



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
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Andrew E. Minkiewicz
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Gentlemen:

Thank you for your letter of July 13, 2012 written on behalf of the Fisheries Survival Fund, regarding the recent Georges Bank yellowtail flounder assessment conducted by U.S. and Canadian stock assessment scientists. Thanks also to Mr. Minkiewicz for taking the time to discuss your concerns with me by telephone.

This was indeed a difficult assessment, and I believe that the concerns you outlined will be reflected in the final assessment documents. I further believe that both the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) and the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) will take these uncertainties into account when recommending catch limits for 2013. As we discussed, the NEFMC's Statistical and Scientific Committee may revisit the assessment at one of its upcoming meetings.

We share your concerns regarding the retrospective pattern in the assessment. This was discussed at length during the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) meeting, and the TRAC did agree to advance the assessment for consideration by the TMGC .

Retrospective patterns occur in a number of the nation's marine fishery stock assessments, including several in the Northeast. I recently discussed this issue with Dr. Richard Merrick, the NOAA Fisheries chief scientist, and have proposed that NMFS conduct a nationwide workshop on retrospective patterns and approaches for resolving them in stock assessments. This proposal will be further discussed by the NMFS Science Board, and I think this workshop can occur in 2013.

I think we are in agreement that the Georges Bank yellowtail stock is enduring a sustained period of depressed recruitment and production, and that fishing pressure has also been high. The poor condition of the stock exacerbates the assessment challenges and increases uncertainty. We will continue to research the mechanisms associated with the poor condition of Georges Bank yellowtail and other regional stocks, and possible linkages with climate change and other environmental factors. Thus I am encouraged by your interest in working with us on this research.

As we work to improve our assessments, it is essential for us to maintain close working relationships with our fishing industry partners. Thank you for taking the initiative to open this dialog. I look forward to future meetings with the Fisheries Survival Fund on this issue and on other issues of mutual interest.

Sincerely,

Russell W. Brian
for

William A. Karp, Ph.D.
Science and Research Director, NEFSC

