



***Illex* and Atlantic Mackerel
Fishery Performance Reports
February 2022**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on February 22, 2022 to review the *Illex* squid and Atlantic mackerel Fishery Information Documents and develop the following Fishery Performance Reports. 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: Eleanor Bochenek, Katie Almeida, Emerson Hasbrouck, Gerry O' Neill, Meghan Lapp, Pam Lyons Gromen, Sam Martin, Zack Greenberg, Dan Farnham Jr, and Greg DiDomenico.

Others present: Jason Didden, Mark Holliday, Will Poston, Purcie Bennett-Nickerson, Mary Beth Tooley, Peter Hughes, Alan Bianchi, Carly Bari, Alissa Wilson, Mike Waine, Tom Miller, and Dave Secor.

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' "fishery information document."

1.2 *Illex* Squid

Market/Economic Conditions

Market conditions/prices seemed relatively similar in 2021 as 2020 - “stable.” Staff noted price increase in 2021 was 7% - an AP member noted that can be just a few cents per pound difference. Seafood in general has seen recent price increases or at least stability.

U.S. suppliers continue to invest in infrastructure to regularly produce quality product. Steady supply from U.S. producers has helped with marketing. Can also get price increases through season as squid get bigger (higher prices for bigger squid) if fishery stays open.

U.S. *Illex* catches do not drive the price of *Illex* – Argentinian *Illex* and Japanese flying squid affect prices. Argentinian *Illex* are in international waters and Chinese fleet catches high volumes – world market dominates price. U.S. landings are a small component. Mark Holliday noted could be useful to have information on scale of other squid species to put U.S. fishery into more definitive context. After the meeting staff queried FAO databases and the 2019 catch of Argentine shortfin squid was listed as about 250,000 metric tons with an “E” noted by Chinese catch, possibly indicating that it is more of an estimate than others.

Environmental Conditions

Work is ongoing to understand environmental drivers – high availability persists. Fishery participants have been working with scientists to better understand how environmental conditions are affecting availability/abundance – it is critical to continue to involve fishermen in related work to understand environmental linkages.

Management Issues

Management should consider ways to achieve 100% of the quota – reconsider the 95% closure threshold. The reporting that exists will not allow substantial overages. The availability/abundance of *Illex* should be taken into account, as abundance appears to be considered when dealing with potential overages in other fisheries such as black sea bass. *Illex* should not be treated differently.

Other Issues

An advisor highlighted the HMS diet study looking at chub mackerel identified *Illex* as important HMS prey in recent years – SSC/Council should be mindful of those results and role of *Illex* in the food web as related to the strategic plan and Ecosystem Approaches to Fishery Management Guidance Document – need to be aware of how prey are, and are not, taken into account. Other advisors opposed delving further into the forage issue as relates to *Illex* and consumption by predators especially given lack of control over those predators’ fisheries. It was noted that for the HMS fisheries that were looked at, they are overfished with overfishing occurring. The low

impacts of the fishery on the stock per working group findings, including that the fishery operates on a small part of the *Illlex* stock, should make this a non-issue

Research Priorities

See environmental considerations section above.

Additional Public Input - NA

1.3 Mackerel

Market/Economic Conditions

Demand has been strong for years – markets have not been a limiting factor. U.S. mackerel have been filling a reliable niche – generally smaller sized fish than European mackerel. U.S. fishery is a small part of overall mackerel trade, but persistent inability to supply will eventually lead to market problems – overseas participants would laugh at our mackerel quantities. After the meeting staff queried FAO databases and the 2019 European catch of Atlantic mackerel was listed as about 825,000 metric tons.

Environmental Conditions

Nothing particularly unusual observed. Few reports of fish from more southern areas.

Management Issues

Early 2021 catches were good near-shore, but once the buffer zone (mid-water trawl/herring) went into effect February 10, 2021 we lost access to those fish. Near-shore fish were also historically helpful given poor winter weather. Would have likely caught the quota in 2021 if access had remained.

There are fish near-shore now (early 2022) also, but again can't access them in 2022. The majority of areas where limited access participants landing with Gerry O'Neill have fished in last 5 years are no longer accessible due to 12-mile herring mid-water trawl restrictions. Herring restrictions affect mackerel. Would like to get more info across the fleet to confirm, but general sense that in 2021/2022 management (buffers) is severely curtailing landings.

Lack of herring RSA inhibits fall mackerel landings in Area 1A.

Horsepower restrictions, and resulting speed limitations, may be affecting the size of the fish that the commercial fishery can catch. Larger fish are faster. Could be an issue to further investigate.

Other Issues/Rebuilding

Need to consider the impact of recreational catch on rebuilding especially given some of the options being considered – can't have unrestricted recreational fishing when there's no commercial quota.

Given management constraints and data collection, need to make sure that sampling (that feeds into the assessment in terms of ages) that is occurring will be representative – across fishery sectors and components of each sector. Also may extend to selectivity assumptions.

Discussion with SSC members attending and AP members highlighted additional uncertainties that may be introduced by how management constraints and data collection may be affecting the fishery-dependent data used by the assessment. How will we know if we are rebuilding given lack of fishery access from management and thus lack of data?

Worth re-considering about whether size-limit measures (like Canada) could benefit mackerel rebuilding. Worth additionally considering how the two (Canada and U.S.) rebuilding approaches may complement each other (or not).

Research Priorities

Refer to above issues identified with rebuilding.

Additional Public Input - NA