



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

NEFMC Monkfish Committee Meeting

Hotel Providence, Providence RI
May 29 & 30, 2013

Meeting Attendance: Tom Dempsey (Chair), Laurie Nolan (Vice Chair), Erling Berg, Steve Heins, Pete Himchack, Mark Alexander, Terry Alexander, Matt McKenzie, Mike Pentony, (NERO) John Quinn; NEFMC staff: Phil Haring and Rachel Neild.

The NEFMC –MAFMC Joint Monkfish Oversight Committee met to discuss the following items:

- The 2013 emergency action modifying monkfish possession limits in the Northern Management Area (NMA);
- The monkfish stock assessment update and recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) reference points;
- The draft Biological Opinion on Atlantic sturgeon and its impact on monkfish management;
- Initial discussion on Framework 8 to adopt Annual Catch Targets (ACT) and specification of days-at-sea (DAS) and trip limits for FY2014-2016, and other modifications to the current management plan;
- Continuation of discussions on the development of Amendment 6, including possible removal of the ITQ alternative;
- Develop recommendations on changes to the cooperative research program priorities;
- Review applications for open seats on the Advisory Panel and make recommendations to the NEFMC Executive Committee.

DAY 1

Emergency Action

In response to an NEFMC request, the NMFS proposed an Emergency Action (EA) to help alleviate the adverse economic impact of quota reductions for several key groundfish species in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank while simultaneously achieving full utilization of the monkfish catch target in the NMA. Under the current EA proposed by NMFS, the monkfish trip limit would be eliminated for vessels fishing on a monkfish DAS in the NMA. NMFS also considered, but did not approve, an alternative proposed by the NEFMC that would have eliminated the monkfish trip limit for vessels fishing on a groundfish DAS in the NMA.

Subsequent to announcement of the proposed action, the NEFMC voted to request that NMFS consider modifying the measures such that the current trip limits applicable to vessels on a monkfish DAS would apply to monkfish limited-access permit holders fishing on a groundfish DAS in the northern area (i.e., not that the trip limit would be eliminated, as in the alternative not approved).

The Committee placed this discussion first on the agenda to provide MAFMC members an opportunity to submit formal comments on the propose rule before the end of the comment period on May 30th.

Comments on this item included:

- MAFMC members are concerned about effort shifts from the NMA to SMA as vessels fishing in the NMA on a groundfish DAS could reserve all of their monkfish DAS for use in the SMA
- Audience and NEFMC members responded that vessels fishing in the NMA currently have a surplus of unused monkfish DAS and are also not using them in the SMA when they could, for a variety of reasons.

Since the NEFMC had already submitted comment by way of its motion and transmittal letter, the Committee took no formal action on this item.

2013 stock assessment update

Staff presented a brief summary of the results of the recent stock assessment update, including stock status (both stocks remain above biomass target and below fishing mortality thresholds), and the major sources of uncertainty. The SSC had reviewed the assessment results for the purpose of recommending updated ABCs to the Councils, but their report was not available until the second day of this meeting, and, thus, could not be used as a basis for setting ACTs at this point in the meeting.

Atlantic sturgeon Draft Biological Opinion

NMFS staff gave an outline of the major points in the draft Biological Opinion (BIOP), namely, the “no jeopardy” finding and its impact on the FMP, particularly Framework 8. The comment period on the draft BIOP ends July 19th, and, pending no change in the finding, the final BIOP will contain a set of reasonably prudent measures which could be considered by the Councils to mitigate interactions of the fishery with Atlantic sturgeon, and minimize mortalities. Importantly, the BIOP includes an incidental take statement, which is not a limit on the number of takes, but if exceeded would trigger a re-initiation of the consultation process and a new BIOP. The Committee took no action on this agenda item.

Framework 8

Committee discussion focused on identifying the range of alternatives for consideration in Framework 8, including ways to better achieve the catch targets, minimize discards and improve catch accounting. One proposal which had been made during the development of Amendment 6, but which members had previously indicated they want to consider in this framework pertains to the boundary line limiting the permit category H fishery to 39°40' N Latitude. Based on earlier advice from NOAA General Counsel, the boundary line could be moved, but not eliminated, by a framework adjustment, rather than an amendment. Given the overall consensus supporting such a move, the Chair made the following statement:

Consensus, without objection to include in Framework 8 an alternative that would move the boundary line of the permit category H fishery to coincide with the SMA-NMA boundary line.

