



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 | G. Warren Elliott, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 26, 2019
To: Council
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: Spiny Dogfish Monitoring Committee (SDMC) Summary and 2020 Specifications Recommendations

The SDMC met on September 16, 2019. SDMC members present included Jason Didden, Fiona Hogan, Conor McManus, Cynthia Ferrio, Dan McKiernan, Angel Willey, and Scott MacDonald (ex officio). Other participants included Kirby Rootes-Murdy, June Lewis, Stew Michels, and John Whiteside. Given the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) endorsed the previously-recommended 2020 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 31.1 million pounds, and considering recent fishery performance, **the SDMC recommended endorsing continuance of the existing multi-year specifications.** The commercial quota would go up from 20.5 million pounds currently to 23.2 million pounds for the 2020 fishing year (no action needed).

Related to its task to recommend measures necessary to avoid exceeding the Annual Catch Limit (ACL), the SDMC concluded that changes to the current 6,000 pound trip limit do not appear necessary given recent fishery performance. The SDMC noted that as long as the states are adhering to their quotas based on the overall ABC/ACL, different trip limits should not affect stock size. Major changes, such as removing the federal trip limit or removing the complete closure once 100% of the quota is caught, are more appropriate for frameworks or amendments where more analysis and public comment can be evaluated. Allowing states to determine trip limits would add flexibility to the fishery, but the interplay of trip limits and prices may make it difficult to predict fishery responses to modified trip limits.

Relevant materials:

SSC Report (see Committee Reports Tab)
Staff ABC Memo (attached)
Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report (attached)
Communications (attached)
Staff Fishery Information Document ([online supplemental](#))
NEFSC Dogfish Data Update ([online supplemental](#))
Massachusetts's 2018 Spiny Dogfish *Economic Analysis* ([online supplemental](#))
ASMFC Spiny Dogfish Trip Limit Scoping Comments ([online supplemental](#))



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MEMORANDUM

Date: August 27, 2019
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden (MAFMC staff) and Fiona Hogan (NEFMC staff)
Subject: Spiny Dogfish ABC Review for 2020 Fishing Year

Dogfish is in multi-year specifications for 2019-2021. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is scheduled to review the 2020 dogfish ABC (year 2 of 3) during its September 2019 meeting. The Dogfish ABC is scheduled to increase from 12,914 MT (28.5 million pounds) to 14,126 MT (31.1 million pounds).

A data update from NMFS' Northeast Fisheries Science Center, a fishery information document that supported the Advisory Panel's meeting, and the Advisory Panel's Fishery Performance Report have been posted to <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc>.

Staff recommends no changes to 2020 dogfish ABCs from the SSC's previous recommendation. While the three-year average of female spawning stock biomass is at a low point since rebuilding, the annual estimate has been trending up since 2017, and the 3-year average may increase next year unless there is a new all-time low for the 2020 index value. Dogfish landings have been below the quota since 2012, but the Advisory Panel has repeatedly noted that the fishery is limited by a weak market for spiny dogfish due to consumer preferences.



Spiny Dogfish Fishery Performance Report August 2019

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on August 19, 2019 to review the Spiny Dogfish Fishery Information Document 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) by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. A series of trigger questions (see below) were posed to the AP to generate discussion of observations in the spiny dogfish fishery. Please note: Advisor comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

Advisory Panel members present: Scott Curatolo-Wagemann, Doug Feeney, James Fletcher, Scott MacDonald, John Whiteside, Jr., Douglas Zemeckis.

Others present: Jason Didden, Fiona Hogan, Cynthia Ferrio, Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Brian Peede, Pat Geer, Alan Bianchi, Stew Michels, Angel Willey, John Boreman, Chris Batsavage, Nichola Meserve, Joanne Pellegrino, Yan Jiao, Sonny Gwin, Chris Hickman, Greg DiDomenico, and Ray Kaine.

Trigger questions:

The AP was presented with the following 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?

Market/Economic Conditions

An advisor noted that markets are extremely limited, though he expects to get close to the 2019 fishing year quota. Self-imposed shipping bans for shark products by the shipping industry have made transport increasingly difficult and negatively affected reaching new markets.

Another advisor stated that improving spiny dogfish demand has been a “slow-go.” Getting larger partners (Council, NOAA, MSC, etc.) could help with demand/educational efforts. One advisor suggested that changing the name would help with marketing, but others disagreed that this was a viable/useful approach, and that efforts should concentrate on educating the public that spiny dogfish is a sustainable product. Public concern about conservation of other sharks, including finning concerns, negatively impacts spiny dogfish demand without justification. NMFS staff agreed that spill-over concerns about sharks generally create confusion about whether spiny dogfish is a sustainable seafood choice. An ASMFC advisor noted that from a public relations perspective, the fishery is unfairly “bashed” despite the U.S. having one of the most restrictive shark fisheries in the world and requested a campaign to dispel misinformation about our shark management.

Environmental Conditions

Advisors from VA and NC stated that weather is a major limiting factor for southern landings, and calm weather contributed to higher southern landings in the later portion of the 2018 fishing year.

An advisor from MA indicated that 2018 fishing year landings in MA were off due to skates taking over where the small boats typically fish, which limited the ability of small boats to fish for spiny dogfish. Since mid-summer 2019 there has been better availability for small boats and he expected landings in MA to be higher in the 2019 fishing year.

Management Issues

An advisor noted that the trip limits (federal and state) prevent a large-scale industrial fishery and a large-scale industrial fishery should be given an opportunity, with much higher trip limits (around 30,000 pounds), and possibly separate quotas for food-fish versus industrial uses.

Several AP members recommended leaving the trip limit where it is now, and were concerned that increasing the trip limit within the time frame of the 2019-2021 fishing years, and before demand was improved, would cause problems such as landing more fish for less money, early closures, and/or small boats being driven out of the fishery (large boats could fill the quota and drive prices down).

