

**New England Fishery Management Council**  
**Recreational Advisory Panel**  
**Meeting Summary**  
November 1, 2011

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met in Plymouth, MA to hear an overview of the new MRIP data collection program and to discuss accountability measures for Gulf of Maine haddock and Council priorities for 2012. RAP members present were Mr. Barry Gibson (Chair), Mr. Rick Bellavance, Mr. Tom DePersia, Mr. Tony DiLernia, Mr. Eric Hromada, Mr. Patrick Paquette, Mr. Jonathan Sterritt, Mr. Don Swanson, and Mr. Kevin Twombly. They were supported by staff members Ms. Anne Hawkins (NEFMC) and Mr. Doug Christel (NMFS NERO).

Discussions were guided by a catch summary for FY 2010 and a draft document on Council priorities for consideration at the November Council meeting.

**MRIP Overview**

Mr. Paul Perra of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) presented a summary of the process for implementing the MRIP data management program to replace the existing MRFSS program. The process is being conducted by NMFS headquarters, and the information will be used for assessments and catch monitoring. RAP members stressed the utility of party/charter vessel logs, and underlined the importance of outreach to recreational fishermen to help them understand the importance of accurate and timely reporting.

**Gulf of Maine (GOM) Haddock Accountability Measures**

The recreational fishery exceeded its catch limit for GOM haddock in 2010, and as a result the NMFS asked the RAP to recommend appropriate accountability measures (AMs) as required by law. Staff explained how the catch limit was determined based on the historical commercial and recreational catches, and noted that the allocation method was not under consideration to be modified at this time. Potential accountability measures were similar to those considered in Amendment 16 and included trip limits, bag limits, and seasonal limits, and could be parsed out by mode (i.e. party/charter, private, etc.). Once implemented, the length of time of the accountability measures will depend on the amount of the overage. The Regional Administrator can maintain the measures for an indefinite amount of time.

The final catch numbers were determined using the MRFSS database. They were compared to the MRIP estimates, but due to reservations with MRIP data NMFS was unwilling to make a final determination of which data were appropriate. If MRIP data is later finalized and shows that an overage was more or less than the MRFSS data suggested, the accountability measures may be adjusted. However, it is unlikely that the MRIP data will be finalized before January 2012, when the AMs must become effective.

RAP members expressed frustration that they were not presented with a clear set of alternatives showing what exact restrictions would be necessary to achieve the desired mortality reductions. Instead, they felt as though they were asked to prioritize the types of measures without knowing what the magnitude of the changes to bag limits or size limits would be. The RAP Chair clarified that they could put number limits on their recommendations, and that some preliminary analysis

of the reductions that would be achieved through various measures was contained in the Amendment 16 text. The RAP spent some time looking at the Amendment 16 proposed measures and the analysis of reduction that would have occurred with each alternative.

Several members of the RAP also questioned why an accountability measure was necessary if the overall catch limit for this stock was not harvested. NMFS staff clarified that the law, as currently written provides no discretion in implementing the AMs. While other management plans include rules to this effect, the groundfish management plan does not at this time.

The RAP was divided on the issue of whether bag limits were appropriate or not, and discussed this at length. Several party/charter operators argued that the lack of a bag limit is a major source of enticement for potential customers, and that an increase in minimum size was far preferable. Some of these operators felt that even a very high bag limit would have a psychological effect that would be detrimental to their businesses, while others said they would agree only to a “skyrocket” bag limit that was very large. They also wondered whether a large bag limit would effectively reduce catch.

Other operators felt strongly that a bag limit was necessary, and should be implemented even if an overage had not occurred. They stated that bag limits had general support amongst members of the recreational fleet with whom they had spoken. Some argued that increasing the minimum size limit would only increase mortality from discards, and would not benefit the stock. Others stated that it is common to either catch very low or very high numbers of haddock, and felt that a bag limit would help to restrict those occasional huge catches. One member stated that it may be preferable to impose a very high bag limit to get customers used to the idea, and to decrease it gradually if necessary.

