/HMA status is needed and is not presently in place.

The SCOQ AP recommends the NEFMC and MAFMC pursue a cross Council workshop to, 1) review the management process in the GSCHMA, 2) better understand what research is being conducted in the area, 3) describe the process for ongoing management of these areas (as things change related to climate), and 4) develop a common understanding what this means for the process of managing these clam access areas in the GSCHMA. It is unclear what is essential in these areas and what data might be needed to address modifications to these clam access/HMA areas going forward. One of the areas that is presently allowed to be fished by clam vessels in the GSCHMA is called the Fishing Rip. This area, although open to fishing, is not a viable location due to the how hard the bottom structure is with boulders; it destroys gear. This highlights the critical nature of collecting and analyzing accurate data to identify effective areas for clam vessels to harvest surfclam.

In terms of MSA reauthorization, stronger requirements to review the EFH designations and any associated management measures (e.g., gear restricted areas, habitat closures) should be included in the statute to ensure these provisions are more responsive to the climate-related changes to the quality of the fish habitat, as well as changing conditions in the clam fisheries and other fisheries the Council manages.

Access to Fishing Grounds: The development of wind energy and aquaculture areas, protected marine areas and historic monuments, and other offshore ocean uses have become a critical issue for our industry. All of these activities have the potential to reduce safe access to historically used fishing ground resulting in a greater concentration of fishing effort in smaller areas.

Other Important Issues

The SCOQ AP would like to request that surfclam and ocean quahog AP members have two seats on Fishery Management Act Teams (FMATs) for issues related to these fisheries.

Quotas

The advisors would like to see status quo quotas and the suspension of the surfclam minimum size limit for the upcoming fishing years. The stability in the quota translates into stability in the fishery and market under normal circumstances (which do not include pandemics). There is uncertainty in the market in 2021 under COVID-19. The peer review committee that did the surfclam assessment agreed that it was well done and surfclam are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (in 2019).

Market/Economic Conditions

For surfclam and ocean quahog, there are occasional landings in Ocean City, MD. It used to be significant but is no longer. Cape May and Wildwood, NJ are no longer significant. Most of the fleet is fishing out of Pt. Pleasant and Atlantic City, NJ, Oceanview, NY, Hyannis, MA (surfclam only), and New Bedford and Fairhaven, MA. Trucking costs and the distance needed to travel to harvest clams has put greater economy on scale and location.

Increasing foreign imports and foreign competition puts a constraint on price, and the price cannot be increased to absorb all the additional costs and still be competitive in the marketplace. Clearwater (clam company in Canada) has been sold to a new syndicate, so it has gone from a public to private entity - it is expected that the bulk of their product will be sold in the U.S. This is exerting additional pressure on the marketplace. The limits to demand for clams in the market is driven by many market factors including foreign seafood competition, other products in the marketplace (e.g. chicken, etc.), shifting toward healthier market products (e.g. clam sushi, etc. versus a fried or cream-based product), and competition with other ingredients, as clams typically are not a center of the plate product. There are also some complicating factors related to U.S. relationships with China and the EU in terms of marketing and sales, including trade tariffs.

COVID-19 dominates issues related to the market and economic conditions. It is unclear how and when this will change the markets going forward. Processors have been looking into ways to adjust to current market conditions with ready-to-eat product lines as the fresh retail and restaurant sales have declined; although processors are preparing for and anticipating increases in going forward.

Over the last year, LaMonica Fine Foods has focused its efforts on building the retail markets and had great success in increased distribution of Retail Canned White and Red Clam Sauces, Clam Juice and Chopped Clams. In addition to canned items, LaMonica Fine Foods has added processing Breaded Calamari and Scallops for the Retail/Foodservice trade. 2020 also was an opportunity for LaMonica Fine Foods to create an online store to sell all of its products direct to consumers. With great demand for the canned items, they also added a line of LaMonica “Simply Mediterranean” 5 variety of Italian/seafood seasonings, 4 varieties Artisan Pasta, Imported Italian Extra Virgin Oil and Balsamic Vinegar. Over the next year they will be working on developing a line of Frozen Seafood Pasta bowls for the retail trade that will be microwavable and will fit the needs and demands of today’s consumer.

In 2020, the Bumble Bee clam factory in Cape May experienced very strong demand and production due to the overall increase in seafood consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, the plant halts production at the beginning of the year for cleaning and maintenance but had to come back up early in Q-1 2021 to meet demand. Employment levels have been steady with no issues. Overall, sales were also strong primarily driven by COVID-19 pandemic. The plant uses ocean quahog as its prime ingredient; there were no resource issues, and the supply of raw material remained adequate.

Environmental Conditions

Many species (including surfclam and ocean quahog) are moving northward and into deeper waters. This movement is temperature driven. Historically, about half the quota for quahog used to be taken in the Southern area. Surfclam are increasing in these Southern areas, possibly because of the faster growth rates for surfclam settling when compared to quahog. The natural shift in the stock distribution northwards has driven the movement of the fishery. For more details, see the Surfclam Fishery Information Document.

General Fishing Trends

The landings per unit effort (LPUE) is not indicative of stock abundance because it only reflects the fishing occurring in a few ten-minute squares (see Fishery Information Documents). The LPUE has leveled off in recent years. The LPUE continues to be higher on Georges Bank and there are 4 permitted vessels in the open portion of the Georges Banks closed area. Vessels fishing in Nantucket Shoals (which tend to be smaller vessels) are operating on seasonal closures - and must fish in other areas when access is not available.

Fleet Capacity

Fleet capacity continues to stay static. The overall quotas are not being harvested. The driving factors are from the marketplace and not an inability to catch the quota. The processors are unable to demand the prices at which the products are sold, because the vendors essentially dictate the prices to the processors. This has limited the amount of capitalization that can be done in this fishery. The fleet continues to age, and there have been limited new builds, which has resulted in increased maintenance time spent to refurbish vessels.

Optimum Yield (OY)

The industry was comfortable with a maximum OY of 3.4 million bushels for surfclam in terms of production. For ocean quahog a maximum OY of 6 million bushels is reasonable in terms of production. Landings for quahog have been below the OY range because of demand for quahog.

Wind Development

The clam advisors are concerned about the BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management) wind farm leasing process and potential impacts to historically important fishing areas. The industry's opportunities to engage with developers on wind array siting relative to the most productive clam fishing beds has not been productive.

This resistance in cooperation lends to the notion that the clam fishery and the ocean wind developers cannot coexist as the developers have made no attempt to give the clam industry any consideration in their layout of their arrays and the spacing between the turbines which will make it unsafe for clam vessels to work within wind farms. Siting is critical in terms of ensuring reasonable fishing access. It has been the experience of the clam industry that any communications by BOEM, wind energy developers, or state regulators is purely perfunctory and true mitigation efforts will not be made.

In the New England and Mid-Atlantic region, offshore wind development is out of control. The industry feels that no matter how hard they try to engage with developers on these issues, their input is not being considered or incorporated into the siting and development process. The spatial and operation requirements of the fishery (considering things like weather, tides, safety, etc.) need to be accounted for to ensure access to the wind arrays, but at present that is not happening. These arrays become de-facto Marine Protected Areas and the Councils and industry have nothing to say about how the fishing grounds are managed within the arrays. Unlike finfish, clams do not move, so once the vessels cannot fish in an area those resources are lost to the fishery and the value it brings to the economy. These areas are also likely to be lost to survey data further impacting the biomass estimates of the fishery.

The Council needs to consider the biological impacts on the fishery itself, and other cumulative environmental effects that may occur. These should include things like productivity of the resource, larval displacement, scour and sediment suspension, hydrographic changes, and effects of sounds and other pressures on the zooplankton community (which includes food for clams). In addition, in water structures from offshore wind or other types of closures (e.g., GSCHMA) will result in vessels having to travel further and having a larger carbon footprint.

Science and Research Initiatives

Industry continues to do research with the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCeMFIS), an industry, university, and National Science Foundation (NSF) supported research center and that has several completed, ongoing and recently funded research projects: <http://scemfis.org>

There are ongoing projects led by Rutgers University to identify economic impacts and develop economic models associated with wind energy development on the surfclam industry.

There is an ongoing RODA Knowledge Trust project (funded by NYSERDA) for surfclam and ocean quahog (as well as some other fisheries) designed to identify economic exposures of lost access for harvesters, processor and shoreside facilities of as a result of future build out of wind energy lease sites.

Research Priorities

The AP feels that MAFMC and NEFSC needs to consider how the fisheries independent surveys will take place within wind energy arrays once constructed.



Atlantic Surfclam Fishery Information Document

April 2021

This Fishery Information Document provides a brief overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for Atlantic surfclam with an emphasis on 2020. Data sources for Fishery Information Documents are generally from unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) survey, dealer, vessel logbook, and permit databases and should be considered preliminary. For more resources, including previous Fishery Information Documents, please visit <https://www.mafmc.org/surfclams-quahogs>.

Key Facts

- There has been no change to the status of the Atlantic surfclam stock. The stock is not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2019.
- The total ex-vessel value of the 2020 federal harvest was approximately \$23 million, lower than the \$28 million in 2019.
- In 2020, there were 7 companies reporting purchases of surfclam and/or ocean quahog in 3 states outside of Maine.
- In 2020, COVID-19 impacted the fishing sector - information on those impacts can be found here and in recent fishery performance reports: <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Northeast-COVID-19-Impact-Snapshot-webready.pdf>
- Overall, surfclam landings per unit effort continues to decline as more dense areas are fished down including declines on Georges Bank. The fishery appears to continue to shift its effort Northward.

Basic Biology

Information on Atlantic surfclam biology can be found in the document titled, “Essential Fish Habitat Source Document: Surfclam, *Spisula solidissima*, Life History and Habitat Requirements” (Cargnelli et al. 1999).¹ An electronic version is available at the following website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/habitat-conservation/essential-fish-habitat-efh-northeast>. Additional information on this species is available at the following website: <https://www.fishwatch.gov/>. A summary of the basic biology is provided below.

Atlantic surfclam are distributed along the western North Atlantic Ocean from the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence to Cape Hatteras. Surfclam occur in both the state territorial waters (≤ 3 miles from shore) and within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; 3-200 miles from shore). Commercial concentrations are found primarily off New Jersey, the Delmarva Peninsula, and on

Georges Bank. In the Mid-Atlantic region, surfclam are found from the intertidal zone to a depth of about 60 meters (197 ft), but densities are low at depths greater than 40 meters (131 ft).

The maximum size of surfclam is about 22.5 cm (8.9 inches) shell length, but surfclam larger than 20 cm (7.9 inches) are rare. The maximum age exceeds 30 years and surfclam of 15-20 years of age are common in many areas. Surfclam are capable of reproduction in their first year of life, although full maturity may not be reached until the second year. Eggs and sperm are shed directly into the water column. Recruitment to the bottom occurs after a planktonic larval period of about three weeks.

Atlantic surfclam are suspension feeders on phytoplankton and use siphons which are extended above the surface of the substrate to pump in water. Predators of surfclam include certain species of crabs, sea stars, snails, and other crustaceans, as well as fish predators such cod and haddock.

Status of the Stock

The most recent assessment of the Atlantic surfclam (*Spisula solidissima*) stock is a management track assessment of the existing 2016 benchmark Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment (SAW 61; NEFSC 2017).^{2,3} This management track assessment indicated the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Figures 1-2). Retrospective adjustments were not made to the model results. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2019 was estimated to be 1,222 ('000 mt) which is 119% of the biomass target ($SSB_{MSY\ proxy} = 1,027$; Figure 1). The 2019 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.036 which is 25.8% of the overfishing threshold proxy ($F_{MSY\ proxy} = 0.141$; Figure 2).

Management System and Fishery Performance

Management

There have been no major changes to the overall management system since the Individual Fishing Quota (ITQ) system was implemented in 1990. The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic surfclam (*Spisula solidissima*) became effective in 1977. The FMP established the management unit as all Atlantic surfclam in the Atlantic EEZ. The FMP is managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), in conjunction with the NMFS as the Federal implementation and enforcement entity. The primary management tool is the specification of an annual quota, which is allocated to the holders of allocation shares (ITQs) at the beginning of each calendar year as specified in Amendment 8 to the FMP (1988). In addition to the Federal water fishery, there is a small fishery prosecuted in the state waters of New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. The FMP, including subsequent Amendments and Frameworks, is available on the Council website at: <https://www.mafmc.org/>.

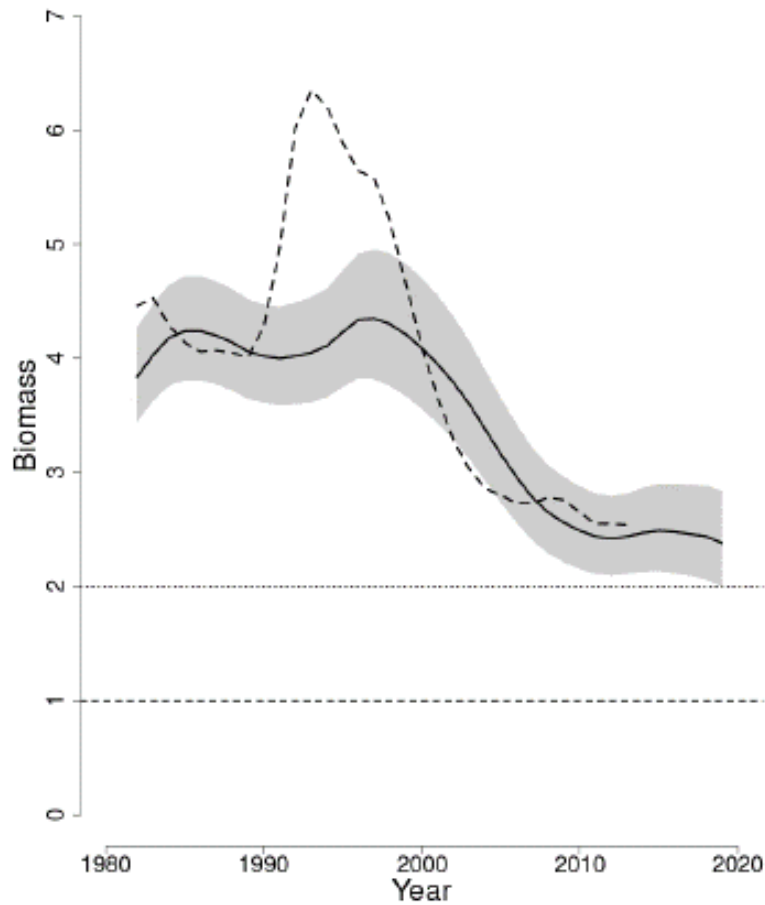


Figure 1. Trends in spawning stock biomass of Atlantic surfclam between 1982 and 2019 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding $SSB_{Threshold}$ ($\frac{1}{2}$ SSB_{MSY} proxy; horizontal dashed line) as well as SSB_{Target} (SSB_{MSY} proxy; horizontal dotted line) based on the 2020 assessment. Units of SSB are the ratio of annual biomass to the biomass threshold ($SSB/SSB_{Threshold}$). The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.³

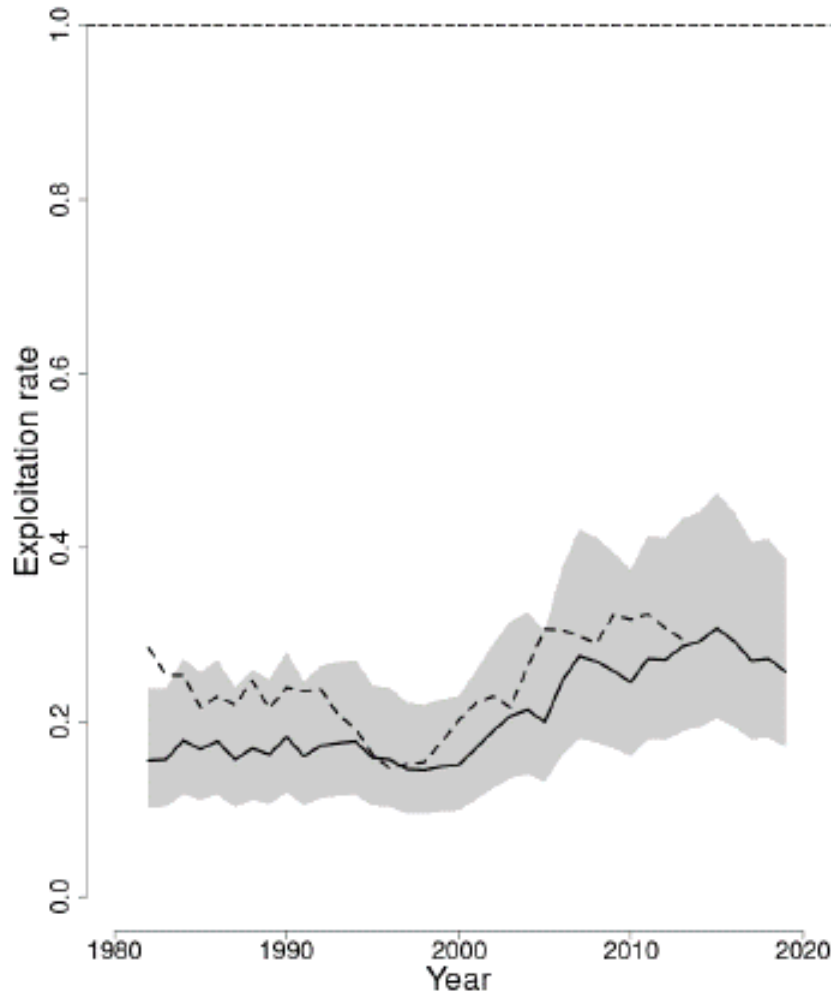


Figure 2. Trends in the fully selected fishing mortality (F_{Full}) of Atlantic surf-clam between 1982 and 2019 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding $F_{Threshold}$ (F_{MSY} proxy=0.141; horizontal dashed line), based on the 2020 assessment. Units of fishing mortality are the ratio of annual F to the F threshold ($F/F_{Threshold}$). The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.³

Commercial Fishery

The commercial fishery for surfclam in Federal waters is prosecuted with large vessels and hydraulic dredges. Surfclam landings and commercial quotas are given in Table 1 and Figure 3. The areas where surfclam are found is shown in Figure 4. The distribution of the fishery has changed over time, as shown in Figures 5-8, with a shift to increased landings in Southern New England and Georges Bank areas. In 2020, COVID-19 impacted the fishing sector - information on those impacts can be found here and in recent fishery performance reports: <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Northeast-COVID-19-Impact-Snapshot-webready.pdf>.

Table 1. Federal surfclam quotas and landings: 1998-2021. Landings for state waters are approximated as total landings - EEZ landings and may not accurately reflect state landings. SSC determined OFLs and ABCs included for years specified.

Year	OFL (mt)	ABC/ACL (mt)	Total Landings (mt meats; w/state waters)	EEZ Landings (mt meats)	EEZ Landings ^a ('000 bu)	EEZ Quota ('000 bu)	% Harvested
1998	NA	NA	24,506	18,234	2,365	2,565	92%
1999	NA	NA	26,677	19,577	2,539	2,565	99%
2000	NA	NA	31,093	19,788	2,566	2,565	100%
2001	NA	NA	31,237	22,017	2,855	2,850	100%
2002	NA	NA	32,645	24,006	3,113	3,135	99%
2003	NA	NA	31,526	24,994	3,241	3,250	100%
2004	NA	NA	26,463	24,197	3,138	3,400	92%
2005	NA	NA	22,734	21,163	2,744	3,400	81%
2006	NA	NA	25,779	23,573	3,057	3,400	90%
2007	NA	NA	27,091	24,915	3,231	3,400	95%
2008	NA	NA	25,223	22,510	2,919	3,400	86%
2009	NA	NA	22,396	20,065	2,602	3,400	77%
2010	129,300	96,600	19,941	17,984	2,332	3,400	69%
2011	114,000	96,600	20,044	18,839	2,443	3,400	72%
2012	102,300	96,600	18,393	18,054	2,341	3,400	69%
2013	93,400	96,600	18,924	18,551	2,406	3,400	71%
2014	81,150	60,313	18,834	18,227	2,364	3,400	70%
2015	75,178	51,804	18,517	18,154	2,354	3,400	69%
2016	71,512	48,197	18,202	18,039	2,339	3,400	69%
2017	69,925	44,469	17,690	16,902	2,192	3,400	64%
2018	Not specified ^b	29,363 ^b	17,114	16,269	2,110	3,400	62%
2019	74,281 ^c	56,419 ^c	16,502	14,986	1,943	3,400	57%
2020	74,110 ^c	56,289 ^c	13,182 ^d	11,956 ^d	1,550 ^d	3,400	46%
2021	51,361	47,919	NA	NA	NA	3,400	NA

^a 1 surfclam bushel is approximately 17 lb. ^b Revised previous 2018 values due to new stock assessment. ^c Revised previous 2019-2020 values due to new analyses. ^d Preliminary, incomplete 2019 data Source: NMFS clam vessel logbook reports.³

Figure 9 provides the distribution of surfclam landings in “important” ten minute squares (TMSQ). Important means that a square ranked in the top 10 TMSQ for total landings during any five-year period (1980-1984, 1985-1989, 1990-1994, 1995-1999, 2000-2004, 2005-2009, 2010-2019). Data for 2020 are incomplete and preliminary, and included in the last time block.

Additional information of the length composition of port sampled surfclam, and their associated sample sizes by area, are available in the stock assessment reports and management track assessment provided.³

Port and Community Description

When Amendment 13 to the FMP was developed, the Council hired Dr. Bonnie McCay and her associates at Rutgers University to describe the ports and communities that are associated with the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries. The researchers did an extensive job characterizing the three main fisheries (non-Maine ocean quahog, Maine ocean quahog, and surfclam). The McCay team characterizations of the ports and communities are based on government census and labor statistics and on observations and interviews carried out during the late 1990s and in the fall of 2001. The description of the fishing gear, areas fished, etc. are fully described in Amendment 13.

Communities from Maine to Virginia are involved in the harvesting and processing of surfclam and ocean quahog. Ports in New Jersey and Massachusetts handle the most volume and value, particularly Atlantic City and Point Pleasant, New Jersey, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. There are also landings in Ocean City, Maryland, and the Jonesport and Beals Island areas of Maine.

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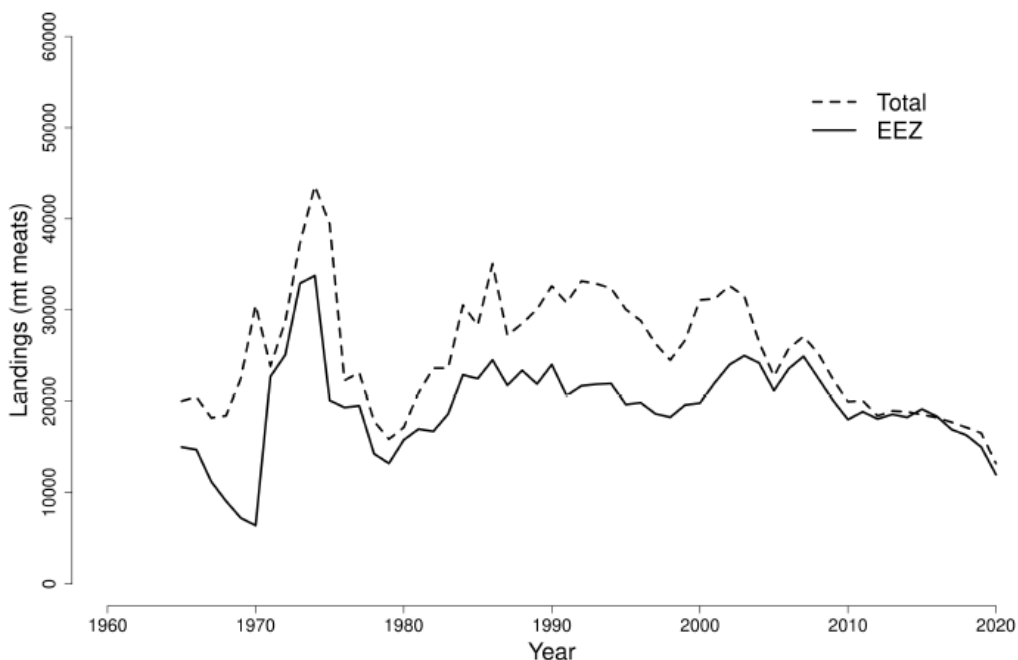


Figure 3. Surfclam landings (total and EEZ) during 1965-2020, and preliminary 2020.⁴

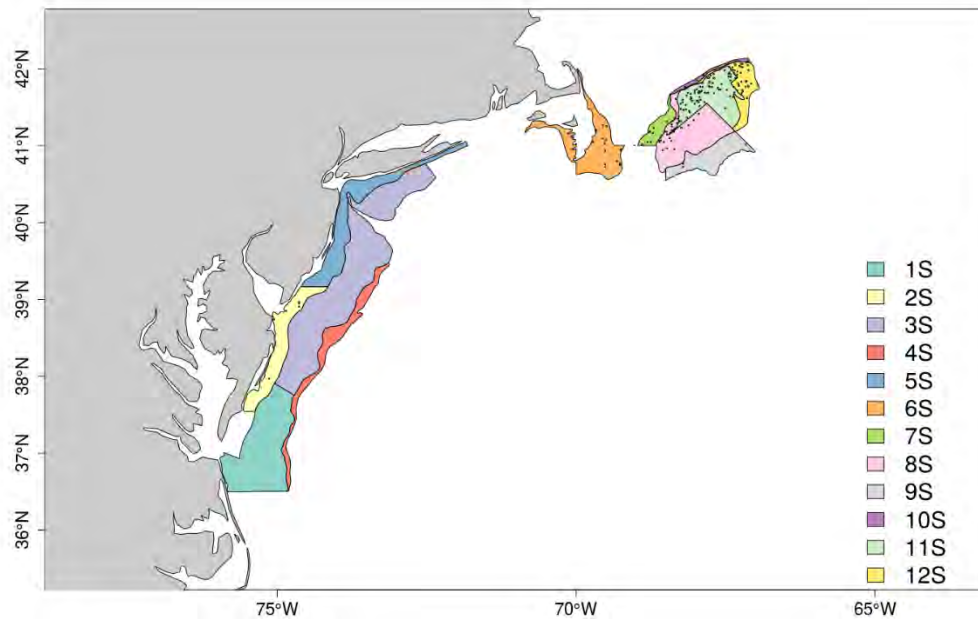


Figure 4. Surfclam stock assessment regions and NEFSC shellfish survey strata. The shaded strata are where surfclam are found.

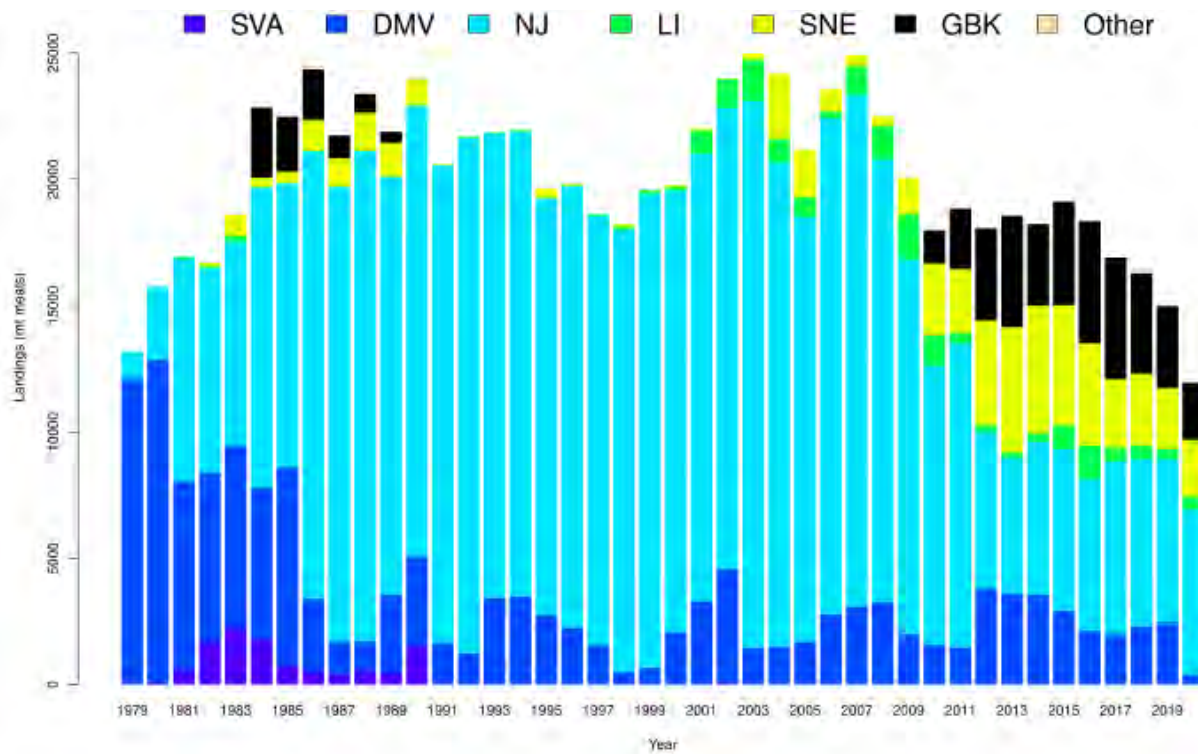


Figure 5. Surfclam landings from the US EEZ during 1979-2019, and preliminary 2020.⁴

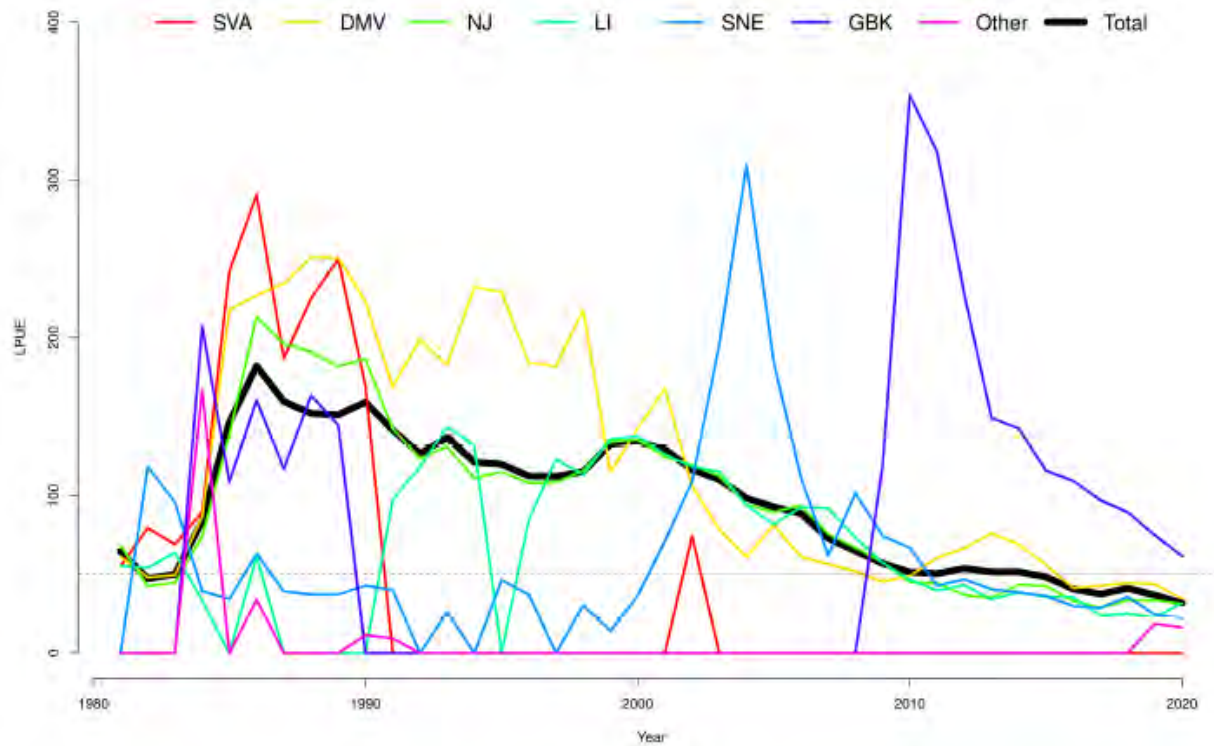


Figure 6. Nominal landings per unit effort (LPUE in bushels landed per hour fished) for surfclam, by region, during 1981-2019, and preliminary 2020. LPUE is total landings in bushels divided by total fishing effort.⁴

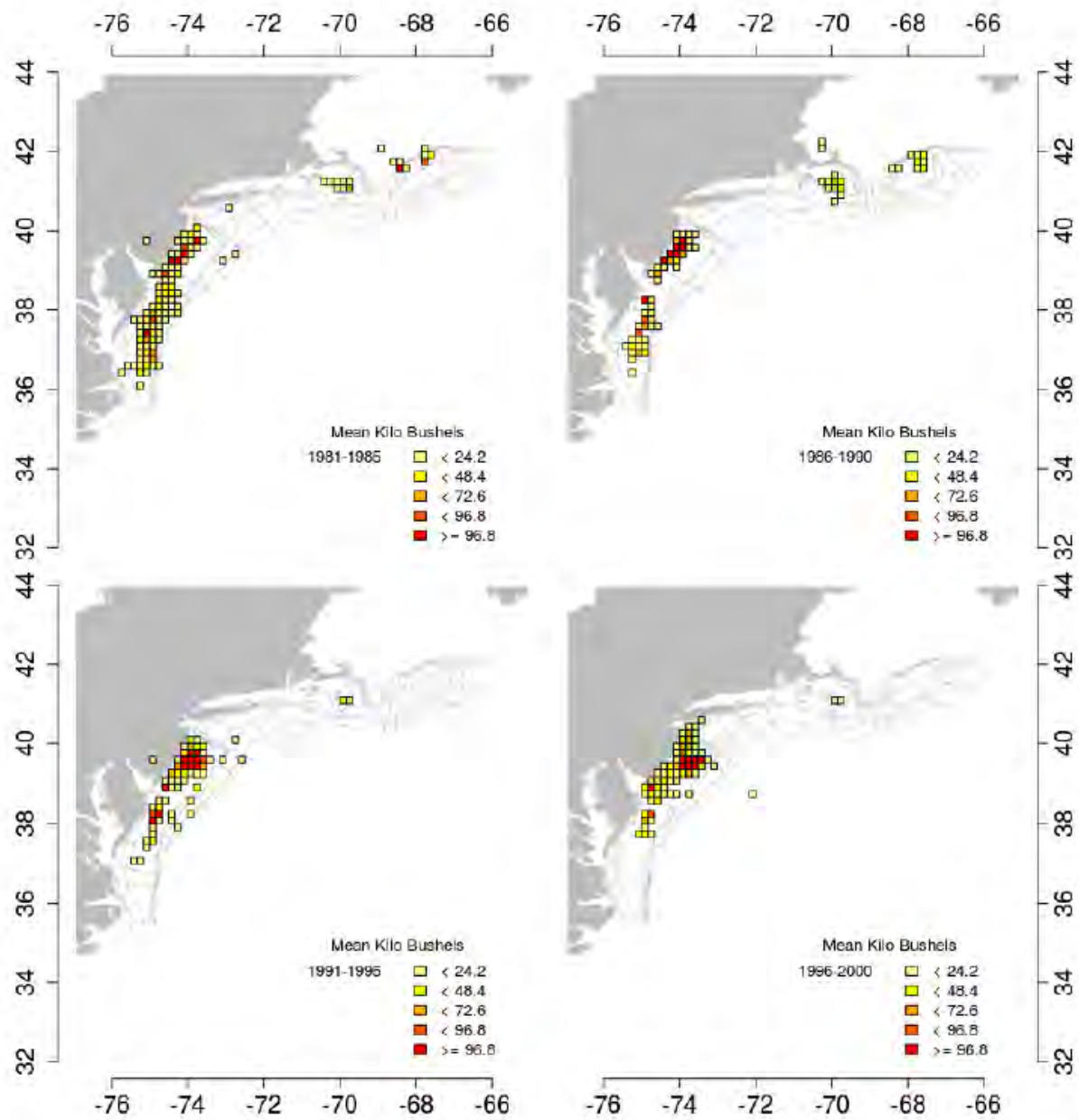


Figure 7. Average surfclam landings by ten-minute squares over time, 1981-2000. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.³

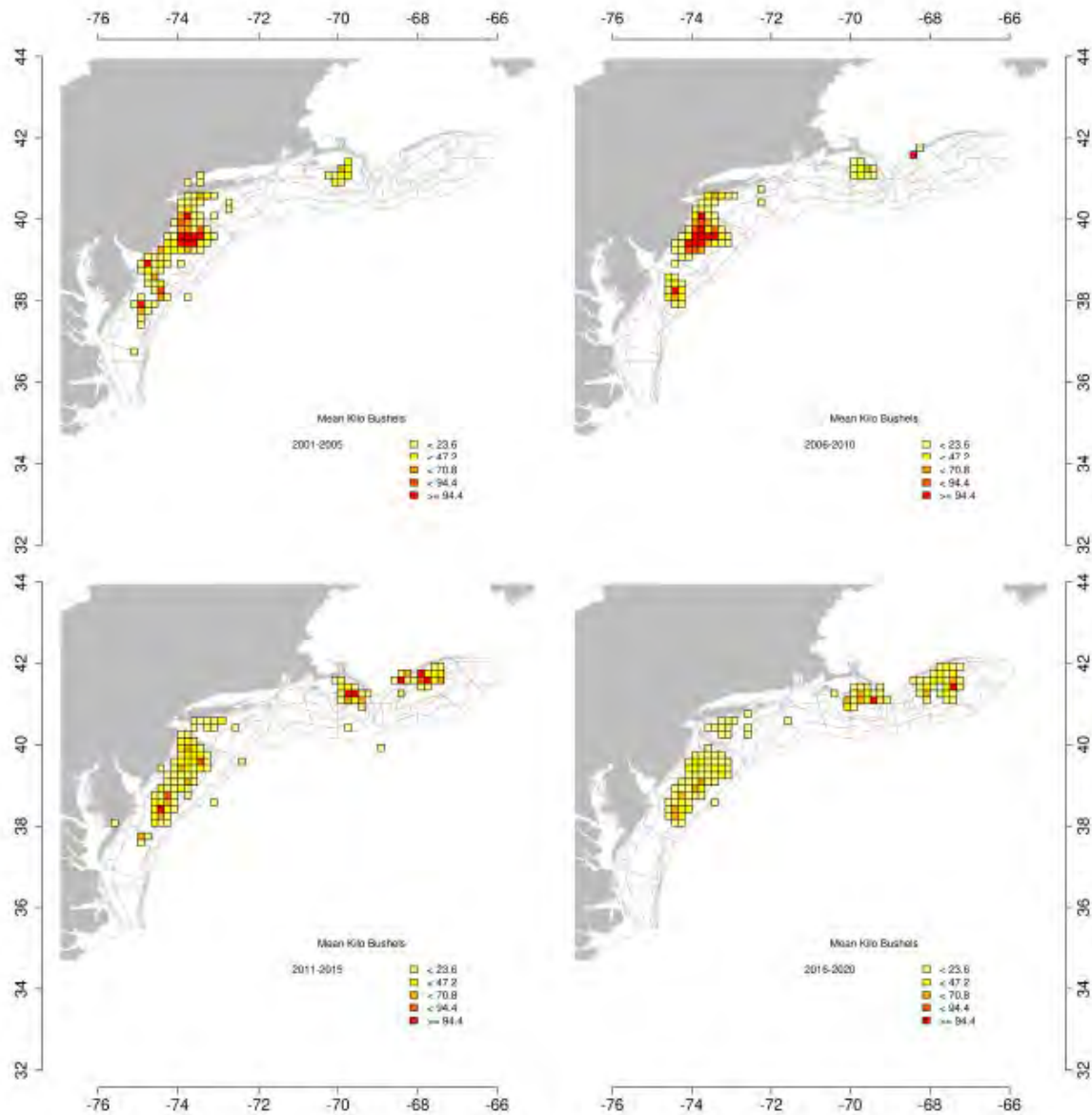


Figure 8. Average surfclam landings by ten-minute squares over time, 2001-2019, and preliminary 2020. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.⁴

Surfclam landings for important 10-minute squares

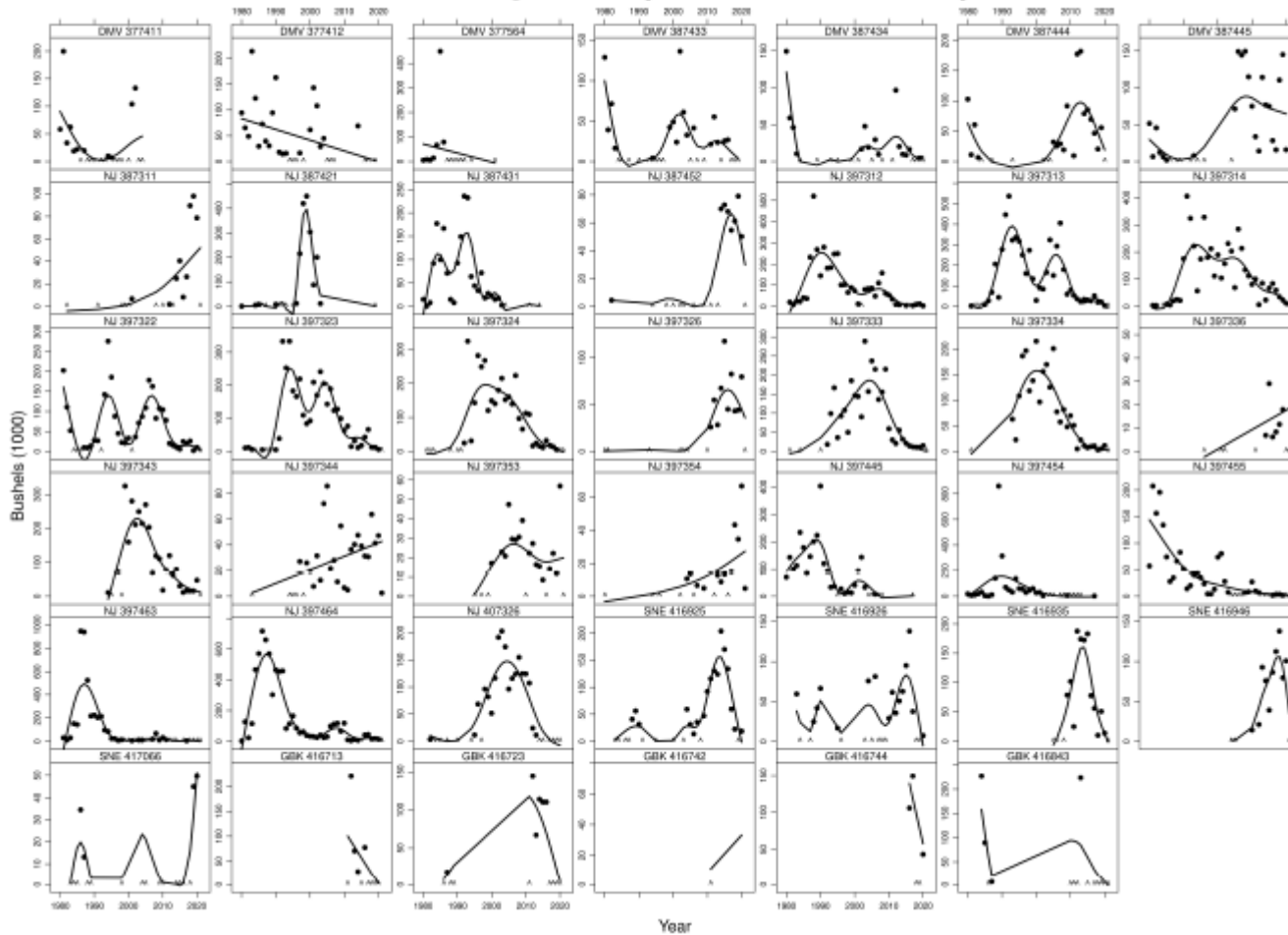


Figure 9. Annual surfclam landings in "important" ten minute squares (TNMS) during 1980-2017 based on logbook data. Important means that a square ranked in the top 10 TNMS for total landings during any five-year period (1980-1984, 1985-1989, ...). Data for 2020 are incomplete and preliminary. To protect the privacy of individual firms, data are not plotted if the number of vessels is less than 2. Instead, a "^" is shown on the x-axis to indicate where data are missing. The solid dark line is a spline intended to show trends. The spline was fit too all available data, including data not plotted.³

Federal Fleet Profile

The total number of vessels participating in the surfclam fishery has remained relatively stable in the recent decade, with vessels shifting between harvesting surfclam or surfclam and ocean quahog (Table 2). The average ex-vessel price of surfclams reported by processors was \$14.48 in 2020, slightly higher than the \$14.37 per bushel seen in 2019. The total ex-vessel value of the 2020 federal harvest was approximately \$23 million, which is lower than \$28 million in 2019. Industry has described several factors that have affected their industry. Trips harvesting surfclam have increased in length as catch rates have declined. The distribution of LPUE in bushels per hour over time is shown in Figures 6 and 11-12.

