

New England Fishery Management Council
Recreational Advisory Panel
Meeting Summary
February 15, 2013

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met in Wakefield, MA to discuss recreational management measures for FY 2013. Members present were Mr. Barry Gibson (Chair), Mr. Mike Sosik (Vice –Chair), Mr. Tim Tower, Mr. Don Swanson, Mr. Jon Sterritt, Mr. Tom Dipersia, Mr. Kevin n Twombly, Mr. Joe Huckmeyer, and Mr. Patrick Paquette. Mr. Mike Plaia listened to the meeting via a web link. RAP members were supported by Tom Nies and Fiona Hogan (NEFMC staff), Mike Ruccio (NERO staff), and Scott Steinback and Min-Yan Lee (NEFSC). Mr. Gibson advised the RAP that Mr. Tower and Mr. Carl Forsberg were appointed to fill vacancies, and thanked Ms. Emilie Litsinger for her service to the RAP.

The purpose of the meeting was to develop recommendations for recreational measures for FY 2013. Mr. Gibson explained that Framework Adjustment 48 – under review by NMFS – included a measure that, if approved, would allow NMFS to adjust recreational measures prior to the start of the fishing year if needed to prevent a recreational sub-ACL from being exceeded, or to allow it to be caught. The measure would provide an opportunity for Council comment. The Council delegated this responsibility to the RAP for FY 2013 in order that comments could be provided to the agency in time for the May 1 start of the fishing year. Changes to measures were expected to be needed because of the large reductions in the sub-ACLs for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and GOM haddock.

Mr. Steinback and Mr. Lee provided the RAP a refresher on the bio-economic model being used to design recreational measure, as well as an update on the recreational harvest in 2012. This model was explained to the RAP at its last meeting in 2012. Changes to the model included a revision to the discard mortality assumption for GOM cod (previously considered to be 100 percent, but reduced to 30 percent as a result of the recent GOM cod benchmark assessment), and incorporation of an estimate of future stock length-frequencies. The economists presented the results of the model which suggested that a change was not needed for GOM cod measures (currently at a 19 inch minimum size and a 9 fish bag limit), but GOM haddock would need an increase in the minimum size to 21 inches. They noted that unlike cod, all haddock discards were assumed to survive and this was a key factor in the model results.

Public comment on the presentation included:

- Mr. Bob Yeomans: This model does not look at the cycles or history of herring and other cod prey. This leads to changes in the ratio of cod to haddock, and that affects recreational catches.

Motion: the RAP recommends for FY 2013 that the GOM cod regulations be a 19 inch minimum size and a 9 fish per person bag limit. (Mr. Dipersia/Mr. Twombly)

RAP members discussed the motion, asking if a larger minimum size would lead to a larger bag limit. Min-Yang advised that this was not examined. There were some questions about the discard mortality assumption and whether it was appropriate. Mr., Paquette expressed concerns that the status quo measures that were proposed left little room for errors in the estimate of the measure effects; he was concerned that using these measures might be more risky than would be wise. His concerns were seconded by several other members, who questioned whether a slightly larger fish size (20 or 21 inches) might provide additional conservation benefits. Other members noted that they expected reduced recreational fishing effort due to the bad economy and felt the measures proposed would be effective. Another concern was that a reduced bag limit would limit charters and would ruin the fishery.

Motion to substitute: The RAP recommends a ten fish per person bag limit and a 21 inch minimum size for GOM cod. (Mr. Paquette/Mr. Tower)

Several RAP members spoke against this motion, in part because it was unclear what the 21 inch minimum size would do to fishing mortality, while others felt this was a better approach and would result in less risk that the sub-ACL would be exceeded. Mr. Ruccio reviewed the process for implementing the regulation, noting that there would be an opportunity for public comment. This might provide time for additional analyses that would make the impacts more clear.

The motion to substitute **failed** on a show of hands (4-4-1).

Motion: the RAP recommends for FY 2013 that the GOM cod regulations be a 19 inch minimum size and a 9 fish per person bag limit.

The original motion **carried** on a show of hands (7-1-1).

The RAP next discussed measures for GOM haddock and considered the increase in the minimum fish size. Mr. Sterritt highlighted the fact that the GOM haddock measures assumed all discarded fish survived, which was known to be untrue. He expressed concern that the measure proposed would not be as effective as expected.

Motion: The RAP recommends FY 2013 regulations for GOM haddock be a 21 inch size limit with no bag limit. (Mr. Dipersia/Mr. Tower)

Mr. Sterritt suggested considering a bag limit of some type to cap catches, but there was no data that suggested this would be effective. Mr. Dipersia explained that party/charter boats would be able to sell trips based on an unlimited bag limit.

The motion **carried** on a show of hands (8-0-1)

Other Business

Mr. Paquette noted that considerable effort had identified measures to mitigate the effects of low ABCs on the commercial fleet, but nothing had been identified for the recreational fleet. The motion was modified several times until the final perfection was agreed upon:

Motion as perfected: that the RAP request the Council chair send a letter to the Regional Office requesting the NERO allow fishing for GOM cod during the months of March and April 2012 to allow the recreational fleet access to un-harvested ACL prior to the end of FY 2012. (Mr. Paquette/Mr. Huckmeyer)

Mr. Paquette noted that the recreational fishery had not caught its FY 2013 sub-ACL for GOM cod and was not likely to do so. The fish were already allocated and the recreational fishery should be provided the opportunity to catch them. This proposal might provide some opportunities to increase catches before the reduced FY 2013 quotas went into effect. Mr. Swanson opposed the motion on the grounds that uncaught fish would be a conservation benefit. Other RAP members spoke in favor of the motion, noting that other fisheries were allowed to fish at the end of the year. RAP members also expressed frustration that the case of recent low catches was due to the presence of large commercial draggers in the inshore GOM.

The motion **carried** on a show of hands (5-4).

Mr. Ruccio cautioned the RPA that at present the NMFS did not have the authority to make this change and it was unlikely it could be implemented before the end of the fishing year.

RAP members asked Mr. Steinback and Mr. Lee if it would be possible in the future to have a wider range of management alternatives for both cod and haddock. This was taken under advisement.

The meeting adjourned with no further business before the RAP at 12:40 pm.