



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
 Northeast Fisheries Science Center
 166 Water Street
 Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

#6

January 20, 2010

Capt. Paul J. Howard
 Executive Director
 New England Fishery Management Council
 50 Water Street
 Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear Capt. Howard:

Subject: Schedule for Atlantic Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment

Thank you for your letter of January 5, 2010, requesting that the Science Center reschedule the next benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic herring from SARC 54 (June 2012) to SARC 53 (December 2011). This change can be accommodated in the SARC schedule, but it will require some details to be considered before the NRCC makes this change official. First, given that the assessment will be held six months earlier, there will be less time to work on the assessment, less data available, and the Terms of Reference will have to be adjusted. This is explained more fully in the enclosed table. Second, adding herring to SARC 53 will mean that either a benchmark assessment (black sea bass or GOM cod) or the review of signposts will need to be deferred to a subsequent SARC. Our staffs will need to work out these details for consideration by the NRCC.

We have consulted with NERO and they support your request to change the herring assessment to SARC 53.

Sincerely,

Nancy B. Thompson, Ph.D.
 Science and Research Director

Enclosure

cc: F. Almeida
 R. Merrick
 F. Serchuk
 P. Rago
 J. Weinberg
 W. Gabriel
 R. McBride
 R. Brown



IMPLICATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT DATE FOR HERRING

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Elements</i>	<i>Dec 2011</i>	<i>June 2012</i>
Terms of Reference	2009 Landings + Discards	Yes	Yes
	2009 LAA (Landings at age)	Yes	Yes
	2010 Landings+ Discards	Yes	Yes
	2010 LAA	Yes	Yes
	2011 Landings + Discards	No	Yes
	2011 LAA	No	Probable
	Yrs of Bigelow Spring Data	3	4
	Yrs of Bigelow Fall data	2	3
	Examination/treatment of Retrospective Pattern (recognizing that alternative model configurations or models might eliminate the pattern)	Somewhat detailed. Might consider alternative measures of Mohn's rho, through 2011, plus could be tied to MSE analyses (below). Would also examine "what-if" scenarios.	More Detailed. Would examine alternative measures of Mohn's rho, through Dec 2011, plus would be tied to MSE analyses (below). Would also examine "what-if" scenarios.
	MSE (Management Strategy Evaluation) of harvest pattern	Possible examination of alternative harvest strategies, some feedback effects, and evaluation of retrospective patterns.	Definite examination of alternative harvest strategies, some feedback effects, and evaluation of retrospective patterns.
	Review of historical landings-at-age data. (This involves review of measures used by Maine to estimate landings across fleets and state fisheries)	Likely	Definite
	Review treatment of acoustic survey	Probable: Detailed analysis of sampling protocols, comparison with Albatross and Bigelow catch rates	Probable: Detailed analysis of sampling protocols, comparison with Albatross and Bigelow catch rates, Possible: Recommendations for revising sampling strategy.
	Review reference points (analyses would progressively improve with more time)	Somewhat extensive: Revise estimates to be consistent with	More Extensive — Revise estimates to be consistent with

		assessment model, and examine of Stock-Recruit relation.	assessment model, and examine Stock-Recruit relation. Use an additional year of data.
	Ecosystem Considerations	Somewhat extensive. Results would inform model scale and might be included as a model based estimate of M2. Unlikely to get predictive model for ecosystem analyses.	More Extensive. Results would inform model scale and probably be included as a model based estimate of M2. Could also explore implications about large predators such as whales.
	Spatial structure of stock	Limited. Existing spatial information might be included in revised assessment model or various simple exploratory models. Possible examination of VMS data.	Possible. Existing spatial information might be included in revised assessment model or various simple exploratory models. Possible examination of VMS data. Further analysis would depend on new data on stock structure. A calibrated spatially structured model is unlikely since existing and historical data would be insufficient to support.
	Review assessment model formulation	Consider alternative models of differing complexity.	Develop alternative models, include any model advances, and possibly shift to alternative model.
Workload	Center	Manageable if TORs constrained	Manageable



New England Fishery Management Council

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John Pappalardo, *Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

January 5, 2010

Nancy B. Thompson, Ph.D.
Science and Research Director
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

RE: Schedule for Atlantic Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment

Dear Nancy:

As you are aware, the Northeast Region Coordinating Committee (NRCC) was not able to satisfy the New England Fishery Management Council's request for a benchmark stock assessment for the Atlantic herring stock complex during 2010 and instead scheduled an assessment for June 2012 (SARC 54). However, the timing for the next assessment is not practical and may cause management problems. The results of the upcoming benchmark assessment will form the basis of scientific and management decisions for the 2013-2015 Atlantic herring fishery specifications, which must be developed during 2012. Adequate time should be budgeted for the Council to make informed decisions based on the best available scientific information. I am therefore writing to request that the Science Center reschedule the next benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic herring from SARC 54 (June 2012) to SARC 53 (December 2011).

The Council's new process for establishing annual catch limits (ACLs) requires at least six months to review new scientific information, work with the Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) to determine acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels, consider management uncertainty and analyze options for ACLs, and select the final ACLs/sub-ACLs for the herring management areas. The Atlantic herring fishing year begins on January 1, so the 2013-2015 fishery specifications should be submitted to NMFS by October 2012 if possible. A benchmark stock assessment in June 2012 does not leave adequate time for the process to develop the 2013-2015 fishery specifications.

The Council faced a similar situation in 2009 when the updated assessment results from the Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee (TRAC) were released in July 2009. As a result of the assessment timing, developing the 2010-2012 herring fishery specifications became more difficult under an abbreviated and rushed meeting/work schedule. Final decisions were made by the Council in November 2009, and the specifications were submitted in late December 2009 and will not be implemented until sometime during the 2010 fishing year. This process created confusion and uncertainty, imposed significant burdens on the analysts and staff members involved, and may generate additional problems if any quotas are reached/exceeded before the specifications are implemented.

There is an opportunity now to avoid this situation for the 2013-2015 herring specifications if the assessment can be rescheduled such that the Council has adequate time to consider the assessment results and incorporate the new science into the decision-making process. A benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic herring will presumably produce a substantial amount of new scientific information, which needs to be fully reviewed by the Herring Plan Development Team (PDT), the SSC, and the Council so that sound and informed decisions can be made regarding scientific uncertainty, management uncertainty, and ACLs for the herring fishery. A December 2011 benchmark assessment (SARC 53) would give the Council and NMFS adequate time to ensure that the best available information forms the basis of the 2013-2015 specifications, and that the specifications can be developed, submitted, and implemented in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Howard
Executive Director

cc: Patricia Kurkul, NMFS Regional Administrator
Council Members