Committee discussion then moved into the alternatives for setting DAS and trip limits. One issue raised by the industry since the implementation of Amendment 5 was a correction to the tail-to-whole fish weight conversion ratio. The effect of this correction was that the trip limits, which are specified in tail weights, declined by about 14% on vessels that land whole, gutted fish, which comprise a significant number of SMA gillnet vessels.

1. MOTION:

To direct the PDT to include alternatives in FW 8 that would increase the allowable tail weight from 450lbs to 500lbs for B and D permits and 550lbs to 610lbs for A and C permits. (Pentony/McKenzie)

Discussion on the Motion: The purpose of this motion is to restore the original whole fish trip limits and adjust the tail weight equivalent accordingly.

Motion passed unanimously.

A member of the Committee raised the issue of vessels not achieving full utilization of the ACT in the NMA, essentially, following on the Emergency Action proposal with a formal change to the FMP.

2. MOTION:

Direct the PDT to examine eliminating MF DAS in the NMA and no trip limit when a GF vessel fishing under a GF DAS. (T. Alexander/Quinn)

Discussion on the Motion:

- Monkfish DAS are not allocated by area, even though there are restrictions on how many DAS of the total allocation can be used in the SMA. Differential DAS allocations by area creates an array of issues, particularly for vessels that fish in both areas.
- Prior to 2007, vessels in the NMA had no monkfish trip limit when on a groundfish DAS, but vessels were still allocated monkfish DAS, even though they never used them.
- Eliminating a fundamental element of the management system, such as DAS, would likely require a full amendment.

PERFECTION TO MOTION #2

Direct the PDT to develop an alternative to allocating MF DAS in the NMA with no trip limit when a groundfish vessel is fishing on a groundfish DAS.

Motion withdrawn.

3. MOTION:

To include an option for analysis to increase the monkfish incidental limit while fishing on a groundfish DAS in the NMA, as follows: D permits would be at 500 lbs per day and C permits at 600 lbs per day. (T. Alexander/Quinn)

Discussion on the Motion:

- Concerns with allowing groundfish vessels to fish under the trip limits applicable to vessels on a monkfish DAS (up to 1,250 lbs. per day) are valid.
- If adopted this change, would result in a shift in the total incidental landings portion of the TAL, and a reduction in the portion of the TAL used to calculate DAS and trip limits for the directed fishery.
- If this is done for groundfish vessels, what is the reason it would not also apply on scallop vessels with limited access monkfish permits and fishing on a scallop DAS?
- The intent is to increase the utilization of the resource and maintain approximate differentials between the permit categories based on initial qualification standards.
- The analysis should include the impact of this measure on discards, excluding discards due to minimum fish size, as well as on achieving full utilization of the TAL.
- The current incidental limit includes an upper limit of 25% of the total weight of fish on board, and the motion should clarify the status of that provision in the proposed alternative.
- The intent is to apply only on limited access monkish permit holders, not Category E permits.

FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO MOTION # 3

To include an option for analysis to increase trip limits in the NMA while fishing on a GF DAS, (for example D permits would be 500 lbs per day and C permits to 600 lbs per day) and to examine the implications of retaining or eliminating the current constraint of the poundage limit or 25% of total weight of fish on board, whichever is less.

Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion then shifted to how adjustments to SMA specifications should be made, whether DAS only, trip limits only, or both.

4. MOTION:

To direct the PDT to analyze an alternative for the SMA that would maintain tail weight limits of 450lb and 550lb and that would adjust the allocation of days at sea to correspond to the ACT in that management area. (Nolan/Heins)

Discussion on the Motion:

- This reflects the comments received in the past from SMA fishermen during specifications setting.

Motion passed unanimously

5. MOTION

To direct the PDT to analyze an alternative for the SMA that would maintain existing days at sea allocations and adjust tail weight limits to correspond to the ACT in that management area. (McKenzie/Heins)

Discussion on the Motion:

- Members discussed how this motion needs to be clarified to reflect the previous discussion about the impact of the revised tail-to-whole weight conversion factor.

MOTION #5 PERFECTED

To have PDT analyze an alternative for the SMA that would maintain existing days at sea allocations and adjust whole weight trip limits and tail weight limits to correspond to the ACT in that management area.

Motion as perfected passed unanimously.

The Committee then discussed specifications options for the NMA.