Processing Sector

Even though this document describes the surfclam fishery, the information presented in this section regarding the processing sector is for both surfclam and ocean quahog as some of these facilities purchase/process both species.

In 2020, there were 7 companies reporting purchases of surfclam and/or ocean quahog in 3 states outside of Maine. Employment data for these specific firms are not available.

In 2020, these companies bought approximately \$23 million worth of surfclam and \$16 million worth of ocean quahog.

Area Closures

Areas can be closed to surfclam fishing if the abundance of small clams in an area meets certain threshold criteria. This small surfclam closure provision was applied during the 1980's with three area closures (off Atlantic City, NJ, Ocean City, MD, and Chincoteague, VA), with the last of the three areas reopening in 1991.

Fishing areas can also be closed for public health related issues due to environmental degradation or the toxins that cause paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP). PSP is a public health concern for surfclam. PSP is caused by saxitoxins, produced by the alga *Alexandrium fundyense* (red tide). Surfclam on Georges Bank were not fished from 1990 to 2008 due to the risk of PSP. There was light fishing on Georges Bank in years 2009-2011 under an exempted fishing permit and LPUE in that area was substantially higher (5-7 times higher) than in other traditional fishing grounds.

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office reopened a portion of Georges Bank to the harvest of surfclam and ocean quahog beginning January 1, 2013 (77 FR 75057, December 19, 2012) under its authority in 50 CFR 648.76. Harvesting vessels must adhere to the adopted testing protocol from the National Shellfish Sanitation Program.

New England Fishery Management Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment 2 (OHA2) implemented measures that restricted access to the Great South Channel and Georges Shoal Habitat Management Areas. The surfclam fishery and mussel dredge fishery can operate in specific exemption areas year-round or seasonally in specific exemption areas. For additional information see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/habitat-clam-dredge-exemption-framework>.

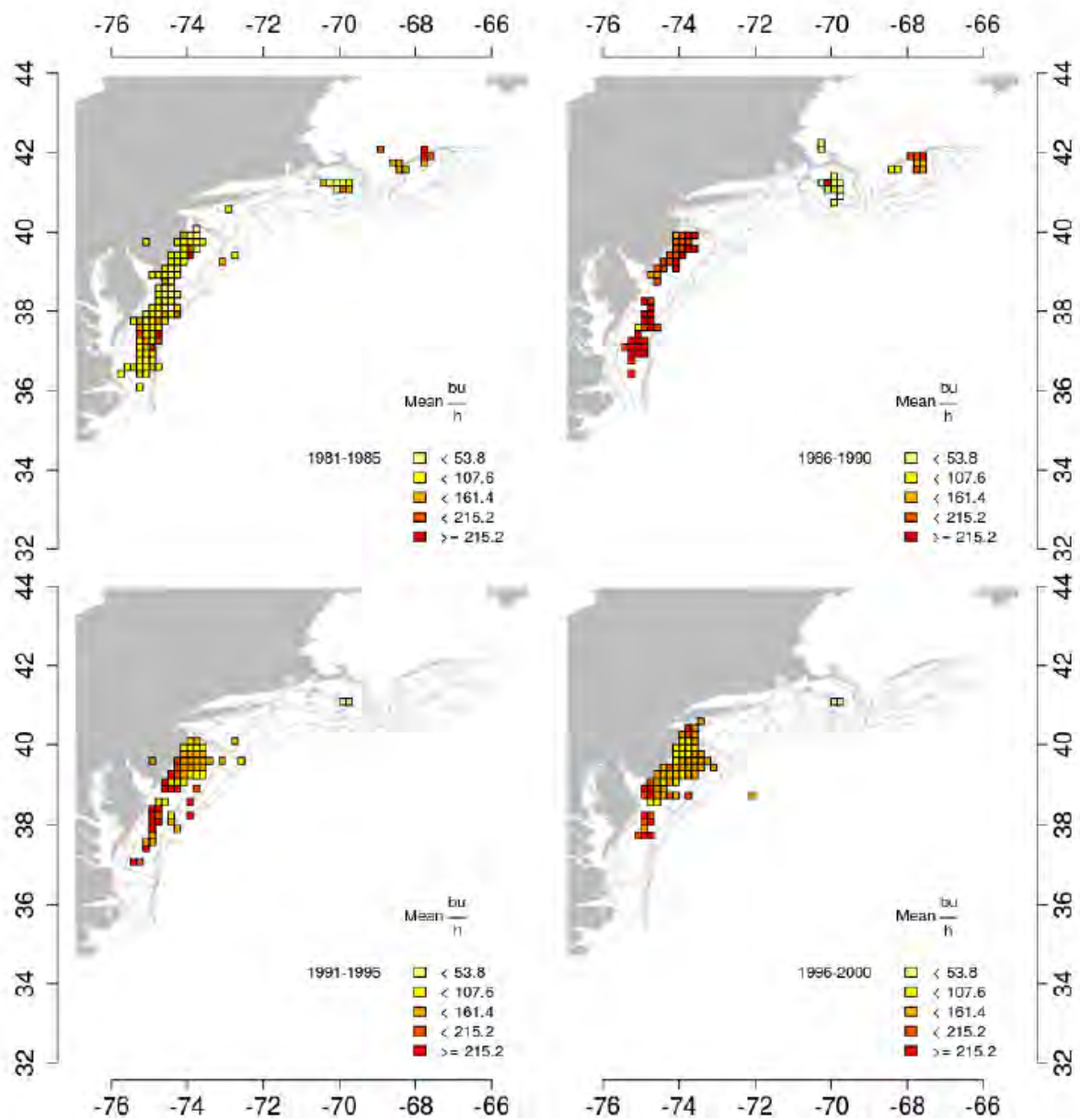


Figure 11. Average surfclam landings per unit effort (LPUE; $bu \cdot h^{-1}$) by ten-minute squares over time, 1981-2000. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.⁴

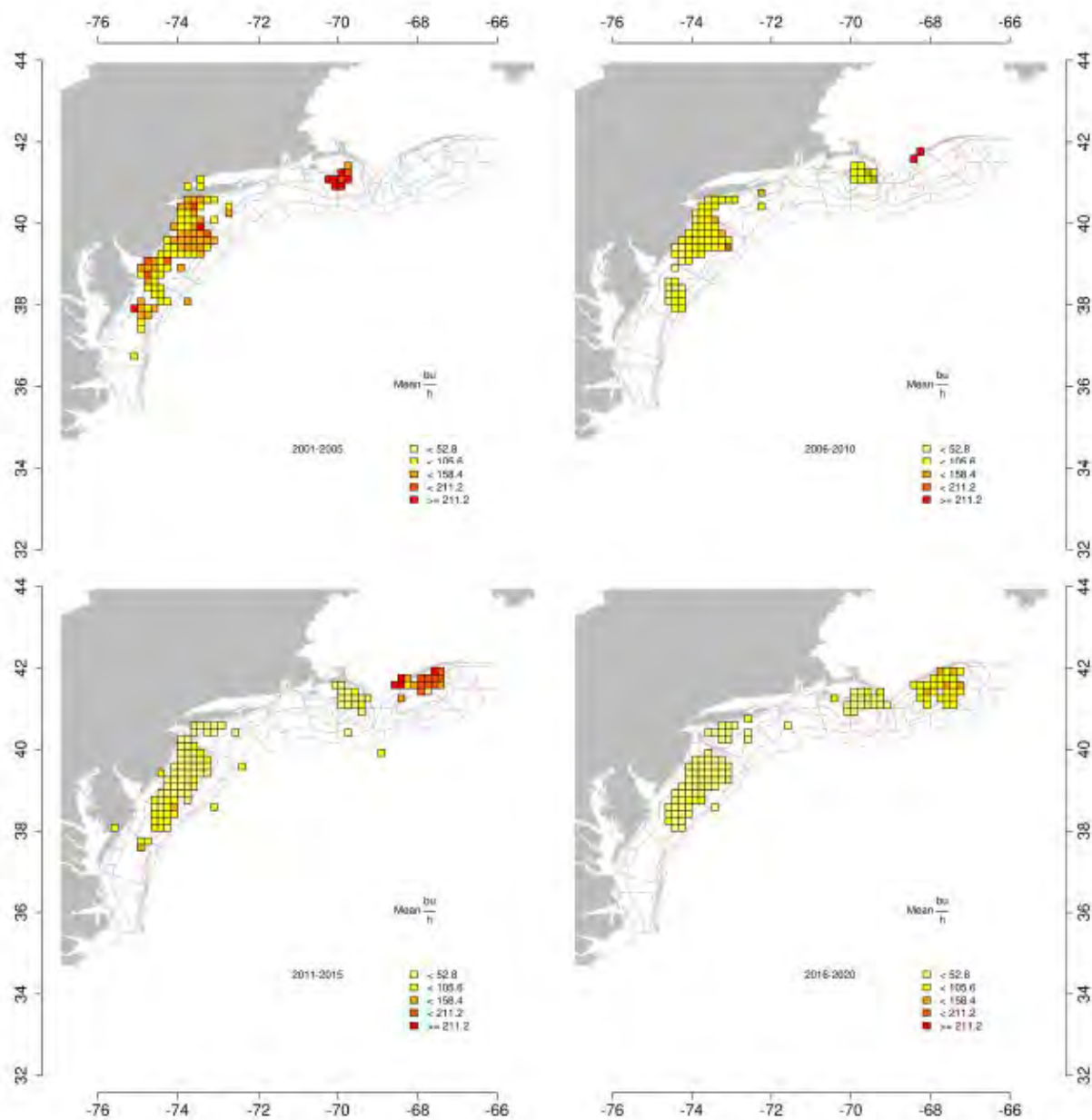


Figure 12. Average surfclam landings per unit effort (LPUE; bu. h-1) by ten-minute squares over time, 2001-2019 and preliminary 2020. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.⁴

Table 2. Federal fleet profile, 2011 through 2020.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Harvesting BOTH surfclam & ocean quahog	12	13	7	7	6	8	14	8	7	8
Harvesting only surfclam	24	29	33	31	31	30	26	31	36	35
Total Vessels	36	42	40	38	37	38	40	39	43	43

Source: NMFS clam vessel logbooks.

References

1. Cargnelli, L., S. Griesbach, D. Packer, and E. Weissberger. 1999. Essential Fish Habitat Source Document: Atlantic Surfclam, *Spisula solidissima*, Life History and Habitat Characteristics. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-NE-142.
2. Northeast Fisheries Science Center. 2016. 61st Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (61st SAW) Assessment Summary Report. US Dept Commer, Northeast Fish Sci Cent Ref Doc. 16-13; 26 p. Available from: National Marine Fisheries Service, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026, or online at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications>.
3. Hennen, Dan. Personal Communication. June 14, 2020. NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543.
4. Hennen, Dan. Personal Communication. March 12, 2021. NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543.



Ocean Quahog Fishery Information Document

April 2021

This Fishery Information Document provides a brief overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for ocean quahog with an emphasis on 2020. Data sources for Fishery Information Documents are generally from unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) survey, dealer, vessel logbook, and permit databases and should be considered preliminary. For more resources, including previous Fishery Information Documents, please visit <http://www.mafmc.org/surfclams-quahogs>.

Key Facts

- There has been no change to the status of the ocean quahog stock. The stock is not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2019.
- The total ex-vessel value of the 2020 federal harvest was approximately \$16 million, lower than the \$19 million in 2019.
- In 2020, there were 7 companies reporting purchases of surfclam and/or ocean quahog in 3 states outside of Maine.
- In 2020, COVID-19 impacted the fishing sector - information on those impacts can be found here and in recent fishery performance reports: <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Northeast-COVID-19-Impact-Snapshot-webready.pdf>
- The fishery appears to continue to shift its effort Northward, and has shown increased effort in the Southern New England and Georges Bank area in recent years.

Basic Biology

Information on ocean quahog biology can be found in the document titled, “Essential Fish Habitat Source Document: Ocean Quahog, *Arctica islandica*, Life History and Habitat Requirements” (Cargnelli et al. 1999).¹ An electronic version is available at the following website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/habitat-conservation/essential-fish-habitat-efh-northeast>. Additional information on this species is available at the following website: <https://www.fishwatch.gov/>. A summary of the basic biology is provided below.

The ocean quahog is a bivalve mollusk distributed in temperate and boreal waters on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean. In the Northeast Atlantic, quahog occur from Newfoundland to Cape Hatteras from depths of about 8 to 400 meters (26 to 1,312 ft). Ocean quahog further north occur closer to shore. The US stock resource is almost entirely within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; 3-200 miles from shore), outside of state waters, and at depths between 20 and 80

meters (66 and 262 ft). However, in the northern range, ocean quahog inhabit waters closer to shore, such that the state of Maine has a small commercial fishery which includes beds within the state's territorial sea (≤ 3 miles). Ocean quahog burrow in a variety of substrates and are often associated with fine sand.

Ocean quahog are one of the longest-living, slowest growing marine bivalves in the world. Under normal circumstances, they live to more than 100 years old. Ocean quahog have been aged well in excess of 200 years. Growth tends to slow after age 20, which corresponds to the size currently harvested by the industry (approximately 3 inches). Size and age at sexual maturity are variable and poorly known. Studies in Icelandic waters indicate that 10, 50, and 90 percent of female ocean quahog were sexually mature at 40, 64 and 88 mm (1.5, 2.5 and 3.5 inches) shell length or approximately 2, 19 and 61 years of age. Spawning occurs over a protracted interval from summer through autumn. Free-floating larvae may drift far from their spawning location because they develop slowly and are planktonic for more than 30 days before settling. Major recruitment events appear to be separated by periods of decades.

Based on their growth, longevity and recruitment patterns, ocean quahog are relatively unproductive and able to support only low levels of fishing. The current resource consists of individuals that accumulated over many decades.

Ocean quahog are suspension feeders on phytoplankton, and use siphons which are extended above the surface of the substrate to pump in water. Predators of ocean quahog include certain species of crabs, sea stars, and other crustaceans, as well as fish species such as sculpins, ocean pout, cod, and haddock.

Status of the Stock

The most current assessment of the ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*) stock is a management track assessment of the existing 2017 benchmark Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment (SAW 63; NEFSC 2017).^{2,3} Based on the previous assessment the stock was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring. The management track assessment updates commercial fishery catch data, and commercial length composition data, as well as the analytical SS assessment model and reference points through 2019. No new survey data have been collected since the last assessment. Stock projections have been updated through 2026.

Based on this updated assessment, the ocean quahog stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Figures 1-2). Retrospective adjustments were not made to the model results. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2019 was estimated to be 3,651 ('000 mt) which is 172.8% of the biomass target ($SSB_{MSY\ proxy} = 2,113$; Figure 1). The 2019 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.005 which is 25.5% of the overfishing threshold proxy ($F_{MSY\ proxy} = 0.019$; Figure 2).

Management System and Fishery Performance

Management

The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*) became effective in 1977. The FMP established the management unit as all ocean quahog in the EEZ. The FMP is managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), in conjunction with

NMFS as the Federal implementation and enforcement entity. The primary management tool is the specification of an annual quota, which is allocated to the holders of allocation shares (Individual Transferable Quotas - ITQs) at the beginning of each calendar year as specified in Amendment 8 to the FMP (1988). In addition to the Federal waters fishery, there is a small fishery prosecuted in the state waters of Maine. The FMP, including subsequent Amendments and Frameworks, are available on the Council website at: <http://www.mafmc.org>.

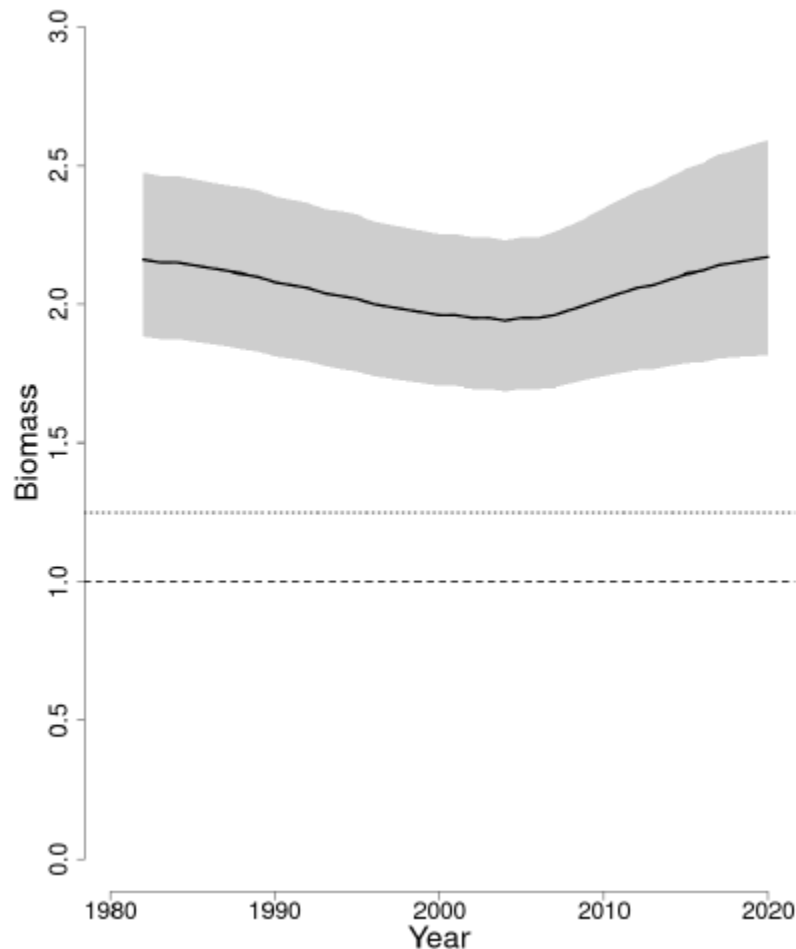


Figure 1. Trends in spawning stock biomass of ocean quahog between 1982 and 2020 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding $SSB_{Threshold}$ (horizontal dashed line) as well as SSB_{Target} (SSB_{MSY} proxy; horizontal dotted line) based on the 2020 assessment. Units of SSB are the ratio of annual biomass to the biomass threshold ($SSB/SSB_{Threshold}$). The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.³

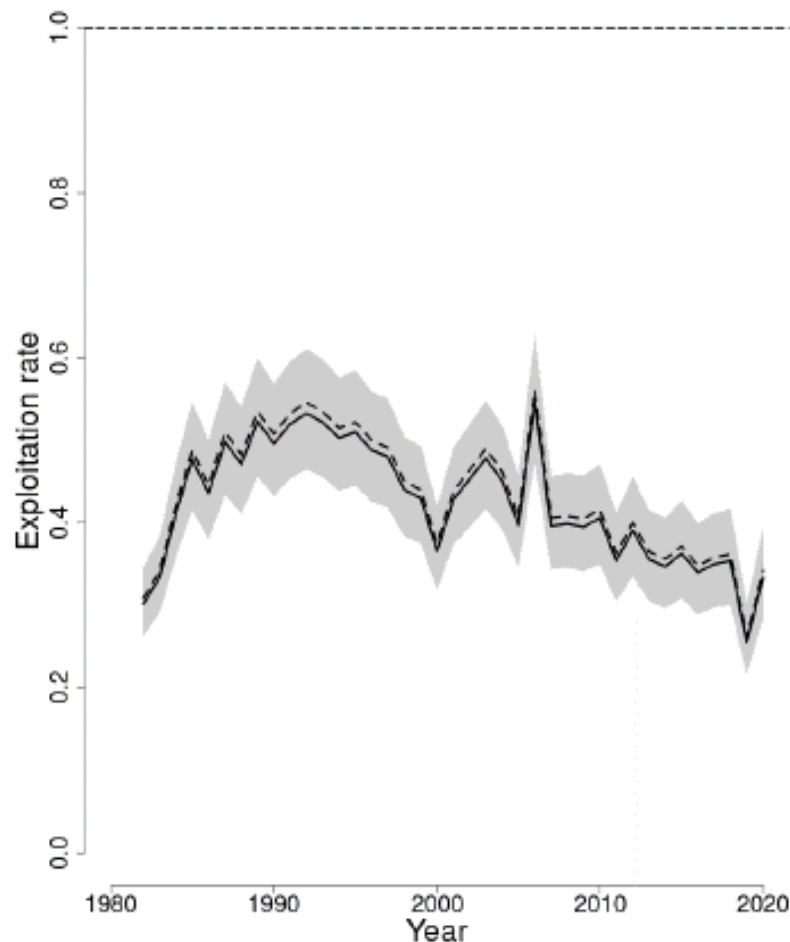


Figure 2. Trends in the fully selected fishing mortality (F_{Full}) of ocean quahog between 1982 and 2020 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding $F_{Threshold}$ (F_{MSY} proxy=0.019; horizontal dashed line), based on the 2020 assessment. Units of fishing mortality are the ratio of annual F to the F threshold ($F/F_{Threshold}$). The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.³

Commercial Fishery

The commercial fishery for ocean quahog in Federal waters is prosecuted with large vessels and hydraulic dredges and is very different from the small Maine fishery prosecuted with small vessels (35-45 ft) targeting quahog for the local fresh, half shell market. Ocean quahog landings and commercial quotas are given below in Table 1 and Figure 3. In 2020, COVID-19 impacted the fishing sector - information on those impacts can be found here and in recent fishery performance reports: <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Northeast-COVID-19-Impact-Snapshot-webready.pdf>.

The areas where ocean quahog are found is shown in Figure 4. The distribution of the fishery has changed over time (Figures 5-8). The bulk of the fishery from 1980-1990 was being prosecuted off the Delmarva but is now being prosecuted in more Northern areas. Figure 9 provides the distribution of ocean quahog landings in “important” ten minute squares (TMSQ). Important means that a square ranked in the top 10 TMSQ for total landings during any five-year period (1980-1984, 1985-1989, 1990-1994, 1995-1999, 2000-2004, 2005-2009, 2010-2020). Data for 2020 are incomplete and preliminary, and included in the last time block. Additional information of the length composition of port sampled ocean quahog, and their associated sample sizes by area, are available in the stock assessment reports and data updates.⁴

Port and Community Description

When Amendment 13 to the FMP was developed, the Council hired Dr. Bonnie McCay and her associates at Rutgers University to describe the ports and communities that are associated with the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries. The researchers did an extensive job characterizing the three main fisheries (non-Maine ocean quahog, Maine ocean quahog, and surfclam).

The McCay team characterizations of the ports and communities are based on government census and labor statistics and on observations and interviews carried out during the late 1990s and in the fall of 2001. The description of the fishing gear, areas fished, etc. are fully described in Amendment 13.

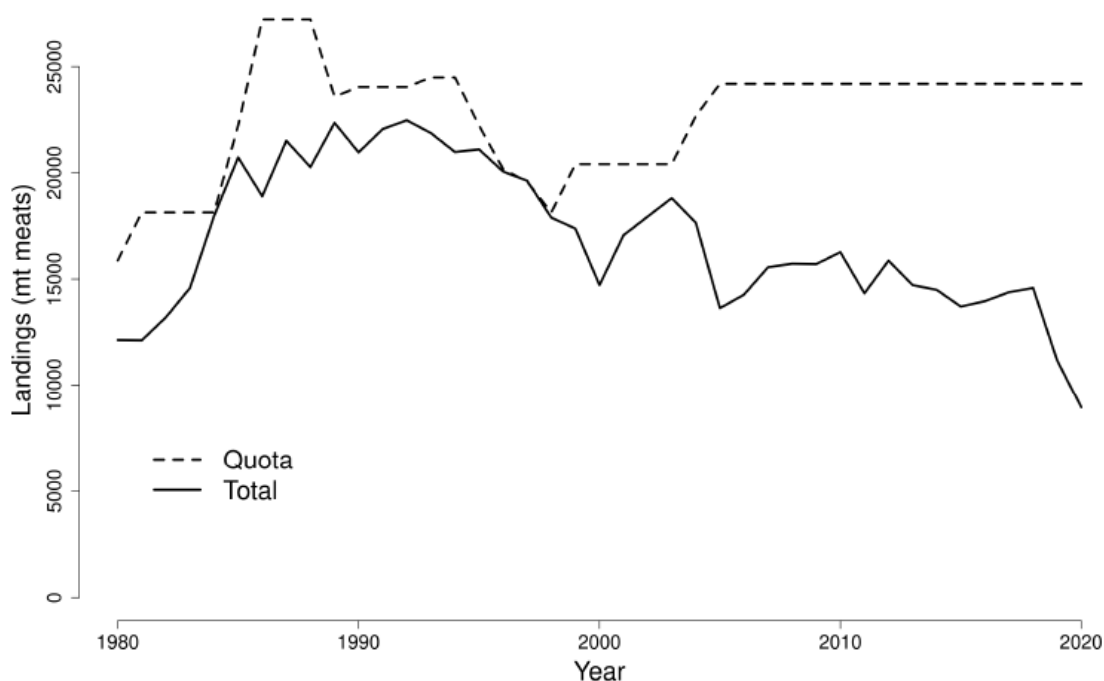


Figure 3. Ocean quahog landings (total and EEZ) during 1965-2019, and preliminary 2020.⁴

Table 1. Federal ocean quahog quotas and landings: 1998-2021. SSC determined OFLs and ABCs included for years specified.

Year	OFL (mt)	ABC/ ACL (mt)	EEZ Landings^a (mt meats)	EEZ Landings^{a,b} ('000 bu)	EEZ Quota ('000 bu; excludes 100,000 ME bu)	% Harvested
1998	NA	NA	17,897	3,946	4,000	99%
1999	NA	NA	17,381	3,832	4,500	85%
2000	NA	NA	14,723	3,246	4,500	72%
2001	NA	NA	17,069	3,763	4,500	84%
2002	NA	NA	17,947	3,957	4,500	88%
2003	NA	NA	18,815	4,148	4,500	92%
2004	NA	NA	17,655	3,892	5,000	78%
2005	NA	NA	13,635	3,006	5,333	56%
2006	NA	NA	14,273	3,147	5,333	59%
2007	NA	NA	15,564	3,431	5,333	64%
2008	NA	NA	15,727	3,467	5,333	65%
2009	NA	NA	15,710	3,463	5,333	65%
2010	NA	NA	16,271	3,587	5,333	67%
2011	34,800	26,100	14,332	3,160	5,333	59%
2012	34,800	26,100	15,864	3,497	5,333	66%
2013	34,800	26,100	14,721	3,245	5,333	61%
2014	Not specified	26,100	14,498	3,196	5,333	60%
2015	Not specified	26,100	13,709	3,022	5,333	56%
2016	Not specified	26,100	13,965	3,079	5,333	58%
2017	Not specified	26,100	14,386	3,172	5,333	59%
2018	61,600	44,695	14,587	3,216	5,333	60%
2019	63,600	46,146	11,178	2,464	5,333	46%
2020	63,100	45,783	8,939 ^c	1,971 ^c	5,333	37%
2020	44,960	44,031	NA	NA	5,333	NA

^a Column excludes Maine Landings which have varied from 48-387 mt per year from 1998-2020 (see assessment for additional details on the Maine fishery). ^b 1 ocean quahog bushel is approximately 10 lb. ^c Preliminary, incomplete 2020 data. Source: NMFS clam vessel logbook reports.

Communities from Maine to Virginia are involved in the harvesting and processing of surfclam and ocean quahog. Ports in New Jersey and Massachusetts handle the most volume and value, particularly Atlantic City and Point Pleasant, New Jersey, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. There are also landings in Ocean City, Maryland, and the Jonesport and Beals Island areas of Maine. The small scale Maine fishery is entirely for ocean quahog, which are sold as shellstock for the half-shell market. The other fisheries are industrialized ones for surfclam and ocean quahog, which are hand shucked or steam-shucked and processed into fried, canned, and frozen products.

Additional information on "Snapshots of Human Communities and Fisheries in the Northeast" can be found at: <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/socialsci/communitySnapshots.php>.

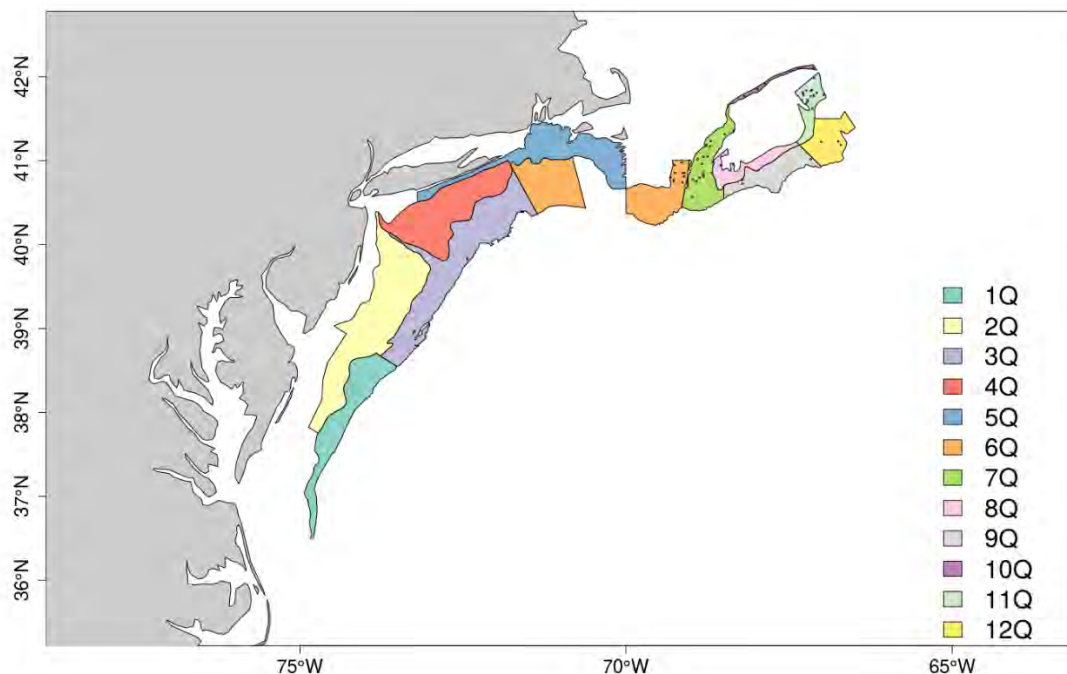


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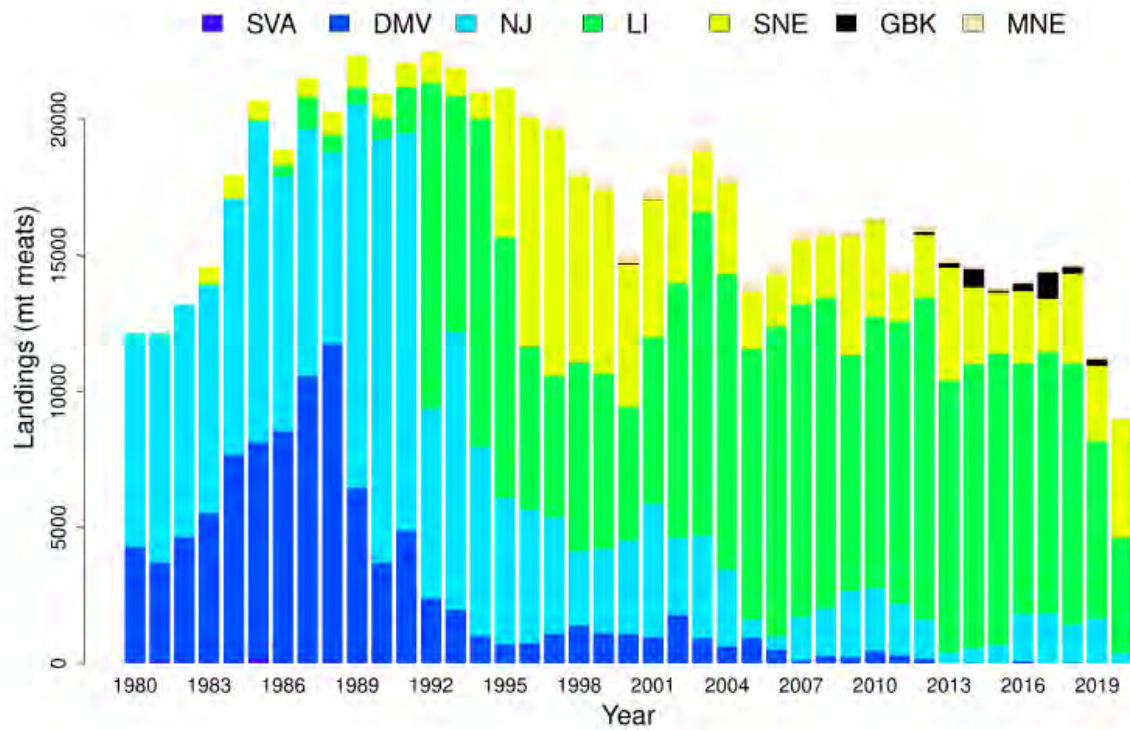


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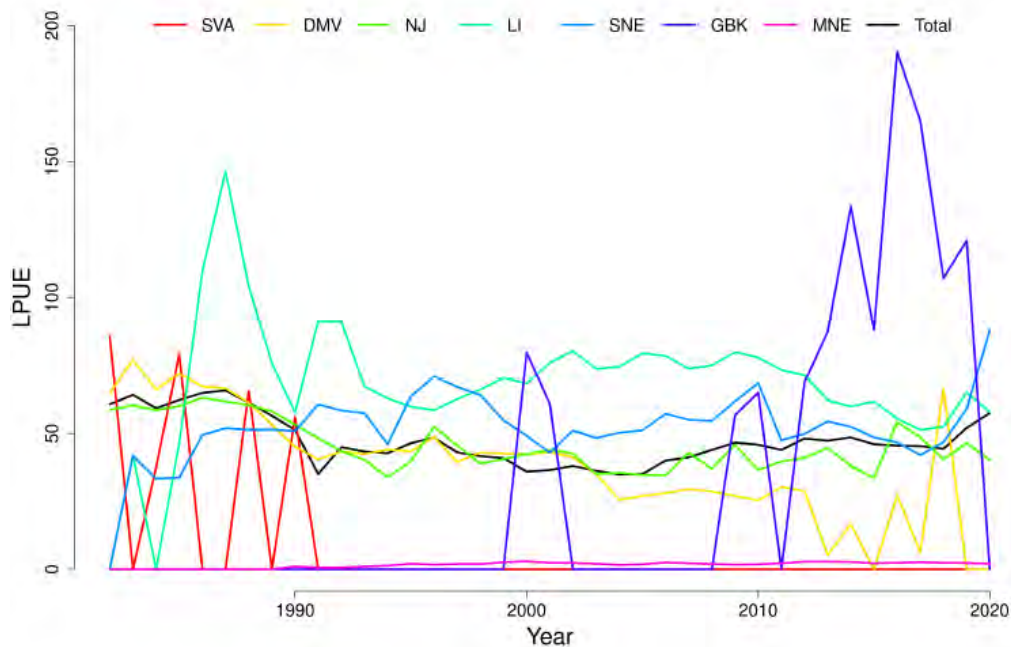


Figure 6. Nominal landings per unit effort (LPUE in bushels landed per hour fished) for ocean quahog, by region, during 1981-2019, and preliminary 2020. LPUE is total landings in bushels divided by total fishing effort.³

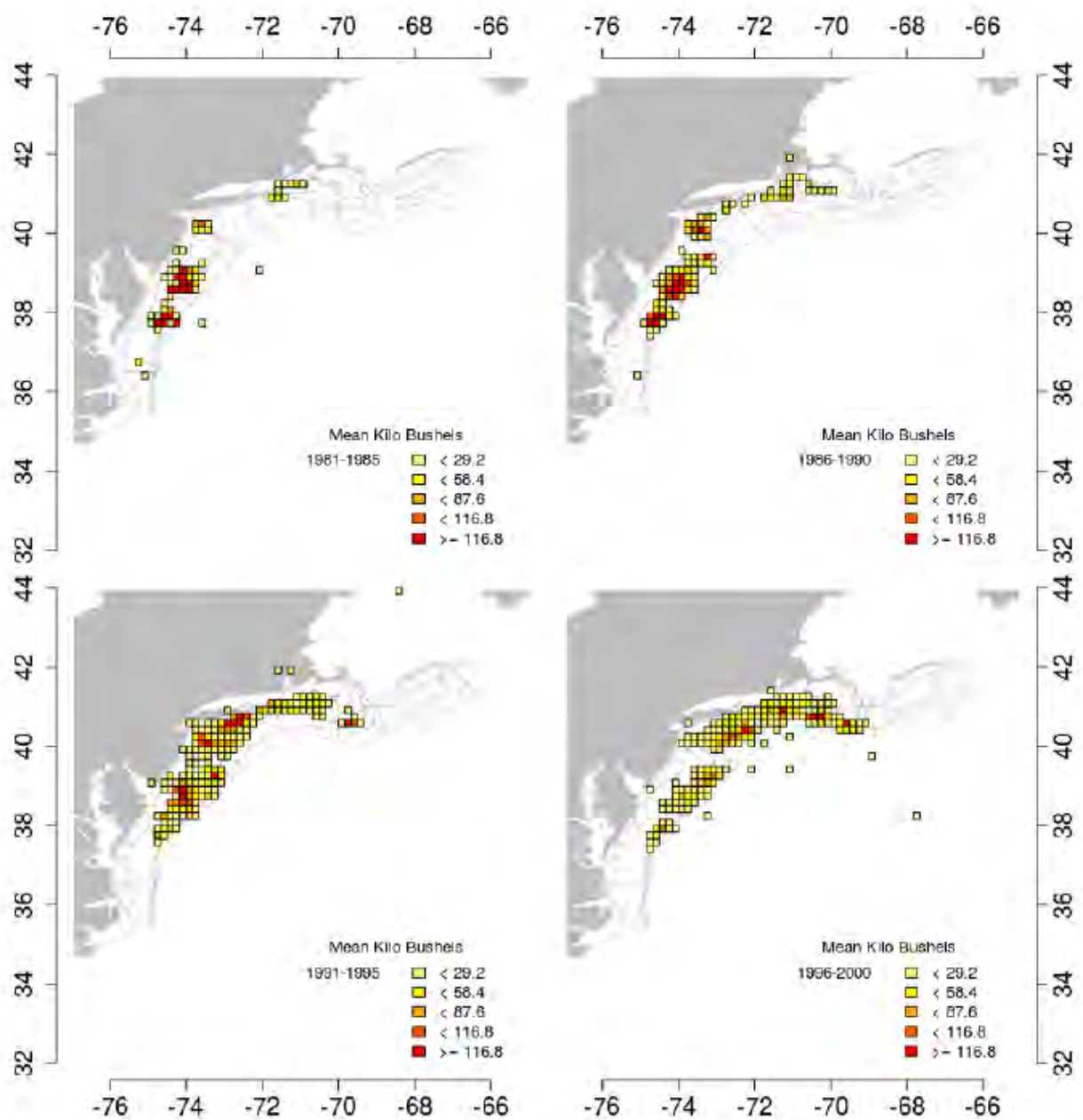


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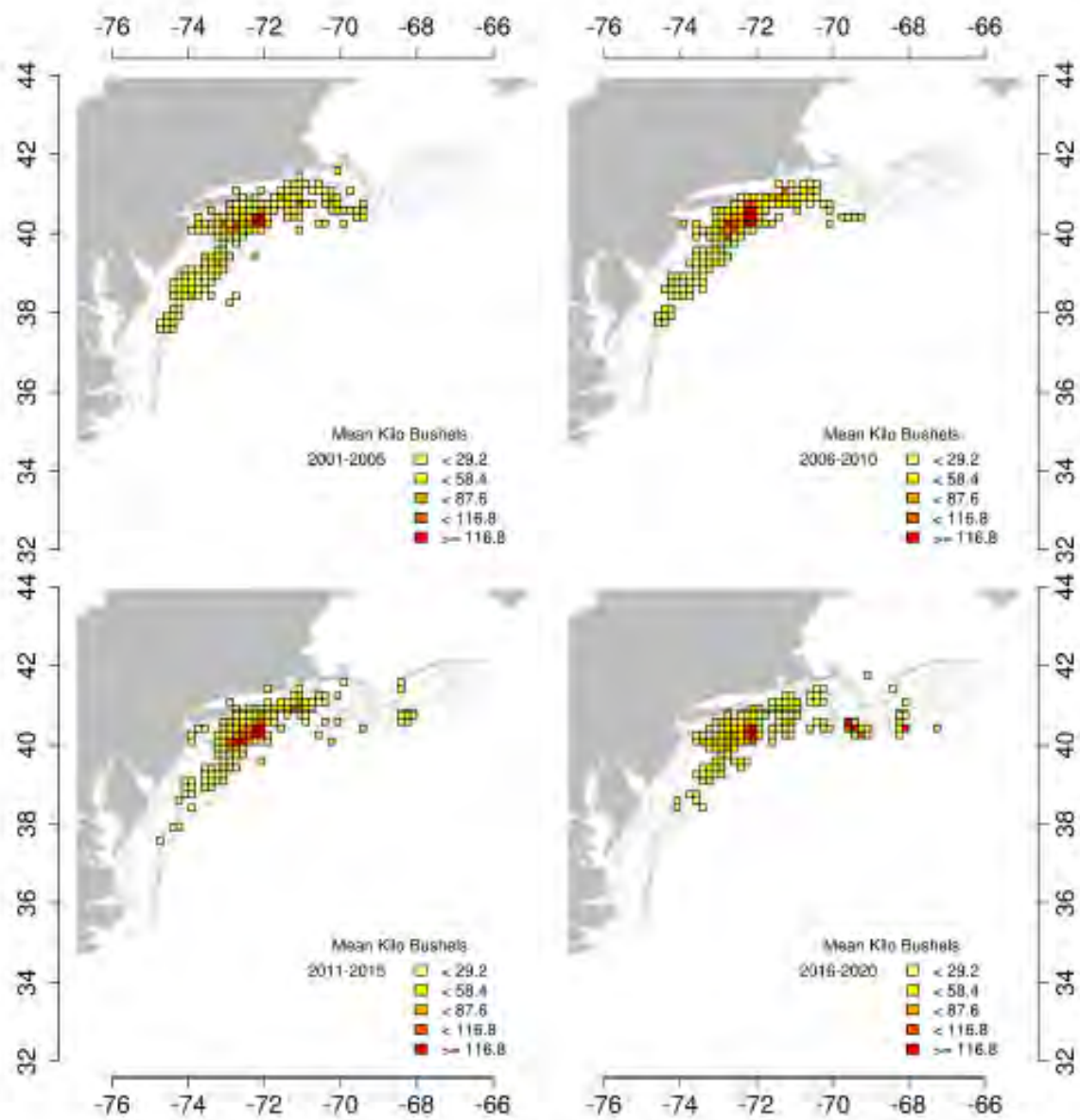


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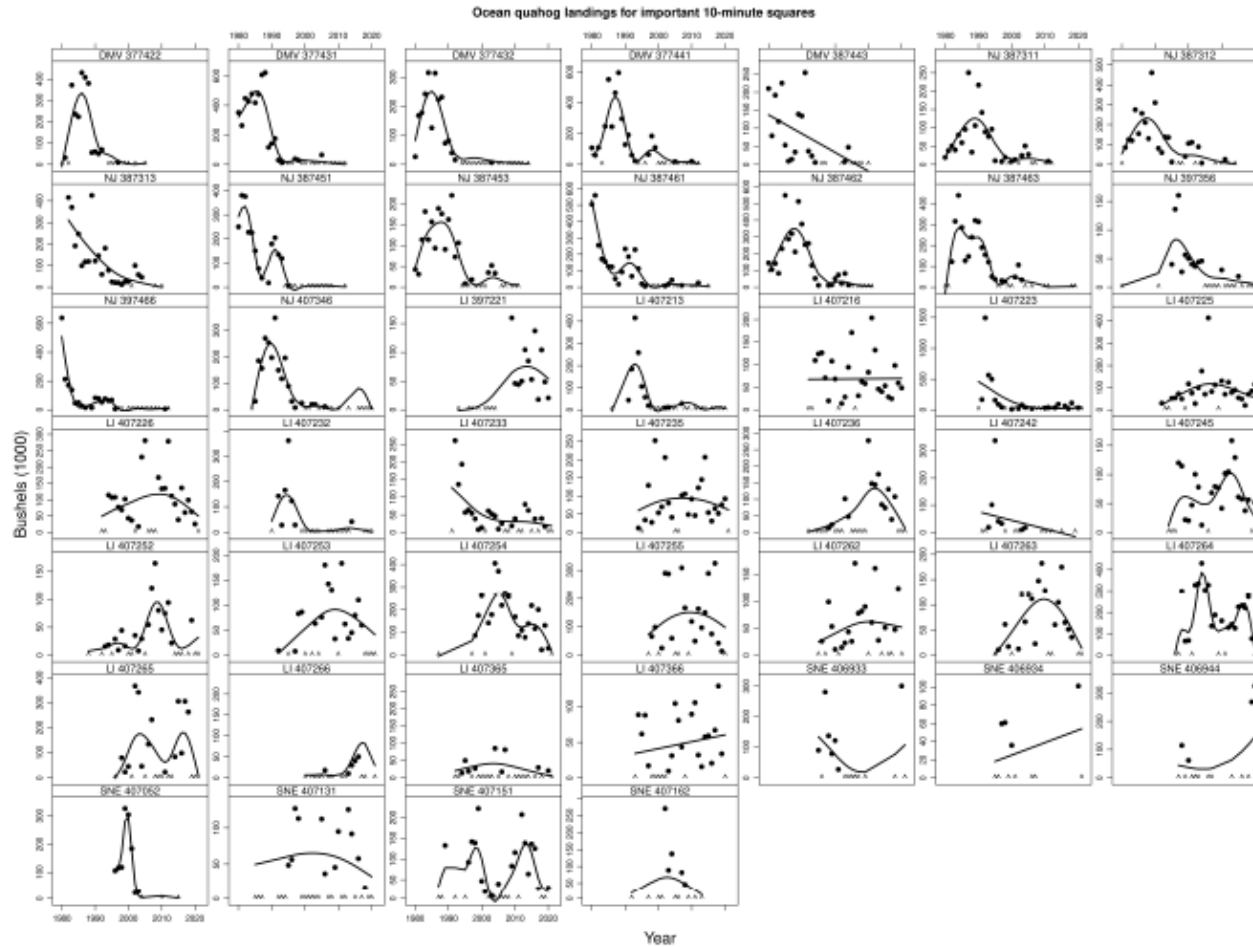


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Federal Fleet Profile

The total number of vessels targeting ocean quahog outside of Maine has remained about the same in recent years; with 19 vessels in 2011 increasing to 22 in 2017, then declining to 15 in 2019 (Table 2). The distribution of LPUE in bushels per hour over time for the non-Maine fishery is shown in Figures 6 and 10-11.

