



## **Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Performance Reports July 2020**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on July 6, 2020 to review the 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. Please note: The AP comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

**Advisory Panel members present:** Katie Almeida, Joseph Gordon, Howard King, Eleanor Bochenek, Gerry O'Neil, Jeff Kaelin, Meghan Lapp, Greg DiDomenico, and Pam Lyons Gromen.

**Others present:** Jason Didden, Doug Christel, Aly Pitts, Dan Farnham Jr, Zoe Goozner, Ryan Clark, Zack Greenberg, Peter Hughes, Alissa Wilson, and Eric Reid.

### **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 MSB species. Each species discussion began by reviewing the species' "information document." Some general points were also made as described immediately below.

#### 1.1 General

Concern was voiced that shifting thermal habitat suitability is impacting the distribution and/or productivity of MSB species, and needs to be taken into account by assessments/management.

There is concern that assessments will be hurt if surveys are limited by wind development.

Concern was voiced about the potential effects of data gaps from missed observer coverage due to COVID-19.

Tariffs affect prices and profitability, and therefore trade. If a buyer is in China, that buyer may try to negotiate price based on what they know they will have to absorb in tariffs.

## 1.2 Butterfish

### **Market/Economic Conditions**

2019 butterfish demand was good for the right size and quality of butterfish.

There is still limited interest in this fishery by the typical MSB fishery participant, but it's a substantial fishery for some.

Traditional markets disappeared (export to Japan – breakfast) and it's a long-term process to re-establish markets. Domestic fresh markets are limited, though suppliers are working on ways to expand the market.

### **Environmental Conditions**

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat.

### **Management Issues**

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine Monument was negatively impacting access to butterfish until mid-2020, especially large butterfish that command the best prices.

**Other Issues** – None mentioned

### **Research Priorities**

Integrating state surveys is important for this species in terms of observing recruitment.

There was support voiced for the SSC providing catch advice that continues to incorporate forage concerns (see the 1992 Patterson paper, the butterfish assessment, and previous SSC approaches). It was also noted that the Fmsy proxy used in the assessment explicitly accounts for the forage role of butterfish.

## 1.3 Longfin Squid

### **Market/Economic Conditions**

Demand continued to be good through 2019 but COVID-19 had drastic impacts on early-2020 demand. Retail trade has provided an outlet for some longfin squid products. COVID-19 will continue to increase market uncertainties for the foreseeable future.

### **Environmental Conditions**

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat.

### **Management Issues**

Area/gear limitations negatively affect fishing/landings. Scup, Tilefish, and Fixed/Mobile Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs) have made longfin squid fishing more difficult. Large mesh requirements on George's Bank also restrict targeting of longfin squid in an areas where fishermen have been seeing signs of longfin squid. The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine Monument may have also been negatively impacting access to areas where longfin squid could have been caught.

### **Other Issues**

Windfarm development continues to be a major concern for the longfin squid fishery given overlap between potential wind farm areas and squid fishery areas.

### **Research Priorities**

Concern was voiced that the spring NEFSC survey may have low catchability for longfin. A public comment also voiced concern about the general catchability of longfin in a bottom trawl survey. These concerns would apply to using the two indices separately, and raises the question whether attempting to assess/manage the stock in multiple cohorts is ready for implementation or is more appropriate to address through/after a research-track assessment process. It needs to be more clearly described how the existing evidence supports two primary cohorts (which happen to align with the surveys). The existing tight controls on this fishery suggest that a careful approach to implementing substantial changes is warranted. There was discussion whether NEAMAP (inshore VIMS) data was included in the assessment update data – staff confirmed it was, in the same fashion as the benchmark and previous update.

## 1.4 Mackerel

### **Market/Economic Conditions**

See RH/S cap discussion below re: 2019. In 2020 fish disappeared before COVID-19 effects were substantially affecting fishing.

### **Environmental Conditions**

See point above in general section about shifting thermal habitat. Mackerel availability continues to be highly variable.

### **Management Issues**

The RH/S cap had substantial negative impacts on the mackerel fishery in 2018/2019. There are discrepancies between New England and the Mid-Atlantic that are hamstringing the mackerel fishery (especially given it's a high-volume fishery), while substantial RH/S cap remains in the Atlantic herring fishery.

The Atlantic Herring fishery has become a choke-species for the Atlantic mackerel fishery.

In early 2020, the fishery collaborated to avoid RH/S and also luckily encountered mackerel further north early with observers onboard to benefit the cap estimates and give the fishery a chance (the previous year's ratio is used in a transition method until enough new trips are observed, so the fishery can potentially be shut down based on the previous year's data).

The current status of mackerel remains overfished.

**Other Issues** – None mentioned

**Research Priorities** – None mentioned