

Potential Management Options Related to Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

OPTION 1 - QUOTA/ACL TRANSFER AND RELATED OPTIONS

Purpose: Acquire more quota.

Option 1A: Options relating to acquisition of additional quota through U.S./Canada process

- Sub-option 1A-1: Re-negotiate fishing year 2012 YTF shared Total Allowable Catch (TAC).
- Description:
 - The upper bound of the 2012 TRAC recommendation was 1,400 mt
 - U.S. overfishing limit for 2012 is 1,617 mt
 - 2012 TMGC agreement set the TAC at 1,150 mt
 - SSC recommendation for 2012 ABC was also 1,150 mt

Notes: Increasing the U.S. TAC would require revision of the ABC; 2012 TRAC for 2013 catch advice will be completed in late June (there is a concern that the poor condition of this stock may continue)

- Working group feedback: Supportive of concept
- Sub-option 1A-2: Transfer unused Canadian quota to U.S. after the close of the Canadian fishery.
- Description: The 2012 Canadian TAC has been fully allocated to the Canadian groundfish and scallop fisheries; however the fishing year in Canada ends on December 31, 2012. If any portion of the Canadian TAC is unused after December 31, the U.S. could request or negotiate for that to be transferred to the U.S. TAC for use for the remainder of the 2012 U.S. fishing year (January 1– April 30, 2013).
- Working group feedback: Supportive of concept

Option 1B: Transfer Annual Catch Limit (ACL) from the scallop to groundfish fishery (updated 2012 scallop catch will be provided at the June 18 Groundfish/Scallop Committee)

Description: Transfer a portion of the scallop sub-ACL to the groundfish fleet based on an updated estimate of scallop fishery catches of GB YTF in 2012. This could be done either as a single ‘lump sum’ transfer or in a series of small transfers (see option 2B).

Working group feedback: Mixed – supported by groundfish fleet; scallop fleet has varying concerns but is not completely opposed to transfer

OPTION 2 - TRIP LIMITS, ROLLING TRANSFERS, PARTIAL AREA CLOSURE; SELECTIVE GEAR

Purpose: Extend fishing opportunity

The following options could be used in combination or as stand-alone options:

Option 2A: Trip limits for sector vessels

Description: Trip limit for groundfish sector vessels fishing in the U.S./Canada Area.

Working group feedback: Not supported

Option 2A-2: Zero possession for commercial groundfish vessels (vessels would still be allocated GB YTF and would therefore need to continue to track their quota)

Description: Groundfish vessels fishing in the U.S./Canada Area would be prohibited from possessing YT.

Working group feedback: Mixed; some supported and some opposed

Option 2B: Rolling series of transfers of YT from scallop to groundfish fleet

Description: Transfer a portion of the scallop sub-ACL to the groundfish fleet in a series of transfers as updated scallop fishery utilization of YT becomes available. An initial transfer could occur as soon as possible that would provide some immediate relief, while posing little risk to scallopers. Following that release, re-evaluation of scallop fishery YT use could occur at fixed intervals (e.g., 2-month spans) and additional transfers made, when possible, if projections indicated underutilization will occur by the scallop fleet. Some ‘reserve capacity’ for both fleets could be maintained by this system of transfers to serve as a “buffer” for the scallop fleet while also providing for additional groundfish GB YTF availability.

Working group feedback: Mixed - supported by groundfish fleet; scallop fleet has varying concerns but is not completely opposed to transfer

Option 2C: Partial area closure of U.S./Canada Area when a sector’s YT ACE is fully utilized (i.e., partial closure of the stock area)

Description: Conceptually, after a sector’s ACE has been utilized, this option would close a portion of the stock area that has higher YTF concentrations while allowing continued operations in designated areas that have lower or no YTF concentrations.

Sub options:

- 1. Allow vessels to fish in the U.S./Canada Area until a fixed percentage of their ACE has been caught (e.g., 80 or 90 percent). Once this threshold has been caught, the area closure would apply and their remaining YT ACE would serve as a bycatch reserve to allow operations in the remaining open area.
- 2. Allow sector vessels to fish in U.S./Canada Area until the sector’s ACE has been fully utilized then prohibit operations in the partial area closure (*see also Bycatch set-aside quota, below*).

Working group feedback: Some members of the working group provided substantial input on the partial area closure concept during the May 31 teleconference. Specifically,

- The potential area closure(s) should not be large
- Access to other species (haddock, window flounder) needs to be maintained in open areas
- Concerns were raised about the calculation of discard rates charged for trips not encountering YTF
- Access to the designated YTF open areas could be structured similar to a scallop access area with potential declaration requirements, selective gear, or other options
- Generally, groundfish vessels are currently trying to avoid YTF but remain concerned that doing so may result in loss of access to other species

Option 2C-2: Bycatch set-aside quota using transferred YTF.