The Maine ocean quahog fleet numbers started to decline when fuel prices soared in mid-2008, and a decline in the availability of smaller clams consistent with the market demand (i.e., half-shell market), and totaled 8 vessels in 2020 (Table 2). The average ex-vessel price of non-Maine ocean quahog reported by processors in 2020 was \$7.81 per bushel, slightly lower than the 2019 price (\$7.86 per bushel). In 2020, about 2 million bushels of non-Maine ocean quahog were landed, a decline from 2.5 million bushels in 2019. The total ex-vessel value of the 2020 federal harvest outside of Maine was approximately \$16 million, lower than the \$19 million in 2019. In 2020, the Maine ocean quahog fleet harvested a total of 16,809 Maine bushels, a 87% decrease from the 124,839 bushels harvested in 2006, and a 43% decrease from the prior year (2019; 29,447 bushels). Average prices for Maine ocean quahog had declined substantially over time but have recently show an increasing trend. In 2003, there were very few trips that sold for less than \$37.00 per Maine bushel, and the mean price was \$40.66. Prices have since been lower. In 2020, the mean price was \$38.31 per Maine bushel. The value of the 2020 harvest reported by the purchasing dealers totaled \$0.64 million.

Processing Sector

Even though this document describes the ocean quahog fishery, the information presented in this section regarding the processing sector is for both surfclam and ocean quahog as some of these facilities purchase/process both species.

In 2020, there were 7 companies reporting purchases of surfclam and/or ocean quahog in 3 states outside of Maine. Employment data for these specific firms are not available.

In 2020, these companies bought approximately \$23 million worth of surfclam and \$16 million worth of ocean quahog.

Area Closures

Fishing areas can also be closed for public health related issues due to environmental degradation or the toxins that cause paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP). PSP is a public health concern for ocean quahog. PSP is caused by saxitoxins, produced by the alga *Alexandrium fundyense* (red tide). Surfclam and ocean quahog on Georges Bank were not fished from 1990 to 2008 due to the risk of PSP. . There was light fishing on Georges Bank in years 2009-2011 under an exempted fishing permit and LPUE in that area was substantially higher (5-7 times higher) than in other traditional fishing grounds.

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office reopened a portion of Georges Bank to the harvest of surfclam and ocean quahog beginning January 1, 2013 (77 FR 75057, December 19,

2012) under its authority in 50 CFR 648.76. Harvesting vessels must adhere to the adopted testing protocol from the National Shellfish Sanitation Program.

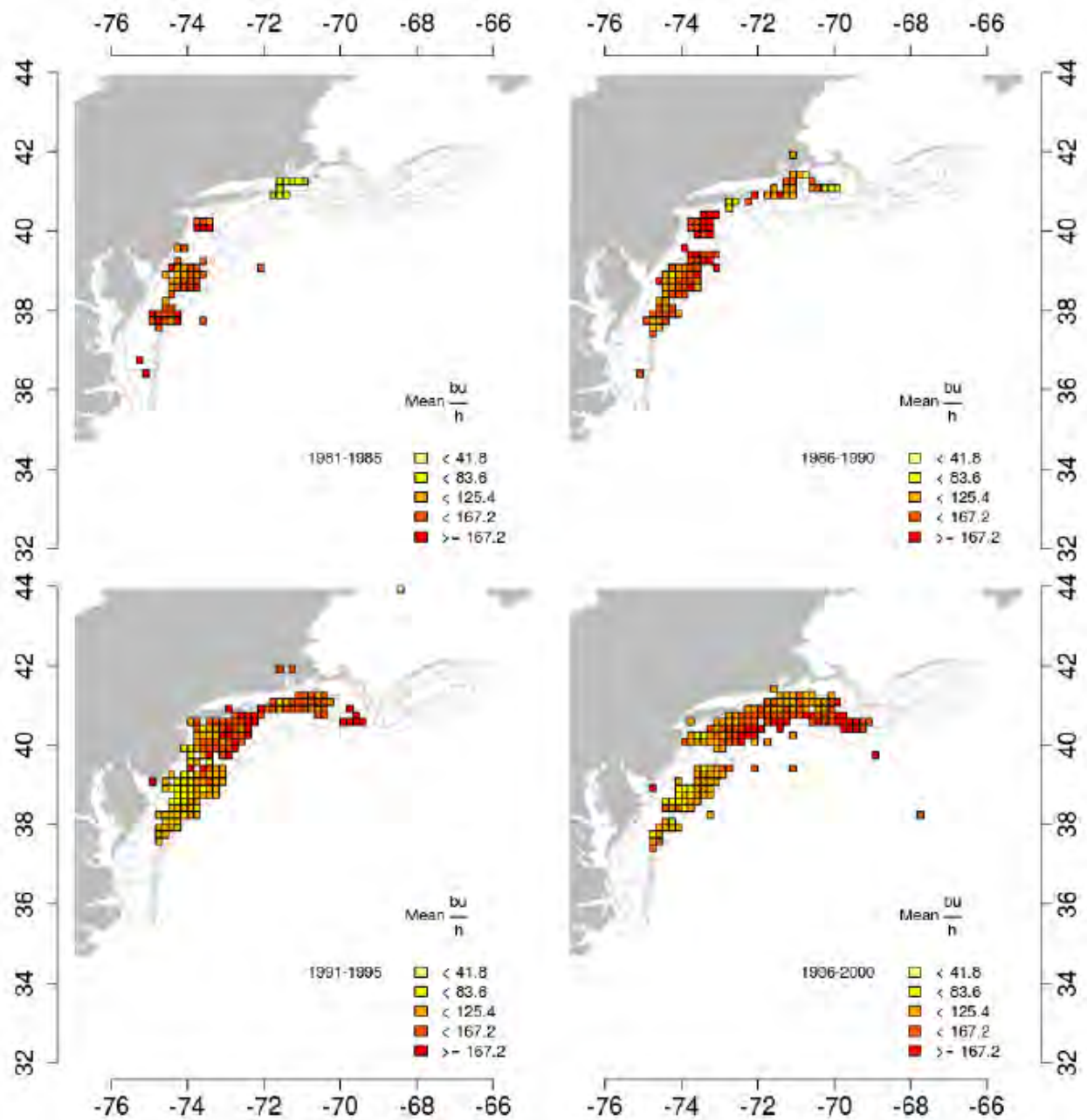


Figure 10. Average ocean quahog landings per unit effort (LPUE; $\text{bu. } h^{-1}$) by ten-minute squares over time, 1981-2000. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.⁴

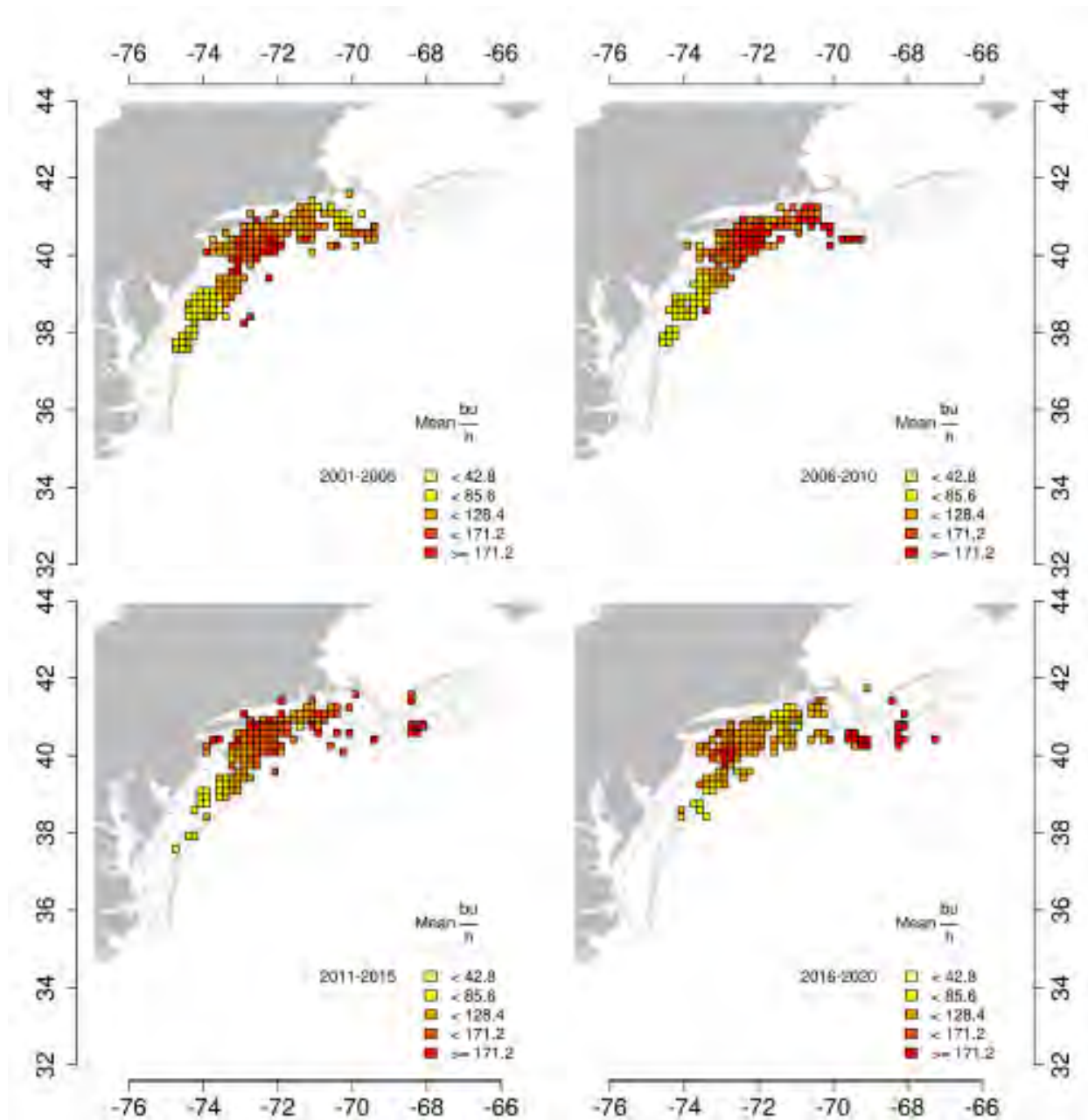


Figure 11. Average ocean quahog landings per unit effort (LPUE; bu. h⁻¹) by ten-minute squares over time, 2001-2019 and preliminary 2020. Only squares where more the 5 kilo bushels were caught are shown.⁴

Table 2. Federal fleet profile, 2011 through 2020.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Non-Maine Vessels Harvesting BOTH surfclam & ocean quahog	12	13	7	7	6	8	14	8	7	8
Non-Maine Vessels Harvesting only ocean quahog	7	6	9	9	10	9	8	8	8	7
Total Non-Maine Vessels	19	19	16	16	16	17	22	16	15	15
Maine Ocean Quahog Vessels	13	12	11	9	8	8	8	8	6	8

Source: NMFS clam vessel logbooks.

References

1. Cargnelli, L., S. Griesbach, D. Packer, and E. Weissberger. 1999. Essential Fish Habitat Source Document: Ocean Quahog, *Arctica islandica*, Life History and Habitat Characteristics. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-NE-148.
2. Fisheries Science Center. 2017. 63rd Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (63rd SAW) Assessment Summary Report. US Dept Commer, Northeast Fish Sci Cent Ref Doc. 17-09; 28 p. Available from: National Marine Fisheries Service, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026, or online at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications>.
3. Hennen, Dan. Personal Communication. June 14, 2020. NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543.
4. Hennen, Dan. Personal Communication. March 12, 2021. NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543.

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: May 24, 2021
To: Council
From: Jason Didden, Staff
Subject: Longfin Squid and Butterfish 2022 Specifications Review

As part of the multi-year specification process for longfin squid and butterfish, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the specifications is warranted.

The following is included for Council consideration on this subject:

- 1) Monitoring Committee Summary (May 19, 2021)
- 2) Report of the May 2021 SSC Meeting – See Committee Reports Tab
- 3) Staff Recommendations Memo (May 3, 2021)
- 4) Squid and Butterfish Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report (April 2021)
- 5) Longfin Squid Fishery Information Document (April 2021)
- 6) Butterfish Fishery Information Document (April 2021)
- 7) Correspondence

Neither staff nor the SSC nor the Monitoring Committee recommended any changes to the 2022 specifications for longfin squid or butterfish, and no action is required by the Council. A potential change to the butterfish mesh size is discussed in the Monitoring Committee Summary, but no change was recommended.



MSB Monitoring Committee Meeting Summary

May 19, 2021

Webinar

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Monitoring Committee met on May 19, 2021 at 1pm. The purpose of this meeting was to develop recommendations related to squid and butterfish specifications (mackerels will be addressed later in the year).

MSB Monitoring Committee Attendees: Jason Didden, Chuck Adams, Doug Christel, Lisa Hendrickson, and Daniel Hocking.

Other Attendees: Jeff Kaelin, Alissa Wilson, Aly Pitts, Greg DiDomenico, Peter Hughes, Zach Greenberg, and Willow Patten.

Illex Squid

After considering the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) *Illex* Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendation of 33,000 metric tons (MT) for 2021-2022 (+10% from the current 30,000 MT ABC), the Monitoring Committee recommended using updated discard information developed for the Research Track Assessment (SBRM approach) to establish the 2022 *Illex* squid specifications. Based on follow-up emails among the Monitoring Committee members, the recommended approach was to use the average discard percentage of total catch estimates from 2017-2019: **4.61%**. The 2017, 2018, and 2019 annual discard percentages (and their CVs) were 3.66% (0.24), 5.51% (0.21), and 4.67% (0.27), respectively. In addition to the high precision of the 2017-2019 discard estimates, two of the highest numbers of observed small mesh (0.5-2.49 in. codend mesh size) bottom trawl trips occurred during these years. The amount that would be set aside for discards (1,521.3 MT) is likely to avoid a substantial ABC overage given recent and historical estimated discards. The current set-aside (4.52%) was calculated as the mean plus one standard deviation of the final 10 years (1995-2004) of data from the previous assessment (SBRM had not been developed at that time).

The recommended *Illex* specifications for 2022 would thus be ABC = 33,000 MT and IOY¹ = DAH² = DAP³ = 31,478.7 mt. The Council could also request that NMFS use existing in-season adjustment procedures to similarly adjust/increase the 2021 specifications. Staff noted that a proposed rule is expected soon that would lower the directed fishery closure threshold from 95% to 94%, and require faster *Illex* dealer reporting (there was no quota overage

¹ IOY = Initial optimum yield

² DAH = Domestic Annual Harvest

³ DAP = Domestic Annual Processing

in 2020 but there were overages in 2018 and 2019). The timing is tight for in-season adjustments, but a similar adjustment was successfully accomplished in 2020.

Per the Council's tasks related to the 2020 Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness, the Monitoring Committee also discussed the appropriateness of the current 10,000-pound *Illex* trip limit implemented once the directed *Illex* fishery closes. While there are some regulatory *Illex* discards reported in the observer database on longfin trips (i.e., 40% longfin of weight kept), instances of *Illex* catch above 10,000 pounds after closures in 2017-2019 on these trips were relatively infrequent (11% of 119 longfin trips with some *Illex* catch). Additionally, 75% of the observed discards occurred due to market concerns (i.e. not regulations). Staff can continue to monitor observer data for substantial regulatory discarding, but at this time the Monitoring Committee recommends no changes to this management measure, especially with an *Illex* Research Track Assessment ongoing.

Butterfish

The SSC did not change its previous butterfish ABC recommendation for 2022 (see table below) and the Monitoring Committee found no need to recommend any other changes to the butterfish specifications previously set by the Council for 2022:

	Specification	2021	2022	Rationale Summary
	OFL	22,053	24,341	From projections
a	ABC	11,993	17,854	From SSC, scientific uncertainty
b	ACT Buffer %	5%	5%	for management uncertainty
c	ACT Buffer	600	893	a times b
d	ACT (a-c)	11,393	16,961	a-c
e	Assumed discards in directed fishing (7.6%)	522	945	from observer data
f	Assumed other discards	637	637	from cap performance
g	Non-longfin discards	1,159	1,582	e+f
h	Butterfish Cap (longfin discards)	3,884	3,884	set by Council
i	Total discard set-aside	5,043	5,466	g+h
j	Landings or "Domestic Annual Harvest" (DAH)	6,350	11,495	d-i
k	Close primary directed at this amount, i.e. with 1,000 mt left; go to 5,000 pound trip limit	5,350	10,495	j-1000

Per the Council's tasks related to the 2020 Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness, the Monitoring Committee also discussed the appropriateness of the current 3-inch mesh requirement for retaining more than 5,000 pounds of butterfish (designed to reduce catch of small butterfish during directed fishing). While there are some regulatory butterfish discards reported in the observer data on longfin trips (40% longfin of weight kept) that are likely using smaller mesh, instances of butterfish catch above 5,000 pounds in 2017-2019 on these trips were relatively infrequent (4% of 969 longfin trips with some butterfish catch). Additionally, 92% of observed discards occurred due to market concerns (i.e. not regulations). Staff can continue to monitor observer data for substantial regulatory discarding, but at this time the Monitoring Committee recommends no changes to this management measure, especially with a butterfish Research Track Assessment ongoing.

Longfin Squid

The SSC did not change its previous longfin squid ABC recommendation for 2022 (see table below) and the Monitoring Committee found no need to recommend any other changes to the longfin specifications previously set by the Council for 2021-2023:

Specification	Longfin 2021-2023 (MT)	Rationale
(a) Overfishing Limit (OFL)	Not available	unknown
(b) Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)	23,400	from SSC
(c) Commercial Discard Set-Aside	2.00%	from recent observations
(d) Initial Optimum Yield (IOY)/DAH/DAP	22,932	ABC - discard set-aside

(The DAH is divided into three 4-month trimesters: 43% Jan-Apr, 17% May-Aug, 40% Sept-Dec with rollover procedures accounting for trimester underages and overages).



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 3, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, Staff
Subject: Butterfish, Longfin, and *Illex* ABCs¹ – Staff Recommendations

Butterfish

As part of the specification process for butterfish, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted. The butterfish fishery is currently under multi-year specifications for 2021-2022. The Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) is projected to increase from 11,993 metric tons (MT) in 2021 to 17,854 MT in 2022, based on previous SSC recommendations. After a review of the available information, staff recommends no changes to the previously-recommended 2022 ABC. A research track assessment is currently underway.

Longfin Squid

As part of the specification process for longfin squid, the SSC and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted. The longfin squid fishery is currently under multi-year specifications for 2021-2023. The ABC (23,400 MT) is not proposed to change from 2021-2023 under the multi-year specifications, based on previous SSC recommendations. After a review of the available information, staff recommends no changes to the previously-recommended 2022 ABC.

¹ An Atlantic mackerel management track assessment is underway, and should be available for SSC review and ABC-setting at the July 2021 SSC meeting.

Illex Squid

As part of the specification process for *Illex* squid, the SSC and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2021 specifications is warranted, and to set 2022 specifications. The *Illex* squid fishery is currently under single-year specifications for 2021. The current ABC is 30,000 MT, set in 2020 after review of various analyses conducted by the Council's *Illex* quota working group. Several of those analyses are informing the current *Illex* research track assessment (RTA). The Council's *Illex* working group identified environmental drivers as a likely useful medium-term avenue of inquiry to inform quotas, and is tracking related work being conducted via the RTA. Two working papers extending analyses considered in 2020 are included for SSC review.

2020 *Illex* landings totaled 28,135 MT, a record high for this fishery in U.S. waters. The fishery closed August 31, 2020, at a time of high weekly landings (in a very similar fashion as 2019).

To prepare for the SSC meeting, Council staff also considered the previous working group products, recent landings, the Council's recently-updated risk policy, and the ABC control rule, which tends toward more caution with higher uncertainty. Given these considerations, staff requested that Dr. Paul Rago review and update relevant previous analyses and consider the outcomes those analyses might suggest regarding a 10% increase in ABC to 33,000 MT. A 10% increase was identified by Council staff as an incremental approach while the RTA is ongoing, which acknowledges both the recent strength of the fishery and the Council's risk policy and ABC control rule.

Based on Dr Rago's analyses, which are supported by additional analyses from a group led by Dr. John Manderson, staff concludes that a 10% ABC increase to 33,000 MT is consistent with the Council's risk policy and would be unlikely to cause overfishing. This ABC would be for 2021 and 2022. The Environmental Assessment for the current specifications considers an ABC range of up to 40,000 MT, so if updated recommendations result from the May 2021 SSC meeting, NMFS may be able to implement changes for the 2021 fishery. Staff anticipates another review process would occur in 2022 depending on the results of the 2021 RTA.



Squid and Butterfish Fishery Performance Reports April 2021

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on April 20, 2021 to review the Fishery Information Documents and develop the following Fishery Performance Reports (mackerel will be dealt with later in the year). The primary purpose of these reports is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. The trigger questions below were posed to the AP to generate discussion. The AP comments summarized below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

Advisory Panel members present: Katie Almeida, Gerry O'Neil, Meghan Lapp, Greg DiDomenico, and Pam Lyons Gromen, Peter Kaizer, and Peter Moore.

Others present: Jason Didden, Paul Rago, Aly Pitts, Peter Hughes, Eric Reid, Mary Sabo, Chuck Adams, and Stephen Pearson.

Trigger questions:

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets, environment, regulations, etc.)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

For organizational purposes, the summary is broken down by species. Each species discussion began by reviewing the species' "information document." Some general points were carried over from previous reports, as described immediately below.

1.1 General

Concern was voiced that shifting thermal habitat suitability is impacting the distribution and/or productivity of MSB species, and needs to be taken into account by assessments/management.

There is concern that assessments will be hurt if surveys are limited by wind development.

Concern was voiced about the potential effects of data gaps due to COVID-19.

Tariffs affect prices and profitability, and therefore trade. If a buyer is in China, that buyer may try to negotiate price based on what they know they will have to absorb in tariffs.

1.2 Butterfish

Market/Economic Conditions

2020 butterfish demand was mostly status quo outside of Covid – i.e. slow development. U.S. butterfish competes with other butterfish that are larger, and which are sometimes imported into the U.S. as well, limiting market expansion. There's still limited interest in this fishery by the typical MSB fishery participant, but it's a substantial fishery for some.

Traditional markets disappeared (export to Japan – breakfast) and it's a long-term process to re-establish markets. Domestic fresh markets are limited, though suppliers are working on ways to expand the market.

Environmental Conditions

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat.

Management Issues

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine Monument negatively impacted access to butterfish until mid-2020, especially large butterfish that command the best prices.

Lobster RGAs are a gear-conflict issue for butterfish (and other MSB species).

The AP reviewed preliminary bycatch data in the longfin fishery – in general AP members thought it was worth continuing to explore bycatch issues to minimize any apparent regulatory issues, but there was not strong interest in making quick changes while the research track assessment is ongoing. A standing request for regulation outreach to the fishery was reiterated – GARFO is working on related outreach materials.

Other Issues

Dogfish abundance has been an issue for the directed fishery – at times vessels can't set on butterfish w/o overloading nets with dogfish.

Research Priorities

Integrating state surveys is important for this species in terms of observing recruitment (the current assessment is examining this).

We need to develop more understanding of biomass trends when fishing mortality does not appear to be a driving factor.

There was support voiced for the SSC providing catch advice that continues to incorporate forage concerns (see the 1992 Patterson paper, the butterfish assessment, and previous SSC approaches). It has been noted that the Fmsy proxy used in the assessment explicitly accounts for the forage role of butterfish.

We need a way to look at forage species holistically in terms of species compositions and abundances of other forage species at the same time. The butterfish biomass decline is concerning especially in context of other forage species (e.g. Atlantic herring and mackerel that are also declining).

1.3 Longfin Squid

Market/Economic Conditions

COVID-19 had drastic impacts on 2020 longfin demand. Retail trade has provided an outlet for some longfin squid products. COVID-19 will continue to increase market uncertainties for the foreseeable future. Ex-Vessel prices dropped 40%-50% from early 2020 to April 2020.

Supply/distribution issues (and increasing shipping costs) are also affecting all seafood markets. EU regulations and market preferences (squid size sorting requirements) also limit ability to re-shuffle squid products into Europe.

Environmental Conditions

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat.

Management Issues

Area/gear limitations negatively affect fishing/landings. Scup, Tilefish, and Fixed/Mobile Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs) have made longfin squid fishing more difficult. Large mesh requirements on George's Bank also restrict targeting of longfin squid in an areas where fishermen have been seeing signs of longfin squid. Until mid-2020, the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine Monument may have also negatively impacted access to areas where longfin squid could have been caught.

Other Issues

Windfarm development continues to be a major concern for the longfin squid fishery given expanding potential overlap between potential wind farm areas and squid fishery areas. Concerns involve **both** fleet displacement and effects on squid mortality/behavior from installation and/or operation of turbines/facilities.

There was a question about 2020 squid effort/CPUE, but that information is not available.

Research Priorities

Investigate NEFSC survey catchability for longfin.

It needs to be more clearly described how the existing evidence supports two primary cohorts (which happen to align with the surveys).

A squid jigging project through CFRF is underway to explore the feasibility of jigging.

1.4 *Illex* Squid

Introduction:

In general, discussion was muted given the expectation that the ongoing research track assessment will provide better information on *Illex*. Similar issues as last year persist.

Market/Economic Conditions

Demand drives the *Illex* fishery and participation. Price/demand are mostly dependent on the international market, which drives world trade prices and/or demand for U.S. *Illex*. Annual variability and price combine to drive interest in fishing for *Illex*. A strong dollar may also impact demand and effort. Market demand for *Illex* was robust in 2016-2020 with new markets (bait and food). MSC certification helps. World production of Japanese flying squid, Argentine shortfin squid, our *Illex*, and Jumbo flying squid creates supply, affects demand for our *Illex*.

Environmental Conditions

Availability changes quickly even in a year (waves of squid “come up onto the bank”). Quota levels have not hurt the stock and are unnecessarily restricting catches in some years; we need to think out of the box regarding quotas. Understanding migration is key and we don't understand the migration behavior and only access a small portion of the population. Real-time assessment would be optimal to avoid leaving excess *Illex* (and revenues) in the water without a conservation purpose during natural peaks. We need to research ways to take advantage of boom years, including considering the size of squid (taking large squid means harvesting fewer animals). Current management is not sensitive to actual *Illex* productivity or the impact of the fishery. The fishing community should be an integral part of any effort; make changes carefully but don't just get stuck where we are.

It was noted that given *Illex* are growing through the season, early shutdowns mean our picture of *Illex* size is incomplete.

There is interest in learning more about spawning habitat and timing. NEFSC staff had

planned for more collection in 2020 but did not get observers due to COVID. Planned for 2021 depending on observer deployments.

Management Issues

In the future, deep-sea coral closures may impact the ability of vessels to operate depending on where squid are in a given year – this may become an issue especially in slower years that last longer – *Illex* patterns are changing like other fish – they seem to be deeper in recent years.

Reduced herring quotas may increase participation in the *Illex* fishery.

A higher incidental longfin limit for *Illex* vessels during longfin closures or a more gradual slowing of longfin fishing could avoid regulatory longfin discarding. The new (since 2014) higher limit (15,000 pounds for Tier 1 longfin permit, 5,000 pounds for Tier 2 when on an offshore *Illex* trip and having more than 10,000 pounds of *Illex*) may not totally solve this problem. There is also interest in seeing commercial size data included annually for review by the AP.

Advisors noted ongoing Lobster/RGA issues and were interested in a better way to transition gears/area. (the Council tried to engage the ASMFC a number of years ago but there was not much interest). Fixed/mobile gear “gentlemen agreements” are used inshore and may be a solution, but might not be practicable for *Illex* given the patchiness of fish and the amount of gear out in the depth where *Illex* is fished. GARFO did have incidents of lobster gear interactions in 2020.

Jonah crab fixed gear is also an issue – boats are seeing more of this gear and it’s becoming a problem.

Regarding *Illex* trip limits after closure of the directed *Illex* fishery, there was a general sense that changing/increasing might be OK, but would need to be tied to possession of longfin to avoid post-closure directing on *Illex*. There were different perspectives on timing (whether or not to wait until after the *Illex* amendment has been implemented before considering other changes).

Other Issues

For refrigerated sea water vessels to participate, they need high densities to drive participation because they have to return to the dock within two days of starting to put *Illex* onboard due to spoilage issues. The fleet is changing from freezers to RSW, increasing catch rates. 3 boats in last 18 months have been converted from freezers to RSW. Some new mackerel/herring boats (besides the ones that have typically participated in *Illex*) have entered in recent years with more efficient pumping technology, increasing landing rates.

Passing of vessels is getting more difficult with the amount of vessels in the fishing areas given the length of tow line (500 fathoms of wire) out in deep water.

Research Priorities

Spawning information and real-time management with cooperative research.



Longfin Squid Fishery Information Document

April 2021

This Fishery Information Document provides a brief overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for longfin squid (“longfin” hereafter, formerly known as “Loligo”), with an emphasis on 2020. Data sources for Fishery Information Documents include unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) survey, dealer, vessel trip report (VTR), permit, and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) databases and should be considered preliminary. For more resources, including previous Fishery Information Documents, please visit <http://www.mafmc.org/msb>.

Key Facts

- 2020 landings, revenues, and average price for longfin squid were down in 2020 compared to 2019. Landings have generally been variable and well below the quota in recent years. 2021 landings are off to a slow start.
- Longfin had a management track assessment in 2020. Based on 2019 data the fishery was not overfished. Overfishing reference points are not available.
- Considerable variability is expected in abundance, availability, and landings for any squid fishery.

Basic Biology

Longfin squid is a neritic (from the shore to the edge of the continental shelf), semi-pelagic schooling cephalopod species primarily distributed between Georges Bank and Cape Hatteras, NC. The squid, and the fishery, generally occur offshore in the winter and inshore during the summer, with mixing and migrations from one to the other in spring and fall. Spawning/recruitment occurs year-round with seasonal peaks in cohorts. The average lifespan of a cohort is about six months. Individuals hatched inshore during the summer are taken in the winter offshore fishery and those hatched in the winter are taken in the inshore summer fishery. Age data indicate that NEFSC spring surveys (March-April) capture longfin squid that were hatched during the previous six months, in the fall, and those caught in the NEFSC fall surveys (September-October) were hatched during the previous spring. Longfin squid attach egg masses to the substrate and fixed objects. Fishing and spawning mortality occur concurrently inshore during late spring through fall. The locations of spawning sites offshore at other times of the year are not well understood. Additional life history information is detailed in the EFH document for the species, located at: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/habitat/efh/>.

Status of the Stock

Based on the last management track assessment, the status of longfin squid in 2019 was not overfished but there are no overfishing reference points available (available at https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi_report_options.php). See Figure 1 for trends in biomass from the last assessment. The assessment also presented unaveraged trends based on the spring and fall surveys separately representing two dominant cohorts, and solicited input from the reviewers about moving to considering the two dominant cohorts separately. The reviewers supported moving forward with such an approach - Since the median fall biomass is about five times bigger than the median spring biomass, there could be considerable management implications if the surveys are ultimately used to manage two cohorts separately (e.g. consideration of either changes to trimester allotments or changes to the overall seasonal management approach might become warranted).

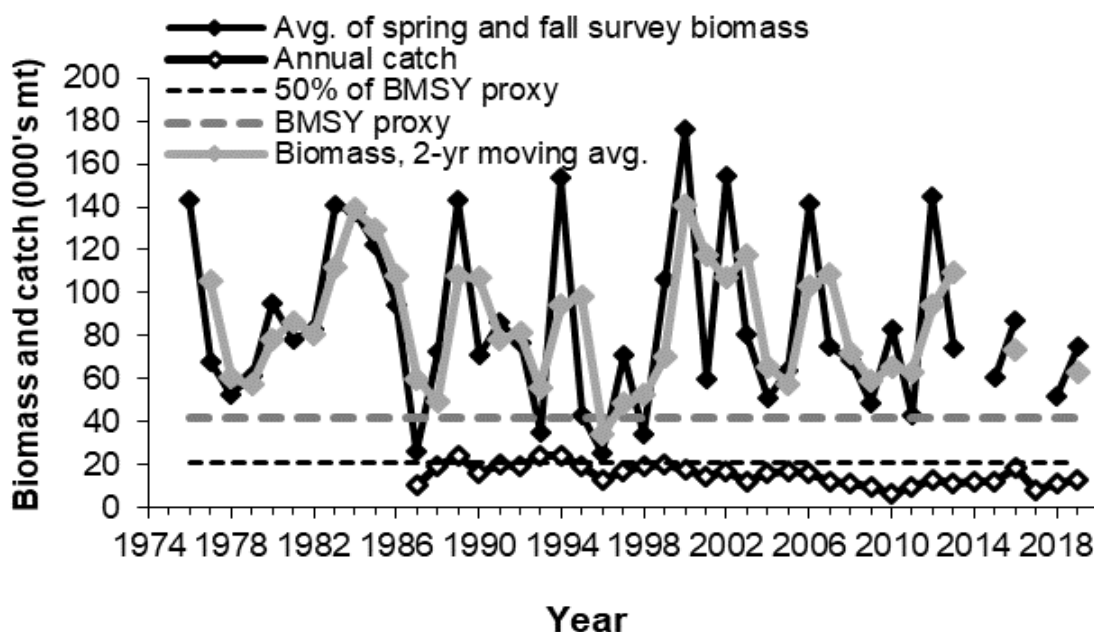


Figure 1. Annualized biomass estimates (annual averages of the NEFSC spring and fall survey biomass estimates in mt) of longfin in relation to the existing BMSY proxy (42,205 mt) and annual catches during 1987-2019 (when fishing was solely conducted by the USA fleet). The grey line represents the annualized biomass two-year moving averages which are used to determine stock status. Some years near the end are missing due to missing survey data.

Management System and Fishery Performance

Management

The Council established management of longfin in 1978 and the management unit includes all federal East Coast waters.

Access is limited with several moratorium permit categories. The quota is divided into three, 4-month Trimesters (T) - 43% (T1 Jan-Apr), 17% (T2 May-Aug), and 40% (T3 Sept-Dec). Unused

quota can roll over into later trimesters within a year depending on the amount of longfin landed. Underages from T1 that are greater than 25% are reallocated to Trimesters 2 and 3 (split equally between both trimesters) of the same year. However, the T2 quota may only be increased by 50% via rollover and the remaining portion of the underage is reallocated to T3. Any underages for T1 that are less than 25% of the T1 quota are applied only to T3 of the same year. Any overages for T1 and T2 are subtracted from T3 of the same year as needed.

The 2021 longfin squid ABC is 23,400 MT, with a commercial quota of 22,932 MT. The 2022 quota is projected to be the same.

Recreational catch of longfin is believed to be negligible relative to commercial catch. There are no recreational regulations except for party/charter vessel permits and reporting.

Commercial Fishery

Figure 2 below from the last assessment describes longfin landings 1963-2019. Figures 3-4 describe domestic landings, ex-vessel revenues (2020 dollars), and prices (2020 dollars) since 1996. Figure 5 illustrates preliminary landings throughout the year for 2019 and 2020. Figure 6 illustrates preliminary landings for Trimester 1 for 2020 and 2021. The Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator was used to report revenues/prices as “2020 dollars.”

Table 1 describes 2020 longfin landings by state, and Table 2 describes 2020 longfin landings by gear type. Table 3 describes 2020 longfin landings by NMFS Statistical Areas.