6. MOTION

To direct the PDT include for analysis an alternative that would adjust the NMA DAS while maintaining the status quo possession limits in order to achieve ACT in that management area. (Pentony/T. Alexander)

Discussion on the Motion:

- The intent of this motion is to include specifications alternatives for the NMA.
- The analysis should reflect possible changes to the incidental portion of the NMA monkfish catch under previous proposals.

Motion passed unanimously.

A Committee member observed that the current trip limit on category C permits is rarely constraining and, therefore, if the ACT were to increase, and upward adjustment to the trip limit would not accomplish anything.

7. MOTION

To direct the PDT to analyze an alternative in the NMA to set the trip limit on C permits equal to that on D permits when fishing under a MF DAS and allocate the C permits more MF DAS. (T. Alexander/**NO SECOND**)

Discussion on the Motion:

- This approach would preserve the distinction between permit categories

Motion failed due to lack of a second.

A member of the Committee explained that the previous motion represented the Committee's effort to identify reasonable alternatives for specifications in the NMA, and in the absence of others, should be formally considered.

8. MOTION

To direct the PDT to analyze an alternative in the NMA to set the trip limit on C permits equal to that on D permits when fishing under a MF DAS and allocate the C permits more MF DAS. (Pentony/T. Alexander)

Discussion on the Motion:

- In response to concerns about the impact on potential effort shifts to the SMA, a member noted that this will not affect the amount of DAS available to fish in the SMA.

Motion failed 4/4/0

Committee discussion returned to the SMA and the relationship between the monkfish fishery and other fisheries in the area, particularly dogfish, skates and, to a lesser extent, groundfish. Some members suggested that the PDT should identify barriers and/or incentives to allowing monkfish gillnet fishermen to use different sized mesh and net configurations (stand-up or tie-down nets) on the same trips without adjusting the monkfish minimum size, including enforcement concerns.

With regard to groundfish, during scoping on Amendment 6, SMA fishermen commented that the current requirement to use all allocated groundfish DAS in conjunction with allocated monkfish DAS before being able to use the difference (allocated monkfish DAS in excess of allocated groundfish DAS) as monkfish-only DAS, is unnecessary, and prevents them from being able to participate in their traditional groundfish fishery. That fishery generally occurs in the early winter due to the availability of groundfish in the area. By that time, however, most, if not all of the allocated groundfish DAS have been consumed by the monkfish DAS usage requirement. In response, the Committee has included a proposed remedy in the draft Amendment 6 document, and members suggested this could be implemented more expediently in Framework 8.

9. MOTION:

To include in FW 8, an alternative that would allow monkfish-only DAS (in excess of groundfish DAS allocations) to be used at any time. (Pentony/T. Alexander)

Discussion on the motion;

- In addition to the resulting economic efficiency, this proposal could reduce groundfish discards by allowing vessels to land groundfish when they are most likely to be caught.

Motion passed unanimously

DAY 2

The discussion began with a continuation of the previous day's discussion of options for consideration in Framework 8.

The Committee discussed the monkfish mesh size rules as an impediment to integrating a dogfish fishery into the directed monkfish fishery. Directed gillnet fishing for dogfish requires mesh smaller than the monkfish minimum mesh size, which can only be used when a vessel is fishing on combined groundfish and monkfish DAS. Members generally agreed that any such proposal should be vetted through the Enforcement Committee and the Advisory Panel.

Next, members of the public and Committee expressed concern about how some fishermen do not tend their gear, or leave it out for extended periods. In some cases this is due to weather or vessel mechanical problems, but in others, it is simply a matter of negligence. Such practices are wasteful and detrimental to the overall performance of the fishery. One member of the public suggested reducing the allowable number of nets, but others responded that such an approach would not resolve the issue. It is, they said, a matter of personal responsibility, which cannot be regulated. While the Advisory Panel could discuss this issue, a resolution is unlikely. Another member of the public pointed out that the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan has similar provisions regarding soak times, and that it is a matter of making such rules enforceable. Outreach and education are important elements to achieving success in achieving gear-tending objectives.

Consensus

The staff should provide the Advisory Panel with information regarding gear soak time, gear tending requirements and exemptions that allow a vessel to haul another vessel's gear (a.k.a. the "Good Samaritan" provision).

The Committee next began discussion of identifying the sources of Management uncertainty and their consideration in setting the ACT. Staff provided the PDT's input on this matter, and noted that in the past, attempts to quantify the factors contributing to management uncertainty were unsuccessful, in large part because that uncertainty arises from the unpredictable decisions individual fishermen make in response to a wide range of exogenous and variable circumstances. The current buffers between the ACTs and ACLs were not set intentionally, but were the consequence of independent processes setting both the ACLs and the ACTs in two separate management actions (Amendment 5 and Framework 7). Only by coincidence did these buffers end up being nearly equal, about 14% below the ACL.