Description:

- Establish bycatch-only pool of fish if additional YT sub-ACL is made available through transfer from scallop fleet or from Canada

- Could be used with the partial area closure option or as a stand-alone provision
- Designed to allow continued fishing after sector YT ACE has been used
- Could be further re-enforced by trip/possession limits or a zero possession requirement
- All fishing would be restricted once the bycatch set-aside quota and sector YT ACE has been used
- Could be paired with gear restrictions

Working group feedback: Idea of a common-access pool of fish was not supported by the working group. Allocation of additional fish to sectors would encourage individual accountability.

Option 2D: Require selective trawl gear type use

Description: Trawl vessels would be required to use either haddock separator or Ruhle trawl gear when fishing in the stock area, either immediately or once portion of GB is closed. (Selective gear for non-trawl vessels could also be used.)

Working group feedback: Concerns were raised that selective gear may under harvest commercially important species, particularly winter flounder. Working group feedback indicated some support for selective gear use in conjunction with discrete access-type areas.

Option 2E: Additional gear modifications

Description: Exploration of gear modifications to further reduce yellowtail flounder bycatch (e.g., low profile dredge for scallop fleet). Would need research and development before implementation could be required.

Working group feedback: Not discussed in May 31, 2012, meeting.

Option 2F: Shift scallop access to areas with lower yellowtail flounder bycatch

Description: Consider access to areas that are currently closed to scallop fishing (i.e., northern edge within Closed Area II); could potentially reduce effort in areas with higher yellowtail flounder bycatch

Working group feedback: Not discussed in May 31, 2012, meeting.

OTHER OPTIONS AND ISSUES

Option 3A: “Hotspot” YT bycatch avoidance

Description: System of catch reporting and fleet advisories designed to help avoid concentrations of YT (i.e., current SMAST scallop program). Could be expanded to include groundfish administered through voluntary informal sector system, SMAST (requires additional funding/staff), agency assistance, or some combination.

Working group feedback: Not discussed in May 31, 2012, meeting.

Option 3B: Scallop sub-ACL “indemnity” concept

Description: Temporarily recuse the scallop fishery from any AM that, under the current scallop regulations, would be required if the sub-ACL is exceeded in 2012. Instead, the pound-for-pound repayment provisions of the U.S./Canada agreement could be utilized should the TAC be exceeded (for fishing year 2012 TAC=ABC=ACL).

Working group feedback: Concerns have been raised that any potential YTF overage would reduce the groundfish allocation in fishing year 2013 but would not similarly affect the scallop fleet as the sub-ACL for that fleet is established based on projected YT catch. The remainder is then apportioned to the groundfish fleet.

Issue: Reporting Accuracy

Description: Concerns were raised during the working group call that accurate stock-area reporting is critical for effective management and stock assessment. Analysis to reconcile VMS and VTR data is ongoing in the wake of GOM cod and is being looked into for GB YTF as well.

Options: This is not a new issue. Past discussions have contemplated potential VMS declarations, limiting fishing to 1 stock area per trip/declaration, or additional reporting requirements to improve fishing location/stock area information.

Issue: TMGC membership

Description: Different TMGC membership has been suggested by various parties. TMGC membership includes 1 government representative, 1 scientist, and 4 industry representatives for Canada and the U.S. The 4 industry representatives for the U.S. have always been Council members, but this is not a requirement of the Understanding. The Council Chair recommends TMGC members, with assistance from the Executive Committee, and final approval by the Regional Administrator. Inclusion of non-Council members may need to undergo FACA evaluation.

Options: Continue discussion about TMGC membership and process

Issue: Informal TMGC meeting, June 2012

Description: Several members of the TMGC will be in Wood's Hole in late June. A face-to-face meeting or teleconference could be held, as needed, to discuss ongoing U.S./Canada issues (e.g., request for unused YT, TMGC membership, future negotiations, etc.).

Issue: Timing of 2012 GB YTF TRAC assessment and potential Council or Agency action(s)

Description: The 2012 GB yellowtail flounder stock assessment conducted through the TRAC process is scheduled to occur in the week of June 25-29 in Wood's Hole, MA. Any recommendations or actions undertaken for fishing year 2012 should incorporate the new assessment information, particularly with respect to the status of the stock.