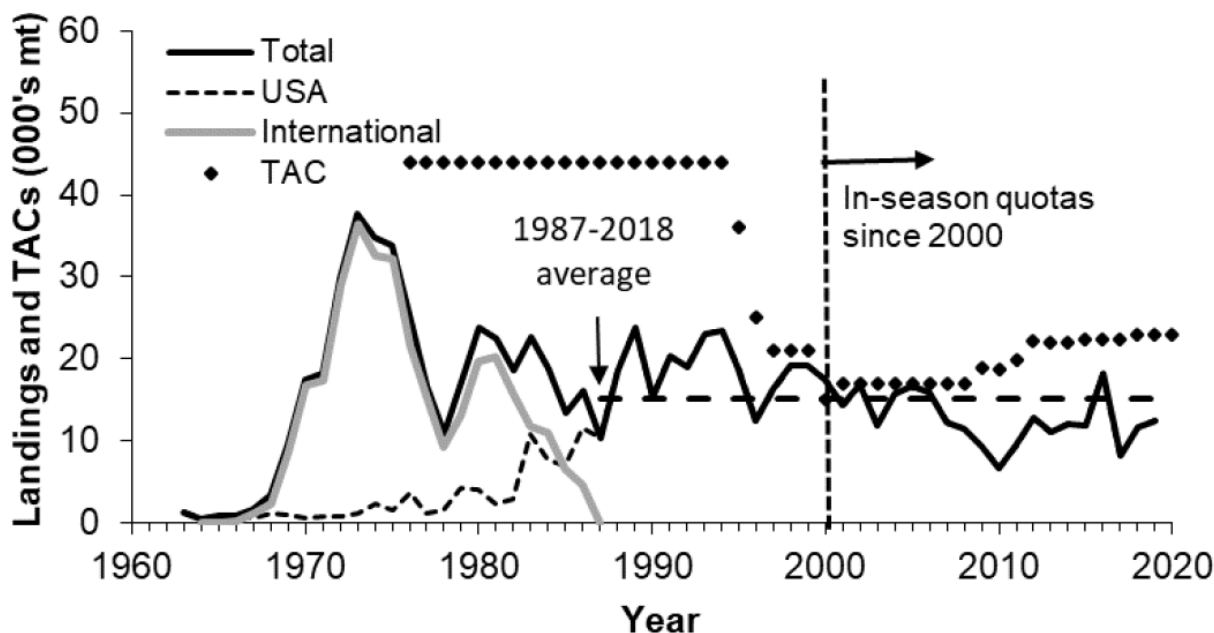


Figure 2. Landings (000s mt) of *Doryteuthis pealeii*, by USA and international fleets, on the Northeast USA continental shelf during 1963-2019 and annual TACs during 1974-2020. In-season quotas were quarterly-based during 2001-2006 and trimester-based during 2000 and 2007-current.

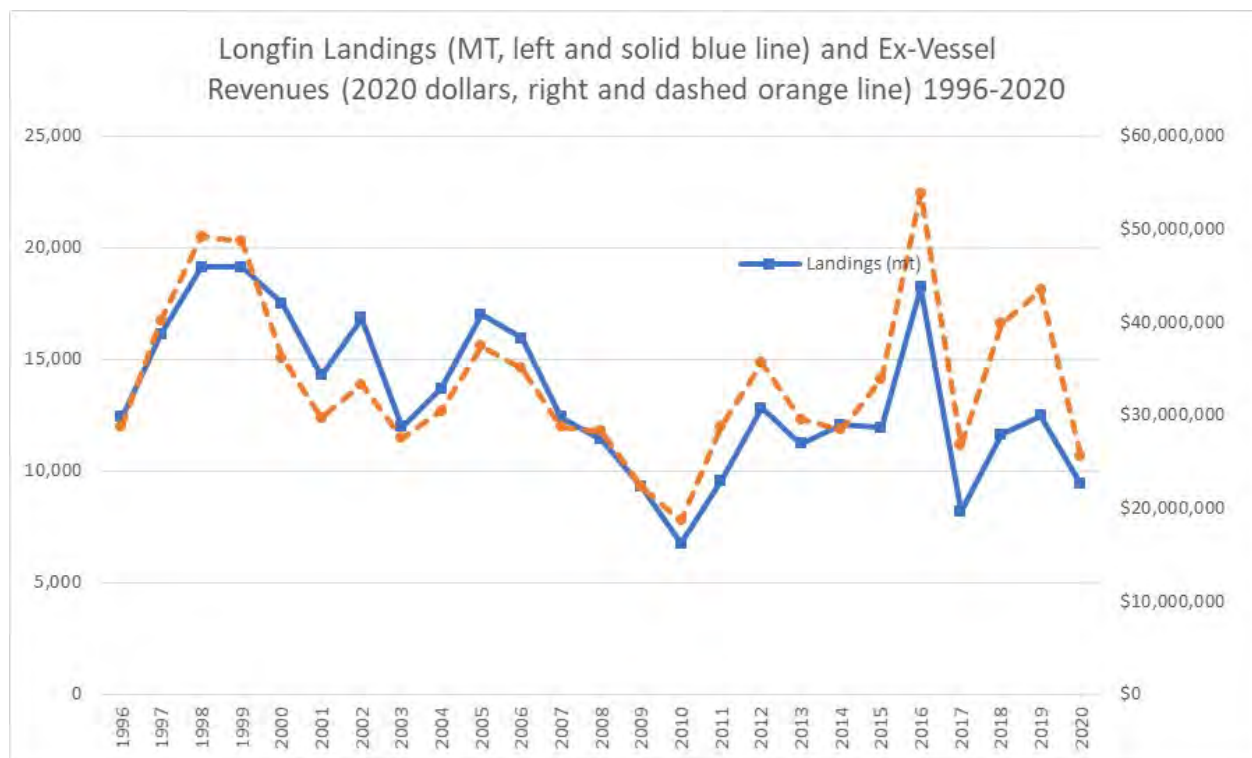


Figure 3. U.S. Longfin Landings and Longfin Ex-Vessel Values 1996-2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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Figure 4. Ex-Vessel Longfin Prices 1996-2020 Adjusted to 2020 Dollars Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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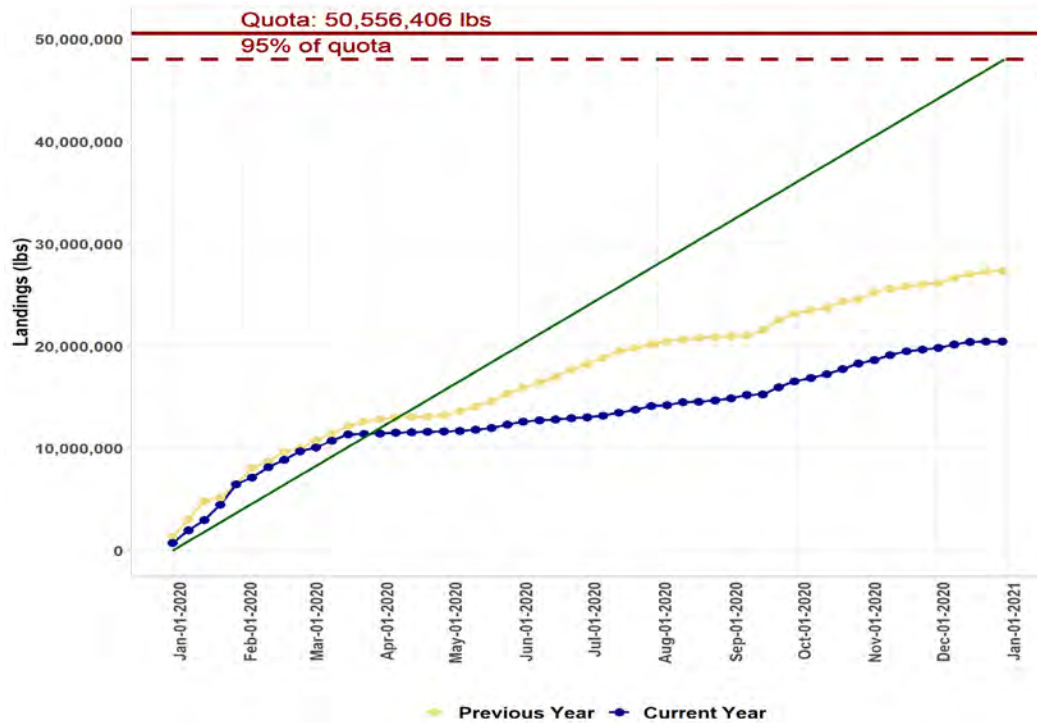


Figure 5. U.S. Preliminary Longfin landings; 2020 in blue, 2019 in yellow-orange. Source: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/commercial-fishing/quota-monitoring-greater-atlantic-region>.

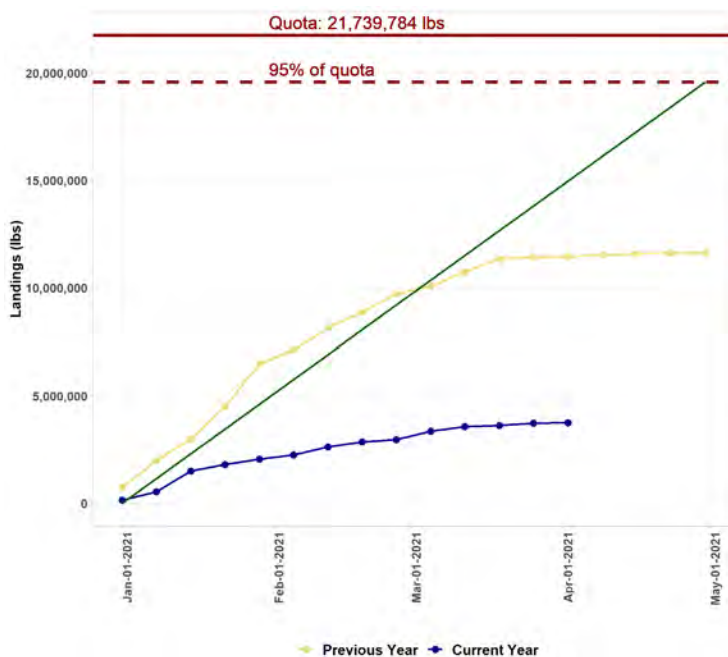


Figure 6. U.S. Preliminary Longfin landings; 2021 Trimester 1 in blue, 2020 Trimester 1 in yellow-orange. Source: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/commercial-fishing/quota-monitoring-greater-atlantic-region>.

Table 1. Commercial Longfin landings (live wt) by state in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

State	Metric_Tons
RI	5,266
NJ	1,690
NY	1,260
MA	545
CT	420
NA/Other	211
Total	9,392

Table 2. Commercial Longfin landings (live wt) by gear in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

GEAR	Metric_Tons
TRAWL,OTTER,BOTTOM,FISH	8,025
UNKNOWN	1,020
Other	347
Total	9,392

Table 3. Commercial longfin landings by statistical area in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished VTR data.

Stat Area	Metric_Tons
622	1,784
616	1,770
613	1,038
626	777
525	748
537	534
612	396
526	323
611	227
562	216
538	206
539	197
623	191
632	76
615	57
627	53
Other	219
Total	8,812

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Butterfish Fishery Information Document

April 2021

This Fishery Information Document provides a brief overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for butterfish, with an emphasis on 2020. Data sources for Fishery Information Documents include unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) survey, dealer, vessel trip report (VTR), permit, and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) databases and should be considered preliminary. For more resources, including previous Fishery Information Documents, please visit <http://www.mafmc.org/msb>.

Key Facts

- 2020 landings, revenues, and average price for butterfish were down in 2020 compared to 2019. Landings have generally been variable and well below the quota in recent years.
- Butterfish's last management track assessment update (2019 data) concluded biomass has been trending down but the stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Recruitment is variable but has been trending lower since 1999. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2019 was estimated to be 69% of the target. A research track assessment is ongoing – if approved via peer review, any new assessment methods would be incorporated into a management track assessment update in 2022 for 2023-2024 quotas.
- Considerable variability is expected in abundance, availability, and landings.

Basic Biology

Atlantic butterfish is a semi-pelagic/semi-demersal schooling fish species primarily distributed between Nova Scotia, Canada and Florida. They are most abundant from the Gulf of Maine to Cape Hatteras and are fast-growing, short-lived, and form loose schools. They winter near the edge of the continental shelf in the Middle Atlantic Bight and migrate inshore in the spring into Mid-Atlantic, southern New England, and Gulf of Maine waters. During the summer, butterfish occur over the entire mid-Atlantic shelf from sheltered bays and estuaries out to about 200 m. In late fall, butterfish move southward and offshore in response to falling water temperatures.

Butterfish are relatively short-lived and grow rapidly; few individuals live beyond 3 years and most are sexually mature at 1-2 years of age. The maximum age reported is 6 years. Juvenile butterfish range from 16 mm to about 120 mm. During their first year, they grow to 76-127 mm, or about half their adult size. Early-spawned individuals are 76-102 mm in the fall; late-spawned individuals are 51-76 mm in the fall and 76-127 mm the following spring. Adult butterfish range from about 120 mm to 305mm with an average length of 150-230 mm. See <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/habitat/efh/> for more life history information.

Status of the Stock

Based on the last management track assessment, in 2019 the status of butterfish was not overfished with no overfishing occurring (available at https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi_report_options.php). However, declining recruitment has led to declines in biomass (Figure 1), and as of 2019 biomass is estimated to have been only 69% of the target. Projections run based on typical long-term recruitment predict a rapid increase in biomass, but that will only occur when the trend in recruitment reverses. Recent projections for catch limits used lower, more recent (last 10 years) recruitment, which reduces future projected biomass and catch recommendations.

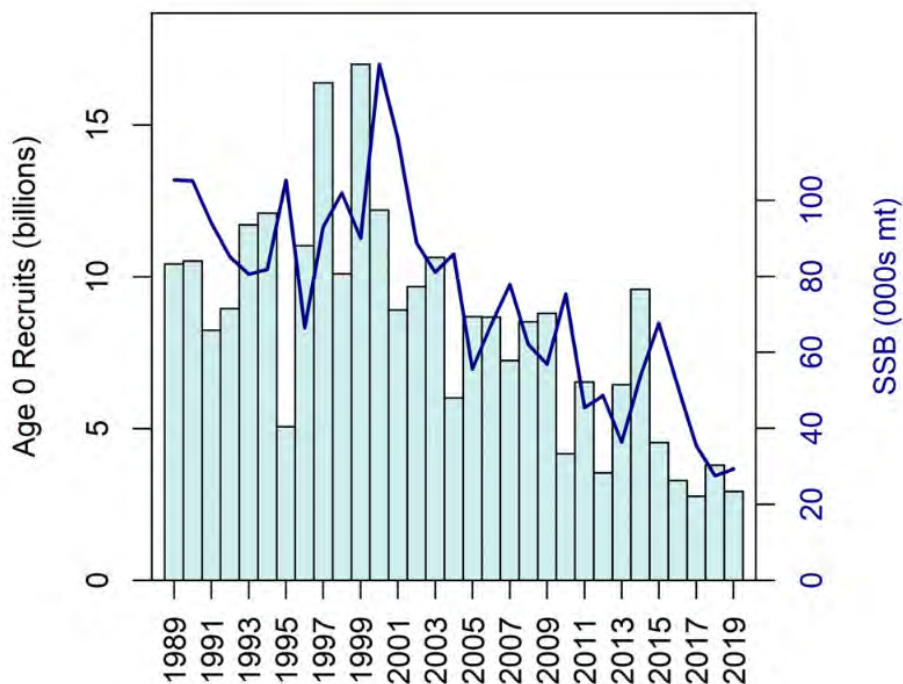


Figure 1. Butterfish recruitment (vertical bars), and the spawning stock biomass (blue line) 1989-2019.

Management System and Fishery Performance

Management

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (the Council or MAFMC) established management of butterfish in 1978 and the management unit includes all federal East Coast waters.

Limited access commercial vessels can fish year-round until quotas are achieved, subject to applicable gear requirements. Incidental permits are limited to 600 pounds per trip. The ABC for 2021 is 11,993 MT, with a commercial quota of 6,350 MT. At 5,350 MT a 5,000-pound trip limit

is implemented to slow the fishery and avoid having to go to the 600-pound trip limit that is implemented once the full quota is reached (in order to minimize regulatory discards). For 2022, the commercial quota is projected to increase to 11,495 MT. Additional summary regulatory information is available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/new-england-mid-atlantic>.

Recreational landings are negligible. There are no recreational regulations except for party/charter vessel permits and reporting.

Commercial Fishery

Figure 2 below, from the last assessment update describes U.S. butterfish catch 1965-2019. Figures 3-4 describe domestic landings, ex-vessel revenues and prices (inflation adjusted) since 1996. The Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator was used to report revenues/prices as “2020 dollars.”

Table 1 describes 2020 butterfish landings by state, and Table 2 describes 2020 butterfish landings by gear type. Table 3 describes 2020 butterfish landings by NMFS Statistical Area as reported in Vessel Trip Reports.

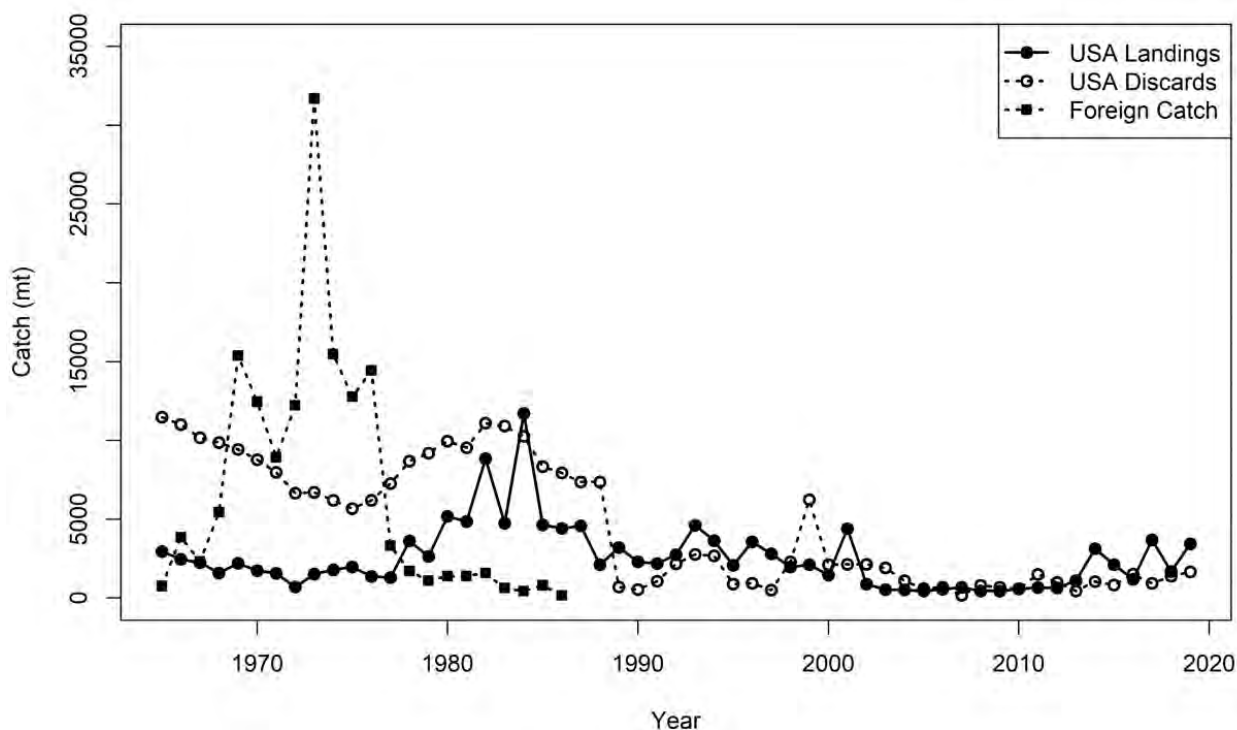


Figure 2. US landings, US discards, and foreign catch of butterfish, 1965–2019. Source: NEFSC Butterfish Management Track Assessment, available at https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/saw/sasi/sasi_report_options.php.

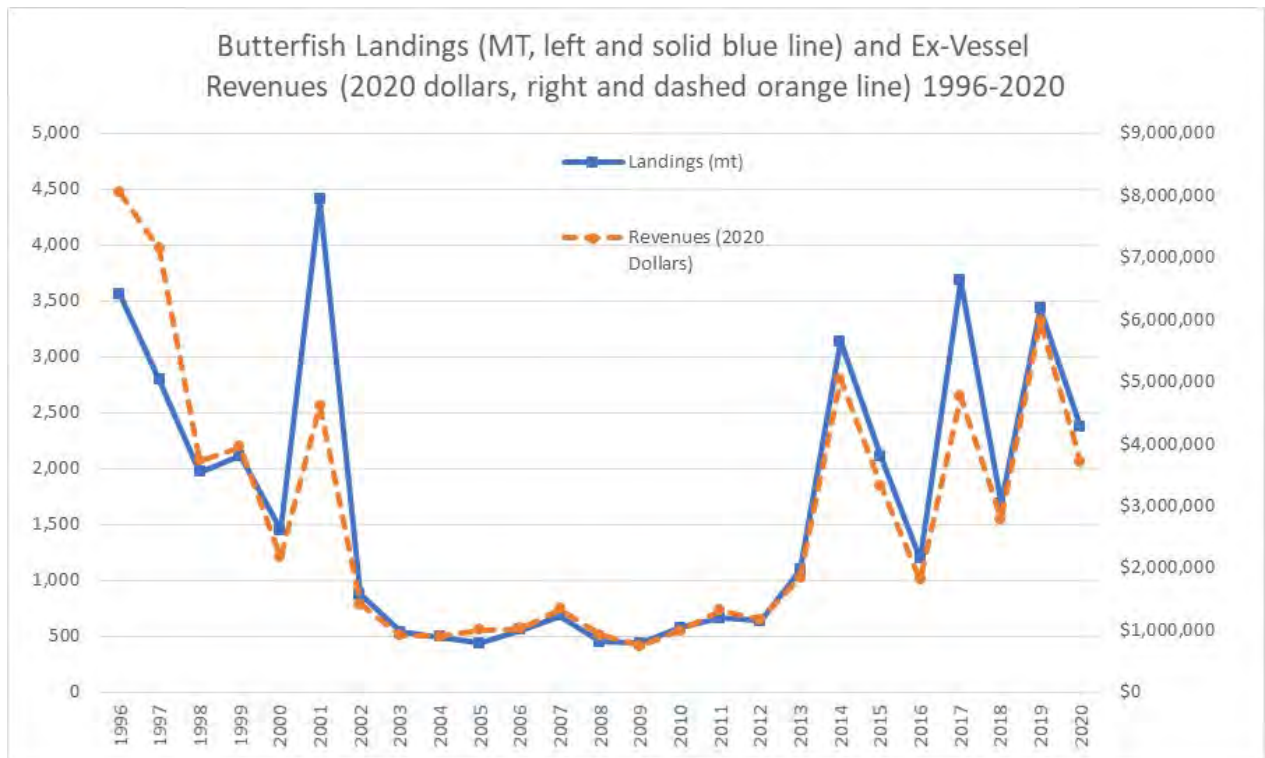


Figure 3. U.S. Butterfish Landings and Butterfish Ex-Vessel Values 1996-2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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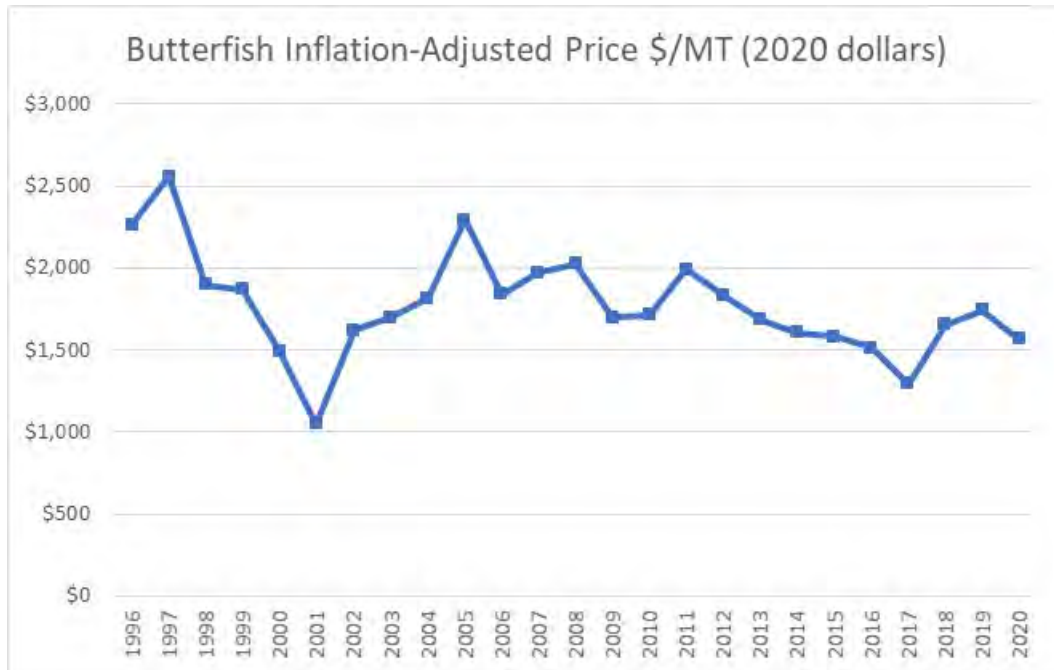


Figure 4. Ex-Vessel Butterfish Prices 1996-2020 Adjusted to 2020 Dollars Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

Table 1. Commercial Butterfish landings (live weight) by state in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

State	Metric_Tons
RI	2,073
NY	177
CT	54
MA	35
NJ	24
Other	5
Total	2,367

Table 2. Commercial Butterfish landings (live weight) by gear in 2019. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

GEAR	Metric_Tons
TRAWL,OTTER,BOTTOM,FISH	2,241
UNKNOWN	94
Other	32
Total	2,367

Table 3. Commercial butterfish landings by statistical area in 2019. Source: NMFS unpublished VTR data.

Stat Area	Metric_Tons
526	1,157
537	715
539	152
616	88
611	82
615	77
613	41
636	32
525	30
622	15
Other	51
Total	2,441

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Date/Time Submitted

05/22/2021 12:46pm

Name

jean publiee

Email

jeanpublic1@gmail.com

Topic

Longfin Squid and Butterfish 2022 Specifications Review

Comments

cut quotas on bluefish,surfclam, quohog, squid,
the plastic in the ocean should be attacked by this agency so that we have a clean
ocean. i see absolutely no action on the part of this profiteering group that you service
doing anything to make our ocean cleaner. they make milloins of dollars and do not lift
a finger to clean plastic from the ocean. why not shame them and mandate they start
spending some oftheir time bringnig back plastic they find in the ocean. they are
making the money make them do some effort.
stop building more offshore crap.



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 25, 2021
To: Council
From: Jason Didden, Staff
Subject: *Illex* Specifications and Control Date

The Council needs to set 2022 *Illex* specifications and can request that NMFS make an in-season adjustment to the 2021 *Illex* specifications.

The following is included for Council consideration on this subject:

- 1) Monitoring Committee Summary – See Longfin Squid/Butterfish Tab
- 2) Report of the May 2021 SSC Meeting – See Committee Reports Tab
- 3) Staff Recommendations Memo – See Longfin Squid/Butterfish Tab
- 4) Squid and Butterfish Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report – See Longfin Squid/Butterfish Tab
- 5) *Illex* Squid Fishery Information Document (April 2021)
- 6) Correspondence

The SSC set an increased ABC of 33,000 MT for 2022 and 2021. Related specifications are discussed in the Monitoring Committee Summary in the preceding Longfin Squid/Butterfish Tab. A potential change to the post-closure *Illex* incidental trip limit is also discussed in the Monitoring Committee Summary, but no change was recommended.

Council staff also recommends the Council consider requesting that NMFS publish notice of an additional control date for the *Illex* squid fishery. There is some uncertainty regarding the final outcomes of the ongoing *Illex* Research Track Assessment and the *Illex* Permit Amendment. An additional control date could proactively increase the flexibility of the Council for considering capacity-related management measures once the outcomes of the assessment and amendment are finalized and alert fishery participants that additional measures to address capacity might be considered pending the outcomes of the two aforementioned issues.



***Illex* Fishery Information Document**

April 2021

This Fishery Information Document provides a brief overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for *Illex* squid with an emphasis on 2020. Data sources for Fishery Information Documents include unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) survey, dealer, vessel trip report (VTR), permit, and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) databases and should be considered preliminary. For more resources, including previous Fishery Information Documents, please visit <http://www.mafmc.org/msb>.

Key Facts

- 2020 was the fourth banner year in a row for *Illex*, with the quota being harvested on a similar timeline as 2019. 2017-2020 represent a unique sequence in the history of the fishery of four consecutive “boom” *Illex* years.
- Prices, and therefore revenues, were down from 2019, and prices are down 26% from 2016.
- Substantial variability is to be expected with any squid species.

Basic Biology

Illex squid is a semi-pelagic/semi-demersal schooling cephalopod species distributed between Newfoundland and the Florida Straits, and lives less than one year. *Illex* is a semelparous, terminal spawner whereby spawning and death occur within several days of mating. The northern stock component, located north of the USA-Canada border in NAFO Subareas 3 and 4, is assessed annually and is managed by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), though landings have been low in recent years and staff has questioned the usefulness of the current NAFO assessment, which is not based on recent data (https://www.mafmc.org/s/g_NAFO_Didden.pdf). The southern/U.S. stock component is located in NAFO Subareas 5 and 6 between the Gulf of Maine and Cape Hatteras, NC and is managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (the Council or MAFMC). Additional life history information is detailed in the EFH document for the species, located at: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/habitat/efh/>.

Status of the Stock

The status of *Illex* is unknown with respect to being overfished or not, and unknown with respect to experiencing overfishing or not. Results from the NEFSC Trawl surveys are highly variable

and without apparent long-term trend. The Council established a working group (<http://www.mafmc.org/actions/illex-working-group>) to investigate if current information could suggest that adjustments to the *Illex* quota are appropriate, and adjustments upward were made in 2020 based on the SSC's review of the workgroup products (<https://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2020/may-12-13>), finding that catches up to 30,000 MT¹ should not cause overfishing. An *Illex* research track assessment is underway in 2021 and is extending topics investigated by the Council's work group.

Management System and Fishery Performance

Management

The Council established management of *Illex* in 1978 and the management unit includes all federal East Coast waters.

Access is limited with moratorium permits. Trip limits are triggered when the quota is approached. Incidental permits are limited to 10,000 pounds per trip. Additional summary regulatory information is available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/resources-fishing/resources-fishing-greater-atlantic-region>. A 2020 action to change *Illex* permitting is in the rulemaking process and a proposed rule is expected later in 2021 – see <https://www.mafmc.org/newsfeed/2020/council-approves-changes-to-management-of-illex-fishery>.

The current quota is 28,644 MT, based on a 30,000 MT Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and a 4.52% discard rate (the mean plus one standard deviation of the most recent 10 years of observed discard rates in the last assessment). Recent SBRM discard rates have been similar.

Recreational catch of *Illex* is believed to be negligible. There are no recreational regulations except for party/charter vessel permits and reporting.

Commercial Fishery

Figure 1, from a recent Science Center data update, describes *Illex* catch 1963-2019 and highlights the early foreign fishery and then domestication of the fishery. Figures 2-3 describe domestic landings, ex-vessel revenues, and prices (inflation adjusted) since 1996. Figure 4 illustrates preliminary 2019 (yellow-orange) and 2020 (blue) landings through the year.

Table 1 describes 2020 *Illex* landings by state, and Table 2 describes 2020 *Illex* landings by gear type. Table 3 provides preliminary information on *Illex* landings by statistical area for 2020.

The Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator was used to report revenues/prices as “2020 dollars.”

¹ 1 metric ton = approximately 2,204.62 pounds

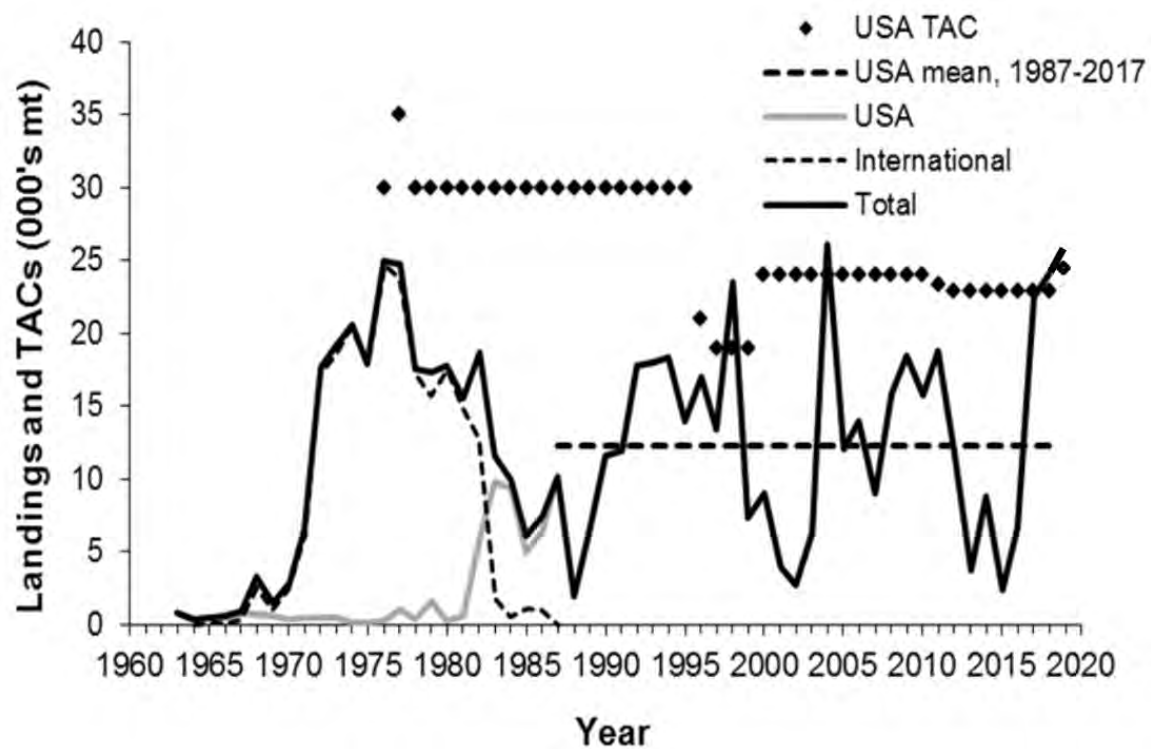


Figure 1. Total annual *Illex* landings (mt) by the U.S. and other countries for 1963-2019. Sources: NEFSC *Illex* Data update, available at <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2018/may-8-9> and NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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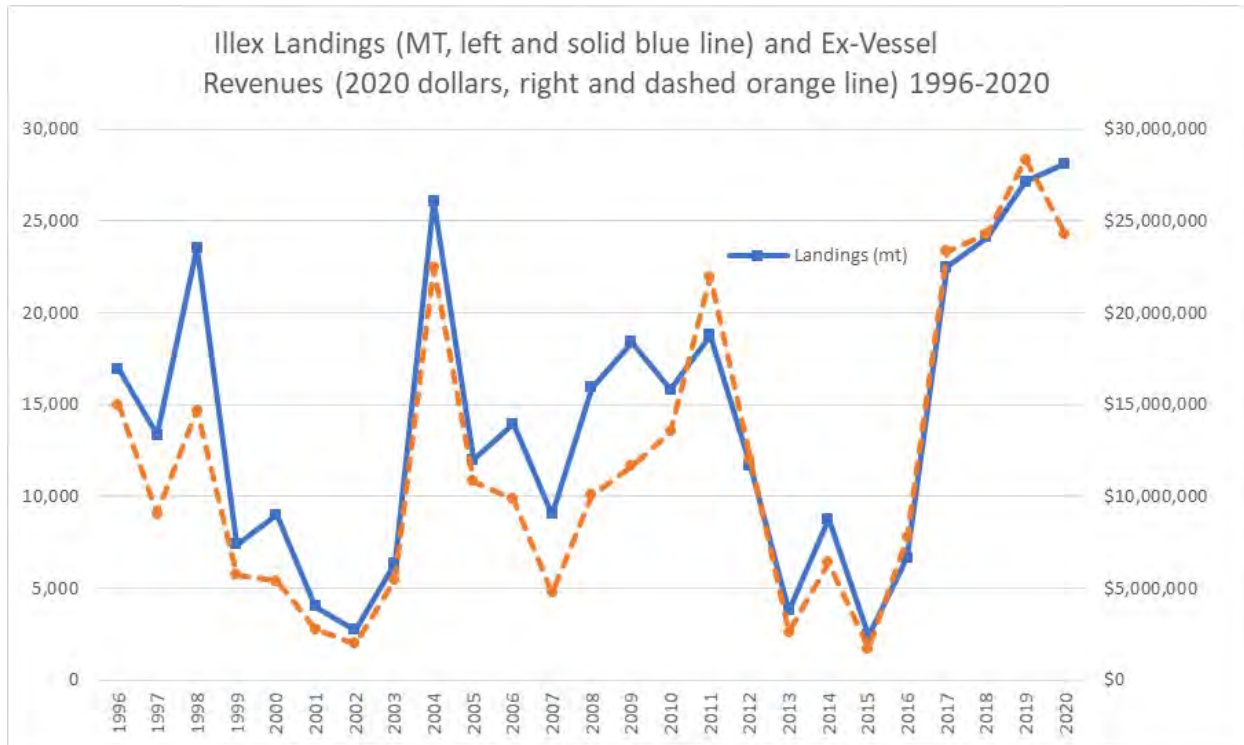


Figure 2. U.S. *Illex* Landings and *Illex* Ex-Vessel Values 1996-2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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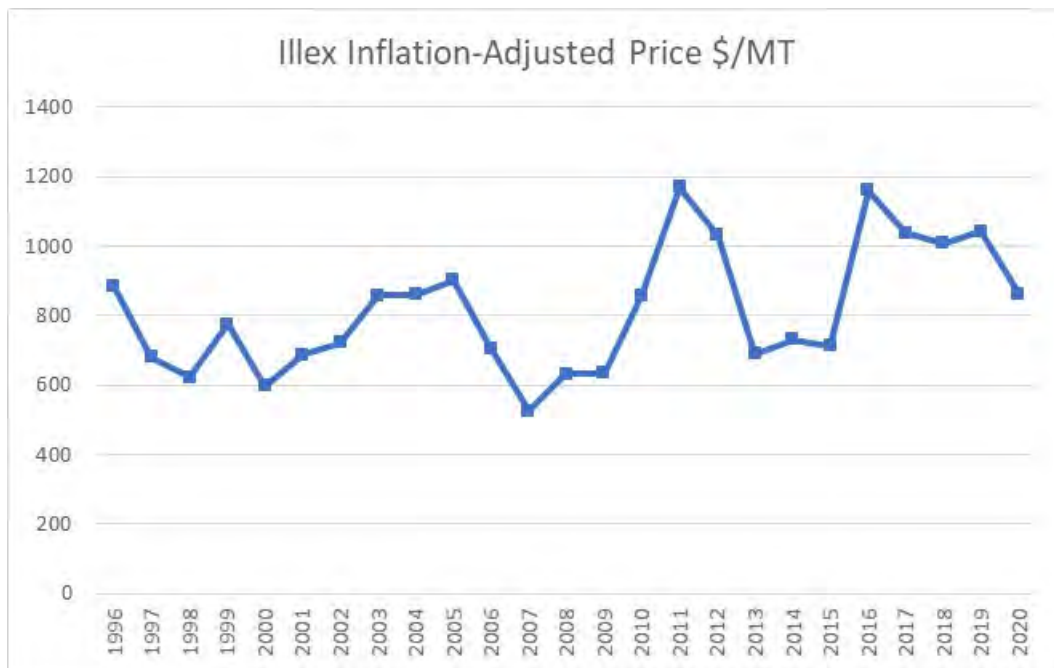


Figure 3. Ex-Vessel *Illex* Prices 1996-2020 Adjusted to 2020 Dollars Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

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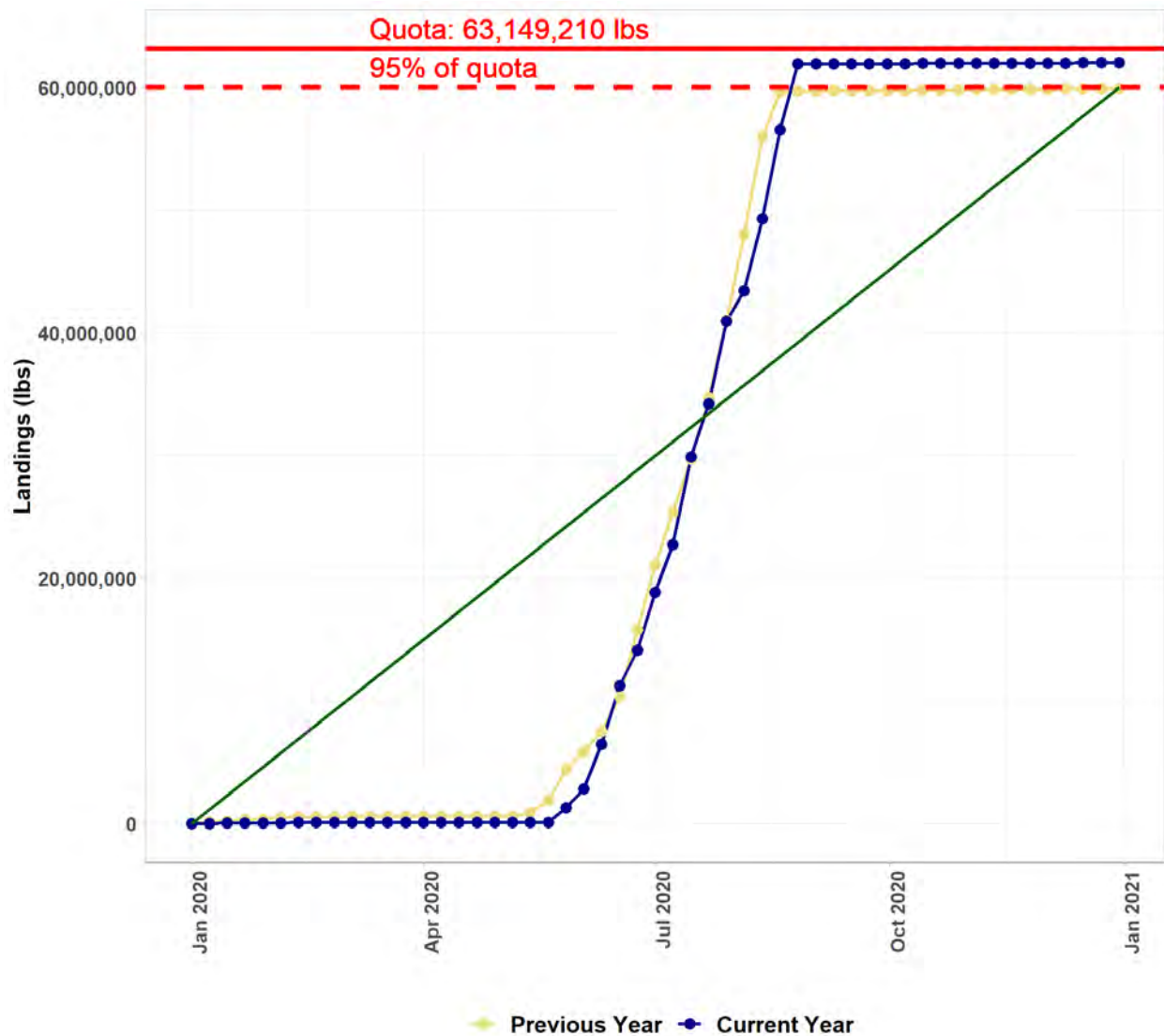


Figure 4. U.S. Preliminary *Illex* landings; 2020 in blue, 2019 in yellow-orange. Source: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/commercial-fishing/quota-monitoring-greater-atlantic-region>.

