



New England Fishery Management Council

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Frank Blount, *Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 12, 2006
TO: Herring Advisory Panel Members
FROM: Lori Steele, Herring Plan Development Team Chairman
SUBJECT: **Joint Herring PDT/ASMFC TC Meeting June 8, 2006**

The Council's Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met jointly with the ASMFC's Herring Technical Committee (TC) on June 8, 2006 to review the 2006 Atlantic Herring TRAC Assessment results and begin work on background information and analyses for the 2007-2009 Atlantic herring fishery specifications. This memo summarizes the PDT/TC discussion at the June 8, 2006 meeting.

Bill Overholtz presented summary information and results from the 2006 herring TRAC assessment, which will be presented to the Council on June 14, 2006. Karen Bolles also presented preliminary information related to ongoing morphometric studies intended to better address outstanding questions related to herring stock structure and stock component mixing. The PDT/TC members discussed the assessment results and updated biological information during the morning hours of the meeting.

- The 2006 TRAC Assessment was a joint assessment of the Atlantic herring stock complex conducted by U.S. and Canadian scientists. Consensus was reached at the assessment regarding assessment methodology, input data, current status of the resource, and appropriate biological reference points for the herring stock complex. The 2006 TRAC Assessment information represents the best available scientific information at this time.
- Overall, the herring stock complex appears to have recovered to high levels and stabilized. Survey trends were updated and evaluated as part of the assessment and have remained relatively flat in more recent years. The resource appears to have re-distributed throughout much of its historical range, and sampling suggests that the age structure of the stock has expanded, both of which are positive signs of a healthy, recovered stock complex.
- Assessment of the Atlantic herring resource remains complex-wide; data are not available at this time to generate a biomass estimate, apply a target fishing mortality rate, or estimate an appropriate level of yield specifically from the inshore component of the resource. Available survey data were updated and suggest that the inshore component of the resource remains relatively stable. The assessment did estimate that the inshore component of the resource represents 18% of the total stock biomass, an average estimate based on three sources of information. The assessment did not, however, provide guidance on either the

appropriateness of TAC distributions among management areas or mixing rates between stock components.

- Consensus was reached at the TRAC Assessment regarding the following reference points for the Atlantic herring stock complex: **MSY 194,000 mt; B MSY 629,000 mt; F MSY 0.31. Current fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.1, and it was agreed that current biomass (2005) is around 1 million mt. Based on these reference points, the stock is fully recovered, and overfishing is not occurring.** Three particularly large year classes seem to have driven the recovery and high biomass in recent years: 1994, 1998, and 2002.
- The model utilized in the assessment exhibits a retrospective pattern; the model tends to over-estimate biomass and under-estimate fishing mortality. Despite this pattern, it is clear that current levels of removals from the stock complex (around 100,000 mt for the last 15 years) are sustainable and should not cause concern relative to the health of the resource. The retrospective pattern in the model suggests that the Council may want to be cautious about allowing removals to increase significantly above what has been observed in the fishery over the last 15 years.

The PDT/TC discussed possible approaches for developing TAC options for the 2007-2009 herring fishery specifications. Since the updated stock assessment data do not indicate that overfishing is occurring and/or the stock is experiencing a decline in biomass, and since recent (15 years) levels of removals appear to be sustainable, there is no technical basis to recommend major changes or significant reductions in the fishery at this time. Therefore, the Council should provide adequate justification/rationale should it wish to consider any major changes to the area-based TACs for the 2007-2009 fishing years, as such changes will be based primarily on allocation and not a specific biological need.

As a starting point for Herring Committee discussion, the PDT will update the “historical catch scenario analysis” that was utilized for the 2005/2006 specifications. This assessment evaluates potential removals of the inshore component of the resource associated with various TAC options under a range of mixing scenarios, which can be compared to “historical” removals (1995-2005) under the same range of mixing scenarios. Recognizing that historical removals appear to be sustainable and have produced a stable biomass over time, more risk to the inshore component will be associated with TAC options that project removals that are higher than historical removals. The PDT/TC discussed possible mixing scenarios and TAC options to be utilized in this preliminary analysis and will continue to develop this work through a conference call on June 22. A preliminary analysis will be presented to the Herring Committee and Advisory Panel as a starting point for discussion at the meeting on July 6, 2006.

The Herring PDT/TC reviewed the preliminary schedule for completing the 2007-2009 herring fishery specifications:

- **Herring PDT/TC meeting June 8, 2006** – review TRAC and begin work on background information and analyses for fishery specifications;
- **Council Meeting June 14, 2006** – review TRAC Assessment results and provide guidance to Committee, as appropriate, for developing specifications and TAC options;
- **Herring PDT Conference Call June 22 10 a.m.** – continue work on updated background information and analysis;
- **Herring Committee/Advisory Panel meeting July 6, 2006** – review updated stock and fishery data, develop preliminary recommendations on fishery specifications and identify TAC options for further analysis;
- **Herring PDT Conference Call July 10 or 11** – discuss Committee recommendations and TAC options, begin to develop final analyses;
- **Herring PDT/TC meeting August 10 or 11, 2006** – review analysis of specifications and TAC options, finalize materials for upcoming AP, Committee, and Council meeting;
- **Joint NEFMC/ASMFC Herring Advisory Panels meeting September 6, 2006** – review analyses and provide recommendations on 2007-2009 fishery specifications;
- **Joint NEFMC Herring Committee/ASMFC Section meeting September 7, 2006** –review analyses and Advisory Panel recommendations, provide final recommendations on 2007-2009 fishery specifications;
- **Council Meeting September 26-28, 2006** – finalize specifications for 2007-2009 fishing years (including research set-asides for 2008 and 2009 fishing years).