The Chair advised the Committee as it deliberated this matter to avoid setting the ACT buffers arbitrarily. One question, he noted, is what level of risk is acceptable that catching or slightly exceeding the ACT will not result in exceeding the ACL. The purpose of the buffer is to diminish the likelihood of exceeding the ACL.

In the ensuing discussion, MAFMC members pointed out that their management plans use triggers when certain levels (e.g., 80%) of the ACLs are reached. Another member observed that the consequences for reaching those trigger points is usually a closure of the fishery, either for the season or for the remainder of the year. In monkfish, however, the incidental catch component is a significant part of the total, and takes precedence over the directed fishery under the goals of the FMP. As a result, triggered closures of the fishery would have widespread impacts on almost every fishery, including scallops and groundfish.

A member of the public pointed out that under the current system there are no immediate consequences for exceeding the ACT, and that the ACT includes assumptions about discards. The Committee should consider keeping the buffers at the current levels and make adjustments

to the management measures that reduce discards and allow vessels to fully utilize the catch targets.

10. MOTION:

To add as an option to FW 8 a 14% management uncertainty buffer between the ACL and the ACT. (M. Alexander/T. Alexander)

Discussion on the Motion:

- This is a continuation of the current buffer, and has not posed a risk of exceeding the ACL.
- There needs to be better process for setting the ACL other than precedent.

Motion passed unanimously

11. MOTION:

To direct the PDT to create an alternative in FW 8 to consider and possibly quantify separate uncertainty buffers for the directed and incidental components of the monkfish fishery. (Heins/Nolan)

Discussion on the Motion:

- A member of the public commented that if the industry takes steps to reduce management uncertainty, such as improved monkfish catch reporting, it should get credit in the form of reduced uncertainty buffers.

Motion passed unanimously

The Committee discussed the potential for setting the ACT equal to the ACL with triggered actions to serve as buffers to prevent exceeding the ACL. This type of change to the management structure may need to be done in an amendment, and General Counsel would need to be consulted, and should only be considered upon getting input from the Advisory Panel, due to the potential impact on business planning.

Consensus

To seek input from the Advisory Panel on the value in, and problems (including safety concerns and business plan effects) associated with a trigger based approach.

Discussion moved to the impact of the specifications on the offshore monkfish fishery in which vessels enroll for the fishing year by obtaining a category F permit. A member of the Committee stated that a number of vessels participate in this fishery but find the program burdensome because it requires vessels not return to port until sufficient DAS have elapsed to account for their landings. It would be more efficient and profitable if those vessels could account for their landings against their DAS allocation after returning to port. This approach, however, would value each DAS used at the full trip limit amount, which is contrary to one of the fundamental assumptions in the DAS specification model, and conceptually equates to an individual allocation of landings. Another fisherman commented that all vessels fishing under the DAS/trip limit system face the same issues. Also, accounting for all DAS used by permit category F

vessels at the full trip limit value will have direct impact on subsequent calculation of DAS available to the inshore fleet.

Another member of the Committee questioned the assertion that a number of vessels participate in the category F fishery, stating that NMFS' data shows no F permit trips in the past two years.

Consensus

To send a formal request that the Regional Office investigate and report on the apparent discrepancy in the Offshore Fishery records, and to bring this matter to the AP for discussion and recommendations, including different pro-rating formulas.

Committee members raised the issue of the delay in availability of monkfish catch information, which contributes to management uncertainty. Monkfish landings data are reported weekly by dealers, but NMFS relies on monthly VTR reports to apportion those landings to each management area, and conducts the initial apportionment when 70% of the VTRs have been received. A member of the public commented that groundfish sectors now report their multispecies VTR catch on a weekly basis, and could add monkfish without much difficulty, and suggested that The Councils could consider requiring weekly VTR reports for monkfish limited access vessels in Framework 8.

Consensus

To send an informal request to the Regional Office that the agency request groundfish sectors to provide weekly VTR reports on monkfish catch.

12. MOTION:

To include an alternative in FW 8 that would require monkfish vessels to change from monthly reporting to weekly VTR reporting (T. Alexander/McKenzie).