Table 1. Commercial *Illex* landings (live weight) by state in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

Most *Illex* landings occurred in NJ, RI, and MA, but further breakdown may violate data confidentiality rules (in spirit if not to the letter).

Table 2. Commercial *Illex* landings (live weight) by gear in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished dealer data.

GEAR	Metric_Tons
TRAWL,OTTER,BOTTOM,FISH	27,459
UNKNOWN	584
POTS + TRAPS,OTHER	53
PURSE SEINE, OTHER	39
Other	0
Total	28,135

Table 3. Commercial *Illex* landings by statistical area in 2020. Source: NMFS unpublished VTR data.

Stat Area	Metric_Tons
622	11,751
526	10,064
626	2,163
537	907
616	455
623	331
627	321
525	238
Other	229
Total	26,458

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David E. Frulla

Kelley Drye & Warren LLP
Washington Harbour, Suite 400
3050 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Tel: (202) 342-8648
Fax: (202) 342-8451
dfrulla@kelleydrye.com

May 19, 2021

Mr. Michael Luisi
Chairman
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Re: Fishing Vessel Enterprises and The Town Dock's Comments Regarding MAFMC June 9 *Illex* Squid Control Date Agenda Item

Dear Chairman Luisi:

We submit the following letter on behalf of our clients, Fishing Vessel Enterprises, Inc. and The Town Dock, regarding *Illex* squid agenda items for the upcoming Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting on June 9, 2021. In particular, the Council agenda includes an item to "[c]onsider an additional *Illex* control date." It is not appropriate to set a new control date in the *Illex* fishery in this way or at this time.

As an initial matter, the control date item has somehow materialized on the Council agenda without any preceding Council, Advisory Panel, or Mackerel Squid Butterfish Committee action. Rather, the control date is emerging under the general heading of "2021-2022 Specifications." A control date does not relate to the 2021-2022 specifications.

Further, a control date should not get set in a management vacuum. A control date is a significant management action generally tied to a capacity-related measure before a council. For example, the control date notice for the Northeast Multispecies Charter/Party Fishery explained the control date was being established because the council is "considering a future action that may affect or limit the number of participants in the fishery." 83 Fed. Reg. 11952 (Mar. 19, 2018). In fact, the control date for the Northeast Multispecies Charter Party Fishery was administratively classified in the Federal Register as an "Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking." See also 84 Fed. Reg. 43785 (Aug. 22, 2019) (Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the American lobster fishery announcing the "control date is intended to promote awareness of possible rulemaking"). It is irregular, at best, to advance for Council consideration a control date with no context—that is, with no capacity action under consideration at any level of the Council process, nor even a threshold discussion of the need for such a management action.

The Council had the opportunity to establish a control date in the appropriate context of its recently-concluded *Illex* Squid Capacity Amendment. It chose to rely instead on a 2013 control date for that 2020 action. Staff recently forwarded that action to the National Marine Fisheries Service for

Mr. Michael Luisi
May 19, 2021

implementation review. The Council should conclude one capacity-related proceeding, and gauge its impacts, before starting on additional capacity reduction.

Finally, a new control date is unneeded for the *///ex* fishery at this time and will, moreover, generate unnecessary confusion among fishery participants. It is unclear, at best, whom the Council would be warning it is planning to exclude from the *///ex* fishery with a new control date. The Capacity Amendment would already eliminate vessels with no requisite landings history before January 1, 2019, and severely curtail the participation of vessels without the requisite history before the 2013 control date.

Accordingly, the Council should resist subterranean efforts to double down on *///ex* squid capacity reduction. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter and for your consideration of these critical issues. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Frulla', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David E. Frulla
Andrew E. Minkiewicz
Counsel for Fishing Vessel Enterprises, Inc. and The Town Dock

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 28, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Julia Beaty, staff
Subject: Unmanaged Landings Update

The following materials are provided behind this tab for consideration during the June 2021 Council meeting.

1. Annual report on unmanaged commercial landings from Maine through North Carolina.
2. Exempted fishing permit (EFP) application submitted by Lund's Fisheries, Inc. to NOAA Fisheries.

The following additional materials are not included with this tab but are linked as supplemental materials. They were submitted by Lund's Fisheries and provide additional information related to their EFP application.

1. Morson JM, Grothues T, Able KW. 2019. Change in larval fish assemblage in a USA east coast estuary estimated from twenty-six years of fixed weekly sampling. PLoS ONE 14(10): e0224157. Available [here](#).
2. Smith J W. 1994. Biology and fishery for Atlantic thread herring, *Opisthonema oglinum*, along the North Carolina coast. Marine Fisheries Review. 56(4). Available [here](#).
3. Pristas PJ and Cheek RP. 1973. Atlantic thread herring (*Opisthonema oglinum*) - movements and population size inferred from tag returns. Fishery Bulletin. 71(1): 297-301. Available [here](#).

The intent of this EFP application is to carry out a project to demonstrate the potential for a federal waters commercial purse seine fishery for Atlantic thread herring. Thread herring are subject to the 1,700 pound commercial possession limit in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters implemented through the [Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment](#). The goal of the Forage Amendment was to prohibit the development of new and expansion of existing directed commercial fisheries on unmanaged forage species in mid-Atlantic federal waters until the Council has had an adequate opportunity to assess the scientific information relating to any new or expanded directed fisheries and consider potential impacts to existing fisheries, fishing communities, and the marine ecosystem. When taking final action on the amendment in August 2016, the Council agreed that use of an EFP, and Council review of that EFP, should be a first step towards considering expanded fisheries for these species.

NOAA Fisheries is currently processing the Lund's Fisheries EFP application. A Federal Register notice will be published with an associated comment period. The Council may wish to

submit comments; however, the timing of the comment period may not align with future Council meetings. Therefore, Lund's has provided their EFP application for this briefing book to allow for Council consideration prior to publication in the Federal Register. If the Council wishes to submit a comment letter, Council staff can work with the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee to draft a letter after the Federal Register notice has published. The timing of publication the Federal Register notice is unknown at this point in time.

2021 Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report

June 2021 Council Meeting

Prepared By: Julia Beaty, Council Staff and Ashley Weston, NOAA Fisheries
May 28, 2021

Background

The Council requested annual updates on commercial landings of unmanaged species as a follow on action to the [Unmanaged Forage Species Omnibus Amendment](#). The goal is to monitor for signs of developing unmanaged commercial fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic. New or growing fisheries could develop in response to changing species distributions, changing market factors, changes in other fisheries, or for other reasons. The information contained in these annual reports can serve as a high level summary to help determine if further evaluation is needed and if consideration of a management response may be warranted.

The tables on the following pages summarize commercial landings of unmanaged species from Maine through North Carolina. This information was compiled by staff at the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Analysis and Program Support Division.

In this context, “unmanaged landings” refers to landings of species from Maine through North Carolina only in locations where they are not managed at the state or federal level with a possession limit, size limit, seasonal closure, and/or limited access. For example, the blue crab landings in this report represent only those landings in states where blue crab is not managed.

Data

The data were accessed from the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Data Warehouse. Both state-only and federal dealer reports are included. The data account for state-only permitted dealers located in the northeast as well as all dealers with GARFO permits, regardless of location.

Table 1 contains the top 25 unmanaged species by weight landed during 2015-2020. Table 2 contains the top 25 unmanaged finfish species by weight landed. Table 3 lists landings of Mid-Atlantic Council ecosystem component species (i.e., those species subject to the possession limit implemented through the Unmanaged Forage Species Omnibus Amendment). Table 4 shows species with increasing rank order of landings every year from 2017 through 2020. Table 5 shows species with increasing landing (though not necessarily increasing rank order) every year from 2017 through 2020.

In all tables, species are listed in descending order of average 2015-2020 landings. Confidential values are not counted in the averages.

Species with Highest or Increasing Unmanaged Commercial Landings

Blue catfish (an invasive species) had the highest unmanaged commercial landings in 2019 and 2020. Mussels had the highest unmanaged landings each year from 2015 through 2018. Hagfish were in the top five species by landings in weight each year from 2016 through 2020 (Table 1).

When ranked from lowest to highest unmanaged commercial landings from 2015 through 2020, four species had an increasing or stable rank every year: blue catfish, sugar kelp, oysters, and gray triggerfish. When considering only 2017-2020, nine species had a stable or increasing rank each year: blue catfish, Atlantic cutlassfish, sugar kelp, oysters, penaeid shrimp, bonito, mantis shrimp, armored sea robins, and gray triggerfish. Landings of these species are summarized in Table 4 and Figure 1.

Changes in rank order can indicate species with noteworthy increases in landings relative to other species from one year to the next. However, species with steady but more incremental increases in landings may also be of interest. Oysters, Atlantic cutlassfish, penaeid shrimp, mantis shrimp, and armored sea robins had both increasing landings each year from 2017 through 2020 (Table 5) and increasing rank order in those years (Table 4).

Green crabs (an invasive species), crevalle, and sea urchins had increasing landings each year from 2017 through 2020, though they did not have increasing rank order each year (Table 5). Nearly all sea urchin landings in Table 5 occurred in Massachusetts. Crevalle are a South Atlantic species. The majority (i.e., 74%) of the crevalle landings shown in Table 5 for 2017-2020 were landed in North Carolina.

Nine other species had increasing landings each year during 2017-2020 (though not increasing rank order) but had low overall landings and are therefore not shown in this memo. Annual landings of each of these nine other species did not exceed more than about 2,000 pounds in any year and averaged 131 pounds per year.

Changes in Management Measures Since 2020 Update

All management measures through 2020 are captured in this report thanks to input from the states of Maine through North Carolina. These measures are updated on an annual basis. This section summarizes changes made in this report, as well as known changes effective for 2021 and beyond which will be captured in future versions of this report. There may be other changes in management measures for 2021 in addition to those summarized below.

Sand lance are ecosystem component species subject to the possession limit in Mid-Atlantic federal waters implemented through the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. Massachusetts implemented a commercial sand lance possession limit in state waters, effective as of May 2020. This is accounted for in the data summarized on the following pages. Rhode Island implemented a sand lance possession limit which will be effective in 2021. This will be accounted for in next year's unmanaged landings report.

As previously noted, gray triggerfish had increasing rank of unmanaged landings every year from 2017-2020. Virginia has discussed the potential for managing gray triggerfish but has not yet determined their preferred path forward.

Penaeid shrimp have also increased in rank order of unmanaged landings every year from 2017-2020. Virginia has allowed an experimental penaeid shrimp fishery in recent years and is in the process of developing regulations for a limited access commercial penaeid shrimp fishery off Virginia Beach. The state intends to continue to allow an experimental penaeid shrimp fishery off the eastern shore area. Most landings are of white shrimp and to a lesser extent exotic tiger shrimp and brown shrimp. Maryland is also considering developing commercial management measures for penaeid shrimp.

Table 1: Top 25 Unmanaged Species Annual Landings, 2015-2020

Report Run on: 2021-05-11. Values are in pounds.

Cells marked with a 'C' are confidential. Averages do not include confidential data.

Common Name	Code	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Avg
MUSSELS	781	15,342,427	11,578,754	10,480,326	5,642,701	879,771	1,486,785	7,568,461
CATFISH, BLUE	67	3,697,016	4,123,309	5,199,117	5,093,158	5,120,580	4,360,167	4,598,891
HAGFISH	150	2,204,603	1,871,105	1,558,251	C	C	C	1,877,986
CONCHS	775	2,666,958	1,066,324	1,234,770	2,368,253	1,901,907	1,103,881	1,723,682
QUAHOG	748	3,113,556	3,028,273	159,961	57,390	23,238	41,426	1,070,641
CRAB, BLUE	700	2,580,077	3,450,444	0	0	0	0	1,005,087
OTHER FISH	526	1,810,527	1,291,616	656,646	844,650	753,287	122,996	913,287
STRIPED MULLET	235	612,729	461,742	778,353	832,924	896,851	691,531	712,355
WHITING, KING	197	564,373	582,919	814,345	327,756	487,327	431,707	534,738
CRUSTACEANS NK	834	0	160,171	234,650	170,342	527,698	447,935	256,799
TUNA, LITTLE	468	212,072	220,244	279,355	232,494	246,951	259,370	241,748
CUTLASSFISH, ATL	99	183,313	61,042	50,840	158,763	287,906	514,328	209,365
MOLLUSKS NK	804	619,872	96,249	179,234	170,703	103,211	38,808	201,346
HARVEST FISH	165	237,082	209,841	172,931	130,037	99,184	102,781	158,643
JOHN DORY	188	206,857	209,695	246,233	122,198	102,405	61,267	158,109
CLAM, BLOODARC	743	113,270	104,888	212,229	98,894	128,042	97,503	125,804
KELP, SUGAR	833	0	C	101,571	99,301	256,646	C	114,380
SEA ROBINS	341	122,319	206,341	149,469	77,456	70,839	30,955	109,563
PERCH, WHITE	506	135,060	139,261	79,294	99,326	117,733	86,474	109,525
OYSTERS	789	0	44,590	79,442	106,065	144,679	174,927	91,617
CRAB, ROCK	712	376,418	57,746	41,900	43,332	10,989	11,916	90,384
CATFISH(SEA)	69	122,786	94,736	C	50,650	43,274	126,630	87,615
PUFFER, NORTHERN	429	91,413	102,934	100,913	70,606	88,364	29,689	80,653
SHRIMP (PENAEID)	738	C	C	C	12,629	44,624	162,457	73,237
HERRING (NK)	167	C	49,567	C	C	54,697	95,906	66,723

Table 2: Top 25 Unmanaged Finfish Species Annual Landings, 2015-2020

Report Run on: 2021-05-11. Values are in pounds.

Cells marked with a 'C' are confidential. Averages do not include confidential data.

Common Name	Code	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Avg
CATFISH, BLUE	67	3,697,016	4,123,309	5,199,117	5,093,158	5,120,580	4,360,167	4,598,891
HAGFISH	150	2,204,603	1,871,105	1,558,251	C	C	C	1,877,986
OTHER FISH	526	1,810,527	1,291,616	656,646	844,650	753,287	122,996	913,287
STRIPED MULLET	235	612,729	461,742	778,353	832,924	896,851	691,531	712,355
WHITING, KING	197	564,373	582,919	814,345	327,756	487,327	431,707	534,738
TUNA, LITTLE	468	212,072	220,244	279,355	232,494	246,951	259,370	241,748
CUTLASSFISH, ATL	99	183,313	61,042	50,840	158,763	287,906	514,328	209,365
HARVEST FISH	165	237,082	209,841	172,931	130,037	99,184	102,781	158,643
JOHN DORY	188	206,857	209,695	246,233	122,198	102,405	61,267	158,109
SEA ROBINS	341	122,319	206,341	149,469	77,456	70,839	30,955	109,563
PERCH, WHITE	506	135,060	139,261	79,294	99,326	117,733	86,474	109,525
CATFISH (SEA)	69	122,786	94,736	C	50,650	43,274	126,630	87,615
PUFFER, NORTHERN	429	91,413	102,934	100,913	70,606	88,364	29,689	80,653
HERRING (NK)	167	C	49,567	C	C	54,697	95,906	66,723
EEL, CONGER	116	44,874	47,459	57,568	90,772	49,819	55,257	57,625
CUSK	96	82,397	58,323	56,440	48,825	42,775	50,778	56,590
BONITO	33	69,033	47,030	51,819	41,514	63,548	59,855	55,467
SILVERSIDE, NK	363	61,286	120,019	37,976	28,314	13,482	23,710	47,465
SILVERSIDE, ATLANTIC	362	20,810	32,470	23,132	16,805	68,371	54,914	36,084
SPADEFISH	381	21,664	23,690	35,844	25,988	30,485	25,989	27,277
RIBBONFISH	98	36,573	15,376	11,615	6,459	49,869	39,185	26,513
HERRING, ATL THREAD	174	C	C	30,482	11,515	13,432	C	18,476
MULLET	234	10,480	15,408	28,951	7,864	11,737	29,306	17,291
RAY, COWNOSE	285	C	C	C	C	16,924	C	16,924
TUNA, BLACKFIN	464	14,834	11,361	15,255	15,882	19,985	19,926	16,207

Table 3: MAFMC Ecosystem Component Species Annual Landings, 2015-2020

Report Run on: 2021-05-11. Values are in pounds.

Cells marked with a 'C' are confidential. Averages do not include confidential data.

Other ecosystem component species had no reported commercial landings during 2015-2020.

Common Name	Code	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Avg
MOLLUSKS NK	804	619,872	96,249	179,234	170,703	103,211	38,808	201,346
HERRING (NK)	167	C	49,567	C	C	54,697	95,906	66,723
SILVERSIDE, NK	363	61,286	120,019	37,976	28,314	13,482	23,710	47,465
SILVERSIDE, ATLANTIC	362	20,810	32,470	23,132	16,805	68,371	54,914	36,084
HERRING, ATL THREAD	174	C	C	30,482	11,515	13,432	C	18,476
SQUIDS, LOLIGINIDAE	803	659	10,940	4,526	C	1,418	1,936	3,896
EEL, SAND (LAUNCE)	206	3,367	C	C	C	C	0	1,684
HERRING, ROUND	166	0	0	C	C	70	844	229
ARGENTINE	171	C	0	0	0	0	0	C
BAY ANCHOVY	6	C	C	C	C	C	C	C

Table 4: Species with Stable or Increasing Rank of Landings Every Year During 2017-2020

Report Run on: 2021-05-11. Values are in pounds.

Cells marked with a 'C' are confidential. Confidential data were accounted for in the rankings, but not in the averages shown below.

Common Name	Code	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Avg
CATFISH, BLUE	67	3,697,016	4,123,309	5,199,117	5,093,158	5,120,580	4,360,167	4,598,891
CUTLASSFISH, ATL	99	183,313	61,042	50,840	158,763	287,906	514,328	209,365
KELP, SUGAR	833	0	C	101,571	99,301	256,646	C	114,380
OYSTERS	789	0	44,590	79,442	106,065	144,679	174,927	91,617
SHRIMP (PENAEID)	738	C	C	C	12,629	44,624	162,457	73,237
BONITO	33	69,033	47,030	51,819	41,514	63,548	59,855	55,467
SHRIMP (MANTIS)	737	358	12,171	8,203	13,378	37,279	57,580	21,495
SEA ROBIN, ARMORED	343	C	C	C	C	2,774	C	2,774
TRIGGERFISH, GRAY	457	0	0	C	898	2,121	1,456	895

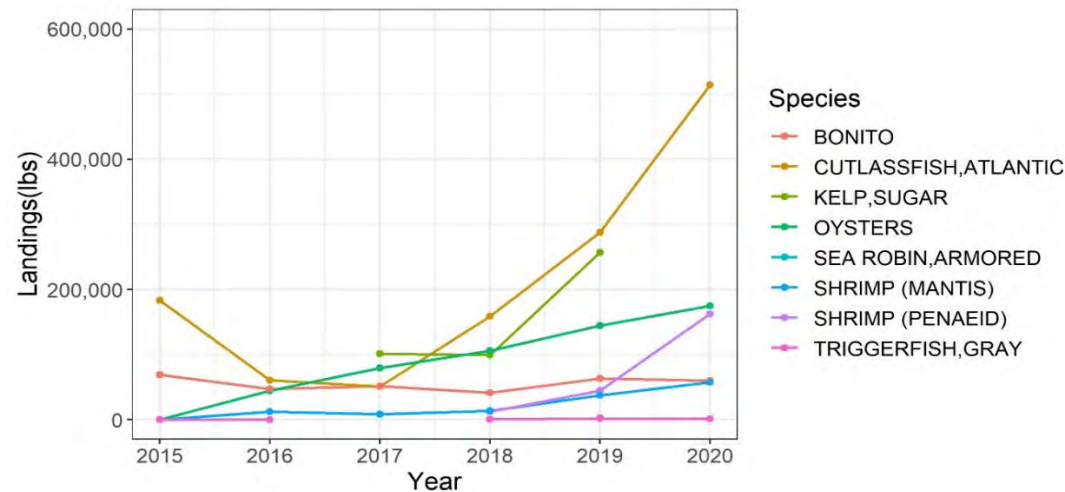


Figure 1: Landings for Species with Increasing Rank Order of Landings Each Year, 2017-2020.

Confidential landings are not shown.

Blue catfish also had increasing rank order but is not shown on this figure due to a much higher scale of landings.

Table 5: Species Increasing Landings Every Year During 2017-2020

Report Run on: 2021-05-11. Values are in pounds.

Cells marked with a 'C' are confidential. Confidential data were accounted for in the rankings, but not in the averages shown below.

Nine additional species also had increasing landings every year during 2017-2020 but are not shown due to low overall landings (i.e., annual landings did not exceed more than about 2,000 pounds in any year and average landings across all nine species were 131 pounds per year).

Common Name	Code	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Avg
CUTLASSFISH, ATL	99	183,313	61,042	50,840	158,763	287,906	514,328	209,365
OYSTERS	789	0	44,590	79,442	106,065	144,679	174,927	91,617
SHRIMP (PENAEID)	738	C	C	C	12,629	44,624	162,457	73,237
CRAB, GREEN	708	26,873	23,849	14,888	52,592	64,729	115,607	49,756
SEA URCHINS	805	49,941	56,548	C	23,984	26,044	28,370	36,977
SHRIMP (MANTIS)	737	358	12,171	8,203	13,378	37,279	57,580	21,495
CREVALLE	87	5,844	7,959	3,959	7,424	8,355	16,998	8,423
SEA ROBIN, ARMORED	343	C	C	C	C	2,774	C	2,774



Lund's Fisheries, Inc.
997 Ocean Drive, Cape May, NJ 08204
www.lundsfish.com

Atlantic Thread Herring Exempted Fisheries Permit Application Project Description – April 26, 2021

Project Objectives:

The intent of the project is to demonstrate the potential for a federal EEZ commercial purse seine fishery for Atlantic thread herring (*Opisthonema oglinum*), VTR Code HRAT, one of several emerging southern species exhibiting increased occurrence in local waters in response to warming water temperatures.

See: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0224157>
<https://spo.nmfs.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf-content/MFR/mfr564/mfr5641.pdf>

Project Start and End Dates:

The project start date would be May 2, 2022 and the project end date would be November 1, 2022. The project would take place during the period of the normal operation of the New Jersey Atlantic menhaden purse seine fishery. A 3000-metric ton (6.6 million pound) catch limit is requested for the first year of this project. A multi-year EFP is requested, to maximize biological data-gathering opportunities for estimating stock size potential and allow investments in the gear for this new fishery to be recouped.

Project Location:

The project would take place throughout the geographic area encompassing the normal operation of the region's menhaden purse seine fishery, in Federal waters from Ocean City, MD, north to Montauk, LI, NY and within the management jurisdiction of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The fishery would take place from 3 to 30 miles offshore in water approximately < 30 fathoms deep.

Number and Duration of Trips:

Trips would be < 24 to 48 hours in length and up to 5 trips/week can be attempted. One to five sets per day are anticipated, depending upon daily fish availability, with about 1.5 hours needed between setting and hauling back the net.

Estimated Weight of Catch (per trip):

An average trip can be estimated as landing 80-100,000 pounds.

Description of the Gear:

A purse seine, of approximately 2000' in length and 180' in depth, of 1" mesh (25 mm), is used by the catcher vessel. A purse boat, towed by or on-board the catcher vessel, is operated by that vessel's crew to deploy and retrieve the net. A carrier vessel is used by each catcher vessel to pump the catch on board and carry the fish to the dock for sale and processing.

Landing Catch for Sale and Sampling Protocols:

All catch will be landed at Lund's Fisheries' Cape May freezer plant and will be recorded and inspected, according to ongoing plant protocols, which includes length and correlating weights. All catch is reported according to SAFIS requirements.

Any bycatch will be recorded although very little bycatch is anticipated, as is the case in the Atlantic menhaden purse seine fishery.

The goal of this project is to create a successful, environmentally sustainable fishery from an emerging resource in a warming ocean, which can respond to existing demand from food markets, recreational bait markets and markets catering to animals in zoos, aquariums, and marine rescue centers.

Regulatory Exemption Request:

This application is consistent with the intent of the MAFMC's 2017 Mid-Atlantic Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment (50 CFR Part 648 § 648.2 - § 648.352). Specifically, at § 648.12, the opportunity for experimental fishing "contributing to the development of new or expansion of existing fisheries for Mid-Atlantic forage species" is provided. Further, an exemption from the § 648.351 Mid-Atlantic forage species possession limit, "of up to 1,700 pounds of all Mid-Atlantic forage species combined per trip in or from the EEZ portion of the Mid-Atlantic Forage Species Management Unit" is requested with this application.

Respectfully submitted:

Wayne Reichle, President
wreichle@lundsfish.com

Jeff Kaelin, Director of Sustainability and Government Relations
jkaelin@lundsfish.com

Dr. Eleanor Bochenek, Director, Rutgers University Fisheries Cooperative Center
eboch@hsrl.rutgers.edu

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Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 25, 2021
To: Council
From: Jessica Coakley, Staff
Subject: Update from NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division (HESD) on activities of interest in the region

The Council will receive a presentation from the GARFO HESD on activities of interest in the region including the release of the draft NOAA Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources (open for comment until July 12, 2021), climate-related actions, coastal storm risk management projects, coastal resilience/beneficial use of dredged material, port development, and aquaculture.

The following materials are included for Council consideration:

- 1) NOAA Draft Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources
- 2) DRAFT Comment letter from Council on #1 (for consideration)

The staff was supportive of this overarching mitigation policy and the process used to develop it. The comment letter, as drafted by staff, affirms the Council support to have the policy finalized. The draft letter will be discussed at the meeting.



Draft NOAA Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources

PREAMBLE

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for the stewardship of the Nation's ocean resources and their habitat.

As outlined in this Policy, mitigation is an important component of NOAA's work in conserving and managing coastal, riverine, and marine resources. This work is conducted in consultation and coordination with other Federal, state, and local agencies, and the public. This Policy does not expand NOAA's authorities, and all NOAA mitigation activities will be conducted in accordance with existing authorities.

The definition of mitigation used in this Policy is derived from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR 1508.20). In practice, the five mitigation elements in the CEQ definition¹ are often categorized into three general types: avoidance, minimization (including rectifying and reducing), and compensatory mitigation. This Policy uses these three categories:

- Avoid—avoid the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action or by modifying the action.
- Minimize—minimize the impact by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- Compensate—offset or compensate for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

This is NOAA's first and only comprehensive national policy on mitigation. Step-down guidance providing more detail on specific issues or for specific regions must be written to be consistent with this Policy.

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 This Order establishes NOAA's policy for mitigation of impacts to NOAA trust resources. NOAA has been engaged in mitigation activities for decades. Many of the statements in this Policy reflect successful approaches currently used by NOAA. Additional details on some aspects of mitigation are covered in existing NOAA and interagency guidance (see section 6.0). This Policy is compatible with those existing NOAA mitigation documents.

¹ The five elements are avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, and compensate.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

.01 This Policy does not alter or substitute for the authorities, standards, and procedures provided by the applicable statutes or the regulations implementing those statutes. This Policy does not expand NOAA's authorities, and all NOAA mitigation activities will be conducted in accordance with existing authorities.

.02 NOAA has authorities relevant to the conservation of a broad range of fish and wildlife resources. These authorities are codified under multiple statutes that address management and conservation of natural resources, including the effects of land, water, and energy development on fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Listed in section 6.0 are the statutes that provide NOAA, directly or indirectly through delegation from the Secretary of Commerce, specific authority for conservation of these resources and give NOAA a role in recommending, requiring, or carrying out mitigation when conducted pursuant to those authorities.

.03 NOAA also has a role in mitigation for activities that NOAA undertakes, such as:

- a. actions that NOAA carries out, i.e., NOAA is the project proponent;
- b. actions that NOAA funds; and
- c. actions that NOAA authorizes under various statutes.

.04 This Policy applies to NOAA trust resources, which are living marine resources and their habitats, including but not limited to: commercial and recreational fishery resources (which include not only marine fish and shellfish but also diadromous fish species); endangered and threatened marine species (which include not only marine fish and shellfish but also diadromous fish species and corals) and their designated critical habitats; marine mammals and marine turtles; marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and other coastal habitats; areas identified as essential fish habitat (EFH); areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC); marine habitats and resources associated with national marine sanctuaries, marine national monuments, and other protected places; and aquatic habitats and resources associated with the Great Lakes. The types of resources for which NOAA is authorized to recommend mitigation also include those that contribute broadly to ecological functions that sustain species. This definition of "NOAA trust resources" is provided for purposes of this Policy only. It is not meant to define or interpret the meaning of terms such as "trust," "trust resources," or "trustee" as they are used in other contexts.

SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.

- .01 Avoid/Avoidance – a method of preventing adverse impacts by not taking a certain action or parts of an action, or by modifying the action to avoid effects.
- .02 Compensate – replacing or providing substitute resources and/or environments.
- .03 Compensatory Mitigation – a method of offsetting adverse impacts by replacing or providing equitable substitute resources or environments through the restoration, establishment, enhancement, or preservation of resources with commensurate services and functions.
- .04 Conservation – a general term for the collective practices, plans, policies, and science that are used to manage NOAA trust resources. Conservation includes protection and restoration.
- .05 Credit – a unit of measure (e.g., a functional or areal measure or other suitable metric) representing the accrual or attainment of ecological functions at a mitigation site. The measure of ecological functions is based on the resources restored, established, enhanced, or preserved.
- .06 Durability – assurance or high probability that a mitigation action will have a relatively long fully functional life, e.g., will persist on the landscape or seascape and provide the desired ecosystem functions and services.
- .07 Enhancement – the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a natural resource to heighten, intensify, or improve a specific function(s). Enhancement results in the gain of selected natural resource function(s), but may also lead to a decline in other function(s).
- .08 Establishment – the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics present to develop a specific habitat resource on a site that did not previously have that resource.
- .09 Essential Fish Habitat – those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.).
- .010 Habitat – coastal rivers and watersheds, estuaries, the Great Lakes, and marine waters; bottom zones through the water column; and an area's physical, geological, chemical, and biological components.

- .011 Impact – a change (usually a decrease but this term can encompass an increase as well) in the quality or quantity of NOAA trust resources.
- .012 Importance – the relative significance of the affected habitat, compared to other examples of a similar habitat type in the landscape or seascape, to achieving conservation objectives for NOAA trust resources.
- .013 Interim loss – the loss of natural resource functions or services associated with the time lag between T1 (the time at which the natural resource functions or services are lost due to injury or authorized impact) and T2 (the time at which the restored resources or compensatory mitigation have reached a functional level where they are replacing the functions or services lost).
- .014 Landscape – a land area encompassing an interacting mosaic of ecosystems and human systems that is characterized by common management concerns. Relative to this Policy, such management concerns relate to conserving NOAA trust resources.
- .015 Minimize – limiting the degree or magnitude of an impact, action, or its implementation.
- .016 Mitigation – measures taken to avoid, minimize, and compensate for adverse impacts to resources. Mitigation includes: avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action; minimizing impacts by limiting or modifying the degree or magnitude of the action or its implementation; rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment; reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments. As a practical matter, these five mitigation elements are condensed into three general types: avoidance, minimization (including rectifying and reducing), and compensatory mitigation.
- .017 Mitigation/Conservation/Restoration/Environmental Bank – a site or suite of sites that provides ecological functions and services expressed as credits that are used to offset impacts or injuries occurring elsewhere.
- .018 NOAA trust resources – living marine resources and their habitats, including but not limited to: commercial and recreational fishery resources (marine fish and shellfish, including diadromous fish species); endangered and threatened marine species (including diadromous fish species) and their designated critical habitats; marine mammals and marine turtles; marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and other coastal habitats; areas identified as essential fish habitat (EFH); areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC);

marine habitats and resources associated with national marine sanctuaries, national marine monuments, and other protected places; and aquatic habitats and resources associated with the Great Lakes.

- .019 Preservation – the removal of a threat to, or preventing the decline of, natural resources by an action in or near those resources. This term includes activities commonly associated with the protection and maintenance of natural resources through the implementation of appropriate legal and physical mechanisms.
- .020 Proponent – the agency(ies) proposing an action, and if applicable, any applicant(s) for agency funding or authorization to implement a proposed action.
- .021 Protection – preventing the decline or loss of species or habitats.
- .022 Re-establishment – the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of returning natural and/or historic functions to a site where these functions once existed, but are now completely absent. Re-establishment is one sub-category of restoration (the other is rehabilitation).
- .023 Rehabilitation – the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of repairing degraded resources and returning them to their natural and/or historic functions. Rehabilitation is one sub-category of restoration (the other is re-establishment).
- .024 Restoration – the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of returning natural and/or historic functions to a degraded habitat or an area where these functions once existed, but are now completely absent. Restoration includes “re-establishment” and “rehabilitation”.
- .025 Scarcity – the relative spatial extent (e.g., rare, common, or abundant) of the habitat type in the relevant context (e.g., landscape or seascape, species range).
- .026 Seascape – a marine and/or estuarine area encompassing an interacting mosaic of ecosystems and human systems that is characterized by common management concerns. Relative to this Policy, such management concerns relate to conserving NOAA trust resources.
- .027 Suitability – the relative ability of the affected habitat to support one or more elements of the affected resources’ (e.g., species’) life history (e.g., reproduction, rearing, feeding, dispersal, migration, or resting from disturbance) stages compared to other similar habitats in the landscape or seascape context.
- .028 Temporal loss – see “interim loss.”

SECTION 4. POLICY.

The following eight principles will guide NOAA recommendations and decisions about mitigation.

.01 Apply the mitigation sequence appropriately.

NOAA will follow the mitigation sequence by first considering avoidance, then minimization, and then compensatory or offsetting measures. The selection of appropriate mitigation measures will give considerable weight to the practicability and feasibility of achieving environmental benefits consistent with applicable authorities. NOAA also recognizes that under some authorities, such as section 404 of the Clean Water Act, strict adherence to the mitigation sequence is required.

In applying the mitigation sequence, NOAA will generally recommend avoiding impacts to high value habitats. High value habitats include irreplaceable and difficult to replace habitats; habitats that are critical for achieving conservation objectives for NOAA trust resources; and habitats that provide essential ecosystem functions or contribute to ecosystem resiliency.

NOAA will determine if habitats are high value by considering the habitat's (a) scarcity; (b) suitability for affected NOAA trust resources; and (c) importance to achieving conservation objectives. A habitat need not have all three characteristics to be considered high value.

.02 Employ the best scientific information available.

NOAA will use the best scientific information available in mitigation planning, implementation, and monitoring. Since the state of mitigation-related science is dynamic, continually involving new information and questions, the best scientific information available is not static. Scientific information includes factual input, data, models, analyses, technical information, and scientific assessments. Scientific information also includes data compiled directly from surveys or sampling programs, appropriate local and traditional knowledge, and models that are mathematical representations of reality constructed with primary data. Additionally, scientific information can be gained through implementing mitigation projects and learning from them through monitoring, and in some cases, research.

Consistent with existing authorities, NOAA may request the collection of information about NOAA trust resources through surveys and other data collection efforts when existing information is not sufficient for the evaluation of proposed actions and mitigation.

.03 Apply a holistic landscape and/or seascape approach.

Mitigation recommendations and decisions should be made using a holistic landscape and/or seascape approach, with a goal of selecting the option that best achieves the conservation objectives for the affected NOAA trust resources. This approach allows for the consideration of a wide range of mitigation options including off-site and out-of-kind compensation in addition to

on-site and in-kind compensation. This holistic approach can also allow for the development of multi-use mitigation strategies to encourage a broad range of ecological benefits.

NOAA supports but does not require the development of landscape or seascape management plans in collaboration with partners and other stakeholders. These plans should incorporate the best scientific information available and complement existing conservation plans (e.g., recovery plans, habitat conservation plans, watershed plans) relevant to the affected trust resources.

.04 Promote mitigation strategies with high probability of success.

NOAA will seek to ensure mitigation is implemented successfully and, with respect to compensatory mitigation, fully compensates for lost or damaged resources. NOAA will support mitigation measures that provide a high degree of certainty in their effectiveness and durability, when they are available. In some circumstances, achieving mitigation goals may require the use of measures that do not have a high degree of certainty. Measures to reduce uncertainty of mitigation outcomes should be incorporated into mitigation or adaptive management plans. In general, compensatory mitigation through banking approaches is an example of a strategy with a high probability of success.

.05 Consider climate change and climate resilience when evaluating and developing mitigation measures.

In developing and evaluating mitigation measures, NOAA will consider how the effects of climate change (e.g., sea-level rise, changes in species and habitat ranges) may influence the effectiveness and resilience of some mitigation approaches. Mitigation that is durable, adaptable, and resilient under a range of climate change conditions is more likely to maintain its effectiveness in the future than mitigation designed for present conditions that may not persist. NOAA will rely on the specific statutory requirements under which mitigation is being conducted and the best available science when incorporating climate change into mitigation measures.

.06 Implement mitigation that is proportional to impacts to NOAA trust resources and fully offsets those impacts.

It is important that mitigation be both proportional in scale to the impacts to NOAA trust resources and of a sufficient quantity and quality to fully offset those impacts, including any interim losses (also known as temporal losses). NOAA will rely on the specific requirements of the statutes under which mitigation is being conducted to ensure that the resources, functions, and services provided through mitigation will be sufficient.

.07 Use preservation of intact habitat as compensation appropriately, taking into account the high risk of habitat loss in many rapidly developing coastal and marine landscapes and seascapes.

NOAA supports habitat preservation as compensatory mitigation in certain, limited situations. Preservation may be particularly valuable when the habitat is at risk of loss or degradation and when the long-term conservation benefits of preserving that habitat outweigh the immediate losses requiring compensatory mitigation. However, because habitat preservation does not result in new habitat functions and services and thus does not provide an immediate offset for habitat losses, NOAA does not generally support the use of habitat preservation as compensatory mitigation when that habitat is at low risk of loss or degradation.

.08 Collaborate with partner agencies and stakeholders.

NOAA will work in collaboration and coordination with partner agencies, tribes, project proponents, and others within the broader array of stakeholders to implement this Policy. NOAA will endeavor to use timely and transparent processes that provide predictability and uniformity. NOAA will seek to engage project proponents, partner agencies, and stakeholders as appropriate, early in the planning and design stage of actions, including planning for mitigation.

When adverse impacts to NOAA trust resources are identified as part of authorizing a project, NOAA will work with action agencies and/or project proponents to identify options for achieving project goals in a manner consistent with this Policy. Those options may include avoiding work in certain areas or time periods, minimizing adverse effects through the use of protective barriers, and compensation through restoration or other measures. Early engagement between NOAA, action agencies, and project proponents is key to achieving the goals of the project proponents consistent with mitigation mandates.

Whenever appropriate, NOAA will, through Interagency Review Teams or other methods of cooperation:

- a. coordinate with partner agencies that have responsibilities for fish and wildlife resources when evaluating mitigation for resources of mutual concern;
- b. seek to develop with partner agencies common mitigation recommendations and compliance approaches across mitigation mandates;
- c. seek to develop with partner agencies common criteria and standards for banks to facilitate their use for diverse mitigation needs;
- d. consider information and plans made available by partner agencies and stakeholders;
- e. collaborate with partner agencies and stakeholders in the formulation of landscape or seascape-level mitigation plans; and
- f. cooperate with partner agencies and stakeholders to develop, maintain, and disseminate tools and conduct training in mitigation methodologies and technologies.

SECTION 5. RESPONSIBILITIES.

- .01 The goal of this Policy is to implement NOAA mitigation authorities in a consistent, effective, and transparent manner. NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service will lead a biennial review of this Policy in collaboration with other relevant NOAA program offices to ensure the purpose and goals of the Policy are being achieved.

SECTION 6. REFERENCES.

- .01 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9601 *et seq.* (CERCLA)
- .02 Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq.* (ESA)
- .03 Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 791–828c (FPA)
- .04 Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act), 33 U.S.C. § 1251 *et seq.* (CWA)
- .05 Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. § 661–667(e) (FWCA)
- .06 Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, 16 U.S.C. § 4101 *et seq.* (IFA)
- .07 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1801 *et seq.* (MSA)
- .08 Marine Mammal Protection Act, as amended, 16 U.S.C. § 1361 *et seq.* (MMPA)
- .09 National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. § 4371 *et seq.* (NEPA)
- .010 National Marine Sanctuaries Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1413 *et seq.* (NMSA)
- .011 Oil Pollution Act, 33 U.S.C. § 2701 *et seq.* (OPA)
- .012 Handbook on Coral Reef Impacts: Avoidance, Minimization, Compensatory Mitigation, and Restoration (U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, 2016)
- .013 Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Mitigation and Conservation Banking and In-Lieu Fee Programs in California (NOAA, California, and other Federal agencies, 2011)



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

May 24, 2021

NOAA/NMFS Habitat
Office of Habitat Conservation
1315 East-West Highway
14th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: NOAA Draft Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources (mitigationpolicy.comments@noaa.gov)

To whom it may concern:

Please accept these comments from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) on the NOAA Draft Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources. The Mid-Atlantic Council manages more than 65 marine species¹ in federal waters and is composed of members from the coastal states of New York to North Carolina (including Pennsylvania). In addition to managing these fisheries, the Council has enacted measures to identify and conserve essential fish habitats (EFH), protect deep sea corals, and sustainably manage forage fisheries.

The Council is supportive of this policy that describes NOAA's views on mitigation for living marine resources and their habitats for the public and the nation. NOAA's approach to mitigation differs from the policies of other federal agencies (e.g., Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service) because of the unique NOAA authorities related to its trust resources. Developing this national level guidance with input from NOAA regional staff over 4-years has resulted in a simple, comprehensive overarching policy from which each region can develop their own specific guidance that recognizes the living marine resource needs and management culture differ in each NOAA region.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and commend NOAA for the development of this comprehensive Mitigation Policy for Trust Resources. This policy will ensure the nation benefits from effective conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and cultural "trust" resources. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher M. Moore
Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

cc: J. Coakley, M. Luisi, W. Townsend

¹ Fifteen species are managed with specific Fishery Management Plans, and over 50 forage species are managed as "ecosystem components" within the Mid-Atlantic Council's FMPs.



