



### **Scallop PDT Meeting Summary**

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Parker River Wildlife Refuge – Newburyport, MA

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PDT members in attendance: Deirdre Boelke, Demet Haksever, Dave Rudders, Bill DuPaul, Cate O’Keefe, Charles Adams, Lyle Kessler, Dvora Hart, Erin Kupcha, Emily Gilbert, Evan Bing-Sawyer, and Brian Hooper.

About 10 people attended in the audience

Purpose of Meeting: Further development of Framework 24 alternatives, discuss plan for analyzing GB access area seasonal closure alternatives, and identify research priority recommendations for 2013-2014.

Staff summarized actions from the January 2012 Council meeting. The Council took action on three issues outside of FW24 at that meeting. First, request Emergency Action to shift 2012 Delmarva trips to Closed Area I. Second, request that the Observer Program develop a mechanism to improve data quality by having Captains review information at the end of a fishing trip. Ms. Kupcha from the Observer Program explained that there are already two ways vessels can review data and provide input (data request and fisherman comment log) but they are working on developing an additional feedback loop to address the concerns raised by the Council. One PDT member suggested that an additional source of potential error is when the data is entered so it may be possible to have a two-step review of the info on the vessel as well as after it has been entered. The Observer Program may be able to report on the progress of this request at the April 5 Committee meeting. Finally, the Council also requested that the Center present the future plans of the scallop federal survey to the Committee and/or Council. Dr. Hart explained that she will be presenting the basic design of the 2012 survey to the Scallop Committee on April 5 and a preliminary method for integrating Habcam data into the overall biomass estimate.

#### ***Framework 24***

Staff summarized an outline of measures developed to date. The PDT reviewed the Background and Purpose and Need and did not have any changes to suggest. The PDT did suggest that within the specification section a specific heading should be added as a placeholder for measures to adjust 2014 allocations if necessary. The PDT also discussed that it would be useful to work on an analysis of the actual impacts of the YT AM closure in 2012. It is possible that the closure could cause increased fishing in other areas and lower than normal effort within that area; therefore, those impacts should be taken into consideration when setting specifications in FW24. The PDT may look into ways to estimate where effort will go and model those impacts, but predicting human behavior is always difficult.

The PDT discussed the general timeline of analyses for the specifications and it was decided that survey data should still be completed by August 1 if possible, and the earliest the SSC could review the ABC would be late August/early September. It was highlighted that since the Habcam team will be involved in the federal survey this year they will not be able to complete their tentatively approved CA2 RSA survey until July the earliest. Therefore, it is not feasible that Habcam data from CA2 will be available for setting the ABC, but it is possible that CA2 results would be available for setting an actual TAC for that area later in the fall. The PDT also discussed including an appendix to describe the methods used to project YT catch since that has become such an important issue.

### Seasonal closures for GB Access Areas

Staff explained that the analyses for this section will likely include an evaluation of spatial and temporal bycatch rates from observer data and a RSA project that evaluated seasonal bycatch patterns in Closed Area I and II (March 2010 – Feb 2011) as well as an updated literature search. NERO staff explained that making this modification will require a change to the GF regulations as well, so this will need to be a joint action. It will also be necessary for the GF PDT to assess the potential impacts on GF mortality and spawning. The timing and availability of the GF PDT to evaluate these measures is uncertain.

Dr. Hart presented monthly bycatch rates in CA1, CA2 and NL from all available observer data (1999-2011). These areas were always closed to the scallop fishery between February and June 14 so there are no observed trips during this period. A model can be used to estimate those months with no data points, but instead the PDT discussed that bycatch rates from surrounding areas should be used instead to fill in those months with actual observer data. That analysis will be prepared and blended with the current analyses reviewed. Based on the data for just the months the areas were open, bycatch rates were higher in the earlier years before larger mesh twine tops were required in all areas (2004). It can be misleading to simply look at the trends by year because there are month and year effects. Therefore, Dr. Hart developed a model to address these effects.

