

NEW ENGLAND  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

The Council Report summarizes major actions approved at NEFMC meetings or highlights items of interest.

At its Jan. 26-28 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, the Council approved actions related to the development of several fishery management plans. The issues involved:

- ◆ A witch flounder ABC
- ◆ At-Sea Monitoring
- ◆ Small Mesh Multispecies
- ◆ The Omnibus Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment
- ◆ Amendment 8 to the Atlantic Herring FMP

[www.nefmc.org](http://www.nefmc.org)  
**Sign Up!**

If you would like to receive committee meeting notices and other types of Council information via email, please **Subscribe** at the top of our homepage.



# Council Report

January/February 2016

## Groundfish

### Witch Flounder ABC Set for 2016-2018

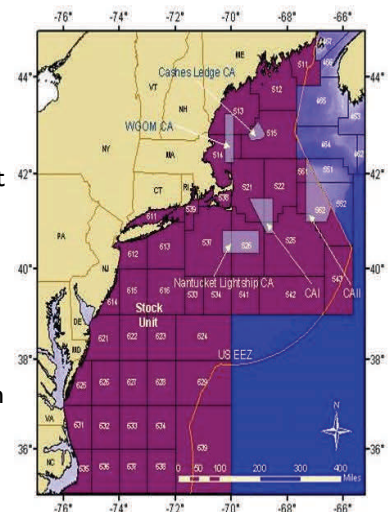
Acting on the advice and recommendations of its Scientific and Statistical Committee the Council moved ahead with a 460 metric ton (mt) ABC for witch flounder, or grey sole, at its January meeting.

Responding to an initial SSC recommendation of 394 mt in December, and based on the reaction of the fishing industry and a number of Council members who cited widespread economic harm with the new limit, the Council queried the SSC about recommending an additional alternative. Stating it would accept a temporary increased risk to stock rebuilding, the Council requested that the SSC consider an ABC within a range up to the overfishing level or OFL.

The SSC revised its recommendation to an ABC with an upper limit of 500 mt, accompanied by an increasing OFL, for the next three fishing years (2016-2018), based on the following:

- The revised ABC incorporates the 2015 catch estimate for witch flounder.
- The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) recommended retaining some buffer between OFL and ABC.
- Economic benefits appear to be modest, but differences in biological risk also appear to be modest, with important uncertainties underlying both models that might underestimate outcomes.
- The recommendation allows the Council to select lower value if it determines costs do not outweigh benefits.
- A constant ABC is consistent with approach for overfished stocks.
- The ABC will be revisited following a benchmark stock assessment in late fall/early winter 2016.

The Council ultimately recommended a 460 mt ABC for witch flounder for fishing years 2016-2018, 40 mt lower than the SSC's upper limit for the ABC, to reduce the risk of overfishing while providing some economic relief for the fishing industry.



Statistical areas used to define the witch flounder stock in red.  
Courtesy of NOAA/NEFSC.



**Next Council  
Meeting  
April 19-21, 2016  
Mystic, CT**

## Groundfish — *continued*

### Items of Interest

\*\*\*\*\*

**The Council initiated an omnibus amendment to address the regulatory changes needed to fully implement the agency's Fishery Dependent Data Visioning Project. View the presentation here:**

[GAR/NEFSC Data Visioning Project.pdf](#)

**Northeast Fisheries Science Center staff presented plans for an improved stock assessment process that includes greater stakeholder involvement. Take a look!**

[Improved Assessments\\_NEFSC.pdf](#)

**At-Sea Monitoring Work A Priority** During the Groundfish Committee's Report at the January meeting the Council also approved a problem statement that relates to the at-sea monitoring program (ASM) and the development of alternatives by the Groundfish Plan Development Team. The motion was unanimously approved and reads as follows:

"When ASM requirements were established in Amendment 16, the expectation was that increased catch limits – resulting from stock rebuilding – would enable the industry to afford the cost of monitoring. Since 2010, annual catch limits for many stocks have declined sharply, along with groundfish revenues, and the size of the fleet. The affordability of the ASM program for groundfish sectors is in question.