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Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 28, 2021
To: Council
From: Julia Beaty, staff
Subject: Offshore Wind Energy Development

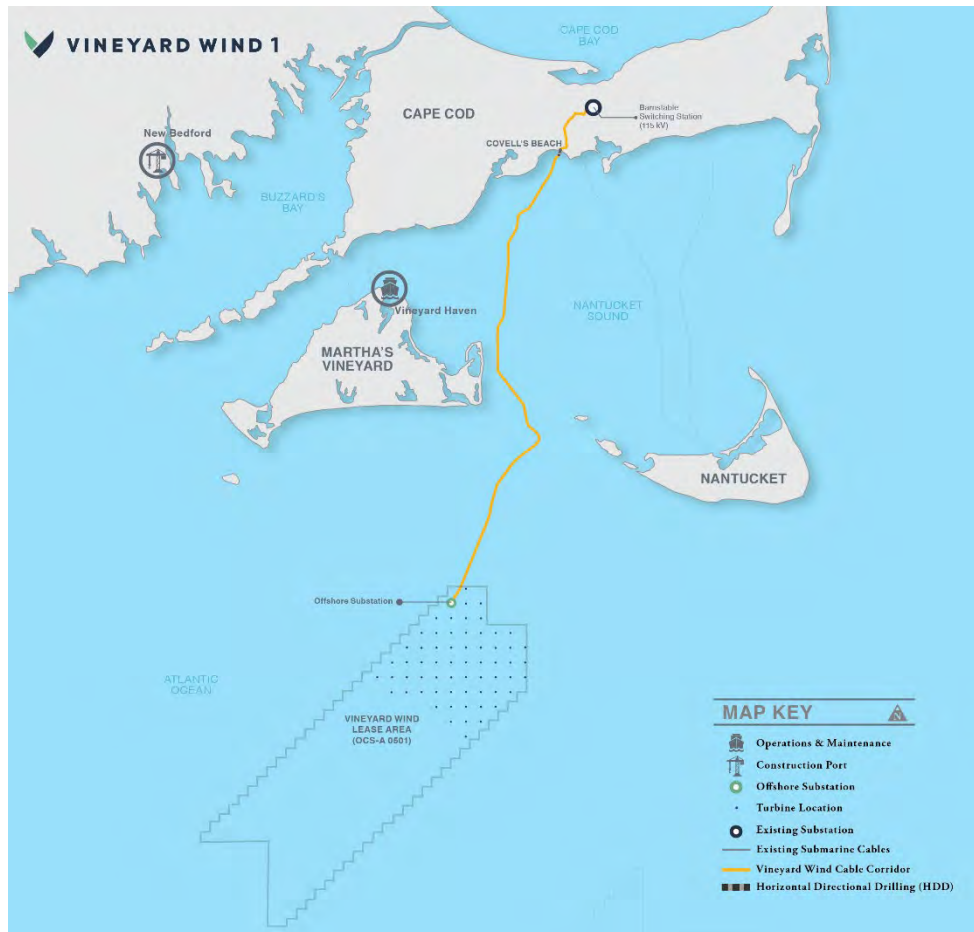
During their meeting on June 9, 2021, the Council will receive presentations on offshore wind energy development from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), Vineyard Wind, and Ørsted.

BOEM will provide a status update on leasing in the Atlantic, including an update on the [proposed sale notice for the New York Bight](#). BOEM will also provide an update on environmental studies, including the [RODEO program](#), [other ongoing environmental studies](#), [completed studies](#), and the [Center for Marine Acoustics](#).

GARFO staff will provide an overview of NOAA Fisheries' roles and responsibilities in the environmental review of offshore wind projects. In addition, they will describe actions NOAA Fisheries has taken as a cooperating agency on wind projects to develop web-based tools, guidance documents, and templates and make them available to wind developers and BOEM to facilitate the assessment of impacts from offshore wind using the best available data and methods.

Vineyard Wind will present on the Vineyard Wind 1 project. Briefing materials provided by Vineyard Wind are behind this tab.

Ørsted will present on the South Fork and Ocean Wind projects. Briefing materials on both projects are included behind this tab.



About Vineyard Wind 1

Vineyard Wind 1, an 800-megawatt offshore wind project located 15 miles south of Martha's Vineyard, will generate clean, renewable, cost-effective power for over 400,000 homes and businesses across the state of Massachusetts while reducing carbon emissions by over 1.6 million tons per year, the equivalent of taking 325,000 cars off the road.

The project received federal approval in 2021. Onshore construction has begun, offshore construction begins in 2022, and the project will deliver power starting in 2023.

Key Permitting Facts

- Offshore wind energy siting off Massachusetts and Rhode Island began in 2010 and included robust stakeholder involvement
- Vineyard Wind obtained lease area OCS-A-0501 in a competitive auction held by the Department of Interior in 2015
- Federal review summary:
- Vineyard Wind filed a Construction & Operations Plan for Vineyard Wind 1 in December 2017.
- The US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in December 2018, a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in June 2020, and a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in March 2021.

- BOEM, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the US Army Corps of Engineers issued a joint Record of Decision (ROD) authorizing the project on May 10, 2021
- Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) conducted a federal consistency review per its Ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) from 2018-2019. Similarly, Massachusetts conducted a federal consistency review per its management policies from 2018-2020. These reviews included input from numerous fisheries stakeholders.
- Over 30,000 public comments submitted in 2019-2020 overwhelmingly in support of Vineyard Wind 1.
- State, regional, and local review was conducted from 2018-2020, with all final permits issued.

Project features:

- The ROD authorizes the construction of up to 84 turbine locations spaced 1 nautical apart on a North-South and East West direction. However, Vineyard Wind anticipates using 62 turbines at 13 megawatts each.
- Two export cables will be installed within a defined corridor to transmit power to shore.
- All cables (offshore export cables and inter-array cables) will be buried at a target depth of 5-8 feet.
- One offshore Electrical Service Platform to collect power offshore prior to transmission.
- One onshore substation in Barnstable, Massachusetts (state review: completed) to transform power for connection to the New England electric grid.
- Onshore construction beginning in 2021, offshore construction starting in 2022, and delivering power starting in 2023.
- Construction staging based out of the Port of New Bedford.
- Long term operations and maintenance based on the island of Martha's Vineyard.

Vineyard Wind South

Vineyard Wind is developing the remaining area of its 0501 lease in two phases. Phase 1, also known as Park City Wind, will deliver 804 megawatts of power to the ISO New England electric grid to meet Vineyard Wind's obligations under long-term contracts with Connecticut electric distribution companies in accordance with Connecticut's renewable energy requirements. Phase 2 will deliver 1,200 to 1,500 MWs of power to one or more Northeastern states and/or to other offtake users to assist them in meeting renewable energy targets.

About Park City Wind

Vineyard Wind's Park City Wind project was selected by the state of Connecticut in late-2019. Park City Wind, named after the City of Bridgeport. The project is similar in scope to Vineyard Wind 1 and includes two offshore export cables within the same corridor and an onshore grid interconnection in Barnstable, Massachusetts. Federal and state review of Park City Wind began in 2020 and is currently ongoing.

About Phase 2

Phase 2, when constructed, will be located south of Park City Wind and occupy the remainder of the lease area. Phase 2 includes two offshore export cables along the same corridor as Vineyard

Wind 1 and Park City Wind with an onshore grid interconnection in Barnstable, Massachusetts. Federal review of Phase 2 began in 2020. State review will be initiated at a future date.

Outreach

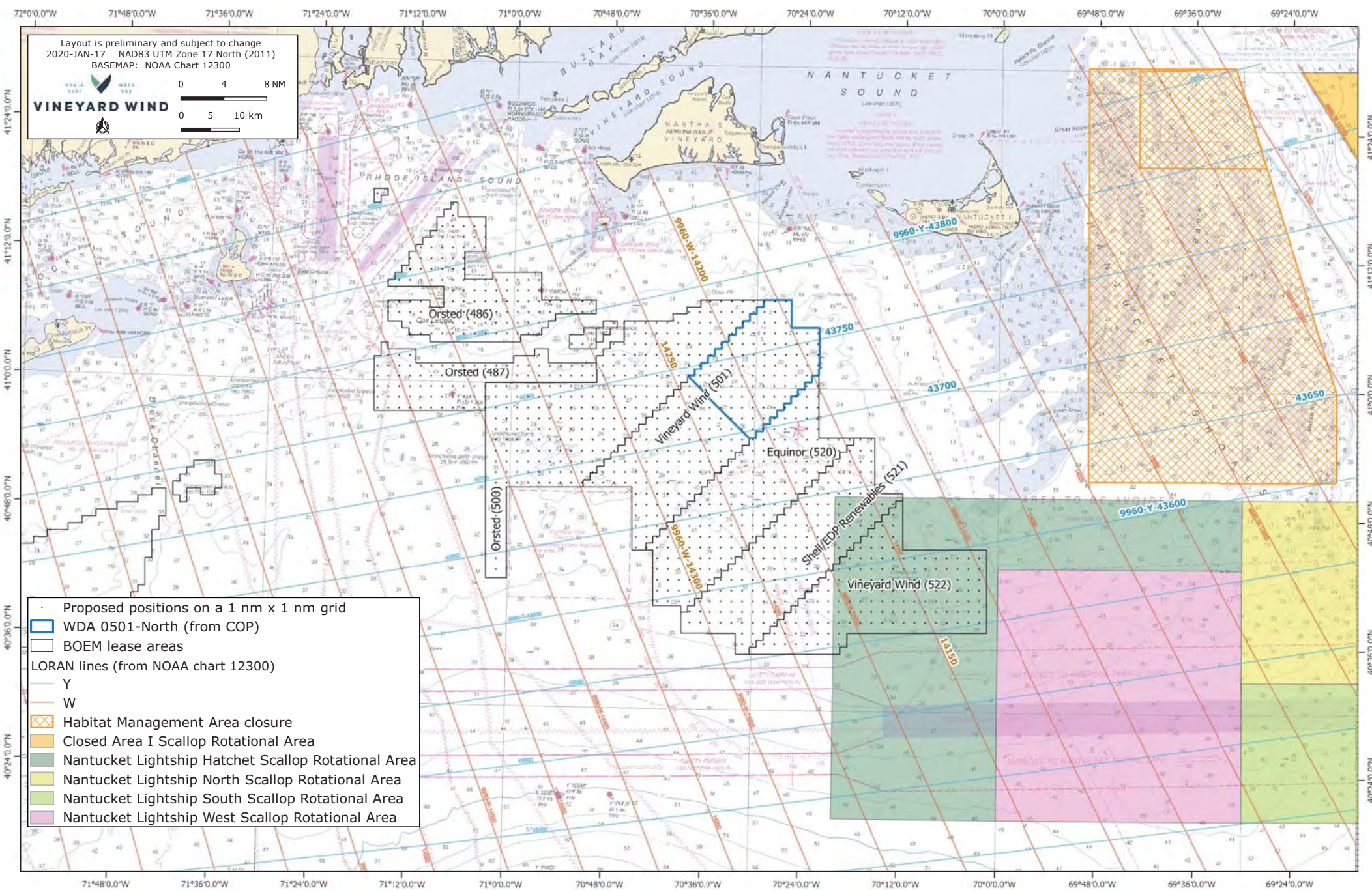
- 2 fisheries liaisons dedicated to work with an expanding network of fisheries representatives, fishing organizations, and individual fishermen to communicate throughout southeastern New England and New York.
- Fisheries Representatives in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut
- Participation in RODA's Joint Industry Task Force
- Participation in the Massachusetts Fisheries Working Group, Rhode Island Fishery Advisory Board (FAB), the New York Fisheries Technical Working Group, and regional meetings such as the New England Fisheries Management Council
- Fisheries email / text network to update fishermen on offshore activities, fisheries surveys and other relevant information for fishermen

Fisheries Science and Research

- Long term fisheries studies designed with input from local commercial fishermen and fisheries scientists
- \$2 million spent annually on research of commercially important species, data to be collected pre/during/post-construction and published on Vineyard Wind's website <https://www.vineyardwind.com/fisheries-science>
- Pre-construction fisheries science surveys begun in 2018 conducted by a leading university aboard local commercial fishing vessels to monitor species
- All fisheries research and data made publicly available
- Support of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance
- Member of International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) working group on Offshore Wind Development and Fisheries
- <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGOWDF.aspx>

Fisheries Mitigation Funds for Vineyard Wind 1

- Massachusetts: \$19 million in direct compensation fund, and \$1.75 million for Fisheries Innovation Fund
- Rhode Island: \$4.2 million in direct compensation fund, and \$12.5 million in Fishermen's Future Viability Trust
- \$3.3 million in direct compensation fund for NY, CT, NJ



South Fork Wind

Project Overview

South Fork Wind will be New York's first offshore wind farm – a centerpiece of New York's ambitious offshore wind energy goals.

Its 15 turbines will produce enough clean, renewable energy every year to power 70,000 homes.

From stronger coastal storms to sea level rise, the harmful effects of climate change are a stark reality on Long Island and South Fork Wind will make a real difference in combatting climate change and meeting East Hampton's clean energy goals.

Benefits to Long Island

We are fully committed to supporting Governor Cuomo's vision of not only a New York powered with 100 percent renewable energy but creating an enduring offshore wind supply chain centered around New York communities and workers.

- South Fork Wind will help the Town of East Hampton meet its 100 percent renewable energy goals.
- The wind farm will displace millions of tons of carbon emissions, the equivalent of taking 60,000 cars off the road.
- We have also proposed locating a facility in Montauk to support the long-term operations and maintenance of South Fork Wind, where we'll base crew transfer vessels that will transport maintenance team members to and from the wind farm.



→ WHO

50/50 partnership between Ørsted and Eversource

→ WHAT

132 MW offshore wind farm

→ WHEN

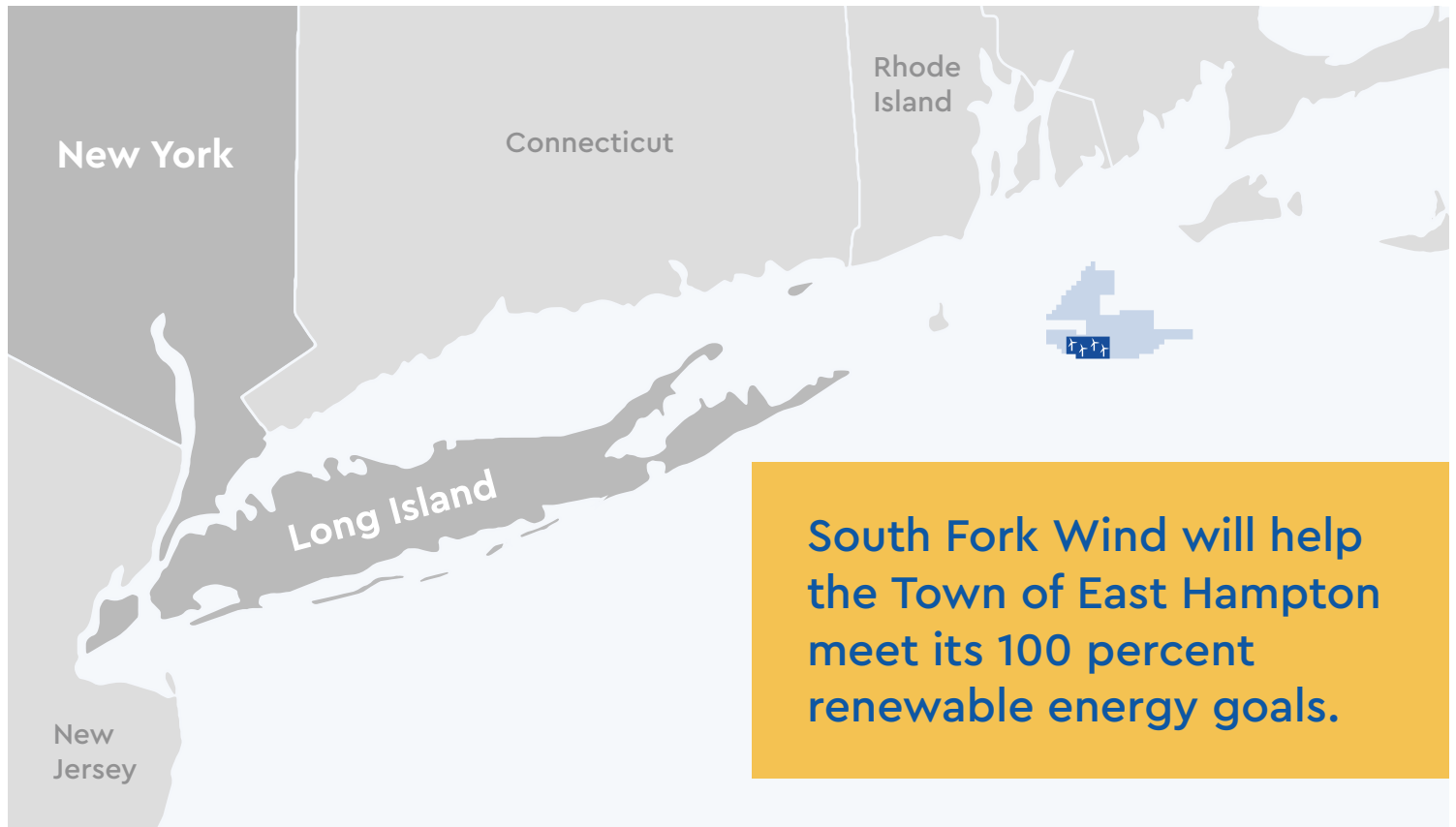
Onshore and offshore construction is planned to begin in 2022 and expected to be fully operational in 2023

→ WHERE

35 miles east of Montauk Point, out of sight from Long Island beaches

→ WHY

Helping the Town of East Hampton meet its 100 percent renewable energy goals, and New York realize its vision of becoming a leader in clean energy



About Ørsted and Eversource

South Fork Wind brings unparalleled experience in developing offshore wind to New Yorkers, as a 50/50 partnership between Ørsted, the global leader in offshore wind and a global leader in climate action, and Eversource, New England's largest energy company and premier electric transmission builder. Ørsted – which was recently ranked the most sustainable company in the world and will become the world's first major energy company to become carbon-neutral by 2025 – envisions a world run entirely on green energy while Eversource is one of the nation's most responsible companies, as ranked by Newsweek, Forbes and JUST Capital.

CONTACT US

Mailing Address

South Fork Wind
PO Box 7110
Amagansett, NY 11930

Office Address

524 Montauk Hwy
Amagansett, NY 11930

Phone

631-267-5777

Email

info@southforkwind.com

Website

southforkwind.com

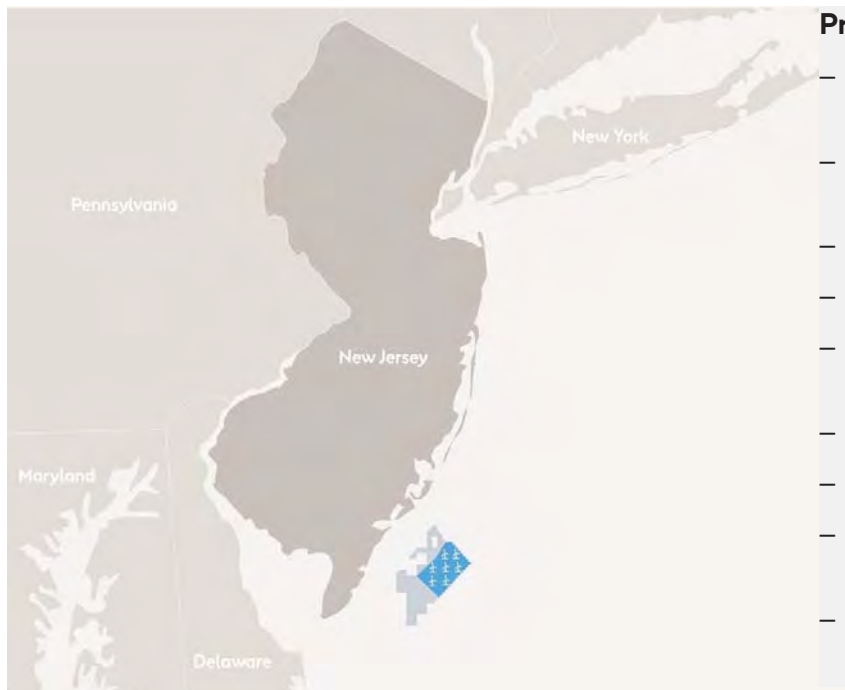
Twitter

[@SouthForkWind](https://twitter.com/SouthForkWind)

Ocean Wind Project Overview

Ocean Wind
An Ørsted & PSEG project

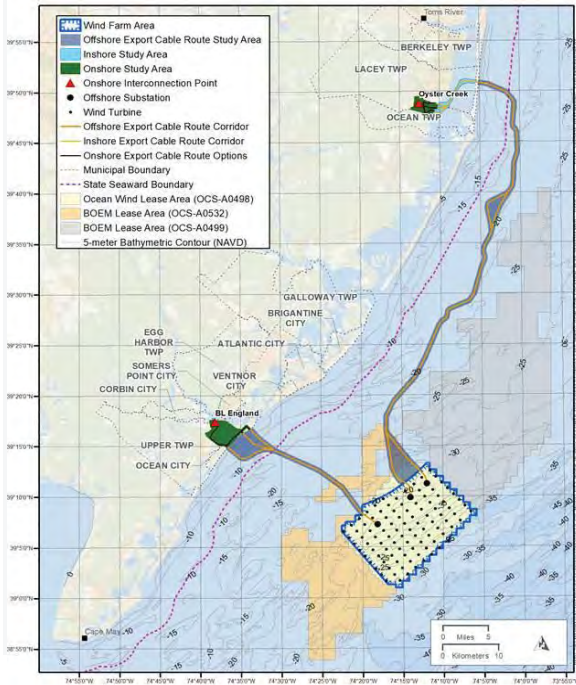
Project Overview - Ocean Wind



Project overview

- Wind Farm is located 15-27 miles off the coast of Southern New Jersey.
- 1,100 MW – one of the largest planned offshore wind farms in the U.S. to date.
- Enough power for about 500,000 homes
- Up to 98 turbines to be installed.
- Commercial operations expected by the end of 2024.
- Ocean Wind is a 75/25 Joint Venture with PSEG
- Notice of Intent (NOI) issued March 30, 2021
- Draft Environmental Impact Statement scheduled May 2022
- Final Environmental Impact Statement scheduled February 2023

Project Route Overview



Offshore Project Description:

- Up to 98 turbines and three offshore substations located in federal waters
- Up to three offshore export cables buried under the seabed floor within two cable corridors
- Northern cables cross Island Beach State Park and will be installed underground using trenchless technology to minimize disturbance on the barrier island

Onshore Project Description:

- Project requires two points of interconnection .
 - Oyster Creek (Lacey Township) ~636 MW.
 - BL England (Upper Township) ~450 MW.
- Onshore cable routes were developed to utilize existing, disturbed rights of way. Majority of cables will be buried.
- Routes developed in discussion with local township officials.
- Several indicative routes were developed and will continue to be refined.

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 28, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Julia Beaty, staff
Subject: Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment

During their June 2021 meeting, the Council will discuss the recent decision by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission's) Policy Board to remand a portion of Addendum XXXIII back to the Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Management Board, as well as the implications of this remand for the Council's Black Sea Bass Commercial Allocation Amendment. This memo provides background on this issue.

The following items are also enclosed for Council review:

1. Letter from Michael Pentony to Chris Moore dated May 18, 2021
2. Letter from Chris Moore to Michael Pentony dated May 21, 2021

The following additional information is not included behind the tab, but can be found at the links below.

1. The appeal of Addendum XXXIII by the State of New York and other background information on the appeal can be found [here](#).
2. The presentation by the State of New York on their appeal is available [here](#).
3. A summary of the ASMFC Policy Board discussion is available [here](#) (pages 13-17).
4. A recording of the ASMFC Policy Board discussion of this appeal is available [here](#).

Background

The Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission's) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) jointly approved several changes to the management program for black sea bass commercial fisheries in February 2021. These changes included modifying the state allocations of the commercial black sea bass quota, adding the state allocations to the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP), and modifying the regulations for federal in-season closures. The Board adopted the new allocations through Addendum XXXIII to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP, while the Council recommended these changes through an amendment to its FMP.

Under the allocation changes approved in February 2021, Connecticut's baseline allocation would increase from 1% to 3% of the coastwide quota to address its disproportionately low allocation compared to the increased availability of black sea bass in state waters. The allocations for all states would then be calculated by allocating 75% of the coastwide quota

according to the new baseline allocations (i.e., the historical allocations modified to account for Connecticut's increase to 3%) and 25% to three regions based on the most recent regional biomass distribution information from the stock assessment. The three regions are: 1) Maine-New York, 2) New Jersey, and 3) Delaware-North Carolina. The regional allocations would be distributed among states within a region in proportion to their baseline allocations, except Maine and New Hampshire would each receive 1% of the northern region quota. Because the allocations would be based in part on the regional biomass distribution from the stock assessment, they would be adjusted if a new assessment indicates a change to the biomass distribution

In March 2021, the State of New York appealed the allocation changes approved by the Board. The appeal argued that New York's baseline quota should increase similarly to that of Connecticut as it too had experienced a significant disparity between allocation and abundance/availability of black sea bass in Long Island Sound, which is shared by New York and Connecticut state waters. Additional information provided by New York through the appeal process suggested that during the years used for the historical allocations, adult black sea bass were rare in Long Island Sound and there was a minimal fishery in both Connecticut and New York. During this time period, New York's fishery primarily occurred in ocean waters. They also presented data showing that since that time, landings in New York and Connecticut originating from Long Island Sound increased along with increased availability of black sea bass.

The Commission's Policy Board considered this appeal in May 2021 and found that it was justified. They remanded the specific section of Addendum XXXIII addressing baseline allocations back to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board for corrective action to address impacts to New York's baseline allocation in a manner comparable to the consideration given to Connecticut. The Policy Board specified that the Management Board's corrective action should not result in a decrease in Connecticut's baseline allocation to less than 3% or decrease the percentage of quota allocated according to regional biomass distribution (i.e., 25%).

Next Steps

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board plans to address this remand during their August 2021 meeting.

Council staff recommend that the Council revisit their allocation recommendation in light of the Policy Board's remand, with the goal of maintaining identical allocations in the Council and Commission's FMPs. If the Council decides to change their allocation recommendation, they would meet with the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board to address the remand during a joint meeting in August 2021.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

May 18, 2021

Dr. Christopher Moore
Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Chris,

We received your May 5, 2021, submission of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment. The EA describes the preferred alternatives adopted by the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board in December 2020 and February 2021. Specifically, the action proposes to modify the black sea bass commercial state allocations, to add the state allocations to the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP), and to modify the Federal regulations for in-season closures.

As you know, at its May 6th meeting, the Commission's Policy Board voted to grant the State of New York's appeal of the corresponding addendum and has directed the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board to reconsider New York's base allocation based on this decision. As a result, the state allocations in the addendum will be different than the allocations approved at the February joint meeting, and those contained in the EA submitted by the Council.


We have not yet begun our review of the EA or made a determination about our ability to approve any aspect of the amendment, including the provision that would add the state allocations to the Federal FMP. As stated during the February joint meeting, we opposed the addition of the state allocations to the Federal FMP for a number of reasons, including the agency resources required to manage the state allocations. During our review, we will carefully consider the merits of the Council's preferred alternatives relative to the National Standards and other applicable laws. With the Policy Board's decision to modify the state allocations in the addendum, the inconsistency between the two bodies' state commercial allocations will also be considered in our review.

We intend to start the Secretarial review for the amendment unless you notify us in writing that the Council intends to revisit the allocation decision in light of the changed circumstances. Once we commence our review, however, we would follow the Magnuson-Stevens Act's process for review and approval or disapproval of Council actions, and any additional changes desired by the Council would require a new and separate action.



If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Emily Keiley at (978) 281-9116.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Pentony". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "M" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

May 21, 2021

Mr. Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
Greater Atlantic Region
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Dear Mike:

Thank you for your letter dated May 18, 2021 informing the Council that you intend to start Secretarial review of the Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment unless you receive notification from us that the Council intends to revisit the allocation decision. Your request relates to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Policy Board decision to remand the allocations back to the ASMFC Management Board after consideration of an appeal from the State of New York.

The Council has not yet had the opportunity to consider their prior allocation recommendation in light of the Policy Board's recent decision. However, the Council plans to discuss this matter during their meeting on June 10, 2021. If on June 10, the Council agrees to revisit their allocation recommendation, we will work closely with ASMFC to coordinate our activities in response to the appeal and develop identical recommendations through our joint process.

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Moore".

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: M. Luisi, W. Townsend, T. DiLernia, J. Beaty, B. Beal, E. Keiley



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: May 28, 2021
To: Council
From: Chris Moore
Subject: Executive Director's Report

The following materials are enclosed for review during the Executive Director's Report at the June 2021 Council Meeting:

1. 2021 Planned Council Topics
2. Status of Council Actions Under Development
3. Status of Completed MAFMC Actions and Specifications
4. NRCC Spring Meeting Agenda
5. CCC May 18-20 Meeting Agenda
6. Staff Memo: Update on Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team discussions relative to the Mid-Atlantic region
7. GARFO SERO Outreach Letter: eVTR Requirements (12/7/20)
8. MAFMC News Announcement: South Atlantic eVTR Requirements (12/10/20)
9. SAFMC Letter to Council: Approval of Dolphin/Wahoo Amendment 12 (4/27/21)
10. NEFMC Letter to GARFO: Comments on Sea Watch Surfclam EFP (4/1/21)
11. GARFO Letter to Coonamessett Farm Foundation: Rejection of EFP Request (5/12/21)
12. HMS Amendment 13 Summary



2021 Planned Council Meeting Topics

Updated 5/25/21

June 7-10, 2021 Council Meeting (Webinar)

- Advisory Panel Appointment Recommendations (Executive Committee Closed Session)
- Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report: Review
- Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment: Final Action (Joint with Bluefish Board)
- [Recreational Reform Initiative: Update \(Joint with ISFMP Policy Board\)](#)
- 2022 Longfin Squid and Butterfish Specifications: Review
- [2022 *Illex* Squid Specifications: Approve](#)
- [2021 *Illex* Squid Specifications: Consider Revisions](#)
- *Illex* Incidental Trip Limit, [Illex Control Date](#), and Butterfish Mesh Regulation Modification: Review and Recommend Changes if Appropriate
- Surfclam and Ocean Quahog 2022 Specifications: Review
- [Habitat Activities Update \(including aquaculture\)](#)
- [Offshore Wind Updates](#)
- [ASMFC Policy Board Remand of Black Sea Bass Commercial Allocations: Discuss](#)

August 9-12, 2021 Council Meeting (Philadelphia, PA)

- Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass 2022-2023 Specifications and Commercial Measures: Approve (Joint with SFSBSB Board)
- Bluefish 2022-2023 Specifications: Approve (Joint with Bluefish Board)
- Recreational Reform Initiative: Update (Joint with Policy Board)
- EAFM Summer Flounder Management Strategy Evaluation: Update and Feedback (Joint with SFSBSB Board)
- [Joint Council-SSC Meeting](#)
- SSC Economic Work Group: Update on RSA Redevelopment Case Study
- Golden Tilefish Multi-Year Specifications Framework: Final Action
- Golden Tilefish Specifications: Review 2022 and Approve 2023-2024
- 2022 Atlantic Mackerel Specifications (including RH/S cap): Review (note that 2021 management track assessment may necessitate re-setting for 2022-2023)
- ~~Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements: Review White Paper and Identify Next Steps~~

October 5-7, 2021 Council Meeting (New York, NY)

- 2022 Implementation Plan: Discuss Draft Deliverables (Executive Committee)
- ~~Joint Council-SSC Meeting~~
- HMS Diet Study Final Report: Review
- Chub Mackerel 2022 Specifications: Review
- Action to Implement a Possession Limit for Bullet and Frigate Mackerel: Update
- 2022 Spiny Dogfish Specifications: Review

- Spiny Dogfish Trip Limit Analyses: Review and Recommend Changes if Appropriate
- Ocean City, MD Video Project: Review Results
- [Private Tilefish Permitting/Reporting Evaluation](#)
- [Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements: Review White Paper and Identify Next Steps](#)

December 13-16, 2021 Council Meeting (Annapolis, MD)

- 2022 Implementation Plan: Approve
- [Recreational Reform Initiative: Update \(Joint with Policy Board\)](#)
- [Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment: Final Action \(Joint with SFSBSB Board\)](#)
- Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass 2022 Recreational Management Measures: Approve (Joint with SFSBSB Board)
- Bluefish 2022 Recreational Management Measures: Approve (Joint with Bluefish Board)
- Biennial Review of 2020-2024 Research Priorities Document: Review and Approve
- EAFM Summer Flounder Management Strategy Evaluation: Update and Feedback (Joint with SFSBSB Board)
- RSA Workshop Report: Review
- Habitat Activities Update (including wind and aquaculture)

2021 Council Meeting Topics At-a-Glance

	June 7-10	August 9-12	October 5-7	December 13-16
Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish and River Herring and Shad (RH/S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021-2022 <i>Illex</i> Specs • 2022 Longfin and Butterfish Specs Review • <i>Illex</i> Incidental Trip Limit and Butterfish Mesh Regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022 Mackerel Specs Review (including RH/S cap) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chub mackerel 2022 Specs Review 	
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass (SF/S/BSB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational Reform Initiative: Update • ASMFC Remand of BSB Allocations: Discuss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SF/S/BSB 2022-2023 Specs • Rec Reform Initiative 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rec Reform Initiative • SF/S/BSB 2022 Rec Mgmt Measures • SF-S-BSB Com/Rec Allocation Amd: Final Action
Bluefish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bluefish Amd: Final Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bluefish 2022-2023 Specs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bluefish 2022 Rec Mgmt Measures
Tilefish		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Tilefish Multi-Year Specs FW: Final Action • Golden Tilefish Specs: Review 2022 and Approve 2023-2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Tilefish Permitting/Reporting Evaluation 	
Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog (SC/OQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC/OQ 2022 Specs Review 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC/OQ Species Separation: Review White Paper and Identify Next Steps 	
Spiny Dogfish			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022 Dogfish Specs Review • Dogfish Trip Limit Analysis 	
Science Issues		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSC Economic Work Group: Update on RSA Case Study • Joint Council-SSC Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HMS Diet Study Report • Ocean City Video Project: Review Results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biennial Review of 2020-2024 Research Priorities • RSA Workshop Report: Review
EAFM		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAFM Summer Flounder MSE Update 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAFM Summer Flounder MSE Update
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Panel Appointments • Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report • Habitat Update • Offshore Wind Updates 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss 2022 Draft Deliverables • Bullet and Frigate Mackerel Action Update 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022 Implementation Plan: Approve • Habitat Update

Acronyms/Abbreviations

Amd	Amendment
Com/Rec	Commercial/Recreational
Com	Commercial
EAFM	Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
GRAs	Gear Restricted Areas
HMS	Highly Migratory Species
Mgmt	Management
MSB	Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish

MSE	Management Strategy Evaluation
Mtg	Meeting
Rec	Recreational
RH/S	River Herring and Shad
SC/OQ	Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog
SF/S/BSB	Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass
Specs	Specifications
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee

Actions Referenced in this Document

- **Bluefish Amd:** Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment
- **SF-S-BSB Com/Rec Allocation Amd:** Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment
- **Rec Reform Initiative:** Recreational Management Reform Initiative
- **Golden Tilefish Multi-Year Specs FW:** Golden Tilefish Multi-Year Specifications Framework
- **SC/OQ Species Separation:** Action to address current species separation requirements in the Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries
- **Bullet and Frigate Mackerel Action Update:** Action to implement a possession limit for bullet and frigate mackerel



Status of Council Actions Under Development

AS OF 5/25/21

FMP	Action	Description	Status	Staff Lead
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment	This joint MAFMC/ASMFC amendment will reevaluate and potentially revise the commercial and recreational sector allocations for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. This action was initiated in part to address the allocation-related impacts of the revised recreational data from MRIP. http://www.mafmc.org/actions/sfsbsb-allocation-amendment	The Council and Board reviewed public comments at the April 2021 Council Meeting and voted to postpone final action until December 2021.	Dancy/Coutre/Beaty
Bluefish	Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment	This joint MAFMC/ASMFC amendment considers potential revisions to the allocation of Atlantic bluefish between the commercial and recreational fisheries and the commercial allocations to the states. This action will also review the goals and objectives of the bluefish FMP and the quota transfer processes and establish a rebuilding plan for bluefish. http://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment	The Council and Bluefish Board will consider final action at the June 2021 meeting.	Seeley
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish	Recreational Reform Framework and Technical Guidance Documents	The Council and Policy Board initiated a framework/addendum to address the following topics for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish: (1) better incorporating MRIP uncertainty into the management process; (2) guidelines for maintaining status quo recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits) from one year to the next; (3) a process for setting multi-year recreational management measures; (4) changes to the timing of the recommendation for federal waters recreational management measures; and (5) a proposal put forward by six recreational organizations called a harvest control rule. The Council and Policy Board may consider addressing some of these topics through a technical guidance document, rather than a framework/addendum. https://www.mafmc.org/actions/recreational-reform-initiative	The Council and Policy Board will receive an update at the June 2021 meeting.	Beaty

FMP	Action	Description	Status	Staff Lead
	Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment	This joint MAFMC/ASMFC amendment considers (1) options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes and (2) options related to recreational catch accounting, such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels. https://www.mafmc.org/actions/recreational-reform-initiative	The Council and Policy Board initiated this action at the joint October 2020 meeting. Minimal progress is expected in 2021 due to other priorities.	Beaty
Surfclam and Ocean Quahog	Addressing Current Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements	As surfclams have shifted toward deeper water in recent years, catches including both surfclams and ocean quahogs have become more common. Current regulations do not allow surfclams and ocean quahogs to be landed on the same trip. The Council is exploring options to address this issue.	An FMAT has been established, and their first meeting was held 11/17/2020.	Coakley/ Montañez
Tilefish	Golden Tilefish Multi-Year Specs Framework	This framework action will consider allowing specifications to be set for more than 3 years (e.g. 5 years) when assessment data support the development of longer-term projections. This action is intended to increase administrative efficiency and predictability from year to year.	Framework Meeting #1 took place at the April 2021 meeting. Final action is schedule for the August 2021 meeting.	Montañez
Omnibus	Omnibus Amendment for Data Modernization	This amendment will address the regulatory changes needed to fully implement the Agency's Fishery-Dependent Data Initiative.	The Council last received an update at the October 2018 meeting.	GARFO/NEFSC

Timeline and Status of Recent MAFMC Actions and Amendments/Frameworks Under Review

As of 5/25/2021

The table below summarizes the status of actions after they have been approved by the Council. For information about the status of Council actions under development, please see the document titled "Status of Council Actions Under Development."

Title	Action Number	Council Approval	Initial Submission	Final Submission	NOA Published	Proposed Rule Published	Approval/Disapproval Letter	Final Rule Published	Regs Effective	Notes
Excessive Shares Amendment	SCOQ Amd 20	12/9/19	4/24/20	9/25/20						
Omnibus Commercial eVTR Framework	MSB FW 14; Bluefish FW 4; SFSBSB FW 15; SCOQ FW 3; Tilefish FW 5; Dogfish FW 4	MAFMC: 12/11/19; NEFMC: 1/29/20	3/4/20	4/14/20	7/17/20	7/17/20		11/10/20	11/10/21	
MSB FMP Goals/Objectives and Illex Permits Amendment	MSB Amd 22	7/16/20	3/15/21							
Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment	TBD	2/1/21	5/5/21							During their June 2021 meeting, the Council will consider whether to revisit their allocation recommendation in light of the ASFMC Policy Board remand of the decision back to the SFSBSB Mgmt Board.

Timeline and Status of Current and Upcoming Specifications for MAFMC Fisheries

As of 5/25/21

Current Specifications	Year(s)	Council Approval	Initial Submission	Final Submission	Proposed Rule	Final Rule	Regs Effective	Notes
Golden Tilefish	2021-2022	4/8/20	5/11/20	7/21/20	11/13/20	12/21/20	12/21/20	
Blueline Tilefish	2019-2021	4/11/18	8/17/18	10/24/18	11/19/18	2/12/19	2/12/19	
Surfclam and Ocean Quahog	2021-2026	8/12/20	9/2/20	2/24/21	2/17/21	5/13/21	6/14/21	
Longfin Squid	2021-2023	8/10/20	10/14/20		5/26/21			EA may have additional edits before final rule
Butterfish	2021-2022	8/10/20	10/14/20		5/26/21			EA may have additional edits before final rule
Illex Squid	2020-2021	6/17/20	10/14/20		5/26/21			EA may have additional edits before final rule
Atlantic Mackerel (including RH/S cap)	2021-2022	8/10/20	10/14/20		5/26/21			EA may have additional edits before final rule
Chub mackerel	2020-2022	3/7/19	5/31/19	10/25/19	3/9/20	8/4/20	9/3/20	Reviewed October 2020. No changes recommended.
Bluefish	2021 (revised)	8/11/20	9/24/20	10/26/20	11/5/20	12/16/20	12/16/20	
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	2021 (revised)	8/11/20	9/30/20	11/20/20	11/17/20	12/21/20	1/1/21	
Spiny Dogfish	2021-2022	10/6/20	12/7/20	2/3/21	3/4/21	5/1/21	5/1/21	

Recreational Management Measures

Current Management Measures	Year(s)	Council Approval	Initial Submission	Final Submission	Proposed Rule	Final Rule	Regs Effective	Notes
Summer flounder recreational measures	2021	12/15/20	1/20/21	1/20/21	4/6/21	5/6/21	5/5/21	Rulemaking required each year to continue use of conservation equivalency
Black sea bass recreational measures	2021	2/14/18	3/5/18	4/10/18	4/11/18	5/31/18	5/31/18	Reviewed in 2020. No changes from previous year's measures.
Scup recreational measures	2021	12/10/14	3/20/15		5/5/15	6/19/15	6/19/15	Reviewed in 2020. No changes from previous year's measures.
Bluefish recreational measures	2021	12/10/19	1/23/20	3/19/20	5/25/20	6/29/20	6/29/20	Reviewed in 2020. No changes from previous year's measures.

