

Fall 2013 Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) Meeting Summary
November 21, 2013
Newport Marriott, Newport RI

Attendees, by group affiliation:

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC):

Bob Beal, Executive Director

Toni Kerns, Interstate Fisheries Management Program Director

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC):

Rick Robins, Chairman

Dr. Lee Anderson, Vice-chairman

Rich Seagraves, Council Staff

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC):

Tom Nies, Executive Director

Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director

Terry Stockwell, Chairman

John Quinn, Vice-chairman

Dr. Jacob Kritzer, Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Bill Karp, Science and Research Director

Dr. Susan Gardner, Senior Advisor

Dr. Jim Weinberg, Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) Chairman

Dr. Paul Rago, Chief, Population Dynamics Branch

Dr. Chris Legault, Population Dynamics Branch

Dr. Matt McPherson, Chief, Social Sciences Branch

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Office (NERO)

John Bullard, Regional Administrator

George Darcy, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries

Kim Damon-Randall, Protected Resources Division

Gene Martin, General Counsel Northeast

Mike Ruccio, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)

Brett Alger, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)

Public Attendees:

Mary Beth Tooley, O'Hara Corp./Small Pelagic Group

Jackie Odell, Northeast Seafood Coalition

Jud Crawford, Pew Environment

I. 2014 Assessment Schedule

The NRCC had a lengthy discussion about the potential 2014 stock assessment schedule. The NEFSC provided a strawman proposal for NRCC consideration, which formed the basis of the discussion. The strawman was characterized as both challenging from a NEFSC resource perspective, and a schedule that would require some flexibility from all the NRCC partners to implement. Key elements of the proposal included rescheduling the 58th Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC 58) from fall 2013 to early 2014 because of the government shutdown, developing an empirical assessment approach for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder through the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC), participation in the NMFS-wide science review project, several stock assessment updates throughout the year, and a 20-stock Groundfish Assessment Review Meeting (GARM IV) in November using the Operational Assessment process. These items are all in addition to the other work performed by the NEFSC. The NEFSC noted that some assessment updates and GARM IV were proposed to occur later in the year than has typically occurred to ensure terminal year data in the updates/assessments were the most recent available.

The NRCC discussed the management timing implications associated with the strawman schedule. In addition, some specific stocks were discussed, including the NEFMC's request that a Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock benchmark assessment be included on the 2014 schedule. Some conceptual approaches involving interim measures were discussed as a way to implement GARM-recommended catch levels after the May 1, 2014, start of the fishing year. Additional approaches to streamline the process, including standardization of assessment reports, were discussed ([Action Item 1](#)). The group also discussed the potential for the NEFMC SSC to peer-review the GARM operational assessments in an effort to streamline the process of incorporating assessment advice into 2014 management actions. It was unclear whether the SSC members would be available in sufficient numbers to conduct the review. As an option to increase time and efficiency, the NEFSC proposed delivering groundfish assessment updates directly to the SSC, and forgoing the review that would take place in the operational assessment process. It was also stated that including the SSC may not help expedite the subsequent Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendation from the SSC to the NEFMC. It was stated that none of the potential efficiencies discussed would fully resolve the potential timing issues that had been raised by the Councils and NERO. Ultimately, the NRCC resolved the groundfish scheduling issue by splitting the assessments into two groups (see below).

Many issues related to data availability, peer review timing, staffing resources, and the management process were revisited during the discussion. These issues are not trivial and, despite not being summarized at length, are recurrent NRCC topics that are key challenges in scheduling stock assessments.

The discussion shifted to potentially prioritizing some groundfish stocks' assessment to earlier in the year so that information would be available to support the status quo management process (i.e., November NEFMC decision on catch advice; May 1 implementation of measures). During this discussion, the NRCC discussed whether a full benchmark or an assessment update was the best approach for GOM haddock in 2014. The discussion highlighted the already extensive examination of potential "spillover" between stock areas that has occurred. Some raised

concerns that a benchmark was unlikely to yield new information on this specific issue; however, there were some additional issues (e.g., recreational discards, potential year class strength) that were also raised as questions surrounding the stock. Ultimately, the NRCC endorsed conducting a benchmark assessment for GOM haddock during SARC59 (July 2014), moving the bluefish assessment to SARC60 in 2015, and prioritizing operational assessments for the two winter flounder stocks (GOM and GBK) and pollock, as these stocks do not currently have quotas for 2014. An action item was adopted to ascertain whether the SSC can provide peer review of these operational assessments ([Action Item 2](#)). Terms of reference for the GOM haddock benchmark will be developed to address the specific NRCC-raised issues for the stock. The remaining groundfish stocks will still be assessed; however, delivery of assessment information is expected to occur too late to be utilized for May 1, 2014, implementation. The NRCC discussed that introduction of new stock information out of the optimal management timeline may not be preferred. If the advice indicates catches could be increased, or that overfishing is occurring or exacerbated, it may result in mid-year changes to catch limits. It was agreed that there was no advantage to completing the updates early in 2014 if they cannot be used in May 1, 2014, specifications. It was left up to the NEFSC to decide when in 2015 to deliver the remaining groundfish assessment updates.