Discussion on the Motion:

- The intent is that this would apply to directed and incidental catch of monkfish
- Since there are no in-season accountability measures or catch-based triggered actions, this proposal would create a substantial administrative burden with no direct offsetting benefits.
- More timely monitoring of catch data would allow for a smaller management buffer to prevent exceeding the ACL.
- Increasing the reporting burden on fishermen could reduce the accuracy of the catch data being reported, especially in the incidental catch component of the fishery. Some operators may choose to discard monkfish rather than comply.

MOTION #12 PERFECTED

To include an alternative that would require MF vessels fishing on a MF DAS to change from monthly reporting to weekly VTR reporting in FW 8.

Discussion on the Motion:

- Only about 1/2 of the monkfish landings are on monkfish DAS trips, so the benefits of this proposal are limited.

Motion withdrawn.

Amendment 6

Committee discussion moved from Framework 8 to Amendment 6. Staff raised a question about a Committee decision from the previous meeting related to two proposals from Advisory Panel members regarding the DAS leasing alternatives. Both proposals contain provisions relating to addressing latent effort concerns through qualifying which DAS could be leased, and program specific to each qualification option (i.e., the various components could not be mixed and matched with each other). The Committee advised that elements in the document specifically and exclusively tied to other elements should be so flagged in the document.

One member commented that while latent effort is an issue in both areas, the concern in the south is that such effort becomes active, or shifts from the north to the south, increasing overall effort usage, while in the north it seems to be to find ways to increase effort, so the overall objectives are different.

Several members of the public agreed that latent effort is an issue that Committee needs to be cognizant of in developing Amendment 6 alternatives, and recognized the different needs of fishermen in the two areas. The Advisory Panel, they suggested, could provide important input on an industry-base resolution to these different concerns.

One of the DAS leasing alternatives in the draft document to address fishing effort increases in a DAS leasing program draws from a provision developed, but not adopted when the NEFMC was looking at groundfish DAS leasing alternatives in 2003. The alternative (numbered 1.7.4.3.4 in the current draft) would apply an adjustment (reduction) factor to DAS leased from smaller horsepower class vessels to larger horsepower class vessels. One member suggested that this type of restriction is not necessary because each DAS is associated with a trip limit, and it does not make a difference what the horsepower is of the vessel that takes that amount of fish. Another member responded that not all DAS are valued at the full trip limit amount when specifications are calculated, since not all DAS produce the full trip limit. But if a smaller boat leases to a larger boat, the likelihood is greater that the full trip limit would be taken, resulting in an overall reduction in allocated DAS in the future.

13. MOTION:

To eliminate further consideration of option 1.7.4.3.4, 2003 GF leasing proposal in Amendment 6 (Nolan/Berg).

Discussion on the Motion:

- The Moratorium rights record does have a specific horsepower value associated with it that could be used in implementing this provision.
- Gillnet boats are not as horsepower dependent when it comes to efficiency in catching monkfish, so there is no need for a horsepower restriction; vessel size (length) may be a better proxy for monkfish fishing power.
- Some method needs to be included that would limit the ability for smaller, less efficient vessels to lease DAS to larger vessels, and the prorating matrix method is the clearest way to do so unless the plan is to allow leasing only within vessel size classes.

FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO MOTION # 13

To eliminate further consideration of option 1.7.4.3.4, 2003 GF leasing proposal in Amendment 6, and to modify option 1.7.4.3.2 (restricting DAS leasing to within vessel size classes) to include prorated DAS leasing between vessel size classes as a sub-option.

Motion as amended passed unanimously

The next item discussed by the Committee was a proposal made at the April NEFMC meeting, to remove ITQs from consideration in Amendment 6. It had been ruled out of order because it was not on the agenda. A similar motion failed to pass at the June, 2012 NEFMC meeting. The intent of the motion was to expedite the development of Amendment 6, recognizing that the majority of the proponents of catch share management are only interested in incorporating monkfish into existing groundfish sector management, particularly in the northern area. A Committee member from the southern area noted, that the majority of comments during the scoping process supported the current management system, with some modifications to address latent effort, but also included a stronger opposition to sector management than to ITQs, if catch shares were going to be adopted.

Discussion continued on how to address the different needs or preferences of fishermen in the two areas. A member of the public noted that this two-day meeting being held just after a holiday weekend is inconvenient, and most fishermen were out tending their gear and could not make the meeting to provide comment.

Consensus

To seek input from the AP on the question of whether to remove consideration of ITQs from Amendment 6.