2021 SPRING NRCC MEETING AGENDA

via Google Meet

All times are approximate

Tuesday, May 25

9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

1. Welcome, Introductions, Announcements
(Simpkins, Sullivan)

9:15 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. (*Break as needed, lunch at noon*)

2. Stock Assessments

Discussion leader: Simpkins

- Schedule revisions, to account for 2020 postponements and other issues
- 2026 research track assessment proposals and recommendations
- Research track steering committees – proposed approach
- Assessment process improvements – progress updates
- Future of winter flounder science and management

3:00 p.m. *Adjourn Day 1*

Wednesday, May 26

9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

3. FDDI and CAMS Update

Discussion leader: Gouveia

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

4. Offshore Wind Update

Discussion leader: Pentony/Lipsky

10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. *Break*

10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

5. NOAA Climate and Fisheries Initiative

Discussion leader: Simpkins

- Potential formation of regional teams

10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

6. Scenario Planning

Discussion leader: Scenario Planning Core Team (Dancy)

- Core Team will present and have NRCC review the draft proposed process and timeline

11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

7. Meeting wrap-up and Other Business

- Complete any unfinished discussions or unresolved new business
- Review action items and assignments
- Identify Fall 2021 meeting date (NEFSC chair)
- Adjourn meeting

12:00 p.m. Meeting adjourns

PROPOSED AGENDA
COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING
VIDEO CONFERENCE CALL
May 18 - 20, 2021

Tuesday, May 18, 2021 1:30 PM to 5:30 PM EST

1:15 pm to 1:30 pm	Meeting Setup	
1:30 pm to 1:35 pm	Overview of WebEx functions	Nicholas Pieper
1:35 pm to 1:40 pm	Opening of Meeting	Marc Gorelnik
	<i>Announce public comment times and instructions to provide comment</i>	
	Welcome and Introduction	Paul Doremus
1:40 pm to 2:30 pm	1. Approval of Agenda and Minutes	
Chuck Tracy	2. NOAA Fisheries Update and Upcoming Priorities	Paul Doremus
	a. Administration Priorities/Transition (budget roll up)	
	b. COVID-19 Operations and Reintegration Plans	
	c. Post-Pandemic Council Operations Discussion	
	d. Other	
2:30 pm to 3:10 pm	3. NOAA Fisheries Science Update	
John Carmichael	a. Fisheries Surveys Outlook and MRIP	
	Catch Estimates	Cisco Werner Evan Howell
3:10 pm to 3:25 pm	Break	
3:25 pm to 5:00 pm	4. Legislative Outlook	
Dave Witherell	a. Huffman/Case MSA reauthorization draft, HR59 (Young), etc.	David Whaley
	b. Report from Committee Staff (tentative)	
	c. CCC Legislative Workgroup Report	Dave Witherell
5:00 pm to 5:15 pm	5. Integration of ESA Section 7 with MSA	Kitty Simonds
Kitty Simonds		
5:15 pm to 5:30 pm	Public Comment (<i>for items not covered on the agenda</i>)	
5:30 pm	Adjourn Day 1	

Wednesday, May 19, 2021: 1:30 PM to 5:30 PM EST

1:15 pm to 1:30 pm	Meeting Setup	
1:30 pm to 1:35 pm	Overview of WebEx functions	Nicholas Pieper
	Welcome Back Day 2	Marc Gorelnik
	<i>Announce public comment times and instructions to provide comment</i>	
1:35 pm to 3:00 pm	6. Recent Executive Orders	
Miguel Rolon	a. Update on Selected Executive Orders Applicable to the Work of NOAA Fisheries	
	b. E.O. 14008 Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad	Paul Doremus
		Sam Rauch
		Jen Lukens
3:00 pm to 3:40 pm	7. Offshore Wind Development	
Chuck Tracy	a. BOEM & Councils engagement	Brian Hooker
	b. Habitat Work Group Report	Kerry Griffin
3:40 pm to 3:55 pm	Break	
3:55 pm to 4:40 pm	8. NS1 Draft Technical Memorandum on managing with ACLs for data-limited stocks & Update on working group products	
John Carmichael		Kelly Denit
		Marian Macpherson
4:40 pm to 5:30 pm	9. CCC Committees	
Presenters	a. Council Member Ongoing Development (CMOD)	Diana Evans
		Tom Nies
	b. Communications Report	Chuck Tracy
	c. NEPA Subcommittee	Chuck Tracy
	d. Status of SCS-7	Dave Witherell
	e. COFI Report	Kitty Simonds
5:30 pm	Public Comment (<i>for items not covered on the agenda</i>)	
	Adjourn Day 2	

Thursday, May 20, 2021: 1:30 PM to 5:30 PM EST

1:15 pm to 1:30 pm	Meeting Setup	
1:30 pm to 1:35 pm	Welcome Back Day 3	Marc Gorelnik
	<i>Announce public comment times and instructions to provide comment</i>	
1:35 pm to 2:55 pm	10. Seafood Competitiveness, Marketing and Economic Growth	
Chris Moore	a. Overview and Session Introduction	Paul Doremus
	b. E.O. 13921 Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth	
	i. Section 4 Councils' Recommendations Update	Kelly Denit
Carrie Simmons	ii. Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) Listening Sessions Feedback Update	David O'Brien
	c. Seafood Marketing efforts including MAFAC, National Seafood Council Recommendations	Jen Lukens Paul Doremus
2:55 pm to 3:10 pm	Break	
3:10 pm to 3:55 pm	11. Electronic Monitoring	
Tom Nies	a. Draft Electronic Monitoring Procedural Directive on applying information law (e.g. FRA, FOIA, MSA confidentiality)	Brett Alger
3:55 pm to 4:15 pm	12. Policy and Procedural Directives on Guidance for Financial Disclosures and Recusals	Adam Issenberg
Tom Nies		
4:15 pm to 4:30 pm	Public Comment <i>(for items not covered on the agenda)</i>	
4:30 pm to 5:00 pm	Break	
5:00 pm to 5:30 pm	13. Wrap-up and Other Business	
Chuck Tracy	a. CCC Outcomes and Recommendations	
	b. Discussion of Next Meeting Dates for 2021 and 2022, Frequency and Schedule of future Council check-in calls	
5:30 pm	Adjourn Day 3	

Version 05/11/2021



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 24, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Karson Coutre, Staff
Subject: Update on Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team discussions relative to the Mid-Atlantic region

NMFS is expecting the final rule this summer for modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) intended to achieve at least a 60 percent reduction in mortalities or serious injuries of right whales in the Northeast Jonah crab and lobster trap/pot fisheries. These fisheries deploy about 93 percent of the buoy lines fished in areas where right whales occur. [Measures in this rule](#) include line reduction, restricted areas/times for buoy lines, testing out ropeless fishing, weak line or inserts, and gear marking.

In 2021, the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) will be asked to recommend risk reduction measures for other Atlantic trap/pot and gillnet fisheries along the entire east coast. Depending on the proposed measures, this could impact MAFMC managed fisheries for monkfish, spiny dogfish, black sea bass, bluefish, and scup, due to their use of pot/trap or gillnet gear. Upcoming steps in this process include:

- Develop and expand the Decision Support Tool to cover all trap/pot and gillnet fisheries in ALWTRP waters (primarily Spring/Summer 2021).
- Full team two-day ALWTRT meeting in June/July 2021 to determine what types of measures to take to scoping. These meetings will be open to the public and are scheduled for Monday June 28, 3-6 pm, and Thursday, July 1, 3-6pm.
- Public scoping meetings are anticipated to occur in August/September, including presentations to the Councils.
- The full ALWTRT will reconvene in November 2021 to discuss scoping results, assemble potential alternatives, and further identify data needs to support decision making.
- The full team will vote on alternatives in early 2022.

More information on the ALWTRT meetings including recordings and presentations can be found on the [Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan webpage](#).



United States Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

December 7, 2020

NAME ON PERMIT
MAILING ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Greater Atlantic and Southeast Region Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting

Dear Greater Atlantic Region Vessel Permit Holder:

You have been identified as holding both a Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and Southeast Region Office (SERO) vessel for-hire permit. In early December, SERO will be sending you an informational toolkit that explains the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program. As a result of holding the SERO permit, you will need to report the new information listed below, in addition to the GARFO information you are accustomed to reporting.

New reporting requirements as a result of holding a SERO for-hire permit

- Socio-economic questions:
 - Trip Fee (dollars);
 - Fuel Used (gallons);
 - Price of Fuel (dollars per gallon).
- Requirement to submit did-not-fish reports in weeks in which no fishing activity occurs in any fishery.

How to report:

- As a holder of a SERO permit, you will be required to meet these reporting requirements regardless of where you fish or what species you target.
- If you have been reporting using eTrips/Mobile 2, simply continue to report as you have been, as this system meets both regions' requirements.
- If you have been reporting using the Fish Online eVTR application, we strongly encourage you to convert to eTrips/Mobile 2 to satisfy the reporting requirements of both GARFO and SERO. At present, Fish Online does not meet SERO reporting requirements.

When to report:

- Reports must be submitted within 48 hours of landing to meet GARFO requirements.

For assistance with reporting requirements contact:

- Your local GARFO Port Agent
- GARFO reporting group at 978-281-9246
- If you are a Fish Online user and want to switch to using eTrips, call 1-800-984-0810 or visit <https://www.accsp.org/what-we-do/safis/etrips-mobile-instructions/>

LATEST NEWS

New South Atlantic For-Hire Reporting Requirements – Information for Greater Atlantic Permit Holders

Beginning on January 4, 2021, all fishermen with Atlantic federal charter/headboat permits for Snapper-Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Dolphin/Wahoo issued by NOAA's Southeast Regional Office (SERO) will be required to electronically report their fishing effort and landings through the NOAA Fisheries Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program.

How Will This Affect For-Hire Operators in the Greater Atlantic Region?

Individuals holding **only** for-hire permits issued by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) will not be impacted by these changes. You can continue submitting your electronic VTRs as you are right now.

Individuals holding **both** a GARFO for-hire permit and a Southeast Region Office (SERO) charter/headboat permit for any of the species listed above will be subject to new reporting requirements.

Information for Dual GARFO and SERO For-Hire Permit Holders

In early December, SERO will be sending you an informational toolkit that explains the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program. The toolkit is also available [here](#).

New Reporting Requirements

As a result of holding the SERO permit, you will need to report the new information listed below, in addition to the GARFO information you are accustomed to reporting.

- Socio-economic questions:
 - Trip Fee (dollars);
 - Fuel Used (gallons);
 - Price of Fuel (dollars per gallon).
- Requirement to submit did-not-fish reports in weeks in which no fishing activity occurs in any fishery.

How to Report

- As a holder of a SERO permit, you will be required to meet these reporting requirements regardless of where you fish or what species you target.
- If you have been reporting using eTrips/Mobile 2, simply continue to report with this software as you have been, as the new fields will automatically appear in January and this system meets both regions' requirements.
- If you have been reporting using the Fish Online eVTR application, we strongly encourage you to convert to eTrips/Mobile 2 to satisfy the reporting requirements of both GARFO and SERO. At present, Fish Online does not meet SERO reporting requirements.

When to Report:

Reports must still be submitted within 48 hours of landing to meet GARFO requirements.

For Assistance with Reporting Requirements Contact

- Your local GARFO Port Agent
- GARFO reporting group at 978-281-9246
- If you are a Fish Online user and want to switch to using eTrips, call 1-800-984-0810 or visit <https://www.accsp.org/what-we-do/safis/etrips-mobile-instructions/>

Additional Information

- [Informational Toolkit](#)
- [Instructional videos](#)
- SERO Webinars to answer your questions: scheduled for 10:00 AM-12:00 PM and 6:00-8:00 PM, EST on **December 16, 2020**. Details are available [here](#).
- SERO Customer service hotline: available from 8:00-4:30, EST at 1-833-707-1632.
- Customer service email: ser.electronicreporting@noaa.gov

December 10, 2020

 Share



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/southeast>

04/27/2021

F/SER25:NM

Mr. Mel Bell, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

Dear Mr. Bell:

The purpose of this letter is to inform the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) of the approval of Amendment 12 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic (Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12). Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12 and its final rule will add bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the FMP for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic and designate them as ecosystem component (EC) species. The Council noted that the two mackerel species have been documented as important forage species particularly for wahoo and to a lesser extent for dolphin. The purpose of Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12 is to acknowledge the ecological role of bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as forage fish and achieve ecosystem management objectives (50 C.F.R §600.305(d)(13)). National Marine Fisheries Service and the Council determined that bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel are currently not in need of conservation and management, making them eligible for consideration as EC species under provisions found within the National Standard Guidelines (50 C.F.R §600.305(c)(1)) and complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other applicable laws.

The notice of availability for Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12 published in the *Federal Register* on January 29, 2021 (86 FR 7524), and the comment period ended on March 30, 2021. The proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* on March 2, 2021 (86 FR 12166), and the comment period ended on April 1, 2021.

On behalf of the agency, I thank the Council for their continued dedication to sustainable fisheries management in the South Atlantic Region. Please contact my staff at the Southeast Regional Office at (727) 824-5301, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

AMENDOLA.KIMBE
RLY.B.1365830769
Digitally signed by
AMENDOLA.KIMBERLY.B.13658
30769
Date: 2021.04.27 12:07:59 -04'00'

for Andrew J. Strelcheck
Acting Regional Administrator





New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116
John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

April 1, 2021

Mr. Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator
NMFS, Northeast Regional Office
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

RE: Comments on Sea Watch Surfclam EFP (86 FR 14597)

Dear Mike:

I am writing to express serious concerns with the proposed Sea Watch Surfclam EFP.

The March 17, 2021 Federal Register notice states that the EFP would allow four commercial surfclam and ocean quahog vessels to conduct at-sea paralytic shellfish poisoning testing in the Closed Area II scallop access area in statistical reporting area (SRA) 552. However, SRA 552 is entirely in Canadian waters, with no overlap of Closed Area II. We think they might have intended to fish in area 562, but without a clear understanding of where the fishing would occur, it is difficult to provide meaningful comment on this EFP request. As a result, we recommend that the EFP notice be modified to clearly indicate where the fishing within Closed Area II would be, since impacts may vary depending on when and where dredging occurs. Also, the Council and interested stakeholders should have another opportunity to provide comments after the area is correctly defined.

Our concerns with the EFP extend beyond the inaccurate description of the EFP area. The Council is actively managing several groundfish stocks within Closed Area II, some of which are overfished and in rebuilding plans. This EFP could have serious adverse impacts on Georges Bank cod, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, Georges Bank winter flounder and northern windowpane flounder mortality and habitat. Beyond closures, the Council has required gear modifications in the groundfish and scallop fisheries to reduce impacts on Georges Bank yellowtail flounder and on northern windowpane flounder. The potential impacts of dredging for surfclams and ocean quahogs on vulnerable stocks should be assessed, particularly for Georges Bank cod and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, which are managed under the transboundary sharing arrangement with Canada.

Also, the Council has been actively managing several scallop cohorts in the Closed Area II area. The area is no longer considered a single management unit, and includes partial closures to protect incoming year classes, and some open areas with very high densities of scallops that will be fished in the coming year. A broad exemption for Closed Area II that would allow

commercial surfclam and ocean quahog fishing is inconsistent with the rotational management program that the Council has developed for this area.

Our evaluation of impacts is constrained by the metrics presented for fishing effort in the notice, which are limited to the number of trips and trip duration. These are cursory and make it difficult to assess what the impacts from fishing will be. 416 trips seem to be a very high level of effort for an experiment to determine whether clams in the area are contaminated with PSP. This high number also ignores broader concerns about impacts on EFH and other species. Information on the number of expected tows, tow duration, and potential bycatch are much more useful to assess for the potential impacts of the activity on managed resources and habitats. We also have concerns that the trip length is underestimated based on the distance of Closed Area II from ports in the Northeast. The steam time to and from Closed Area II is over a day and a half in total.

There is no rationale provided as to why two trips per week landing 4,800 bushels each are required to evaluate the effectiveness of testing for PSP in this new area. Is the purpose of the exempted fishery to determine that clams throughout the area do not contain problematic levels of PSP or is it to support future fishing in this area? Testing for PSP could be conducted with minimal harvest of surfclams and ocean quahogs, and without landing the product. As written, the scale of the EFP would presumably allow a fishery to be prosecuted within Closed Area II, as opposed to just an exploratory testing exercise.

The Council's Fishing Effects Model¹, and its precursor, the Swept Area Seabed Impact Model², estimate the effects of different bottom-tending gear types on benthic habitats. These models estimate a greater magnitude of impacts in deeper waters where the seabed is less affected by tidal currents. Some portions of Closed Area II deeper than approximately 80 meters are lower energy and therefore expected to be more vulnerable to fishing gear impacts. This issue is well described in section 6.1 of the Environmental Assessment prepared by NOAA Fisheries when the PSP exemption area was originally authorized³.

Beyond the concerns about managed species and habitat, fishing industry groups have worked together to reduce gear conflicts in this area, particularly between mobile and fixed gear fishermen, specifically vessels fishing with lobster pots. Gear conflicts that may emerge with this new fishery should be considered.

While not an issue related to NEFMC-managed resources, southeastern Georges Bank is both surfclam and ocean quahog habitat. As we understand it, the fishery is currently restricted to landing one species or the other on a trip. The EFP should explain how mixed surfclam/ocean quahog catches will be accommodated if both species are encountered during the same trip.

Based on these concerns, we recommend that the EFP notice should be modified to clearly define the area that is being proposed for fishing so that the Council and public can better understand the scope of this research and potential impact on resources within the Closed Area II

¹ NEFMC (2011). The Swept Area Seabed Impact approach: a tool for analyzing the effects of fishing on Essential Fish Habitat. New England Fishery Management Council, Newburyport, MA: 257p.

² NEFMC (2020). Fishing Effects Model Northeast Region. New England Fishery Management Council, Newburyport, MA: 109p.

³ National Marine Fisheries Service (2012). Re-Opening a Portion of the Georges Bank Closed Area to Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Harvesting. Environmental Assessment and Regulatory Impact Review. NMFS Northeast Regional Office, Gloucester, MA: 104p.

management unit. There also should be a clear explanation of how concerns over managed species and habitat will be addressed.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas A. Nies". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas A. Nies
Executive Director



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

May 12, 2021

Natalie Jennings
Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc.
277 Hatchville Road
East Falmouth, MA 02536

Dear Ms. Jennings:

We received your application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to extend and expand the Coonamessett Farm Foundation's (CFF) project in the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA). After a review of the application and the information available from the current EFP for this project, we are unable to proceed with this new EFP request at this time.

The initial research plan for this project was submitted in June 2019. The plan was broad in scope, and we expressed our concerns about the potential adverse impacts to the HMA. After several conversations with my staff, and receiving comments and suggestions from the New England Fishery Management Council's Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT), CFF submitted a revised research plan in November 2019, which divided the project into two phases. We included a summary of this revised research plan in the announcement of the EFP application in the *Federal Register* (85 FR 4638; January 27, 2020). We issued the EFP on May 27, 2020, which will expire on May 27, 2021.

As you proposed, Phase I of the project was constrained to a limited area within the Rose and Crown area and was intended to serve as a 'proof of concept' phase. Vessels fishing under the Phase I EFP were to use dredge-mounted cameras to collect data to characterize substrate types where surfclam and mussel fishing occurs. A portion of the funds generated from the fishing trips was intended to support data collection using cameras to examine the habitat impacts of dredging, conduct habitat mapping and analysis, and research the presence of juvenile cod in the HMA. CFF proposed that Phase II of the plan would involve more use of dredge-mounted cameras and increase the geographic scope of compensation fishing to include a portion of the Davis Bank East area in order to fund an expansion of the non-fishing research aspects of the project.

CFF's research plan specified that the transition to Phase II would be based on how well the data collected during Phase I addressed the Council's research priorities for the HMA. In December 2020, CFF submitted an initial progress report that provided summary data from the 34 commercial trips taken at that point in Phase I. The progress report included annotated video data from 8 tows (of the 1,791 tows total conducted), 4 conducted in June and 4 in September. The report anticipated an intensive video survey independent of commercial fishing would begin in February 2021; however, we have not yet received any results from this period. Until more Phase I results are provided to us for review, it is premature to consider moving to Phase II of



this project. Once complete Phase I results are available, and before we would authorize a Phase II EFP, we also intend to solicit input from the Council and its Habitat PDT on the utility of the data for evaluating potential new exemption areas within the HMA. This is a key purpose of Phase I, and one that is necessary to evaluate the appropriateness of the proposed Phase II design.

However, even the preliminary data available from Phase I raise concerns about Phase II of this project. The video from only a small fraction of tows has been analyzed, so it is not yet clear how well or consistently a dredge-mounted camera can document the substrates where surfclam and mussel fishing occur. Furthermore, the dredge track data provided in the progress report indicate that surfclam and mussel fishing does occur in complex habitat. In one example provided, up to 80 percent of the tow occurred in what could be considered complex habitat. We do not know how these compare to nearby unfished areas, but it is clear fishing does not solely occur on sandy bottom as was once thought.

We were able to determine that the potential impacts of the Phase I proposal were minor and temporary in nature because Phase I was restricted to a limited area within the Rose and Crown area and for a limited duration, and because it was unclear the extent to which surfclam or mussel fishing gear interacted with complex habitats. As such, the issuance of the Phase I EFP did not require the preparation of an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act. We have not made any determination on what level of analysis might be needed to assess the potential impacts of an expanded Phase II project.

Given the need for additional analysis of Phase I data in order to determine whether a transition to Phase II may be appropriate, please let us know if you would like to discuss a reasonable extension of the Phase I EFP. If you have additional questions please contact Douglas Potts (Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,



Michael Pentony
Regional Administrator

Cc: Dr. John Quinn, NEFMC Chairman
Thomas Nies, NEFMC Executive Director

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna: Proposed Rule for Draft Amendment 13 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP

NOAA Fisheries announces a proposed rule for Draft Amendment 13 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. The publication of this proposed rule coincides with the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that analyzes the ecological and socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives that are considered in Draft Amendment 13. A schedule of public hearings will be announced in a separate Federal Register notice.

Who is affected?

The proposed measures could affect any U.S. fisherman who targets or incidentally catches Atlantic bluefin tuna.

What will it do?

A full description of the proposed management measures can be found in the proposed rule, which published on May 21, 2021, and the full range of alternatives considered can be found in the DEIS, which is on the [NOAA Fisheries Website](#). The proposed measures are summarized below.

Proposed Measures
<p>Longline category</p> <p><u>Individual Bluefin Quota (IBQ) Shares</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dynamic determination of IBQ shares based upon amount of designated species landings;• Modify regional Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic IBQ designations and cap bluefin catch from the Gulf of Mexico <p><u>IBQ Share Cap</u> - Cap amount of IBQ shares owned per entity at 25%</p> <p><u>Electronic Monitoring</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify and expand regulations for camera installation;• Specify additional fish handling protocols;• Reduce hard drive mailing frequency <p><u>Cost Recovery Program</u> - Implement a cost recovery program via dealers</p> <p><u>Dealer Reporting Requirements</u> - Remove PIN and dead discard requirements for IBQ reports</p>
<p>Purse Seine category and quota reallocation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modify codified quota allocation percentages to reflect the annual 68-mt allocation to the Longline category;• Discontinue Purse Seine category and reallocate quota when Amendment 13 is implemented;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reallocate Purse Seine category quota proportionally to directed bluefin categories, including Reserve
Angling category Modify Angling category trophy areas and allocations (percentages)
Harpoon category Set a Harpoon category limit on the total number of bluefin at 10 fish (combined large medium and giant) and maintain current retention limit range on large medium bluefin
Permit category corrections Allow vessels with an open access Atlantic tunas or HMS permit to change permit categories within a fishing year provided they have not landed a bluefin

Submit Comments by July 20, 2020:

Written comments, identified by “NOAA-NMFS-2019-0042,” may be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>, or sent by mail to the contact information included below. All comments received are a part of the public record and generally will be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All Personal Identifying Information (name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). You may submit attachments to electronic comments in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

For further information on this proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement, contact HMS staff at 978-281-9260. Copies of the proposed rule, draft environmental impact statement, and other supporting documents are available upon request from the Highly Migratory Species Management Division (phone: 301-427-8503).



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

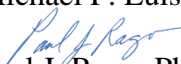
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 28, 2021

To: Michael P. Luisi, Chairman, MAMFC

From:  Paul J. Rago, Ph.D., Chair, MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee

Subject: Report of the May 2021 SSC Meeting

The SSC met via webinar on the 11th and 12th of May, 2021 to address the following topics:

Review potential changes to the 2021 *Illex* ABC specifications and set the 2022 *Illex* ABC, (2) Receive an update on butterfish fishery and review previously recommended ABC for 2022; (3) Receive an update on longfin squid fishery and review previously recommended ABC for 2022; (4) Receive an update on the Atlantic Surfclam fishery and review previously recommended ABC for 2022; (5) Receive an update on Ocean Quahog fishery and review previously recommended ABC for 2022; and under Other Business (6) discuss approaches for incorporating State of the Ecosystem report information into SSC decisions (Attachment 1).

All 20 SSC members participated in the meeting on the first day and 19 on the second day (Attachment 2). Other participants included Council members, Council staff, NEFSC and GARFO staff, industry, and the general public. Council staff provided outstanding technical support before, during and after the meeting. I thank Sarah Gaichas and Geret DePiper for their excellent meeting notes and members of the SSC and Council Staff for their comments on an earlier draft of this report. I also thank Tom Miller who expertly crafted the summary discussion of the section on *Illex* ABCs and Mike Wilberg who chaired the sessions on *Illex* squid.

All documents referenced in this report can be accessed via the SSC's meeting website <https://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2021/may-11-12>

I convened the meeting and made an opening statement regarding my role as a contractor to the Council for the purpose of providing technical support for the *Illex* Quota Working Group. My analyses formed part of the basis for consideration of the 2021 and 2022 ABCs. To avoid any appearance of conflict of interest, I asked Dr. Michael Wilberg (SSC vice chair) to chair this portion of the meeting and Dr. Thomas Miller to lead the discussions on the Terms of Reference. I also clarified the scope of my contractual support from the Council, noting in particular that my participation as a member of the Research Track Assessment Working Group was not supported by either the Council or any other entity.

***Illex* Squid**

This session opened with a presentation by Jason Didden who provided an overview of the Research Track Assessment and summarized the findings in the Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report.

Lisa Hendrickson, the NEFSC assessment lead for *Illex*, elaborated on the progress of the Research Track Assessment (RTA). The RTA is a comprehensive benchmark of *Illex* that will include new data on ageing and maturity, as well as the importance of environmental data for interannual variations in availability to the fishery and surveys, and an analyses of statolith microchemistry to evaluate inshore vs offshore inhabitation and movements by *Illex*. An economist on the Working Group will be examining various economic factors affecting in season effort distribution and possibly advance our understanding of landings per unit effort in relation to abundance. Interviews with commercial harvesters and processors are also underway to provide context for interpretation, and for the first time, results of the Study Fleet may be incorporated into the assessment. An assessment model framework used in the Falklands will be evaluated for use in the US. Given the complexity of the model and some COVID-related staffing and data availability issues, a delay in the assessment until early 2022 is being considered and will be considered by the NRCC later in May.

Questions for Lisa Hendrickson were related to the assessment model and its data requirements. The model allows for in season recruitment and migrations and requires an estimate of initial stock size. Data requirements include weekly estimates of average size, fishing effort and landings. As a sub-annual species, *Illex* is much different than other managed species such that special considerations must be given to the needs of in-season management its relationship to the overall assessment model.

Finally, it was noted by Jason Didden that 2020 was the fourth consecutive year of high catch rates by the fleet and early closure due to ABC restrictions. Fishermen reported seeing large squid near the time of fishery closure. Unlike many fisheries, the pandemic had only modest impacts on fishing patterns. *Illex* is primarily a frozen product and was less affected by reduced demand by restaurants.

Following Jason's presentation, there were two scientific presentations by Dr. John Manderson and Dr. Paul Rago. Dr. Rago's work provides a modeling framework for evaluating a range of feasible estimates of biomass and fishing mortality for *Illex*. The feasibility of these estimates rests on obtaining realistic estimates of factors such as overlap between the fishery and the resource area, overall availability of *Illex* to the bottom trawl survey domain and estimates of capture efficiency. Dr. Manderson's work summarized various approaches to refine such estimates using a variety of advanced statistical modelling approaches.

Manderson Presentation

Dr. Manderson provided an overview of work that he and colleagues are preparing for the RTA and a detailed summary of work in support of 2021-2022 ABC for *Illex*. The published paper of Lowman et al. (2021) was updated to incorporate the NEFSC spring and fall bottom trawl survey and the Canadian DFO survey in NAFO Area 4VWX. *Illex* habitat was defined using presence-

absence data (rather than absolute catch per tow) and analyzed using a Generalized Additive Model to define a spatially-distributed probability of occupancy. This differed from the approach used in Lowman et al (2021) who used the VAST model for comparable estimates in the US fraction of the stock area. Neither approach accounts for the fraction of the stock that occurs outside the survey sampling areas so the estimates are considered minimal estimates of total *Illex* distributional area. Diagnostic methods suggested reasonable predictive power for the model. Analyses of spatial footprint of the commercial fishery from VTR records suggested that fishing activity occurs in less than 1.2% of the habitat area for the period 2008-2019. Using estimates of the overall *Illex* distributional area, the NEFSC fall survey covers about 43% of the stock area while the spring survey covers only about 29% of the habitat because many of squid are thought to be still offshore.

Interviews with fishers were used to obtain ball park estimates of gear efficiency based on patterns of squid behavior revealed by sonar. Commercial nets can be up to an order of magnitude larger than research trawls in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. Median estimates of net efficiency were 0.363 and 0.121 for commercial and research trawls, respectively.

Questions from the SSC included clarification about the basis for capture efficiency estimates. It was noted that many of the respondents have been active participants in the Study Fleet program and have also been involved with research conducted by the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP). Technical questions regarding the spatial modeling of *Illex* habitat addressed concerns about spatial autocorrelation and the potential use of an alternative statistical Bayesian approach to VAST known as INLA. See <https://becarioprecario.bitbucket.io/inla-gitbook/>. This approach has been used by investigators at both VIMS and CBL. It was noted that the Manderson et al. approach was patterned after a similar analysis in a recently published paper for a case study in Europe (Moriarty et al. 2020).

Rago Presentation

Dr. Rago presented an overview of several indirect methods for bounding the historical range of biomass and fishing mortality estimates and assessing the implications of alternative quotas for 2021 and 2022. The methods rely on analyses of spring and fall NEFSC bottom trawl surveys (1997-2019), landings (1997-2019), and VMS records (2017-2019). In addition, conventional Leslie-Davis depletion models were used to estimate initial population sizes and catchability coefficients. The depletion models include measures of weekly fishing landings, effort, and average size of squid. The indirect methods can be viewed as a system of models that can be used to iteratively refine our understanding of the stock dynamics of *Illex* and highlight key sources of uncertainty. The derivation of various bounds on stock size and fishing mortality are dependent upon estimable quantities of availability of *Illex* to the shelf area and overlap of the fishery and the surveys. Estimates of survey and fishery catchability also factor into the estimation. In this context, the analyses summarized by Manderson and colleagues were essential for advancing this evaluation.

Results of the standard depletion analyses revealed severe violations of the underlying assumptions, particularly those related to closed population. The failures of the models to fit the underlying data in most years were interpreted by the SSC in 2020 as evidence of low fishing

mortality and/or high rates of migration. To explore the magnitude of unknown growth, migration and natural mortality (defined as the variable X), a simple mass balance was developed to illustrate the potential magnitude of their combined effects. The model can be written as a function of the ratio between fishing and natural mortality and the product of gear efficiency and availability. A characteristic feature of these analyses was an exploration of the uncertainty over a broad range of the joint parameter space. For the 1997-2019 period, the average unexplained biomass (X) ranged from 31,000 to 234,000 mt. Even the minimum estimate of X was equal to the largest average catch during this period.

One of the central problems of fisheries science is the dilemma of determining whether an observed catch is the product of a high F applied to a small stock or a low F applied to a large stock. These relationships can be explored by the use of an Envelope Method that examines the realized range of biomass estimates based on an assumed wide range of historical F and catchability estimates applied to a time series of landings and survey values. The Envelope Method develops a range of feasible estimates that are consistent with the joint effects of the assumed F and catchability values. The method also incorporates a range of natural mortality estimates from the published literature.

The biomass of *Illex* alive at the end of the fishing season can be compared to what would have been present in the absence of fishing mortality using an Escapement Model. In this approach, the initial biomass at the start of the fishery is estimated by adding to terminal biomass to the catch adjusted for natural mortality. Results suggested that the average escapement rates over the 1997-2019 period ranged from 0.36 to 0.95, over a large range of parameter values. Moreover, when hypothetical values of historical catch of 30,000 mt or 33,000 mt were assumed, the average escapement was above 40% over a broad range of plausible values for M and catchability.

The final indirect method considered was an analyses of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data to estimate fishing mortality. The spatial footprint of the fishery is highly concentrated with nearly all fishing activity occurring in an area less than 900 nm² in 2019. In 2017 and 2018 the fishery footprint was less than 550 nm². Estimates of area swept by vessels suggest rates of fishing mortality that would not be sustainable or profitable unless the population was continuously replenished by migrations. This conclusion is directly supported by the results of the mass balance model, even though the models are completely independent of each other and share no common data or parameters. The VMS analyses were further extended to consider the effective fishing mortality on the entire in the US stock area. Effective F can be written as a function of the ratio of population densities in the fished and unfished areas and the total areas for each. Based on these assumptions the estimated maximum total fishing mortality on the population would range from 0.001 to 0.038 (i.e., 0.013/24 to 0.912/24) week⁻¹. The high value of 0.038 is approximately an order of magnitude below the candidate fishing mortality reference points reported in Hendrickson and Hart (2006).

The system of indirect methods can be refined by incorporating the results of Manderson et al. and the results of the VMS analyses. With these updates, the average biomass estimates for the 1997-2019 period ranged from 137 to 652 kt using the Envelope Method. The corresponding average escapement values ranged from 0.66 to 0.97 given the observed catches. Given a hypothetical annual catch of 33 kt over this same period, the range of average escapements was

0.42 to 0.92. Finally, the range of feasible effective F s for 2017-2019 was 0.082/24 to 0.167/24 or 0.003 to 0.007 week⁻¹.

The SSC followed up with a series of questions related to assumptions about catchability. The catchability parameter does not consider the dispersal of squid above the net which could occur even during day time hours when *Illex* are largely on the bottom to avoid predators. Commercial harvesters report a large fraction of squid above the headropes of their nets which are several fold higher than research bottom trawls. These observations suggest lower overall q values and therefore higher swept areas biomass estimates. By consistently overestimating q the resulting estimates of F are also overestimated.

SSC further suggested that in view of the limited overlap of populations between seasonal surveys and no generational overlap between annual surveys, the focus for assessments should be on the most recent years.

The SSC questioned whether the minimal overlap of the fishery footprint with the population footprint is sufficient to conclude that fishing mortality is low. The simple answer is no, because it is the flux of animals through the footprint of the fishery that determines the rate of fishing mortality. Think of a net at the mouth of a salmon river. Although it constitutes a small fraction of the habitat it still has a high potential to exert a high F on the stock because most of the population will transit through the fished area. Such a concept for *Illex* is highly unlikely, but same principle applies. A low percentage of overlap does not guarantee a low exploitation rate.

The SSC's questions led to further clarification of the "move-along" rule used to interpret the behavior of harvesters in small areas. The move-along rule is a function of the school density below the vessel rather than the average density in the stock area.

During preparation of this report, several harvesters noted that many fishable areas are inaccessible due to gear conflicts. This would in fact lead to increased escapement. Conceptually escapement in these analyses assumes that only part of the stock is observable in US and Canadian waters. If some fraction of the resource is never available to the survey or fishing areas, then the estimated escapements would be biased low. For example, if escapement were estimated as 0.5 but if 30% of the population always remained offshore, then the actual escapement would be $0.5 \times 0.7 + 1.0 \times 0.3 = 0.65$. In other words, 70% of the population would be exposed to a 50% escapement fishery and 30% of the population would have 100% escapement.

The SSC noted that the methods provide insights on the potential magnitude of escapement but do not provide insights into what is necessary for a sustainable fishery. The approaches presented do not provide an estimate of the overfishing limit (OFL).

Didden Staff Memo

Jason Didden summarized the staff recommendation to increase the quota to 33,000 mt. This value is within the scope of a pending new EA which analyzed potential effect of catches up to 40,000 mt and appeared consistent with the Council's recent adoption of a liberalized risk

policy. The proposed 10% increase from the 2020 quota is viewed as an interim measure until the results and outcomes of the 2021 *Illex* RTA can be considered.

The SSC members questioned the choice of a single alternative ABC. Only one value was selected for evaluation in consultation with Council leadership. The Escapement Model was used to compare last year's quota of 30,000 mt with the proposed value of 33,000 mt. The SSC expressed concerns that future analyses of this type should include discussion of options with the SSC in advance on the meeting to avoid the appearance of a foregone conclusion. The SSC agreed that this was a reasonable interim step given that a Research Track Assessment is in progress. Should such an analysis be required in the future, the SSC requests it be consulted beforehand to help refine the request. Further discussion of this topic is summarized under

Other Business.

As a further point of clarification, the analyses treated the ABC as equivalent to catch but that the actual commercial quota would be adjusted downward to account for discards.

Public Comment

An industry member asked whether the risk of overfishing for *Illex* was less than that afforded other species under management in the Mid-Atlantic region. In response, it was noted that direct comparisons of risk were not possible but that all of the analyses suggested that the risk of overfishing was low across the full range of plausible parameter values. The industry member urged consideration of the full range of quotas up to the current limit of 40,000 mt specified in the EIS.

Industry members appreciated the quality of the work and the uniqueness of the *Illex* fishery. Commenters noted that the robust life history of squid, the relatively small fleet, low discards, and concentration of fishing mortality into relatively short season all suggest low risk of overfishing.

Another industry representative noted that fishermen reduce transit and search times as much as possible by focusing on known areas of abundance. It was suggested that an increase of the ABC to 35,000 mt, when reduced by discard estimates would result in a quota of 33,000 mt, which would allow an extra week of fishing by the fleet at the end of the season. The valuable collaboration with industry and their provision of data and expert judgement was also highlighted.

By way of written comment, one fishermen observed that Russian vessels fished around the perimeter of squid aggregations which tended to drive squid to the bottom and reduce dispersal. The commenter also suggested inclusion of a fishermen on the SSC.

***Illex* ABCs for 2021 and 2022**

Following this general discussion, the SSC addressed the Terms of Reference for *Illex* Squid. Responses by the SSC (in *italics*) to the Terms of Reference provided by the MAFMC are as follows:

For *Illex* Squid, the SSC will provide a written report that identifies the following for the 2021-2022 fishing years:

- 1) Review the appropriateness of the staff recommendation to modify the *Illex* squid ABC from 30,000 MT to 33,000 MT for the 2021 fishing season and an ABC of 33,000 MT for the 2022 fishing season. If the staff recommendation of 33,000 MT is inappropriate, specify an alternative ABC for 2021, if needed, and for 2022 and provide any supporting information used to make this determination.

There is no OFL available for Illex squid. The SSC did not develop a method to generate an F_{MSY} proxy. Accordingly, the SSC reviewed and accepted an ad hoc approach to developing an ABC recommendation presented in a working paper presented by Dr. Paul Rago (Rago 2021, working paper).

*Based on evidence presented to it, including patterns that suggest an increase in abundance, low levels of exploitation, and catches that have been constrained by existing ABCs for the last four years, the SSC continues to believe that the *Illex* stock is at a high level of abundance and experiencing a low exploitation rate.*

*Under its risk policy, the Council accepts a higher risk of overfishing when a stock is at a high level of abundance (i.e., $B/B_{MSY} > 1$). While awaiting results of a Research Track Assessment that is currently underway, Council staff recommended an incremental approach to establishing an ABC that recognizes the high likelihood that *Illex* squid are at a high level of abundance and experiencing a low rate of exploitation. Council staff recommended an interim ABC of 33,000 MT.*

Analyses presented to the ABC in Dr. Rago's working paper indicated that an ABC of this level is likely not to be in conflict with the Council's risk policy.

The SSC recommends an ABC of 33,000 MT for 2021 and 2022 pending acceptance of results from the Research Track Assessment that is currently underway and may be available early in 2022.

- 2) If appropriate, specify any metrics the SSC could examine in late 2021 or 2022 to determine if any 2022 ABC modification might be appropriate;

In the short term, the SSC will consider:

- a) *Pattern and distribution of landings during the upcoming fishing season, and*
- b) *Pattern and distribution of catches (if available) during the upcoming surveys.*

The SSC recommends further analyses similar to those presented in the Rago (2021, working paper), including a wider range of ABC specifications be explored in the future. The SSC notes its discussions were constrained during the meeting because only analyses of a single

ABC value were made available. The SSC notes it was not possible to evaluate whether ABCs higher than 33,000 MT were similarly compliant with the Council risk policy. Additional analyses that evaluate other possible ABCs may set the foundation for a continued incremental approach to increasing ABC.

The SSC recommends including the approach explored in the Rago working paper (2021, working paper) in the Research Track Assessment so that it receives more complete peer review. Currently, results are available for only two levels of ABC (30,000 MT and 33,000 MT), and these preclude an assessment of how risk changes as ABC varies.

- 3) The most significant sources of scientific uncertainty associated with determination of the ABC;

The SSC notes the following important sources of scientific uncertainty:

- a) The extent, distribution and magnitude of the Illex stock remains poorly defined. The lack of biomass and exploitation rate estimates for this species.*
- b) The extent to which catch is driven by variation in availability to the fishery as opposed to variation in underlying abundance remains largely unknown.*
- c) Whether a 40% escapement B_{MSY} proxy is appropriate as a foundation for management of Illex is uncertain.*
- d) The level, extent and inter-annual variability in immigration into, emigration from and recruitment to the stock are poorly described.*
- e) Despite progress from the analyses presented, the relative catchability between fishing fleets and the survey remains poorly quantified.*

- 4) The materials considered by the SSC in reaching its recommendations;

- *Rago, P (2021). Indirect Methods for Bounding Biomass and Fishing Mortality for Illex Squid and Implications of an Alternative Quota in 2022. Working paper submitted the SSC, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. May 2021. ([Rago document link](#))*
- *Manderson, J. P., B. Lowman, B. Galuardi and A. Mercer (2021). Plausible bounds for availability of and net efficiency for northern shortfin squid in the US fishery and Northeast Fishery Science Center Bottom Trawl Survey. Working paper submitted the SSC, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. May 2021. ([Manderson et al. document link](#))*
- *Staff memorandum Butterfish, Longfin and Illex ABC. Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. ([Staff Memo link](#))*
- *Illex Fishery Information Document (2021). Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, April 2021. ([2021 FID link](#))*
- *Squid and Butterfish Fishery Performance Reports (2021). Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, April 2021. ([2021 FPR link](#))*

- 5) A conclusion that the recommendations provided by the SSC are based on scientific information the SSC believes meets the applicable National Standard guidelines for best scientific information available.

The SSC certifies the recommendations are based on the best scientific information available.

The second day of the meeting began with a review of four previously specified ABCs for Butterfish, Longfin Squid, Atlantic Surfclam, and Ocean Quahog. Each species included an overview by the Council lead and an update by the Assessment Lead from the NEFSC. There were no formal Terms of Reference for these stocks, although the SSC had the option of revising the SSC in light of new information. The Covid pandemic affected data collection for all species and influenced the commercial fisheries to varying extents.