Advisors were asked for their thoughts on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) idea to eliminate the federal trip limit and rely on the states to set trip limits to manage their state or regional quota. Only two advisors voiced opinions at this time, both against, on the grounds that doing so might disadvantage VA/NC fishermen by allowing more northern states’ participants to fully supply processors before the fish are available further south. Some concern was also expressed about all fishermen’s voices being accounted for in the ASMFC process. Council staff will forward information about ASMFC comment opportunities on this subject to the Advisory Panel.

An ASMFC advisor stated that from the NC perspective it would be useful for VA to allow fishing/landing based on a federal permit. In combination with a NC/VA shared quota this would allow higher landings. He noted that while most people in NC fish in NC state waters, and are not greatly affected by the federal trip limit, it does limit flexibility when fishermen see dogfish offshore; some years it's a major issue, some years it's not.

Other Issues

An advisor expressed concern that no one is seeing (or looking for) male dogfish beyond the survey – but squid fishermen looking for squid in deep water do see dogfish. He also expressed concern that recent science indicating that dogfish spend substantial time outside the survey area or off the bottom has not yet been incorporated into the assessment of spiny dogfish. He also had similar concerns about research regarding pup production, and communicated that catching more dogfish will give other species a chance to rebuild.

Two advisors stated that encouraging the establishment of additional processors, especially in the southern region, would be useful given the shipment costs to the New England processing operations.

Research Priorities

The current spiny dogfish research priorities were reviewed. The advisors were asked to provide input on the current research priorities by email. One comment was received that for the upcoming benchmark, we should look at study fleet data as it could help inform knowledge of how temperature drives distribution and on male/female distribution issues. The same advisor also asked how study fleet data is currently used for spiny dogfish science and/or management; staff will ask for input from the NMFS Science Center.



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MEMORANDUM

Date: September 26, 2019
To: Council
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: Spiny Dogfish Communications

Two communications were received related to spiny dogfish – they are included below.

From: Greg DiDomenico <gregdidomenico@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 17, 2019 2:06 PM
To: Didden, Jason <jdidden@mafmc.org>
Cc: Wark, Kevin <KevinWark@comcast.net>
Subject: Dogfish

Jason
I was too late for the call yesterday.
But just wanted you to know where GSSA is on this topic.

We feel strongly that Dogfish
Management needs to be under the control of the MAFMC .

The trip limit should not only be maintained but should remain the same for federal and state waters.

No other arrangement is prudent or acceptable for this fishery.

Greg DiDomenico
GSSA

From: Douglas Zemeckis <zemeckis@njaes.rutgers.edu>
Sent: Monday, August 19, 2019 7:22 PM
Subject: Re: Spiny Dogfish AP Meeting - Monday, Aug 19 @ 1:30pm

Hello Jason,

My apologies for having to jump off of the call earlier than anticipated this afternoon. I'm heading out on a research trip tomorrow morning aboard a scalloper and some items came up that I needed to take care of before the end of the business day.

I wanted to follow-up with some dogfish research recommendations, many of which were probably brought up after I got off the call. Here are some suggestions and ideas that I had written down in order to add to what was contributed during the call:

- Promotion and Marketing: This seems to be a reoccurring priority and where the conversation ended when I got off the call. Increased promotion and marketing would be very helpful for this fishery which is largely influenced by market demands, including efforts with both foreign and domestic markets. Doug Feeney was describing some of the ongoing efforts in New England, but there currently isn't much south of SNE. This need for marketing and promotion is one that I commonly hear when talking with commercial fishermen here in NJ. In response, I'm part of a team that just submitted a pre-proposal to the NOAA S-K funding opportunity to meet these goals by working with the culinary sector to educate chefs and encourage increased utilization of dogfish. A related hurdle is the lack of processors south of New Bedford. I'd echo the recommendations to promote the opening of a processor near the more southern ports. Also, I've had some conversations with and questions from commercial fishermen in NJ regarding what factors influence dogfish quality upon landing. Research or related recommendations would help with market development by providing as high of a quality product as possible.

- Trawl Catchability: This came up a bit during today's call and I remember seeing it in previous documents; based on the off-bottom movements observed by dogfish in previous PSAT tagging and ecological knowledge of this behavior from fishermen, it would be helpful to better understand the factors influencing dogfish catchability by trawls, particularly given the importance of the trawl survey index for assessing this stock. For example, potential herding behavior would be valuable to understand when interpreting trawl survey data. Some groundfish species have been shown to swim to the bottom when a moving vessel approaches with or without a net in the water. So, even if an animal is off-bottom, it doesn't mean that they are not available to the gear. Also, related to trawl catchability, it seems like it would be valuable to take a closer look at the availability of dogfish to the trawl survey based on previous PSAT tagging (e.g., Carlson et al., 2014) and potentially additional tagging in the future. The butterfish habitat model might serve as a useful example here to evaluate habitats surveyed with respect to those that are utilized by dogfish.

- Stock Structure and Tagging: Have there been any publications from the ECU or NEFSC conventional tagging projects? Fishery catch patterns and PSAT tagging data provide some indications of complexity in population structure that would be helpful for consideration in the stock assessment and different management options. The results from these previous studies, as well as

perhaps future tagging studies or application of other stock ID tools (e.g., genetics), would help provide these insights into stock structure.

Again, my apologies for jumping off the call early today. But, hopefully these add to the points discussed during the rest of the call. Please let me know if you have any questions related to these points and where I might be able to help further.

Cheers,
Doug

Douglas Zemeckis, Ph.D. | County Agent III (Assistant Professor)
Marine Extension Agent for Ocean, Atlantic, and Monmouth Counties