The Committee then addressed an issue that some fishermen, particularly in the northern area, have with the DAS/trip limit system, namely that when a vessel is on a multi-day trip, it may only exceed the daily limit on some of the days, but overall the landings come in below what would be allowed for the entire trip duration, which consumes the DAS allocations faster than is necessary. A Committee member suggested a resolution would be to only charge DAS for those days when the incidental limit is exceeded. In other words, DAS charged on the trip would be based on pro-rating the landings against DAS allocations by permit category.

14. MOTION:

To include an alternative for consideration in Amendment 6 to allow vessels to pro-rate their MF DAS usage with MF landings on C and D permits in the Northern fishery Management Area. (T. Alexander/Quinn)

Discussion on the Motion:

- The intent is to enable vessels to use their DAS more efficiently.
- The pro-rating would be based on 24-hour days, not partial days.
- This proposal values each DAS at the full trip limit, which is inconsistent with how the DAS allocations are made. If the DAS allocation method were to value each DAS at the full trip limit, then the number of DAS allocated would be significantly lower.
- Why doesn't this also apply to permit categories A&B?
- This proposal is equivalent to an individual quota system, and should be called that.

FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO MOTION #14

To include permit category A&B vessels.

Motion, as amended, failed 1-7-1.

Based on the similarity between the discussions on the previous motion and the earlier discussion of permit category F issues, the Committee returned to that (category F) discussion in the context of Amendment 6, which relates to section 1.2.2 of the draft Amendment 6 document. One Committee member noted an important difference between the two is that since a vessel enrolls in the F category for the entire year, if it does not make full use of the prorated trip limit, it has forgone all other directed monkfish fishing for the rest of the year.

15. MOTION

To remove section 1.2.2 in the draft Amendment 6 document (eliminate the trip limit for category F vessels, and prorate DAS used based on pounds landed). (T. Alexander/Nolan)

Motion passed 8-0-1.

The Committee discussed but took no action on revising the current management reference point structure and perhaps establishing sub-ACLs for some components of the fishery. Alternatively, the Committee would like PDT input for future discussion on modifying the decision tree to separate out the sources of management uncertainty for different components of the fishery.

The Committee also briefly reviewed the Report of the SSC but took no action since that report was only an interim report on the recent meeting. The SSC requests additional analyses before making its final ABC recommendations.

Research Set-Aside (RSA) Priorities

The final agenda item before the meeting entered a closed session to review AP applications was to consider and make recommendations to the NEFMC on modifications to the RSA priorities. The current RSA priorities are:

1. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) Age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction, and (d) natural mortality;
2. Stock definition, stock movements, mixing, and migration through tagging studies, DNA markers, morphological characteristics and other means, focusing on: (a) Short- and long-term movements, and, (b) habitat use in relation to broad scale movements
3. Research concerning trophic interactions of monkfish with other species and monkfish cannibalism;
4. Research concerning bycatch and discard mortality focusing on: (a) Target species (i.e., monkfish or Northeast multispecies), and (b) non-target species (e.g., monkfish or skate);
5. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on: (a) Size and/or species selectivity, and (b) bycatch reduction, including reducing bycatch of and interactions with protected species.

One Committee member noted that many of these mirror the research recommendations from the Review Panels in the past several stock assessments. Some members also suggested that one of

the priorities should be to fill in gaps in survey coverage, particularly in inshore waters. Following its review of the PDT's recommendations and this discussion, the committee agreed to the following:

Consensus

To adopt the following RSA priorities, in order of importance:

1. Research on monkfish life history focusing on: (a) age and growth, (b) longevity, (c) reproduction, and (d) natural mortality;
2. Migration patterns focusing on: (a) Short- and long-term movements with respect to management areas and off-shelf movements, and, (b) habitat use;
3. Research concerning trophic interactions of monkfish with other species and monkfish cannibalism;
4. Cooperative research surveys to fill in gaps in current survey coverage;
5. Research concerning bycatch and discard mortality focusing on: (a) Target species (i.e., monkfish or Northeast multispecies), and (b) non-target species (e.g., monkfish or skate);
6. Trawl and gillnet gear studies focusing on: (a) Size and/or species selectivity, and, (b) bycatch reduction, including reducing bycatch of and interactions with protected species.

16. MOTION: MATT MCKENZIE/MARK ALEXANDER

To move forward the consensus RSA recommendations from the Monkfish Committee.
(McKenzie/M. Alexander)

Discussion on the Motion:

- The motion is to formally convey the recommendation for consideration by the NEFMC.

Motion passed unanimously.