Butterfish

Jason Didden began with an overview of the 2020 fishery, findings in the Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report and a review of previously approved ABC. A Research Track Assessment for butterfish is currently underway with Dr. Charles Adams serving as the lead scientist. Dr. Adams provided an overview of the working groups (WG) progress. Notably the WG is hoping to implement a state space model (known as WHAM—Woods Hole Assessment Model) for the first time. This model will allow for incorporation of covariates and estimation of misreported catch. A young of year index, derived from six different fishery independent surveys will be incorporated into the model. The effects of shifting biomass will be addressed via changes in survey strata definitions and the Ecosystem Dynamics and Assessment Branch will be working on productivity measures. The results of the 2021 RTA will be available in 2022 and be used to set 2023 and 2024 specifications,

The SSC inquired about previous inconsistencies in the estimation of weights at age for older Butterfish. These concerns are not only relevant to butterfish but other species as well and may be due to low sampling frequencies in some years.

Jason Didden observed that fishery prices were down only slightly in 2020 and that dogfish bycatch was impeding fishing activity for some trips. The SSC requested that “new” information in the Fishery Performance reports be highlighted in some way.

The SSC noted in the 2020 Management Track Assessment that biomass has been declining for some time and recruitment has been down since 1999. Stock biomass has remained above B_{msy} due to low fishing mortality. Following a 2/3 reduction in ABC between 2020 and 2021 the stock biomass is projected to increase in 2022. Dr. Adams commented that the projections were based on the most recent 10 years of recruitment estimates reflecting a period of lower productivity.

While these trends were of concern to the SSC, several factors led the SSC to conclude that a downward adjustment to the quota was not necessary for 2022. The projected total removals for 2020 are likely to be biased high suggesting a slightly lower F than used in the projections. Industry members reported almost no chance that the quota in 2021 would be attained due to a weakened export market for butterfish and low domestic demand. Results of the RTA for Butterfish will be available in 2021 for use by the SSC in 2022.

The SSC urged that trends in abundance should be followed closely but did not find any compelling evidence to reject the previously **approved ABC of 17,854 mt** for 2022.

Longfin Squid

Jason Didden provided an overview of the fishery and management issues for Longfin Squid. Last year the SSC recommended a constant **ABC of 23,400 mt for 2021-2023**. Landings were down in 2020 due to reduced restaurant demand during the pandemic. Restrictions on shipping and transportation impacted export markets. Revenues decreased even more due to an overall price drop.

The assessment model for Longfin squid does not adequately reflect the intra-year and spatial biological features of the stock. It is thought that there are two dominant cohorts per year with differing productivity, and fishery exploits one predominantly. Current management by trimesters indirectly addresses the linkages between inshore and offshore production differences but a more realistic model to address these differences is preferred. Lisa Hendrickson reported that an ongoing research on maturity and migration (via statolith microchemistry) will lay the basis for an updated assessment approach, but a Longfin squid RTA is currently not on the RT schedule but is being considered for 2026.

The Management Track Assessment process does allow for introduction of more complicated models but the expected effects of such a change are expected to be well beyond the scope envisioned under the MTA. Prior to 2000 a two-cohort model was employed so such a change is not without precedent. Concerns of the SSC included the potential impacts of offshore wind energy development on squid fishing areas and the presence of fishing in known spawning areas. For these reasons, the SSC urged consideration of conducting the RTA before 2026.

Notwithstanding these concerns about modeling and management approaches there was no compelling evidence to change the recommendations from the 2020 MTA and SSC specified ABCs. Therefore, the SSC recommended continuing with the previously **approved ABC of 23,400 mt** for 2022.

Atlantic Surfclam

Jessica Coakley provided an overview of the fishery and management issues for Atlantic Surfclam. The current ABCs for Atlantic Surfclams were specified by the SSC in 2020 following a Level 3 MTA in 2020. Surfclams are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Landings through 2020 have been summarized but no surveys were conducted in 2020. Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog are surveyed by commercial vessels over their entire range every 6 years. The slow rate of change in these sessile stocks, low rates of exploitation, and model formulation justify this sampling strategy.

Spatial analyses of fishing activity by 10-minute squares reveals a shift in landings from south to north over time. Overall LPUE has been declining but remains high in Southern New England and on Georges Bank. Landed value of the fishery declined by about \$5 million between 2019 and 2020. In the Fishery Performance Report industry advisors preferred stability in the quota. Sales continue to be low due to Covid but distributors are hoping for a more normal summer.

Wind energy development continues to be a concern because it will reduce access to traditional fishing areas and concentrate effort elsewhere.

The SSC expressed concerns about the apparent conversion of high fishing success areas into average density areas. Earlier assessments interpreted these average density areas as thresholds for profitable fishing activity of roughly 50 bushels per hour fished. The population consequences of these serial reductions in density are not known but restrictions due to wind energy development may exacerbate these uncertainties. Dr. Daniel Hennen reported that survey data are inadequate to determine threshold patch densities for reproductive success. A number of GIS exercises are underway at Rutgers University to map overlap of fishing areas with wind farms but these products are not yet available for public distribution. GARFO has produced a useful mapping utility that overlaps wind lease areas and historical landings areas across species <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/data/socioeconomic-impacts-atlantic-offshore-wind-development>. Industry representatives expressed some concerns about two 10-minute squares off Atlantic City that are in the path of proposed power cables from offshore projects; these areas currently produce about 65% of the regional landings.

Although the resource remains above Bmsy, stock size is beginning to approach this level, a characteristic of a mature fishery. Risk assessments suggest that Surfclam and Ocean Quahog are highly sensitive to climate change. Coupled with the northeastern shift in fishing effort, the updated perception is that the Georges Bank population is not as large as previously thought, and because of the potential effects of wind energy development, close monitoring of changes is recommended. None of these concerns were sufficient at this time for the SSC to recommend changes in previously agreed ABCs for 2022.

Ocean Quahog

Jessica Coakley provided an overview of the fishery and management issues for Ocean Quahog. Ocean Quahog was last assessed in 2020 via a Level 1 Management Track Assessment. The stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The SSC used the modified OFL probability distribution with CV of 100% and P* of 0.49 based on new risk policy to set a constant six-year ABC for 2021-2026. Landings have been declining in southern areas but the overall pattern of LPUE is much flatter than for Atlantic Surfclam. Total revenue declined by about \$3M in 2020 compared to 2019.

SSC members reiterated concerns about exploitation of this long-lived species especially in the face of climate changes and wind energy development. The NEFSC assessment lead Dr. Daniel Hennen suggested that these concerns are not as acute as for Atlantic Surfclam. He noted that the Georges Bank stock is large and relatively untouched and that recruitment appears to be consistent over time. Other SSC members noted that wind energy development could create refugia beneficial to maintaining population stability. This aspect would be hard to quantify in view of the relatively few 10-minute squares now being fished heavily.

Industry advisors identified an important interjurisdictional concern related to the designation of EFH by the New England Fishery Management Council. A joint meeting with representatives from both Councils, the GARFO and industry is recommended to address impacts on the clam industry.

None of these concerns were sufficient at this time for the SSC to recommend changes in previously agreed Ocean Quahog ABC for 2022.

Other Business

Development of a Working Group to “Operationalize” the State of the Ecosystem Report

Following the presentation of the 2021 State of the Ecosystem Report in March 2021, the SSC report to the Council noted that a “more focused effort on how broader ecosystem indices might transfer into uncertainty of OFL estimates to derive ABCs could be a valuable advance. Ideally, the linkage of SOE with the appropriate level of OFL CV could become a regular part of future analyses.” There was broad support by the SSC for “establishing a working group to identify information and trends in the SOE that can be used in the setting of ABCs.”

Drs. Sarah Gaichas and Geret DePiper (NEFSC) initiated the discussion of how this process might work. Tasks could be broken down into short and long-term objectives. Short-term objectives ensure that the SOE is relevant to upcoming assessments whereas longer term items would include a process for integrating results of the SOE into the SSC’s decisions on ABCs. Brandon Muffley noted that an effort to operationalize the SOE would have management benefits for strategic planning by the Council and their funding of research priorities. Conceptually the approach would be similar to the Ecosystem and Socio-economic Profile (ESP) Reports used by the North Pacific Council. The ESP reports include the human dimension of ecosystems. A similar approach for mid-Atlantic stocks would ensure consideration of factors not always captured in stock assessments. Such considerations may require broadening the bases used to determine the CV of the OFL for ABC determination. Discussions sparked an enthusiastic response by SSC members to participate in a WG.

The WG could also address climate changes beyond temperature effects to include oceanographic changes. Some cautionary notes were expressed by the SSC noting that it will be necessary to identify specific causal links between an indicator and its effects on species yields. Major gaps in our understanding persist. Simply increasing the uncertainty of the OFL estimate to reduce the ABC may be inappropriate if a reduction in the OFL *per se* is more scientifically justified.

Conceptually, both bottom-up and top-down approaches could be tried. One or more case studies might be used to test competing approaches by walking through the SOE report to evaluate how a given factor or index would affect the uncertainty in development of catch advice.

A critical question remains--If an assessment model had no explicit consideration of an ecosystem component how do you superimpose the potential effects on that species/assessment? Stock assessments generally include the cumulative effects of changes in average weights and other life history parameters. It will be important to avoid “double counting” of effects for instances where an ecosystem factor is responsible for a given change that is already included in the assessment. To address this concern and others it will be important to include stock assessment scientists in this discussion.

In summary, support for the working group was strong and an initial list of volunteers (Gaichas, Fay, Latour, Wilberg, DePiper, Jiao, Gabriel, Secor) was identified.

Research Track Assessment Schedule

Brandon Muffley provided the SSC with an overview of the Research Track Assessment process and solicited comments on the initial set proposed assessments for 2026. Currently, one topic based and three species-specific assessment proposals are recommended for consideration by the NRCC. If the topic-based proposal is selected, that would occupy one of the two available peer review slots (spring and fall) and the other could be used for species specific assessments; if species-based proposals are selected, there would be four assessments. Assessment of the Winter Flounder complex (3 stocks) – would take two slots given the number of stocks assessed. Longfin squid and Monkfish are the other two species under consideration and could fill the other available slot. The topic-based proposal under consideration for 2026 is an ecosystem topic focusing on considerations of ecosystem and climate information in the stock assessment process.

SSC members inquired about the genesis of the RTA proposals. It was noted that these are the result of collaborations between the NEFSC staff and a subcommittee of the NRCC. The longer planning horizon is designed to ensure sufficient time for research on the topic or species. However, in some cases, the critical research gaps may preclude a particular species. For example, a validated ageing procedure for Monkfish has yet to be developed. The SSC will have the opportunity to provide direct input at its September meeting. Concerns were expressed that there should be a tighter link between SSC research recommendations and RTA planning. In particular, it was noted that the expected effects of wind energy development would create greater needs for spatial methods of stock assessment. Some concerns were raised that the theme-based RTAs may not have their intended benefits if they duplicated broader efforts in these areas. For example, dynamic reference points are being addressed by many research groups around the world. Consideration should be given to the value of the information produced and reducing overlap with other research efforts.

Others on the SSC advocated for more of a systems engineering approach to identify critical needs. Brandon noted that the NRCC is likely to formalize a RTA Steering Committee to look at specific and general research needs across both Councils and all FMPs. By design, the RTAs are to be products of longer-term research effort so the ability to alter the schedule is limited. This may be counterproductive if priorities change over the five-year planning horizon.

National SSC

The 7th meeting of the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS) was originally scheduled for August 2020 in Sitka, AK. The meeting was subsequently rescheduled to be a virtual meeting in 2021. Upon further consideration, the SCS Steering Committee is now recommending that an in-person meeting in 2022 would be more beneficial overall. The CCC will be considering this proposal at its next meeting.

***Illex* Process Discussion**

Following the first day of the meeting, Dr. Tom Miller, species lead for *Illex* squid, expressed important concerns about the process used to reconsider the *Illex* ABC for 2021 and 2022, and the limited number of alternative ABCs considered. Following a series of emails with Tom, I proposed that we discuss Tom's concerns in greater detail under Other Business on May 12. Dr. Michael Wilberg again served as chair of the meeting for this discussion.

Dr. Miller's comments were not criticisms of the work that was done but he did have concerns about the process of identifying potential ABCs in advance and restricting the analyses to limited options. Transparency, a primary objective of all SSC deliberations, was obscured by the wording of the Terms of Reference which appeared to constrain the options of the SSC. In most instances, the SSC considers a full range of factors before deciding upon the basis for a particular ABC value. In this instance, the SSC began with consideration of a particular value, followed by the justification.

The SSC acknowledged that prior to most SSC meetings Council staff will prepare a candidate ABC based on an earlier decision by the SSC. However, this is viewed as a starting point for discussions and not necessarily definitive. Members of the SSC supported Dr. Miller's perspective, and again noted the paramount importance transparency and trust in the derivation of ABCs. To maintain this perspective one alternative may be to have the SSC species lead make a specific recommendation for an ABC. In any event, several options should be analyzed prior to such discussions. These recommendations are consistent with the Council's Standard Operating Procedures for the SSC.

SSC members also noted that the wording of TOR 1, especially the use of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" could be improved. Such words can be viewed as divisive and should be more neutral and fully reflect the nature of scientific uncertainty. While specificity of the TOR was a concern, several members noted that other Councils do make staff recommendations on a regular basis, with the understanding that they are not binding. From a group dynamics perspective, beginning with a specific alternative often serves to catalyze discussions better than a blank slate.

The SSC concluded the discussion with a number of concerns which included

- Improved specification of scenarios and necessary computations for presentation,
- Improvements on wording of ToRs
- Clarification of the process for considering staff and external recommendations and boundaries about what the SSC is allowed to do. Deviations from staff recommendations have occurred in the past even in instances where no analyses have been done.
- Can decisions about data poor species be done in a more rigorous and consistent fashion?

Members of the public suggested that SSC consider sources of "certainty" as well as the traditional emphasis on "uncertainty" to help balance the discussions about data poor species. Others also recommended that the SSC's debate about the process for *Illex* be fully characterized in the report to the Council.



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting

May 11 – 12, 2021 via Webinar

Webinar Information

(Note: same information for both days)

Link: [May 2021 SSC Meeting](#)

Call-in Number: 1-844-621-3956

Access Code: 129 786 6609##

AGENDA

Tuesday, May 11, 2021

12:30 Welcome/Overview of meeting agenda (P. Rago)

12:40 Review and potential change to 2021 *Illex* ABC specifications and set 2022 *Illex* ABC

- Review updated work products from the *Illex* Quota Work Group
- Review of staff memo and 2021 - 2022 ABC recommendations (J. Didden)
 - Update on the 2021 *Illex* Research Track stock assessment
- SSC 2021 – 2022 *Illex* ABC recommendations (T. Miller)

5:30 Adjourn

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

8:30 Butterfish data and fishery update; review of previously recommended 2022 ABC; update on the 2021 Butterfish Research Track stock assessment (J. Didden)

9:15 Longfin Squid data and fishery update; review of previously recommended 2022 ABC (J. Didden)

10:00 Atlantic Surfclam data and fishery update; review of previously recommended 2022 ABC (J. Coakley)

10:45 Ocean Quahog data and fishery update; review of previously recommended 2022 ABC (J. Coakley)

11:30 Other Business

- Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem report
 - Discussion on ways to operationalize report; formation of SSC sub-group
- Review and feedback on possible 2026 Research Track assessment priorities

12:30 Adjourn

Note: agenda topic times are approximate and subject to change

ATTACHMENT 2

MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee May 11 – 12, 2021

Meeting Attendance via Webinar

Name

Affiliation

SSC Members in Attendance:

Paul Rago (SSC Chairman)	NOAA Fisheries (retired)
Tom Miller	University of Maryland – CBL
Ed Houde	University of Maryland – CBL (emeritus)
Dave Secor	University of Maryland – CBL
John Boreman	NOAA Fisheries (retired)
Geret DePiper	NOAA Fisheries NEFSC
Lee Anderson (May 11 th only)	University of Delaware (emeritus)
Jorge Holzer	University of Maryland
Yan Jiao	Virginia Tech University
Rob Latour	Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Brian Rothschild	Univ. of Massachusetts – Dartmouth (emeritus)
Olaf Jensen	Rutgers University
Sarah Gaichas	NOAA Fisheries NEFSC
Wendy Gabriel	NOAA Fisheries NEFSC
Mike Wilberg (Vice-Chairman)	University of Maryland – CBL
Alexei Sharov	Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources
Mike Frisk	Stony Brook University
Mark Holliday	NOAA Fisheries (retired)
Cynthia Jones	Old Dominion University
Gavin Fay	U. Massachusetts—Dartmouth

Others in attendance (only includes presenters and members of public who spoke):

Lisa Hendrickson	NEFSC
Charles Adams (May 12 th only)	NEFSC
John Manderson (May 11 th only)	Open Ocean Research
Jason Didden	MAFMC staff
Brandon Muffley	MAFMC staff
Eric Reid	NEFMC Vice-Chair
Greg DiDomenico	Lunds Fisheries
Katie Almeida	The Town Dock
Jessica Coakley (May 12 th only)	MAFMC staff
Dan Hennen (May 12 th only)	NEFSC
Peter Himchak (May 12 th only)	LaMonica Fine Foods



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 16, 2021

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Council Discusses Scallops, Habitat, Climate Change, NTAP, Congressional Updates, and Ecosystem at April Meeting

The New England Fishery Management Council met [April 13-15, 2021](#) by webinar. Here are some highlights.

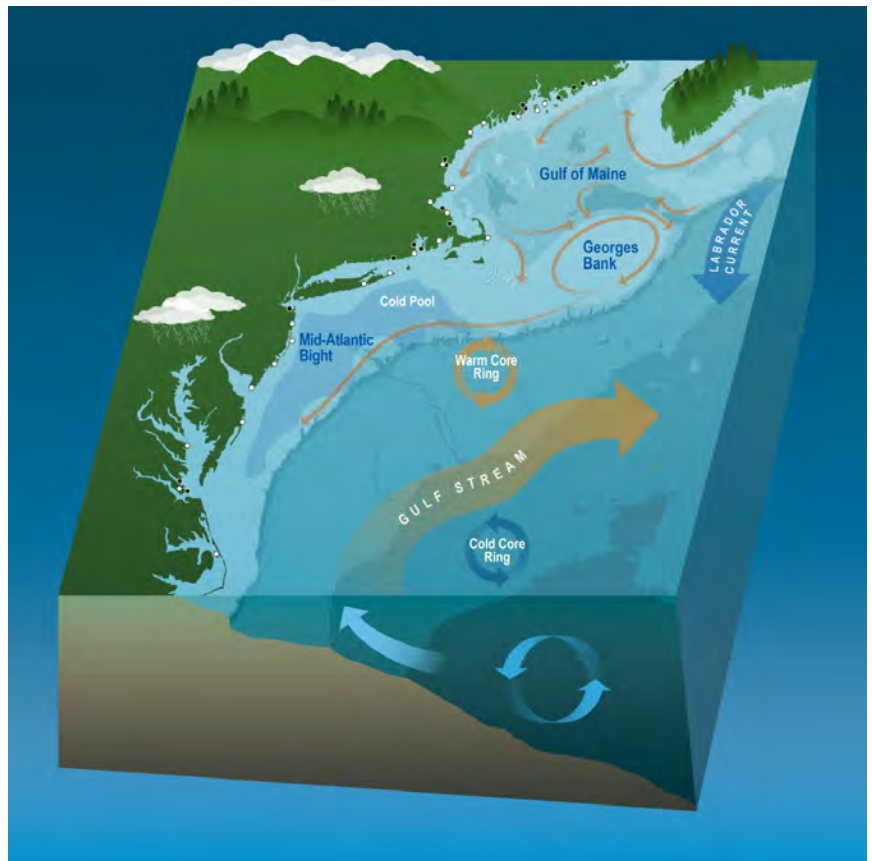
CLIMATE SCIENCE: The Council received a climate science [presentation](#) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center that covered: observed changes on the Northeast Continental Shelf related to temperature, currents, and pH; NOAA's Climate Science Strategy; the Northeast Regional Action Plan; and more.

NRCC CLIMATE CHANGE PLANNING: The Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) is moving forward with an East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative. The NRCC consists of leadership from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The South Atlantic Council, although not an NRCC member, is participating in the climate change scenario planning initiative.

The Core Team supporting this work met for the first time on [March 11, 2021](#). During its April meeting, the New England Council received:

- A general [presentation](#) on the initiative, which is described in the [draft plan](#) being considered by the NRCC in May; and
- An overview of the six phases of work associated with the initiative and approximate timeframes for each phase.

Public workshops are planned as part of this work, possibly later in 2021. Here's the planning initiative [webpage](#).



Shown above, the U.S. Northeast Continental Shelf. A list of upcoming webinars in the NOAA Fisheries U.S. Northeast Climate-Fisheries Seminar Series is posted [here](#). – NOAA Fisheries graphic



New England Fishery Management Council

EXECUTIVE ORDER LISTENING SESSION: In conjunction with the New England Council's April meeting, NOAA Fisheries conducted a public listening session on Section 216(c) of [Executive Order 14008](#), Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. This section relates to making fisheries and protected resources more resilient to climate change.

Council members and the public asked questions and provided comments on the Executive Order to NOAA Fisheries leadership. More information on how to provide further comments can be found [here](#).

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC), which is made up of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors of all eight of the nation's [regional fishery management councils](#), submitted comments on Section 216(a) of the Executive Order. This section refers to the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, often referred to as the 30x30 initiative. The CCC's letter can be found [here](#).

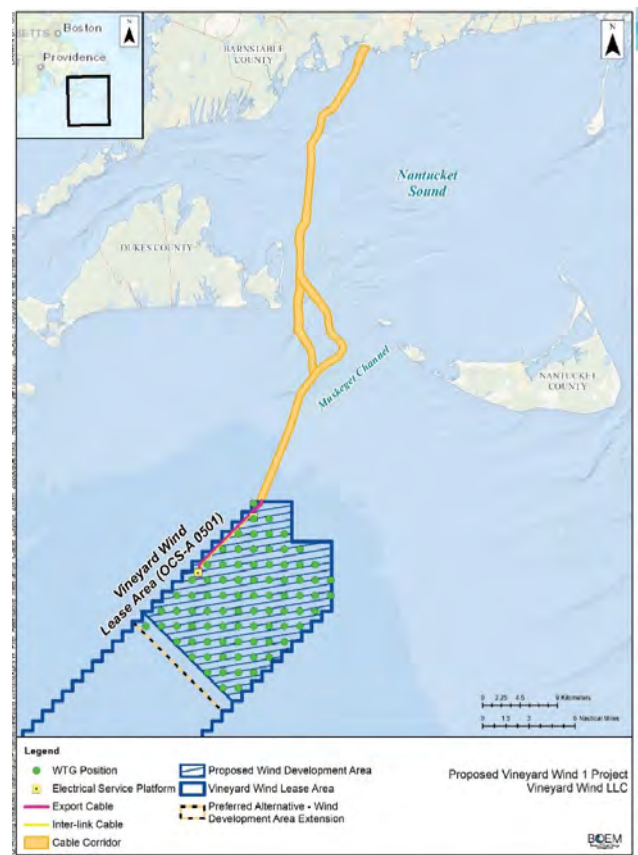
CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE: The Council also received an update on recent congressional activities, which covered: (1) a rundown of new leadership on key marine-related committees in Congress; and (2) an overview of newly introduced and potential bills that will or may be addressed by the current Congress.

HABITAT: Under this report, the Council received updates on three topics – habitat areas on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank, aquaculture, and offshore wind.

Northern Edge – Last fall, the Council approved a 2021 habitat priority to “assess the possibility of and, if possible, develop an action to revise Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank.”

The Council's [Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 \(OHA2\)](#), which became effective in April 2018, proposed revising the HMAs and Closed Areas on Georges Bank and included establishing two new Northern Edge HMAs. One would have been closed to fishing. The other would have been closed to mobile bottom-tending gears, except for groundfish vessels west of 67° 20' W longitude, but would have allowed scallop vessels to fish in a scallop rotational program under certain conditions.

NOAA Fisheries disapproved this portion of the amendment for reasons described in the [OHA2 final rule](#). Since that time, scallop industry members have been asking the Council to revisit the HMAs to investigate options to allow a limited amount of scallop fishing on the Northern Edge. The Council agreed to do so as a 2021 habitat priority, recognizing the undertaking would be a multi-year effort that would require input from many.



Above, the Vineyard Wind I Lease Area and Proposed Development Area. The cable corridor to shore is shown in yellow. – BOEM graphic



New England Fishery Management Council

At this point, the Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT) is in the early stages of developing a white paper to: (1) summarize available information; (2) identify issues of concern; and (3) assess the feasibility of revising the Northern Edge HMAs through a new action.

The Habitat PDT is consulting with other PDTs, the Habitat Committee, Habitat Advisory Panel, full Council, and science/management partners. The Council will continue to receive updates as the work progresses.

Aquaculture – The Council reviewed a draft plan outlining ways to better engage and coordinate with federal partners on aquaculture issues. Development of this [Aquaculture Coordination Plan](#) was another 2021 habitat priority. The plan will continue to be refined as needed by the Habitat Committee. Here is the Council's [Aquaculture Policy](#) and [Aquaculture Background Document](#).

Offshore Wind – The Council received an overview of ongoing offshore wind development activities in the Northeast Region and agreed to submit formal comments on the following projects: Ocean Wind LLC – New Jersey; the New York Bight Wind Energy Areas; and the Port Access Study for Northern New York Bight. The Council supported developing and submitting these comments jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Council if appropriate. The two Council maintain an informational [offshore wind webpage](#) and collaborate frequently on offshore wind issues. Maps of the above projects can be found in the meeting [presentation](#).

ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOPS: The Council received a brief progress report on the status of [2021 scallop work priorities](#) and an introduction to the new [Scallop Survey Working Group](#), which recently held its [first meeting](#). The group is looking into ways to facilitate collaborations for conducting scallop surveys. Documents associated with the Council's April meeting scallop discussion can be found [here](#).



Atlantic sea scallops caught during a UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) research trip. – SMAST photo

New Biological Opinion (BiOp) for Scallop Fishery – It's About Turtles



NOAA Fisheries is on the homestretch of revising the 2012 Biological Opinion for the Atlantic sea scallop fishery, which focuses on turtle interactions. The Council received a [brief update](#) on the timeline associated with the new BiOp and is expected to receive a detailed overview during its June or September meeting after the Biological Opinion is completed. More specific information can be found in the [presentation](#) the Council received in April 2020 explaining the reasons why consultation on the BiOp was reinitiated.



New England Fishery Management Council

NORTHEAST TRAWL ADVISORY PANEL (NTAP) – The Council heard a short recap of NTAP’s [March 19, 2021](#) meeting. (1) NTAP is continuing to work on revisions to its existing [charter](#). The Council will receive more information on this initiative at a future meeting. (2) The Northeast Fisheries Science Center has funds available to support NTAP research. The Council agreed by consensus that these funds should be used to support a project titled “Quantifying the impact of a restrictor rope on the composition, rate, and size-distribution of catch derived from a bottom trawl survey.” More information is available in the [funding memo](#). The Mid-Atlantic Council also supported using the available funds for this project.

STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM – The Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented the [2021 State of the Ecosystem Report for New England](#). Here is the [presentation](#).

The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the report during its March meeting and provided [recommendations](#) on possible revisions for incorporation into next year’s report. The SSC briefed the Council on these recommendations.

“Regime shifts and changes in how the multiple system drivers interact can result in ecosystem reorganization as species and humans respond and adapt to the new environment.”

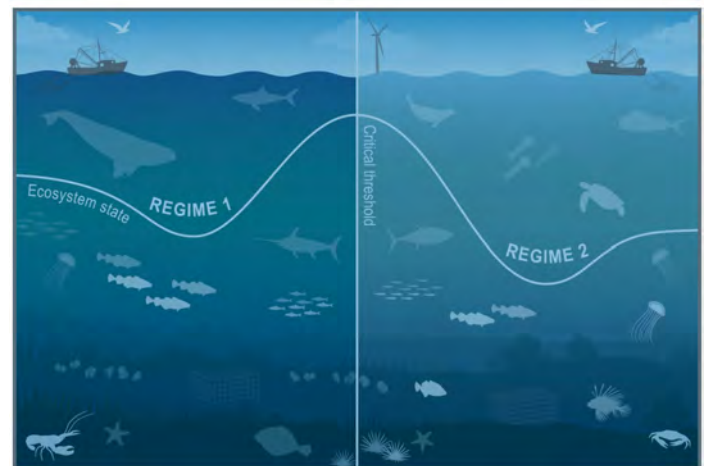
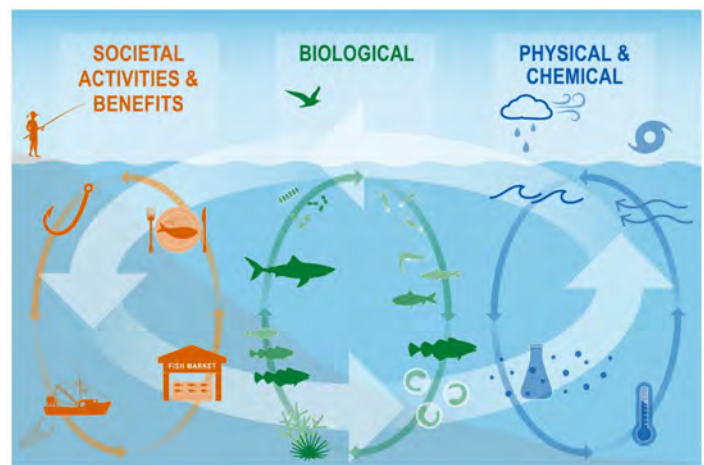
– 2021 State of the Ecosystem Report, New England

EBFM: The Council received a short update on a recent meeting of the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Steering Committee, which now has [five new industry members](#).

The committee is developing guidance about how the Council should conduct public information workshops on EBFM using the example Fishery Ecosystem Plan ([eFEP](#)) for Georges Bank, science [communication tools](#), and tangible worked example [tools](#). Here is the [meeting summary](#).

MORE COMING: News on actions regarding herring, skates, and the party/charter recreational groundfish fishery will follow soon. Visit the [April 13-15, 2021 meeting webpage](#) for additional info.

Characterizing Ecosystem Change for Fishery Management



(1) Societal, biological, physical, and chemical factors comprise the multiple system drivers that influence marine ecosystems through a variety of different pathways. (2) Changes in the multiple drivers can lead to regime shifts — large, abrupt and persistent changes in the structure and function of an ecosystem. – Excerpt from 2021 report



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 23, 2021

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Council Decides Against Limited Entry for Party/Charter Component of Recreational Groundfish Fishery

The New England Fishery Management Council will not be developing a limited entry program for party/charter vessels that participate in the recreational groundfish fishery. The decision was made during the Council's [April 13-15, 2021](#) webinar meeting.

The Council debated a motion to move ahead with limited entry and thoroughly discussed the advantages and potential drawbacks of using limited entry to manage the for-hire groundfish fleet. The final vote was 7-to-7 with two abstentions. Therefore, the motion failed for lack of a majority and, as such, the Council will not pursue work on a limited entry amendment. Here is a recap of how the Council got to this point.

- The Council voted in January 2018 to ask NOAA Fisheries to publish a [revised control date](#) for the party/charter fishery. The new control date became [March 19, 2018](#), replacing March 30, 2006.
- The Council conducted [listening sessions](#) in April and May of 2019 to gauge public support for potential party/charter limited entry and then received a summery report about those sessions in December 2019.
- The Council made it a [2020 groundfish priority](#) to develop a simple strawman limited entry program for the party/charter fleet and hired a contractor to help with this work.
- The Council made it a [2021 priority](#) to receive the strawman report and decide if an amendment should be initiated.
- The Council received a [presentation](#) during its January 2021 meeting on the Party/Charter Limited Entry [Strawman Proposal](#), which was prepared by [Tidal Bay Consulting](#).
- The Council took time following its January meeting to consider feedback on the proposal and next steps before casting its deciding vote on April 15, 2021.
- Here are the April 2021 [meeting materials](#) and [audio](#) related to this discussion.
- Questions? Contact Dr. Jamie Cournane, the Council's groundfish coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 103, jcournane@nefmc.org.



A successful recreational fishing trip aboard the Lady Tracey Ann, which sails from Eastman's Docks in Seabrook, NH. The large cod were caught in May 2007 on Jeffrey's Ledge in the Gulf of Maine. – Mark Godfroy photo



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 23, 2021

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Atlantic Herring: Council Provides Guidance on Actions to Rebuild Stock, Consider Spawning Protection on Georges Bank

The New England Fishery Management Council received a progress report during its [April 13-15, 2021](#) webinar meeting on two evolving framework adjustments to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan. The Council discussed both actions and provided feedback to guide the Herring Plan Development Team (PDT), Herring Committee, and Herring Advisory Panel (AP) on the work these groups will continue to conduct in the months ahead.

FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 9 – This framework includes two components:

- Measures to rebuild the Atlantic herring resource; and
- Measures to potentially adjust accountability measures (AMs) in the fishery.

In October 2020, the Council received [a letter](#) stating that “NOAA’s Assistant Administrator for Fisheries formally determined the Atlantic herring stock is overfished based on the [best scientific information available](#).” The agency asked the Council to develop and submit a rebuilding program within 15 months, which would give NOAA Fisheries time to review and implement the program within the two-year timeframe required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act for stocks in an overfished condition.

Despite the current low biomass of Atlantic herring, overfishing is not occurring. This factor led several Council members to question whether environmental factors beyond the Council’s control were impacting the status of the stock and whether there were ways to account for environmental impacts in the rebuilding program.

At present, Framework 9 includes

View a Copy
of the
Presentation
Summing Up
Both Herring
Frameworks
[HERE](#)



Atlantic herring. – Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries photo



New England Fishery Management Council

two rebuilding options that need further development and analyses. These focus on: (1) using the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) control rule that the Council approved in [Amendment 8](#) to the herring plan; or (2) using a constant fishing mortality rate (F) based on rebuilding the resource in seven years instead. More information on both approaches will become available at future meetings.

Regarding accountability measures, the herring plan currently includes AMs to adjust sub-annual catch limits (sub-ACLs) due to quota overages and/or to potentially allow carryover of unharvested catch.

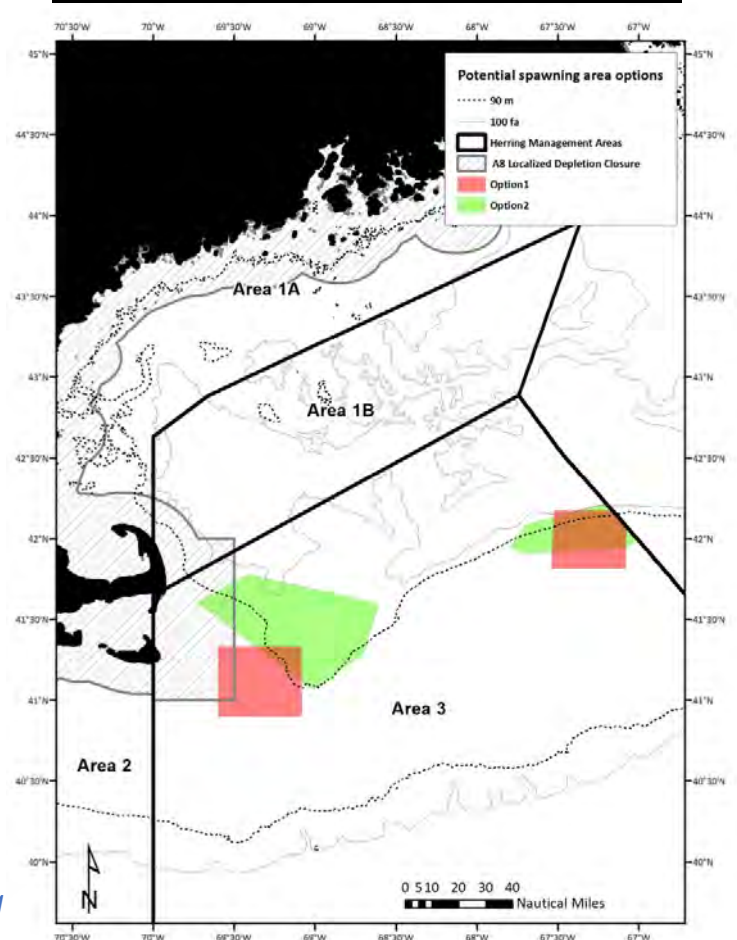
As part of Framework 9, the Council will consider options to adjust AMs when overages occur. However, due to concerns about unintended distributional impacts among the different herring management areas and given the current status of the stock, the Council will not pursue options to allow more flexibility for carryover. This way, unharvested fish will remain in the water to contribute to stock rebuilding. The Council will receive more information about Framework 9 at its June meeting, when it is scheduled to approve the range of alternatives for further development. Final action is expected to take place during the September meeting.

FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 7 – This framework focuses on protecting spawning herring on Georges Bank and is on a longer timeline than Framework 9. The Council will receive another progress report on this action in June.

During the April meeting, the Council took two votes to clarify the scope of the action, which now will allow the Herring PDT, Committee, and AP to proceed with their work. The Council agreed to:

- Specify that any ultimate restrictions related to spawning protection apply only to vessels on a declared Atlantic herring trip; and
 - Refine the goals and objectives of [Framework 7](#) to specify that this action will focus only on measures that minimize potential impacts on adult spawning aggregations of herring.
- *Copies of all herring-related materials used during the Council's discussion are available [here](#).*
- ***Questions?** Contact Deirdre Boelke, the Council's herring plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 105, dboelke@nefmc.org.*

Potential Atlantic Herring Spawning Area Options on Georges Bank



Potential options for Georges Bank spawning closures. **Option 1** is colored red and **Option 2** is green. The gray hatched area is the Inshore Midwater Trawl Restricted Area approved in [Amendment 8](#).



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston SC 29405

Call: (843) 571-4366 | Toll-Free: (866) SAFMC-10 | Fax: (843) 769-4520 | Connect: www.safmc.net

Melvin Bell, Chair | Stephen J. Poland, Vice Chair
John Carmichael, Executive Director

SAFMC Meeting Agenda

Revised

June 14-18, 2021

Meeting Via Webinar

(SAFMC website webinar registration:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4049457759372649999>)

Except for advertised (scheduled) public hearings and public comment sessions, the times indicated on the agenda may be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the completion of agenda items. Interested parties should be aware that meetings may start earlier or later than indicated.

Use the online comment form at: <https://safmc.wufoo.com/forms/m9mrll0e1fm0f/> to submit comment on items on this agenda. Comments will be accepted from May 31 to June 18, 2021. These comments are accessible to the public, part of the Administrative Record of the meeting, and immediately available for Council consideration.

View submitted comments at <https://safmc.wufoo.com/reports/2021-june-council-meeting-public-comment-report/>.

Webinar startup and soundchecks will begin 30 minutes prior to each session.

Monday, June 14, 2021

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Law Enforcement Committee (CLOSED)/Spud Woodward 10:00 am – 10:30 am

- Selection of 2020 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Monday, June 14, 2021

COUNCIL SESSION

COUNCIL SESSION I (CLOSED)/Mel Bell 10:30 am – 12:00 noon

- AP and SSC selection

12:00 noon to 1:30 pm

Lunch

COUNCIL SESSION I/Mel Bell 1:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Call to order and introductions

Adopt agenda

Approve minutes

- Reports (state agencies, Council liaisons, NOAA OLE, USCG)

- South Atlantic Research Priorities
 - Status of research to meet 2019 priorities
 - Approval of 2021-2022 South Atlantic Research Priorities
- Southeast Longline Surveys Presentation (SEFSC)
- Commercial Electronic Logbook Update (SEFSC)
- Dolphin Participatory Workshops Presentation (SEFSC)
- Recreational Workgroup Updates
 - Joint Workgroup with the GMFMC on Section 102 Update
 - SAFMC Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup
- HMS AP and ICCAT Update
- Protected Resources Report

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Snapper Grouper Committee/Jessica McCawley 8:30 am – 12 noon

- Gag
 - Assessment presentation (SEFSC Staff)
 - SSC recommendations (Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair)
 - Fishery overview
 - Management response
- Red Porgy (Amendment 50)
 - AP recommendations (Jimmy Hull, AP Chair)
 - Review and approve for public hearings

12:00 noon to 1:30 pm Lunch

Snapper Grouper Committee/Jessica McCawley 1:30 pm – 5:30 pm

- Golden Tilefish
 - Assessment presentation (SEFSC Staff)
 - SSC recommendations (Genny Nesslage)
 - Fishery overview
 - Management response
- Yellowtail Snapper
 - Fishery Overview
 - AP recommendations (Jimmy Hull)
 - Review options paper

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Snapper Grouper Committee/Jessica McCawley 8:30 am – 12:00 noon

- Red Snapper

- Assessment presentation (SEFSC Staff)
- SSC recommendations (Genny Nesslage)
- Fishery overview
- Management response
- AP recommendations on items not already covered (Jimmy Hull)
- Updates on South Atlantic Red Snapper Count and Greater Amberjack Count

12:00 noon to 1:30 pm Lunch

Dolphin Wahoo Committee/Anna Beckwith 1:30 pm – 3:45 pm

- Amendment 10 – review and approve for formal review

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

PUBLIC COMMENTS

4:00 pm If you would like to provide comment during the live public comment session, please sign up at the following link:
<https://safmc.wufoo.com/forms/mm6cio00x6jk33/>
Public comment will be accepted regarding any of the items on the Council agenda. The Council Chair, based on the number of individuals wishing to comment, will determine the amount of time provided to each commenter.

Approval for Public Hearings:

- (1) Red Porgy (SG Amendment 50)
- (2) King Mackerel (CMP Amendment 34)

Final Approval:

- (1) Dolphin Wahoo (Amendment 10)

Thursday, June 17, 2021

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Dolphin Wahoo Committee/Anna Beckwith 8:30 am – 10:00 am

- Amendment 10 (continued)
- Project plan for Dolphin Wahoo amendments – provide guidance on type of amendments and overall topics for inclusion.

Mackerel Committee/Steve Poland 10:00 am – 12:00 noon

- AP report (Ira Laks, AP Chair)
- King Mackerel (Amendment 34) – approve for public hearings

- Gulf Cobia (Amendment 32)

12:00 noon to 1:30 pm Lunch

Executive Committee/Mel Bell 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

- CCC Report
- 2021 budget update and approval
- FMP workplan review

Habitat & Ecosystem Committee/Steve Poland 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

- Coral 10 – review public hearing comments and approve all actions
- Habitat Blueprint update
- AP report (Anne Deaton, AP Chair)

Friday, June 18, 2021

COUNCIL SESSION

COUNCIL SESSION II /Mel Bell 8:30 am – 12:00 noon

1. Council staff reports
 - a. Executive Director
 - b. Allocation Decision Tool update
 - c. Climate Change Scenario Planning update
 - d. Citizen Science Update
 - e. Outreach and Communications update
2. Outreach and Communications AP report (Scott Baker, AP Chair)
3. NMFS SERO Reports
 - a. Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology
 - b. For-Hire Electronic Reporting Update
 - c. Landings Update
4. Committee Reports
5. SSC and AP Appointments
6. Executive Order 14008
7. Other business
8. Upcoming meetings

Adjourn