The current configuration of the ASM program may lead to significant economic impacts (i.e., economic losses) to the groundfish fishery and negative social impacts (i.e., those that reduce resiliency and increase vulnerabilities of fishing communities). Therefore, the Council requests analysis of the following by the PDT prior to the April Council meeting to assess whether:

1. [Sampling methods] are the most appropriate to verify area fished, catch, and discards by species and gear type for the sector system, and;
2. ASM provides the sector fishery, recognizing the heterogeneity within the fleet (trip length, homeport, etc.) the maximum flexibility to meet ASM goals and objectives."

It determined that work on ASM would be the PDT's highest priority in 2016 while recognizing the possibility that not all of tasks would be completed by the next Council meeting.

## Small Mesh Multispecies

**Development of Amendment 22 alternatives Begins** The Council reviewed scoping hearing and written comments on Amendment 22 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) FMP. In its initial stages of development, the action is intended to establish a limited access program for silver and offshore hake, aka whiting and red hake. Limiting access is meant to prevent new entrants from increasing the catch of 'choke' species with low annual catch limits. During the scoping period, the NEFMC received nearly 100 oral comments and 12 written comments on the proposed amendment

The range of measures the Council approved for further development include single and multi-level (or tiered) qualification criteria with and without different criteria for the northern and southern management areas. Vessels qualifying for a limited access permit would be able to fish for whiting and red hake with possession limits that reflect recent activity by vessels in the tier and management area.

The Council also approved the development of alternatives that may add to or modify the boundaries and/or seasons of the exemption areas where vessels with small-mesh trawls may fish for whiting, red hake, and other species. The existing November 28, 2012 control date was re-affirmed as the basis for determining limiting future access.

Development of measures to improve bycatch monitoring and reduction was also discussed and referred to the Small-Mesh Multispecies Committee for consideration in the amendment or in a future action.

## Industry-Funded Monitoring

**Preferred Omnibus Alternatives Identified** The Council approved preferred alternatives for the omnibus elements of an Industry-Funded Monitoring (IFM) Amendment for public review at hearings this spring.

In development since 2014 with NOAA Fisheries in the lead and participation and support from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, the Omnibus IFM Amendment proposes to establish a standardized administrative structure that could apply to any new industry-funded monitoring programs. The amendment also would include monitoring coverage targets for the herring and mackerel fisheries.

Future IFM programs would be developed on an FMP-specific basis through future framework adjustments to each plan. Industry funding would be used in conjunction with, not instead of, federal funding to pay for *additional* monitoring to meet FMP-specific coverage targets that would be determined by each Council.

NOAA and the Councils are not looking at a one-size-fits-all set of requirements for IFM. Instead, each Council would determine which fisheries, if any, need additional monitoring. If adopted, the IFM Amendment would not affect the existing sea scallop and groundfish IFM programs.

The amendment includes proposals to a.) apportion the costs of any additional monitoring between NOAA Fisheries and fishermen based on the availability of federal funding; b.) establish standardized service pro-

vider requirements with flexibility to modify some elements; and c.) allow Councils to establish a “monitoring set-aside” mechanism to fund additional monitoring in individual FMPs.

The amendment also proposes to establish a prioritization process to determine how funding would be allocated among IFM programs when there is a federal budget shortfall to pay for total administrative cost for IFM programs.

The preferred omnibus alternatives approved by the Council in January refer to Alternative 2 of the *IFM Discussion Document* found here [http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/1\\_Discussion-Document-and-Appendix-1-3\\_01.12.16.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/1_Discussion-Document-and-Appendix-1-3_01.12.16.pdf), beginning on page 7, including:

1. Omnibus Alternative 2.2 (Council-led Prioritization Process for IFM programs); the NEFMC added that this process could be modified through a future framework adjustment; and
2. Omnibus Alternative 2.6 (Monitoring Set-Aside Provision) which also could be modified via a framework adjustment.

