



Final Scallop PDT Meeting Summary

Thursday, January 5, 2012
Hilton Garden Inn – Warwick, RI

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

Other invited presenters: Art Trembanis, Scott Gallagher, and Richard Wahle
About 30 people attended in the audience

Purpose of Meeting: Initial discussion of Framework 24 objectives and potential measures, and discussion of scallop survey results and preliminary fishery data for fishing year 2011.

Framework 24

Staff reviewed 2012 Council priorities and items identified for inclusion in Framework 24. In addition to the framework the Council also requested the PDT to complete a performance evaluation of the LAGC IFQ program to date, as well as coordination with the GF PDT and Habitat PDT on issues under consideration in those plans. The PDT reviewed PDT work assignments and timelines for Framework 24. It was discussed that final action needs to be moved to the November Council meeting. The primary reason is the same timing issue that has faced this process for years; survey results are not available before August 1. Following that deadline several weeks are needed to combine the results into an overall biomass estimate and set of projections. After that the SSC needs to approve the ABC, and then analyses are completed for the economic impacts, YT projected catch, RPM analyses, and other aspects of the environmental assessment. That is a substantial amount of work that would not be complete by early September when the AP and Cmte would need to review the analyses and identify preferred alternatives. The Center also plans to complete an updated assessment this spring as well as explore the best way to integrate survey results from Habcam. While this would be expected to be completed before the 2012 survey season begins and before FW24 analyses, it is additional work that the PDT would likely review at some point in 2012.

Therefore, the PDT thinks the Council should be clear from the beginning that final action will not be until November, which pushes implementation back to May 2013, after the start of the fishing year. Several PDT members voiced that the PDT should still strive for September final action, but it does seem unrealistic. The default measures for 2013 set under FW22 will help elevate some of the complications of late implementation, but the industry should be prepared that FW24 will likely not be implemented until May 2013, best case scenario.

The PDT briefly discussed the three additional measures. For the first one, opening date of GB access areas, the PDT discussed that preliminary results from observer data suggest there may be utility in revising the date for reducing bycatch and also optimizing yield from a scallop meat weight perspective. It was noted however, that this topic could get bogged down if results are not available and may be a less pressing issue since FW47 proposes to eliminate the 10% bycatch cap in access areas. In terms of Issue #2, YT flounder AM for LAGC trawl fishery, the

Regional Office is going to confirm if sub-dividing the ACL is feasible to monitor. **The PDT discussed two potential additions to FW24. First, in light of the issues that are coming up with ACL monitoring, it was suggested that AMs should trigger in Year 2 following an overage, not the subsequent fishing year. Second, it was recommended that the observer set-aside program should be expanded to include coverage of LAGC vessels in open areas. The PDT recommends that the Scallop Committee consider these two additional issues in Framework 24.**

Scallop Survey Results

Ms. Cate O'Keefe presented the results from the 2011 SMAST video survey. This year SMAST expanded their regular survey footprint by adding stations west of Hudson Canyon and east of Long Island. In total, SMAST sampled 2,788 stations in 64 days between May and July. Overall, biomass is similar in both GB and MA in 2011 compared to 2010, but over 20 million pounds were surveyed in the new stations added in 2011. The survey observed very high densities of small scallops (<70 mm) in the Great South Channel, but only small patches of recruiting scallops in the Mid-Atlantic. Their survey did see a reduction in biomass in the Nantucket Lightship access area, particularly due to the 2010 access area fishery. It was noted that the survey was conducted on a 3 nautical mile scale that may be too coarse to detect all of the scallops in the small area, and that this area may require a finer scale (1.5 nautical miles) survey as has been conducted in the past. Closed Area I had a reasonable amount of biomass based on SMAST results, but it was mentioned that there is substantial effort in that area in 2011 and 2012, so the results from the 2012 survey of this area will be very important. Biomass in CA2 was reasonable, some smaller scallops were seen and the majority of the biomass is in the southeastern part of the access area. Hudson Canyon had high biomass values with larger scallops present. Finally, Delmarva biomass is much lower than the 2010 survey; 21 million pounds of exploitable biomass in 2010 compared to 10 million in 2011.

