



**Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda
Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) / Plan Development Team (PDT)
May 26, 2022
Webinar Meeting Summary**

FMAT/PDT attendees: Tracey Bauer, Julia Beaty, Mike Celestino, Emily Keiley, Dustin Colson Leaning, John Maniscalco, Scott Steinback, Greg Wojcik, Tony Wood

Other attendees: Jeff Deem (AP member), Michelle Duval (Council member), Toni Kerns (ASMFC staff), Meghan Lapp (Seafreeze, ltd.), Savannah Lewis, Shanna Madsen (Board member), Nichola Meserve (Board member), Adam Nowalsky (Council member), Will Poston (American Saltwater Guides Association), Paul Rago (SSC chair), Mike Waine (AP member), Kate Wilke (Council member)

Summary

The following sections summarize input from FMAT/PDT members provided during their May 26, 2022 webinar meeting and over email.

SSC Evaluation

Dr. Paul Rago, the chair of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) provided an overview of the SSC's review of the Framework/Addenda Options. Two FMAT/PDT members asked if many of the SSC's concerns would be addressed by use of models such as the Recreational Economic Demand Model (REDM) and Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model (RFDM) when setting recreational measures. Dr. Rago said he did not have enough information to draw that conclusion because the Council and Policy Board Motion did not request an evaluation of the RFDM and REDM. He also noted that the SSC chose not to rank the options and their concerns about Options B-E were not an implicit endorsement of the current process. In response, an FMAT/PDT member pointed out that the SSC addressed three additional questions not contained in the original motion and the models could also have been considered within the review. In the opinion of this PDT/FMAT member, the SSC conclusions drawn from these three additional questions were very critical of the proposed harvest control rule options. This PDT/FMAT member said he believes the issues the SSC identified are generally all addressed through use of the REDM and the lack of consideration of that model is a serious oversight.

Another FMAT/PDT member noted that the SSC did not consider the accountability measure options, which would likely have addressed some of the SSC's concerns with how the harvest control rule approaches may prevent overfishing.

Dr. Paul Rago also recommended consideration of a different approach that is not within the range of options in the Framework/Draft Addenda and was not considered before this FMAT/PDT meeting. He emphasized that this concept was not discussed by the SSC. This approach would consider recent recreational fishing mortality rates compared to the fishing mortality rate induced by recreational harvest limit (RHL) when determining whether measures should be adjusted. The RHL is derived from stock assessment projections, which make assumptions about future biomass trends and future catch levels. These assumptions and the RHLs are projected forward two years under the biennial management track assessment schedule. With this in mind, comparing recent recreational harvest to the RHL alone may result in unnecessary restrictions or excessive and destabilizing liberalizations if stock biomass changed at a different rate than expected through projections. Instead, the decision to change measures could be based on more recent information produced by an updated stock assessment. For example, fishing mortality attributed to the recreational sector (F_{rec}) could be compared to a recreational fishing mortality target (F_{target}). The F_{target} could be calculated by applying the recreational sector's allocation of acceptable biological catch (ABC) to fishing mortality associated with the ABC. In summary, there could be benefits to comparing F_{rec} to F_{target} , which relies on the most recent stock assessment data, as opposed to comparing recent harvest estimates to an RHL that relies on data from an older assessment. This approach has some similarities to other concepts considered through this Framework/Addenda (e.g., considering if overfishing occurred when determining if an accountability measure is triggered under some sub-options). One FMAT/PDT member noted that further consideration should be given to the appropriateness of partitioning coastwide reference points into fleet-specific reference points, as discussed during previous FMAT/PDT meetings. The FMAT/PDT agreed that this approach warrants further consideration, development, and analysis and could benefit from additional input from the SSC.

Progress on Recreational Economic Demand Model and Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model

Based on discussions with the modelers, the Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model should be available for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass this fall. The modelers have made several changes based on the September 2021 SSC sub-group review and plan to document those changes upon completion of the models.

