



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 27, 2023
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: 2023-2025 *Illex* ABCs

Executive Summary

The Council adopted a preliminary Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 40,000 metric tons (MT) for *Illex* for 2023. The plan was to revisit the ABC after the NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) updated relevant analyses (which has occurred and will be available for the SSC).

Additional information on fishery performance and past management measures can be found in the 2023 *Illex* Fishery Information Document created by staff and the 2023 *Illex* Fishery Performance Report developed by the Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP).

The Council will meet in April 2023 to review the recommendations of the AP, the SSC, and the MSB Monitoring Committee, as well as receive input from the public. The Council will then recommend catch and landings limits and other management measures for 2023-2025.

There could be some rationale from the updated NEFSC analyses to support ABC increases. However, considering the relatively high uncertainties involved, staff recommends maintaining a 40,000 MT ABC for 2023-2025.

Current Measures and Review of Prior SSC Recommendations

The directed fishery operates under a limited access permit system (about 75 permits). The open access/incidental permits are limited to 10,000 pounds per trip. The directed limited access fishery does not start with trip limits, but the fishery is slowed with a 10,000-pound trip limit for all permits once 96% of landings are projected to have occurred. Given a 40,000 MT ABC for 2022, 4.52% was set aside for potential discards, and the remaining catch constitutes a landings quota of 38,156 MT.

In March 2022, the SSC established an ABC of 40,000 MT. This ABC was derived from the Council-supported escapement analysis and was associated with an approximately 5% chance of exceeding the $\frac{2}{3}$ F:M generic guidance for data poor species. Model results suggested this provides greater than 50% escapement for *Illex* squid. In July 2022 the SSC noted that the Research Track Assessment did not provide any acceptable reference points which the SSC could use to justify any revision of its previous recommendation.

Recent Catch and Landings

Quotas were reached from 2017-2021. In 2022 only 14% of the quota was landed. The Advisory Panel highlighted high diesel prices and a robust inshore 2022 longfin squid fishery as contributing to lower *Illex* landings in 2022 (see Fishery Performance Report).

Stock Status and Biological Reference Points

There are no accepted reference points. The 2022 Research Track Assessment peer reviewers concurred with the *Illex* working group that the *Illex* stock “was lightly fished in 2019.” The reviewers noted that “the term ‘lightly fished’ needs to be interpreted with caution since it has no specific definition relating to sustainable exploitation.”

Staff Recommendation

Updated analyses on likely escapement/overfishing suggest a relatively low risk of catches of up to 40,000 MT causing a problem for the *Illex* stock. Depending on one’s risk preference there could be some rationale from the updated analyses to support ABC increases. However, given the relatively high uncertainties involved with this stock, staff recommends maintaining the current ABC through 2025 unless the fishery reaches its quota – whereupon the escapement/overfishing analyses should be revisited to consider potential modifications for the next year.