The empirical assessment approach to Georges Bank yellowtail flounder was discussed, in particular, how the development and coordination of the assessment would occur with Canada. There were also some concerns raised about how such an approach could be used to evaluate whether overfishing is occurring and whether the TRAC process complies with certain National Standard 2 requirements. Additional discussion focused on the need to ensure that TRAC terms of reference for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder are well coordinated.

The NRCC discussed the potential tradeoffs with the strawman assessment schedule. The NEFSC clarified that in most cases, it was not an issue of connections between the specific tasks in question, but an overall resource limitation that forced the need to put forward one task over another. For example, there is little subject overlap between the yellowtail flounder empirical approach and the potential scallop survey methods review, but they could not both be kept on the schedule because they were tentatively scheduled at the same time and other time slots were already taken. The NRCC decided in favor of retaining the GB yellowtail work in 2014. It was unclear when the scallop survey methods review might occur. The NEFSC relayed it has expended considerable effort trying to coordinate the various participants necessary to conduct the review in 2013, but had found it challenging to obtain commitment and an agreeable schedule. The NEFSC intends to offer options to the NRCC at their next meeting for doing this review in 2015.

The potential catch cap monitoring and discard review methods project was discussed. This was another item that fell out of the potential 2014 priorities for a few reasons. The data needed to re-create cap estimates at any given point to analyze potential different outcomes are not available. The data are now being archived so that such evaluations can be made in the future. In addition there have been critical shortages of staff at NERO. The division that would take the lead on the review has been without three statisticians for many months. While it appears the hiring freeze board has approved refilling two of those vacancies, it may take some time complete the hiring and bring new employees up to speed. NERO and NEFMC proposed to

delay the review until at least early 2015 to accommodate the acquisition of the necessary data and personnel. This is contingent on NERO completing the hiring in early 2014.

Much of the initial 2014 scheduling discussion dealt with the specific schedule for NEFMC managed stocks. However, much of the timing and process-related issues discussion also applied to MAFMC-managed stocks. Some time was spent perfecting which MAFMC stocks need assessment information for 2014, as well as establishing what level of assessments are necessary. Some discussion of the potential 2015 assessment schedule was held. The group had initially planned to revisit the 2015 schedule discussion later in the day, but ran out of time.

An updated 2014 stock assessment schedule reflecting the NRCCs discussion will be distributed in the coming weeks ([Action Item 5](#)).

II. Draft Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) Participation Guidance Document

The NEFSC provided the draft SAW participation document for NRCC discussion. The general outline was based on similar guidance developed for ASMFC assessment-related working groups. The NEFSC staff stated that the objective of the document was to increase transparency in the working group process and ensure the scientific process followed the NS2 guidelines on Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) and peer review. The NRCC had considerable discussion on the document, including input from the public in attendance. General Counsel advised that conflict of interest statements would be more effective if they were a written declaration. The NRCC had several questions aimed at clarifying specific points within the draft document. Much of the discussion centered on ensuring that outside participation could continue to occur in the SAW process. The NEFSC will take the numerous comments and suggestions provided from the NRCC, revise the document, and provide an updated draft for further NRCC consideration ([Action Item 3](#)).

III. River Herring

NERO Protected Resources Division (PRD) provided an overview of a proactive conservation planning process for river herring. PRD has funded a grant to ASMFC to help foster a comprehensive multi-discipline and wide representation group. The objective of the Technical Working Group (TEWG) is to identify priority conservation efforts that could be undertaken. These may be actions that could be developed for implementation or research projects to further understanding. These collective processes are designed to inform future status review for river herring. Letters soliciting TEWG membership will be distributed in the near future. PRD mentioned that one issue is that the TEWG is focused on river herring only, though there is interest in shad from many groups. In addition, the comprehensive motion recently adopted by the MAFMC is only a subset of the outcome needed for PRD in status review.