Based on the SMAST results, the PDT discussed two major topics. First, is the 10% increase in the Mid-Atlantic stock resource currently being used to account for biomass from unsurveyed areas sufficient, and second, what is the most effective boundary for surveys of the Mid-Atlantic. It was discussed that 23 million pounds of additional scallops were sampled in waters outside the original federal survey strata, about 17% of the total Mid-Atlantic biomass. About 10 years ago the federal survey was extended to include waters up to 40 meters west of Hudson Canyon, so a portion of the additional biomass in the SMAST survey is now surveyed by the federal survey as well. While it seems that the federal survey has been extended sufficiently to the west of Hudson Canyon to include much of the additional biomass in that area; however, it does not cover waters east of Long Island, where SMAST sampled about 17 million pounds. In the end the PDT discussed that the 10% value identified in the last assessment is an average, so some years will be higher but the Center should potentially consider new survey areas east of Long Island to approximately 40 meters during the next benchmark assessment. In terms of the second issue the PDT discussed that surveys need to initially sample farther than the expected resource extent to confirm where to survey in the future.

Dr. David Rudders from VIMS gave the next presentation on the areas they surveyed in 2011: CA2, Southern New England/Long Island open areas (SNE/LI), New York Bight open areas

(NYB), and Delmarva. The two open areas complement the work by SMAST very well with similar results. This dredge survey is able to provide additional information on gear performance, scallop biology and product quality and bycatch. VIMS conducted four separate surveys between May and October. Dr. Rudders reported that the scallops in Closed Area II were in poorer condition than years past and suggested that there may have been a potential spawning failure in that area or some other phenomenon. Overall biomass was high and small amounts of recruitment. Abundance values are similar to SMAST results, but shell heights are larger. He also reported superior meats east of Long Island, some of the largest and highest quality their team has ever seen. He argued that could be one reason catch rates are higher in open areas than projected because the federal survey does not cover this area and the meat weights were above average. Scott Gallagher commented that there was a diatom bloom in June 2011 that may have provided more food this year; however he cautioned that when that settles it can cause anoxic conditions on the seafloor so that should be monitored.

VIMS reported lower biomass in Delmarva from this survey as well, but signs of recruitment. VIMS survey was conducted in October after most of the fishing had occurred in that area compared to SMAST that sampled the area in May. The biomass that is in Delmarva is spread out, not in high density areas. NYB had larger scallops but very patchy making this a difficult area to survey. He added that this area has lots of sand dollars, and they found that the survey dredge is not efficient in areas with high amounts of sand dollars, compared to the commercial dredge. Dr. Rudders added that the two surveys of NYB this year now give us a good idea of where the inshore extent of the resource is. The PDT discussed that right now it seems that there will be an update assessment in 2012 that will simply take the current SAMS model and add 2010 and 2011 data. And the next benchmark assessment will likely not be until 2014, and that is when issues about survey boundaries, new SH:MW data and potentially new reference points would be considered.

Dr. Scott Gallagher from WHOI gave the next presentation on biomass estimates for Closed Area I using Habcam. Habcam was used to conduct an intensive survey of CA1 with RSA funds and was used by NMFS as the third leg of the federal survey that covered all of GB. The Closed Area I survey was five days in length and was a one nautical mile grid over the entire area and a more intensive 0.5 nautical mile grid over the more abundant part of the access area, along the western boundary. The survey collects scallop abundance information as well as substrate type, abundance of other vertebrates, as well as oceanographic information. The researchers are still working with NMFS on a variety of models that can be used to develop a biomass estimate, but for now the current estimate is over 18,000 mt of biomass in CA1, and most of that is exploitable biomass, just under 17,000 mt.

Another presentation was given by Dr. Art Trembalis from the University of Delaware. He presented work conducted with 2011 RSA funds that used AUV technology to estimate scallop abundance in the NYB area. Survey work was conducted in July for ten days including 30 different survey sights south of Long Island and west of Hudson Canyon. This survey also included side-scan sonar, swath bathymetry, and water information. This is a pilot study to examine if this technology is fruitful for estimating scallop abundance. The team is still in the process of identifying the most efficient way to count and process all the data. These data are available online at: http://cshel.geology.udel.edu/kml_files/Scallop/CruiseData/.

