

New England Fishery Management Council
Recreational Advisory Panel
Meeting Summary
September 17, 2008

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met in Wakefield, MA to provide recommendations for Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Panel members present were Barry Gibson (Chair), Bud Brown (Vice-chair), George Costella, Jonathan Sterritt, Don Swanson, Tony Dilernia, Michael Sosik, Ed Nowak, and Joe Huckmeyer. Groundfish Oversight Committee Chair Rip Cunningham participated in the discussions, while Council staff Tom Nies supported the meeting. Major issues discussed by the Panel included the results of the Groundfish Assessment Review Meeting (GARM III), recreational/commercial allocation of groundfish stocks, and recreational management measures. The Panel's progress on measures was hindered by the lack of advice from the Plan Development Team (PDT); the PDT work has stalled because critical PDT members are working on a groundfish interim action.

GARM III Overview

Council staff gave a brief overview of the GARM III assessment results, focusing on stocks of most concern to the recreational industry (GOM cod, GB cod, GOM haddock, pollock, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder). RAP members offered several comments and questions on the GARM results:

- The pollock assessment results do not match the recovery of pollock noticed by recreational fishermen, particularly on Stellwagen Bank.
- Predation by spiny dogfish and cormorants are slowing groundfish rebuilding. It does not seem reasonable to be looking at additional reductions from fishermen when spiny dogfish are being allowed to decimate cod and other stocks.
- Was there any exploration of the suggestion at the GARM to combine winter flounder stocks to improve the assessments? (Staff replied that this was more a research suggestion and was not explicitly examined at the GARM meeting).
- How will these results affect recreational fishermen in Mid-Atlantic States? We only catch small amounts of cod, pollock, white hake in federal waters. Is there a de minimus status that can be examined because the amount of fish we currently catch won't affect rebuilding? (Staff replied that if recreational measures are adopted to rebuild GB cod, mid-Atlantic fishermen would probably be affected).

Staff next reviewed changes to the commercial/recreational allocation measures that are being considered in the amendment. For stocks where the recreational catch is less than five percent of the removals from federal waters, an allocation will not be identified. For stocks that exceed this level, several different time periods are being considered. While the exact calculations have not been completed, it is probable that allocations will only be made for GOM cod, GOM haddock, and possibly pollock and GB cod- the winter flounder stocks are primarily caught in state waters. Staff next presented preliminary information on the mortality reductions that might be needed from recreational fishermen. These are contingent on rebuilding periods (which have not yet been selected by the Council) and allocation decisions. The preliminary range of reductions that was presented to the RAP was:

Stock	Allocation Years	
	1996-2006	2001-2006
GOM cod	-27%	-2%
GOM haddock	-18%	None
Pollock	-35%	-29%

RAP members expressed concern over any reductions at all for GOM cod. They noted that FW 42 targeted a thirty-two percent reduction in GOM cod mortality and information provided at a previous RAP meeting indicated that GOM harvest declined by almost twice that amount. A RAP member argued that the recreational fishery had already done more than was required for GOM cod, and should be given credit for those sacrifices. Concern was also expressed about expecting recreational fishermen to reduce pollock mortality. The RAP was reminded that the needed reductions were expressed in terms of mortality and did not necessarily translate into a reduction in catches compared to FY 2007. RAP members asked staff what commercial catch had done under the FW 42 restrictions. Staff replied that commercial catch (in numbers of fish, the metric used to calculate allocations between components) declined in 2006 but then increased in 2007. RAP members argue that this supports their contention that they did more than was necessary under FW 42.

Management Measures

Without any additional PDT advice, the RAP was unable to provide specific recommendations for measures. They reviewed their earlier advice, which suggested the first choice to reduce mortality should be an increase in minimum size limits and bag limits. Two members expressed caution over this approach. They described the experiences in the scup and summer flounder fisheries: there is a break-point in scup bag limits where party/charter vessels cannot attract passengers, and size limits can get large enough to discourage clients who do not want to discard fish. They suggested that a change in season might be a better approach. This was not accepted by all panel members, however. The RAP members agreed that it would be important to hold a future meeting to discuss measures when PDT advice is available to provide more specific recommendations.

Recreational/Commercial Allocations

The Panel next discussed recreational/commercial allocation issues. Several members spoke in favor of a strong statement from the RAP recommending that the Council choose the 2001-2006 time period for determining the allocations for each component of the fishery. Other RAP members pointed out that the allocations are based on MRFSS data, which is not precise and has large errors. Since these allocations will be difficult, if not impossible, to revise in the future, the Groundfish Committee Chair panel urged that these error bars should be remembered and the RAP should argue for the largest share possible. Other members expressed the belief that MRFSS under-estimates recreational catch; when a new system is implemented to replace MRFSS, more accurate current estimates of catch may conflict with allocations set using under-estimated data from MRFSS. The panel briefly discussed not having an allocation at all, but noted that this might cause the same problems that occurred during FW 42 development: recreational fishermen are subject to the same mortality reductions as the commercial fleet.

While the RAP noted the recommendation of the Groundfish Advisory Panel to use the 1996-2006 time period for GOM cod, GOM haddock, and pollock, the RAP believes the following arguments support the more recent period (in addition to those offered at the May RAP meeting):

- Stock sizes of GOM cod, GOM haddock, and pollock were low in the mid-90s, reducing access to these fish by recreational fishermen. Using 2001 as the starting date for the allocation chooses a period when access improved because rebuilding had begun.
- The more recent time period is more consistent with current conditions in the fishery. They are more reflective of where the fishery is at present, and where it is likely to be going.

The RAP reiterated its support of the 2001-2006 time period for determining the allocations between recreational and commercial components of the fishery, for those stocks that will be subject to an allocation. The RAP also recommends that in those instances where recreational harvest is only a small portion of removals, additional management measures may not be necessary. The RAP also supports the Council's option that if the recreational share of the federal catch is less than five percent, there should not be any annual catch limits (ACLs) or accountability measures (AMs) for the recreational fishery.

The RAP also asks that it be allowed to meet at a future date to provide recommendations for specific measures.