Members from both sides generally agreed that inconsistency in regulations was worse than restrictions that required low catch levels. The panel also considered whether it would be preferable to have different recommendations for the party/charter and for the private fleets. Several felt that poor data methods had created this situation, and action should not be necessary because they actually caught few haddock. A few panel members stated that the recreational fleet should be looking for a bigger allocation rather than developing restrictive accountability measures.

Public comment included:

- Mike Flaherty, Recreational Fisherman (Wareham MA): I agree that not using bag limits is what got us into this mess. To even entertain the idea of not having bags limits in 2010 is lunacy. The charter industry has to entice business from other areas, but still all that marketing just ends up with people taking what they want and going back home. We live here and have to live with the consequences.

One panel member made a strong statement that he felt this process was unfair, because a large increase in bycatch was recently given to the industrial herring fleet and was being discarded, because the lobster bait industry was increasingly catching juvenile haddock, and because there were large numbers of GOM haddock and the total ACL was not being caught.

**Motion:** To recommend to the Committee/Council that they use an increase in size limit to get the appropriate reduction needed for 2012 (Mr. Bellavance/Mr. DePersia)

The RAP briefly discussed GOM cod and stated that they had heard the ongoing assessment may lead to large reductions in catches in upcoming years. There was concern that an internal battle could arise between party/charter and private recreational operators if there were suggestions to allocate to each of those fisheries. Some RAP members felt that, if it was true that cod catch would be severely limited, it was important to be able to market haddock on party/charter trips in order to keep their businesses operational. Others worried that increasing haddock trips would lead to the ACL being exceeded even further.

RAP members asked for exact numbers that would be necessary for bag limits and increases in minimum size, and were told that the analysis was not available at this time.

**Motion as perfected:** To recommend to the Committee/Council that they use an increase in size limit, not to exceed 2 inches, to get the appropriate reduction needed for 2012 (Mr. Bellavance/Mr. DePersia)

Several people pointed out that this motion would increase the minimum size to up to 20 inches, which was less than a previous minimum size of 21 inches. The makers of the motion clarified that the intent was for it to apply to the entire fishery.

**Motion to amend:** To recommend to the Committee/Council that they use an increase in size limit, not to exceed 2 inches, to get the appropriate reduction needed for 2012. Any additional necessary reduction would be achieved through the use of a bag limit. (Mr. Sterritt/Mr. Paquette)

Some RAP members expressed discomfort with supporting the motion when they did not have any indication how the bag limit would be defined.

The motion to amend **failed** on a show of hands (2-5-1).

**Motion as perfected:** To recommend to the Committee/Council that they use an increase in size limit, not to exceed 2 inches, to get the appropriate reduction needed for 2012 (Mr. Bellavance/Mr. DePersia)

The motion **carried** on a show of hands (4-3-1).

By consensus, the RAP agreed it was important to them to make a statement about the process for this meeting. They felt that they did not have the appropriate information to make this recommendation and no analysis to consider what the actual options were. They wanted to state to the Council that if it really wanted their opinion, they needed to be given tools so they could form their compromise together. None felt completely satisfied about what would come out of this particular motion.

### **Council Priorities for 2012**

The RAP had several recommendations for the Council to consider during its priority discussion on November 16<sup>th</sup> in Newport, RI.

- The members did not feel that recreational issues should be the lowest priority item for the Groundfish Committee, and recommended moving them up in the list.

- RAP members discussed the possibility of imposing restrictive measures on recreational fishing in the southern cod area, as anecdotal reports suggest a derby fishery in that area. Some ideas included a 10-fish (or higher) possession limit per day of a trip or a closed area. The area in question is referred to as Appletree, and is a discrete area south of Rhode Island or Connecticut that should coincide with the Southern New England Regulated Mesh Area. By consensus, they agreed to recommend that the Council consider appropriate measures for trips in the area.
- The members recommended adding to priorities the development of a mechanism to allow transfer of catch quota between the recreational and commercial fisheries.
- The RAP also supported the Council pursuing an action to modify the herring access areas.