The Recreational Economics Demand Model (REDM) has also been updated in response to the SSC sub-group review. It now accounts for uncertainty in the MRIP estimates, which is a major improvement over a different version of this model which is used in management for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock recreational fisheries. An updated angler preference survey is underway through the end of June and so far has seen higher response rates than expected. By October it is anticipated that updated versions of the Recreational Economic Demand Model using the new survey results will be available for summer flounder and black sea bass. The scup model may require more time to develop. It is also important to note that, through a separate effort through the Summer Flounder Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), the summer flounder REDM is coupled with a biological model of the summer flounder population. The goal of this MSE is to evaluate the biological and economic implications of alternative strategies for managing the recreational summer flounder fishery. As the focus of the MSE is summer flounder, similar biological models were not developed for black sea bass and scup. Nonetheless, the REDM can be coupled directly to stock assessment outputs for all three species to account for changing stock conditions

Recommendations for Final Action

Four FMAT/PDT members stated that they did not support continued use of the No Action approach and recommended that the Council and Policy Board take action through this Framework/Addenda to establish a new process for setting measures. These FMAT/PDT members were specifically concerned with challenges under the current process of setting measures to allow harvest to meet but not exceed the RHL.

One FMAT/PDT member expressed concern that many stakeholders may perceive the goal of this action to be to prevent further restrictions and that all other options would lead to more liberal measures than the No Action Option. Three FMAT/PDT members disagreed with this perceived goal and said it is more important to improve the process for setting measures than to focus on having the most liberal measures possible.

The FMAT/PDT briefly discussed potential continued development of some options through a separate management action, if desired by the Council and Policy Board. Considering this possibility, three FMAT/PDT members recommended removing the Fishery Score Option (Option C in Section 3.1 of the Draft Addenda) from further consideration. One FMAT/PDT member noted the SSC concerns with this approach, especially regarding the weighting scheme. Another FMAT/PDT member noted that this option could result in greater changes in measures when changes are needed due to the lower number of bins, compared to the other options. One FMAT/PDT member was concerned that some options have more bins than may be possible to generate significantly different measures for.

Three FMAT/PDT members recommended that, if further development is desired, the Council and Policy Board consider modifying the binned approaches such that the boundaries between the bins signify triggers for changes in measures as opposed to assigning pre-determined measures to each bin. This modification would decrease the burden of generating pre-determined measures and allow for continuous updating of models with new data.

Four FMAT/PDT members expressed support for regional conservation equivalency (Option B in Section 3.3 of the Draft Addenda), as opposed to state-by-state conservation equivalency (Option A in Section 3.3) due to concerns about the appropriateness of using MRIP data at the state level as opposed to the regional level. One FMAT/PDT member said decisions regarding state-by-state or regional conservation equivalency should be a policy decision for the Council and Policy Board.

Fishing Mortality as a Management Target

A sub-group of the FMAT/PDT discussed options A-C in Section 3.2 of the Draft Addenda on a separate conference call and over email. These options pertain to the preferred target metric for setting measures. Neither the RFDM nor the REDM generates fishing mortality as an instantaneous rate. The models are currently configured to produce estimates of either landings, total removals (harvest plus dead discards) or an exploitation rate (removals associated with a specific time period relative to biomass, e.g. one year or one month), but neither of the models are equipped to produce instantaneous fishing mortality in a form that could be directly compared to the biological reference points provided within the stock assessment reports. The closest equivalent would be the calculation of an exploitation rate that could be compared to suitable exploitation levels at different levels of biomass. Further time-consuming model development would be required to pair the RFDM with the stock assessment models for each

species. This would not be possible for the REDM. As such, Option C in Section 3.2 is unable to be implemented at this time. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the RFDM will be updated to provide the capability to model instantaneous fishing mortality in the coming years, unless this is identified as a priority issue by the Board and Council.