

NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

NEFMC Herring Plan Development Team (PDT)

ASMFC Herring Technical Committee (TC)

FINAL REPORT

August 14, 2012

Holiday Inn, Mansfield MA

The NEFMC Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met jointly with the ASMFC Herring Technical Committee (TC) to review the most recent benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic herring (SAW/SARC 54) and discuss the development of the Atlantic herring fishery specifications for 2013-2015. All members present at the meeting were members of the Herring PDT, with some overlapping membership on the ASMFC TC. No one attended the meeting representing the ASFMC TC only.

Meeting Attendance

Herring PDT Members: Lori Steele (Herring PDT Chair), Rachel Neild, NEFMC Staff; Matt Cieri (outgoing Herring TC Chair), Jon Deroba, Sara Weeks, Micah Dean, Jamie Cournane, Madeleine Hall-Arber, Carrie Nordeen, Lindsey Feldman, Renee Zobel (in-coming TC Chair); Steve Correia (via webinar)

Interested Parties

In Audience: Ray Kane (CHOIR), Erika Fuller (Earthjustice), Jeff Kaelin (Lund's Fisheries), Peter Mullen (fisher), Rich Ruais (ABTA), Steve Cadrin (SMAST), and Mitch McDonald (NOAA General Counsel)

By Webinar: Mary Beth Tooley (Council), Roger Fleming (Earthjustice), Tom Rudolph (PEW) and other interested parties via GoToMeeting (webinar)

After some general announcements, Ms. Steele provided a brief update to the Herring PDT/TC regarding the development of the upcoming fishery specifications. She identified the primary issues to address at this meeting – discussion of the stock assessment and issues related to the overfishing level (OFL), including scientific uncertainty and management uncertainty for the 2013-2015 specifications.

SAW/SARC 54 Review

Dr. Jon Deroba provided an overview of the 2012 Atlantic herring assessment and peer review (SAW/SARC 54, discussing each of the terms of reference (TORs). In particular, the assessment indicated that age-2 fish from 2010 (i.e., the 2008 year class) represents the highest recruitment on record.

Dr. Deroba noted, under TOR 3 (acoustic survey), that the NMFS hydroacoustic survey was excluded from the assessment for several reasons including an unexplainable drop in the survey abundance index after the first three years and the survey extent only covers a proportion of the stock (Georges Bank stock during spawning). The PDT/TC noted that the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) received funding to conduct an inshore Gulf of Maine (GOM) acoustic survey.

Under TOR 6 (natural mortality, M, and consumption of herring), Dr. Deroba discussed the two approaches considered in the assessment to account for M and address the consumption of herring by predators. Ultimately, in the assessment, M rates-at-age were increased by 50% overall during the 1996 – 2011 fishing years to ensure that the implied levels of consumption were consistent with what has been observed through other data sources (i.e., diet studies estimating consumption of herring by predator fish,

marine mammals, and seabirds). This approach also resolved a great deal of the retrospective pattern observed in previous herring assessments.

As part of the discussion of TOR 9 and 10 (projections), the PDT/TC reviewed the data and projections provided in the assessment report (SSB through 2011 and projections with stock simulation through 2015). All additional PDT/TC discussion related to the SAW 54 assessment will be reflected in the Draft Herring Specifications Discussion Document, which will be prepared for the September 4 SSC meeting and further updated for the September 20 Herring Committee/ASMFC Herring Section Meeting.

Draft Herring Specifications Discussion Document – Overfishing Level, Scientific Uncertainty (ABC), Management Uncertainty (ACL/OY)

Ms. Neild provided an overview of the Draft Herring Specifications Discussion Document with an interlude of questions and discussion by the PDT/TC. More detailed information reflecting the PDT/TC discussion will be provided in the Draft Discussion Document. In summary:

- The scientific uncertainty discussion should acknowledge qualitative uncertainty (e.g., stock structure in US and Canadian waters and the exclusion of the acoustic survey and state trawl surveys).
- The PDT/TC agreed to provide information/discussion in the document related to using a 75% F_{MSY} approach and/or a constant catch approach as possibilities for the SSC to consider when specifying ABC. The constant catch approach may allow for better business planning, more stability in the fishery, and may be possible given the current (rebuilt) status of the stock. However, there are tradeoffs associated with this approach, as catch may be foregone in earlier years to allow for more in later years. The PDT will provide an example for consideration in the Draft Discussion Document, which will apply a constant catch that would be expected to have a greater than 50% probability of maintaining fishing mortality below F_{MSY} (i.e., not overfishing).
- The management uncertainty discussion focused on Canadian catch (New Brunswick weir fishery). This catch is quite variable year-to-year. It is the only deduction that the PDT/TC believes is necessary to address management uncertainty at this time. The PDT/TC agreed to provide 3 year, 5 year, and 10 year average catches from the NB weir fishery in the document as options for management uncertainty. The 75th percentile of the catch distribution will also be provided as another approach, which may require a larger deduction for management uncertainty (versus an average across years), but it may better address the variability of the fishery. The 75th percentile approach may be more appropriate to consider if the provisions for returning un-utilized catch from the NB weir fishery to Area 1A could be revisited/revised to allow for more unutilized catch to be returned, if appropriate (not just 3,000 mt). The PDT suggests that a percentage-based provision may address this (e.g., all un-utilized NB weir catch as of October 15, except for x%, would return to Area 1A on November 1). Available information suggests that very little, if any, activity occurs in the NB weir fishery during November and December, and overall, effort in the fishery (reflected by the number of active weirs) has declined over time.
- There was also a brief discussion about Research Set-Aside (RSA). Jeff Kaelin and Peter Mullen expressed interest in considering a RSA during the upcoming specifications process.
- The PDT/TC agreed to begin consideration of approaches to analyze sub-ACL options (i.e., distribution of catch among the four management areas). Depending on the outcome of the SSC meeting and the recommendations for ABC, there may be an opportunity to simplify the analysis of the TAC/sub-ACL options. The PDT/TC agreed to revisit the previous analysis (2010-2012 specifications) and investigate other possible approaches (e.g., MRAG model).