

#8c

## SNE/MID ATLANTIC WINTER FLOUNDER STUDY FLEET PROPOSAL

### Rationale:

The SSC has determined that 644 tons of winter flounder will likely perish simply because other fisheries exist. This number is roughly half of what was landed in the last year of a directed fishery. It is unconscionable that these fish should be simply wasted, given the shortage of available fishery dependant data that has been created by the prohibition of retention associated with the interim rule and beyond. In our current condition we are hobbled by indecisiveness. As the management of this fishery transitions away from a closure, we are all challenged to determine at what point the stock can again support a fishery and at what level should it exist. A fishery that moves from having no possession limit to one that is closed in the course of one year is clearly in need of greater investigation than it has received. Uncertainty, surrounding fishing mortality and natural mortality rates as well as the potential for this stock to rebuild to projected levels are not going to be answered, absent, a focused effort and inquiry. It is only prudent that the leading edge of available mortality should be invested in the establishment of a platform of greater understanding, upon which to build an effective management response to the complexity of this fishery. In our current state, no steps are being taken to explain the sudden reversal of opinion of the condition of the stock or the unexplained mortality that was referenced in the GARM. There does not exist the possibility of an informed discussion on the course of management's large mesh only approach given the lack of discard data currently available and under consideration. The council and NMFS have long focused on a large mesh solution as being all that is needed and to date, all we have is a moratorium on landings and a robust discard only policy exemplifying that as the best we can do. A reoccurring retrospective pattern should trigger an inquiry by the scientific community and intensified questions about mortality by those in charge of managing it. Left unanswered it is unlikely that things will remedy themselves and less likely looms the prospect that we will discard ourselves to greater stock health and overall recovery. There exists a great need to expand the knowledge of this stock in general and specifically to construct a protracted analysis of all fishing F as it occurs throughout an entire year. If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it.

### Proposal:

Designate a portion of the 644 tons to the establishment of a voluntary SNE Winter Flounder Study Fleet. Within the study fleet, vessels would be allocated 10-20,000 lbs of Fld for the fishing year 2010. A vessels allocation would be consistent with that vessels PSC. This would be a Hard TAC. All fld caught

would count against the TAC. This would include legal, sublegal and regulatory discards occurred in the small mesh fishery.

Vessels would be required to be in the existing study fleet program or monitored with "Fish Tracs" or an equivalent.

Vessels would record all lengths and weights of flounders caught.

Vessels would report daily.

Vessels would be legally bound by "sideboard" sector contract agreements to the terms of the contract surrounding the study fleet.

Vessels would be required to obtain biological samples as requested throughout the year.

#### Benefits to Science:

The establishment of real time, special, and temporal and size distribution patterns of Winter Flounder.

Greater understanding of offshore and inshore spawning events.

The establishment of a fact based understanding of all fishing related mortality.

Through the elimination of scientific uncertainty surrounding fishing mortality, actual natural mortality rates will become more determinable.

The effectiveness of currently used analytical tools will become clearer.

#### Benefits to Management:

The establishment of a Winter Flounder Study Fleet changes the relationship between managers and fishermen for the better. This council action would empower sector members to fish for solutions in the interest of all and a more satisfactory and timely regulatory outcome.

A study fleet would turn discards into data at a time when data is desperately called for.

The establishment of a study fleet would create an incentive to fish clean in all small mesh fisheries and forever link heightened stewardship to profitability.

The establishment of different gear strategies and attitudes within the industry signals a partnership between the council, the industry and SFA that will clearly expedite the recovery of this critically important stock.

Investigates the need for a hard TAC or mandatory gear modifications in the small mesh fishery as a means to avoid prolonging rebuild periods, ineffective management measures and future closures associated with a reoccurring pattern of uncertainty

Benefits to Industry:

A study fleet allows for limited retention of by catch levels of winter flounder in related large mesh fisheries.

Increases the attractiveness of sector membership and potentially offsets the associated costs.

Encourages healthy gear innovations

Creates an incentive to fish clean and rewards a culture of stewardship and progressive thought.

Demonstrates the industry's ability to prosecute clean small mesh fisheries ,immediately, as a means to preserve the right to target small mesh stocks within the range of Winter Flounder.

