



Bluefish Joint Advisory Panel Webinar Meeting Monday, August 1, 2022

MAFMC Advisors in attendance: Steve Heins (NC), Willy Goldsmith (DC), Phil Simon (NJ), Mike Waine (NC), Paul Lane (NC), Eric Burnley (DE), William Mandulak (NC)

ASMFC Advisors in attendance: Peter Fallon (ME), Charlie Locke (NC)

Other attendees: Karson Cisneros (MAFMC Staff), Dustin Colson Leaning (ASMFC Staff), Alan Bianchi (NC DMF), Chris Batsavage (Council and Board Member), Michael Celestino (NJ DEEP), Thomas Newman, Cynthia Ferrio (GARFO), Michelle Duval (Council Member)

The Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on August 1st, 2022, to provide comments on bluefish recreational management measures for 2023. AP feedback at this meeting will inform the Council and Board's August 8th bluefish recreational management measures discussions.

Summary

Four advisors voiced support for status quo recreational management measures in 2023. The rationale for supporting status quo measures included stability, recent overages, the disparate discard estimates, and the unknowns related to the upcoming research track stock assessment.

An advisor asked what percent of for-hire trips landed the full 5 fish bag limit and whether trips had increased in recent years. Staff responded that they can follow up with that information. This advisor added that they had heard mixed feedback from the AP in the past on whether the for-hire sector should have an increased bag limit. They felt that any liberalization considered by the Council and Board should make the private and for hire bag limits equal, not further divergent between the modes. They added that they did not understand the justification for further discrepancies between the bag limits and do not feel that the argument that the for-hire fleet is such a small component of the fishery justifies giving a conservation pass on a resource that's in rebuilding. Furthermore, they would like to see divergent measures by mode explored further through the sector separation amendment as part of the [recreational reform initiative](#). Another advisor added that they agreed with these comments.

Advisors asked clarifying questions related to the variable recreational dead discard estimation methodologies, the monitoring committee (MC) discussion, and whether there is a good sense of the level of noncompliance in the recreational fishery. Staff did not have a multiyear analysis of noncompliance available but noted that when conducting bag limit analyses using MRIP data, anglers kept up to 15 bluefish on trips in 2021. More work needs to be done to quantify the levels of noncompliance in this fishery over time.

An advisor asked if the MC was recommending both an RHL liberalization and status quo recreational measures. Staff responded that the MC did recommend an RHL that is higher than 2021 recreational harvest, however given the level of management uncertainty the MC discussed, they did not recommend liberalization of measures.

One advisor commented that management doesn't fit the for-hire and private sector equally and different states and regions have different management needs. Regulations in one region should not take away from business in another region.

One advisor asked whether the MC discussed the large difference in total catch in 2010 compared with recent years while the stock biomass remains similar. They added that they thought that if catch had been reduced to zero, there would still be the same biomass. Staff responded that the MC did not specifically discuss this.

In terms of next steps, an advisor asked when and how the research track assessment results would be shared with the AP. Staff responded that they can distribute information to the AP in advance of the public meetings for the peer review and that staff would also plan to update the AP on assessment results at their June fishery performance report meeting next year. They also asked whether there is any intention to adjust 2023 specifications as a result of the June management track assessment. Staff responded that no midyear adjustments are anticipated resulting from the assessment.