MAFMC representatives clarified that the motion adopted was not designed to preempt other river herring conservation efforts. Rather, it was designed to ensure that due diligence is undertaken to implement catch controls for Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The MAFMC expressed support for ensuring that collaborative efforts are undertaken by all parties. The NEFMC also

expressed a desire to participate in collaborative efforts, but raised concerns about the level of resources that may be necessary to support all herring (river and sea) projects.

The NRCC acknowledged that some river herring issues (e.g., hydroelectric-related issues) may be beyond the Councils' and Commission's scope. PRD staff stated this is why the TEWG is a multi-discipline approach including state, Federal, and Canadian regulators, industry, non-governmental organizations, Native American tribal and Canadian First Nations representatives, and others. The NRCC discussed whether the NRCC would be an appropriate oversight group for the TEWG. It was decided that many of the NRCC participants would be highly involved in the TEWG. The group did not think it was the most appropriate group for oversight and stated that doing so would be a substantial expansion from the coordination role of the NRCC.

IV. Ecosystem Based Fishery Management (EBFM)

The NRCC discussion on this topic was held to make sure management bodies are developing EBFM approaches in a complementary manner. Both Councils and the Commission have initiated EBFM-related processes; however, both noted that development has not been moving very quickly, given other priorities. Within the region, the preliminarily identified ecosystem units have a high degree of overlap between the Councils' and Commission's jurisdiction. No specific action items or recommendations resulted from the brief EBFM discussion. The issue may become a recurrent topic at NRCC meetings to ensure, as EBFM development moves forward, that coordination and collaboration occurs between member organizations.

V. Other Topics

The NRCC had a brief update from NERO on the potential administrative overhead to be assessed to all NOAA-administered grants. John Bullard reported that there is no new news on this topic, and that an update should be forthcoming in the next few weeks. Updates will likely be provided through a nation-wide briefing, perhaps in a Council Coordinating Committee (CCC) call. ASMFC staff asked to be included in any CCC call dealing with this issue.

The NRCC did not discuss the draft Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) public comment guidance document drafted by NEFSC. The NRCC had previously provided comments on an initial draft. An updated draft was developed by NEFSC to address these comments. Many of the issues raised during the SAW participation discussion may also apply to the SARC guidance document. The updated SARC document will be reviewed once again by the NRCC ([Action Item 4](#)), in an effort to finalize the guidance for the 2014 SARC cycle.

The NRCC had insufficient time to discuss coordination of research priorities and 2014 priorities. These topics will be addressed in the next NRCC meeting, as needed. Upcoming NRCC meetings will be scheduled after conducting a poll for available dates ([Action Item 6](#)).

-End of summary-

NRCC Fall Meeting 2013 Action Items

November 21, 2013—Newport Marriott, Newport, RI

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ASMFC MAFMC NEFMC
NEFSC NERO NRCC

1. Standardized Assessment Result Report Document
 - Convene essential personnel to develop template for multispecies assessments
 - Use template as region-wide report moving forwardResponsible parties: NEFSC, NEFMC
Due Date: ca. mid-January??
2. New England SSC Peer Review for 2014 Operational Assessments
 - Ideal critical mass > 3 SSC members
 - If less than 3 SSC are available quickly identify integrated peer review processResponsible parties: NEFMC and NEFSC
Due Date: ca. mid-January?
3. SAW Participation Working Group Document
 - Revise alternatives based on Fall 2013 NRCC discussionResponsible parties: NEFSC (lead), MAFMC, NEFMC, NERO, and ASMFC
Due Date: NEFSC distribute revised SAW documents by December 6, 2013
Reviewers Provide written comments on to NEFSC by January 17, 2014
4. SARC Public Participation Document
 - Review the revised draftResponsible parties: NEFSC (lead), MAFMC, NEFMC, NERO, and ASMFC
Due Date: NRCC provide written comments to NEFSC by December 20, 2013
5. Finalize 2014 Stock Assessment Schedule
 - Revise schedule based on Fall 2013 NRCC discussion
 - Include mackerel research planningResponsible parties: NEFSC (lead), MAFMC, NEFMC, and ASMFC
Due Date: NEFSC distribute revised schedule by November 27, 2013
6. Poll Membership for Winter and Spring NRCC Meeting Dates
Responsible parties: NERO
Due Date: December 6, 2013

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Winter 2014 – dates and format (conference call/video conference/webinar) T.B.D.

Spring 2014 – dates and location T.B.D., ASMFC host

Fall 2014 – dates and location T.B.D., NERO host