The analyses suggest that for Closed Area 2 bycatch rates are highest in October. Based on preliminary results, which may change after more months are included in the analyses, an earlier opening date and closure in the fall could help reduce YT and improve scallop yield. Mr. Smolowitz added that the preliminary data from the RSA project are similar suggesting that bycatch is relatively low until August and then increases during the fall. Moving to Closed Area I the preliminary results are not as clear. Bycatch rates are much lower overall in CA1 compared to CA2, and there does not seem to be a strong seasonal trend in this area. The months of November and January are the highest, but since overall bycatch relatively low these results are likely driven more by meat weight variations. It was suggested that adding a “meat weight factor” like number of scallops killed per pound of YT could help. Finally, the preliminary results from the observer data for Nantucket Lightship suggest that bycatch rates actually get lower later in the year, but this model still needs more work. If there are not strong YT bycatch patterns than openings should be timed with highest meats to reduce F and associated impacts. The highest meat weights on GB are from May through the middle of September, with a peak in June; and the lowest are in April followed by March. Based on these preliminary results, the PDT discussed that it may be useful to consider different seasonal restrictions per area.

The PDT discussed that moving the opening date to May 15 as an example would improve scallop yield and reduce F. The issue is what the impacts would be on GF mortality and spawning; and that will require input from the GF PDT. In general, there are two ways to approach these seasonal restrictions: develop and fixed opening and closing date, or leave the areas open all year and identify a fixed time period to close the areas when bycatch rates are highest. The PDT discussed that having the areas open longer could have beneficial impacts of spreading effort out, but in access areas there is a fixed possession limit so there is less incentive to fish in high meat weight months compared to open areas. Another added that the seasonal cycle for scallop meat weight variation is not as strong in the Mid-Atlantic.

### YT AMs for LAGC trawl fishery and Timing of YT AMs

Staff briefly described a summary of which vessels are in the LAGC trawl fishery, what recent catch has been, homeport, dependence on scallops etc. As the PDT discussed the observer data for this fleet it was noted that there was substantial coverage in 2006-2008; therefore the PDT is going to summarize those years with the 2010 data set it already has to help identify potential AMs. While the PDT discussed the observer data for this fleet a member of the audience asked several questions about specific observed trips that could impact how the data are summarized: do any of the vessels switch gears on the same trip; how

many of these vessels use two nets; is the location confirmed later with VTR? One PDT member reminded the group that it has not yet been confirmed if a framework action can prohibit use of a gear type.

The PDT discussed the measure to potentially divide the YT sub-ACL further. The major concern with this idea is that it will require more observer coverage. The question is how much? While this action already has a measure to include LAGC IFQ vessels in the observer set-aside program, which should increase coverage for this sector of the fleet, it is still not clear just how much coverage would be needed to monitor the YT sub-ACL if it was divided further. This led to a larger discussion of YT monitoring in general in this fishery and how that is going to change if FW47 is approved and the 10% YT TAC is no longer in place for GB access areas. It was discussed that vessels are still required to report YT catch daily in access areas, but there is no area TAC to monitor real-time so will that information be available online at all, or will the first report on YT catch be on or around January 15, 2013 when the Agency has to report the overall YT catch for the sub-ACL. Dr. Adams reminded the PDT that the time lag in the YT Sub-ACL monitoring reports posted online is due to the lag in observer data delivery, and that Council, NERO and NEFSC staff agreed to the current posting schedule in a conference call on June 15, 2011. However, he recommended switching to the use of the most recent 12 months' worth of observer data for this monitoring report (rather than only posting YT discards through the most recent month of available observer data). This would eliminate the current situation where it is March 7, but the YT Sub-ACL report that is online only shows data through September 30, 2011. Use of the most recent 12 months' worth of observer data would allow the YT Sub-ACL monitoring report to be more real time.