The NEFMC is scheduled to review and select preferred alternatives for the herring and mackerel components to the IFM Amendment in April, while the Mid-Atlantic Council will take its first crack at selecting preferred omnibus alternatives on February 9-11 in New Bern, NC.

### NEFMC-Approved Guiding Principles for Data Collection Programs Established to Estimate Fishery Catch

- ⇒ Identify a clear purpose and need, and articulate objectives for industry-funded monitoring programs to ensure appropriate design criteria;
- ⇒ Ensure affordability especially for fisheries on the economic margins, but also give the necessary consideration to conservation and sustainability;
- ⇒ Recognize that an affordable robust program is likely to need a mix of data collection using people as well as technology; and
- ⇒ Incentivize reliable self-reporting

The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, initially enacted in 1976.

The Council develops rules for both commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the region's coastline. NEFMC management authority extends to fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and southern New England and overlaps with the Mid-Atlantic Council for some species.

## Atlantic Herring

**Committee Recommendations Approved** Following the Herring Advisory Panel and Committee meetings earlier in the month, the Council took up recommendations at the January meeting that were recently vetted by these groups. The focus was Amendment 8 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan, an action that will establish a long-term harvest strategy, or control rule, that is intended to guide how future acceptable biological catches, or ABC's, will be set and that explicitly accounts for the role of Atlantic herring in the ecosystem. The amendment also will address the issue of possible localized depletion.

Following a review and encouragement by its Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Council adopted the use of a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) approach to developing the amendment's ABC control rule. MSE is a collaborative decision-making process to aid in the development of alternatives. It involves greater upfront public involvement in identifying potential objectives and technical analyses on how potential alternatives perform relative to the objectives. It is a tool increasingly used by NMFS and Councils to support decision-making, though new to New England.

An expanded explanation published by a researcher with New England experience stated: "Unlike many bio-economic models, MSE is specifically designed to realistically account for error and uncertainty in data and model structures and to provide explicit quantitative management advice that can be directly applied by fishery managers to set catch or effort limits. MSEs also generally assess performance based on multiple objectives rather than focusing solely on optimal economic performance." (Holland, D. S. (2010), "Management Strategy Evaluation and Management Procedures: Tools for Rebuilding and Sustaining Fisheries", OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Working Papers, No. 25, OECD Publishing)

In an 8/7/1 vote, the Council directed the Herring Committee to discuss five specific examples of alternatives suggested in scoping comments for Amendment 8. All were potential area closures that would limit when and how close to shore midwater trawl vessels could operate. The Herring Committee will continue developing the range of amendment alternatives through early spring.

The Council also asked the Herring and Groundfish Committees to examine the potential of allowing the herring midwater trawl fleet operating on Georges Bank to catch up to 50% above their current 1% haddock catch cap as a buffer to avoid a fishery closure, while still retaining the 1% cap. A large area closure is in place until May 1, 2016 as an accountability measure because the 1% cap was exceeded in 2015. Further consideration will include the economics of the herring fishery and the large biomass of Georges haddock. Work on this issue will not begin until after the April Council meeting.

And finally, the Council agreed to recommend the use of state portside data to monitor the current river herring/shad and haddock catch caps. Many believe this method will enhance the accuracy of the bycatch estimates for the herring fishery.

### NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

50 Water Street,  
Mill 2  
Newburyport,  
MA 01950

Phone:  
978.465.0492  
Fax:  
978.465.3116  
[www.nefmc.org](http://www.nefmc.org)

\*\*\*\*\*

For more  
information about  
this publication,  
please contact  
Patricia Fiorelli

[pfiorelli@nefmc.org](mailto:pfiorelli@nefmc.org)  
or 978 465 0492  
ext. 106