Finally, Dr. Dvora Hart presented survey information from the 2011 federal survey which had 1 leg using the standard survey dredge on GB, one in the MA, and a third leg that only used Habcam on GB. The highest scallop concentrations are within the cod HAPC and waters to the west, Closed Area 1, HC, and the NYBight area. Overall biomass down in the MA, but that is mostly due to Del and ETA areas being fished down. There is not much recruitment, except for some in Delmarva, which is concerning since there has not been recruitment in the MA for several years. Biomass is higher on GB, primarily from larger scallops in the Channel; fishing will likely increase in that area in the next few years. The third leg of this survey was the first time Habcam has been used for a large scale survey and there is a substantial amount of follow-up work needed to identify the best way to convert the abundance info from Habcam into a biomass estimate. That work will be done now so that after the 2012 surveys are conducted the turnaround should be faster so that results can be used in FW24. Overall, Dr. Hart reported that the abundance estimates for all the survey results are in general agreement. Some variation is expected, but overall the results are very similar. Before the Committee meeting she is going to convert the abundance values into biomass estimates so the survey results can be further compared.

Dr. Hart next presented what the future plans of the federal scallop survey likely are. While this process has not been officially approved on all levels, the federal survey will likely include a stereo Habcam system that will be deployed on all legs of the survey starting in 2012. The number of dredge stations will likely be reduced because of limited survey time, but it was clarified that the intent of the Agency to always have some level of a dredge component for the federal survey. The next two years will likely focus on continuing to integrate habcam with the survey dredge so that data would be available to evaluate the number of dredge tows needed at the next benchmark assessment. Some concerns were raised by members of the audience that valuable information comes from the dredge component and the Agency should not move away from a dredge survey too quickly.

Other Scallop Research Set-aside Results

Staff presented a summary of all 2010 and 2011 RSA projects and identified which ones have produced results used directly in the management process. One project not related to scallop biomass surveys presented preliminary results. Dr. Richard Wahle from the University of Maine gave a presentation titled: Developing Tools to Evaluate Spawning and Fertilization Dynamics of the Giant Sea Scallop.

Preliminary 2011 scallop catch and YT catch

See Document #4. The fishing year is not over yet, but based on data from March-November and assumptions about effort for Dec-Feb it is possible that total catch for 2011 could be about 56.3 to 60.0 million pounds. If all RSA, observer set-aside, and general category is harvested that would equal about 5.05 million pounds (1.25, 0.6, and 3.2 million pounds respectively). If all LA access area catch is harvested equaling approximately 24 million pounds that equates to about 51.2 to 54.9 million pounds for the limited access fishery depending on assumptions of open area LPUE and how many carry over DAS are used. Therefore, right now it seems likely that LA catch will be above the sub-ACT of 47 million pounds, and LA catch will be very close to the LA sub-ACL of 55 million pounds.

See Document #4a. The PDT reviewed a preliminary estimate of YT catch for 2011 as well. The PDT made several suggestions about how the estimate can be improved, but total SNE/MA YT catch will not reduce dramatically from the preliminary estimate. Therefore, it is likely that the sub-ACL for that stock area will be exceeded and AMs will trigger. How long those areas would close to the LA fishery is uncertain based on pending implementation of FW23 as well as FW47. While the PDT discussed that the assessment method is the one to use until the YT assessment can compare methods, it would be useful to complete the estimate more spatially to see how robust the assessment method is. The PDT discussed that until data is available in a more timely way, monitoring ACLs “real-time” is very problematic.

Other Business

The PDT discussed how necessary observer data is from off-watch hauls because the PDT was informed that some observers have having a difficult time getting information from Captains about off-watch hauls. The PDT responded that the information is useful but it could be reduced to: number of off-watch hauls and weight of shucked scallops from on-watch hauls if that would improve working conditions. The PDT recommends that the observer office reach out to the industry to further explain how important this information is and how important cooperation with observers is for all vessels.

The PDT did not have time to review the Draft outline for the Performance Evaluation of the LAGC IFQ program or the draft research priorities for 2013 and 2014. Those two topics will be revisited at the next meeting.

The next meeting will likely be in early March