Related to that somewhat, the PDT also discussed if it was possible to include a new alternative under 2.3.3 Timing of YT AMs – that would change how observer data gets back into the system. Specifically, could the system be modified to be more like how observed catch is reported for sectors (e.g. daily reporting of YT by area). Ms. Kupcha from the observer program explained that the Agency intended to have Toughbooks implemented in the scallop fishery, which would have improved the ability to monitor the fishery more real-time, but implementation of that system is still uncertain. It was discussed that it could be possible to make changes to the system, and it could potentially be done outside of the FW/Council process.

#### Leasing of IFQ mid-year

The PDT plans to develop this section based on sector leasing provisions.

#### Expand observer program to include LAGC IFQ vessels in open areas

The PDT had a brief discussion about the feasibility of this alternative. There was support for expanding the program to help improve accuracy and precision of bycatch estimates. The PDT discussed how the current target coverage levels are set and it was explained that they are essentially back calculated using the available TAC per area and estimated trip length for LA coverage rates. It was discussed that adding the LAGC IFQ fishery in open areas is a small component of overall catch so should not require much of the total set-aside. Currently all the observer TAC is not being used, so adding this component should not cause a decrease in coverage for other aspects of the fishery. However, it was noted that this could change based on a drop in price, or a new method for estimating discards – specifically a stratified estimate. This estimate is going to be reviewed at SARC 54 and it may require additional observer coverage for all portions of the fleet.

The PDT discussed that the program could be more flexible if the observer set-aside was not area specific. Prior to A15, the observer set-aside TAC was allocated to each area by setting aside % of each area's TAC. A15 changed this allocation process by taking 1% of the annual ABC/ACL, which is then divided proportionally into access areas and open areas (648.53(g)). This process for setting the compensation

rate and coverage rates does involve setting a baseline allocation to these areas, but the PDT could explore other ways to provide this “baseline” amount by area, while still incorporating more flexibility. Some PDT members more familiar with setting the compensations and coverage rates using the annual observer set-aside plan to discuss potential options prior to the next PDT meeting.

### ***LAGC IFQ Report***

Staff reviewed the draft outline for the LAGC IFQ Report. The PDT suggested that additional issues that could be useful to include would be an evaluation of highgrading. Is there any evidence that under an IFQ there is more incentive for highgrading/. One way this could be evaluated would be to compare the observed bycatch rates on LA and LAGC dredge trips. Another suggestion was to include information about price for landed IFQ product. Is there any evidence that dayboat or IFQ trips have higher prices than other scallop catch? Staff is going to continue to identify potential indicators for enforcement and governance. Dr. Demet Haksever and Mr. Evan Bing-Sawyer described the preliminary analyses for the report including landings and revenue information before and after implementation of IFQs.

### ***Research Priorities***

The PDT reviewed the research priorities from 2011 and 2012. It was discussed overall that some of the priorities need to be updated and revised because they are too long and dated in some cases. The PDT agreed to modify the priority about turtles based on suggestions from Kimberly Murray. However, the PDT agreed to lower that item from High Priority to Medium Priority. The PDT also discussed that in light of current actions to modify EFH and GF closed areas there may be future needs to assess the scallop resource outside of current access areas to either modify boundaries or create new access areas. The PDT is going to review priorities by email before the April meetings and provide a final range of recommendations for the AP and Cmte. A member of the audience argued that there is a greater need to assess scallops in open areas than before not just to help with setting scallop TACs for those areas, but to improve our predictions of where the fleet will fish so projections of YT catch are as accurate as possible for future sub-ACL decisions. There was also a request from the audience to look back and see how RSA funds have been spent in terms of research topic.

### ***Other Business***

The PDT had a discussion about 2012 surveys based on tentative RSA awards recently announced. There are many surveys approved this year and it will be necessary to get data to the PDT as soon as possible for FW24. It was discussed that the deadline will remain at August 1, with the understanding that some distinct areas may come in later. Those results would not be used in the setting of ABC, but could be used in setting specifications if available.

***The next meeting will likely be during the first week of May***