Scallop PDT Meeting Summary
Tuesday, October 9, 2012
Boston, MA

PDT members in attendance: Deirdre Boelke, Demet Haksever, Bill DuPaul, Cate O'Keefe, Charles Adams, Dvora Hart, Chad Keith, Emily Gilbert, Evan Bing-Sawyer, Travis Ford, Brian Hooper, and Lyle Kessler.
4 people attended in the audience

Purpose of Meeting: Review final FW24 projections for scallop and YT catch, develop YT AM alternatives, and discuss data available for CA2 north for Omnibus and future scallop action. **PDT recommendations that require Committee action are underlined.**

Review FW24 projections

1. Assumptions for the projections: All alternatives use the same starting point for 2012 biomass. For 2015 and beyond open area F set at 0.38 or overall F=0.28; whichever is reached first. For all areas closed under FW24 the model assumes they close for two years, access area for three years, and then reverts to an open area. F in GB access areas set at 0.23 for all areas in years beyond FW24. The model draws recruitment randomly from historical recruitment levels for each sub-area in the SAMS model. For No Action have to set max F at 1.2 eventually in areas that have allocations; after a period of years the areas will not provide specified level of catch. All scenarios have the same assumptions for: open area DAS, ETA and Delmarva close in 2013 and HC closes in 2014. Mortality from RSA and other set asides is removed overall – not from a particular area.
2. PDT explored a new Alternative 2 requested by the AP and Committee – provide same overall level of access area effort as Alternative 1, but include access in NL. Concerns were raised about potential for high levels of RSA to be harvested from NL. It is possible that a substantial portion of RSA will be harvested from NL in 2013 since it is the closest access area to New Bedford. To date about 75% of 2012 RSA has been harvested from NL (260,000 pounds) and more could be harvested from that area later this year. Some will likely come from open areas as well, but if 1.0 million pounds came from NL in 2013, that would be a large portion of NL total catch. The more catch removed from NL in 2013, less will be available from that area in 2014, and there are serious concerns about other access areas in 2014.
3. Therefore, after much discussion, the PDT decided to recommend an option that would be added on to both Alternative 2 and 4, which prohibits RSA compensation fishing in NL in 2013. This would be a temporary restriction due to the serious concerns about low biomass levels in access areas in 2013 and 2014. It was discussed that there are sufficient areas in open areas where vessels can get compensation trips in and reducing effort in NL in 2013 would have more benefits for the fleet overall. Concerns were raised about the precedent set that there should be restrictions on what areas RSA should come from. Overall, the PDT supports that each project should decide, but in this case since biomass is so low in most of the access areas there will be too much incentive to fish in NL and that area is the only area in good shape and it needs to be protected for the fishery in 2013 and 2014.
4. In general, the PDT raised serious concerns about 2014. It was discussed that this action may only be one year, but it cannot be ignored how poor most of the access areas are looking for 2014. The scallops are very scattered in CA2, Delmarva may not be able to handle the high levels of F set for that area in 2014, the scallops in CA1 have been below average in terms of quality, and NL may not support all the catch projected in the scenarios. If effort is pushed too high in 2013, there will be very limited options for 2014, until recruitment improves in the Mid-Atlantic in 2015/2016.

5. Following the meeting a final run was completed for Alternative 4 so that it included one 18,000 pound trip in 2013 from either CA1, CA2, HC and NL. For 2014, there was not sufficient biomass to support two 15,000 pound trips without increasing F very high in some areas. So the possession limit for Alternative 4 in 2014 is 13,500 for FT vessels.
6. In addition to the regular scenario runs, the PDT reviewed a "sensitivity analysis" performed that modified some of the assumptions. It is possible that these projected catch levels may be more realistic given recent performance of the fishery estimates and results from the 2012 surveys related to recruitment. Specifically, LPUE was increased by 10%, a strong recruitment for 2013 was assumed (above average); below average recruitment for future GB recruitment. The results suggest that realized catch may be about 10% higher for open areas (1,000 mt), and a slightly longer period with landings above 25,000 due to higher recruitment in the MA.
7. The PDT discussed that the allocations for part-time and occasional vessels should be combined into one trip for the alternatives with reduced possession limits. For example, two 13,000 pound trip limit for full-time vessels translates into two 5,200 pound trip limits, or potentially one 10,400 pound trip. Vessels would still be permitted to break trips and take more than one trip to fulfill their possession limit, but the PDT recommends that trips be allowed to be combined for the alternatives with reduced possession limits.
8. The PDT discussed that FW24 will be complicated because it is uncertain if it will be a one or two year action. Therefore, the document will have to consider both possibilities. Some members of the PDT understand why it makes sense to only set specifications for one year due to uncertainties about YT catch and status of EFH closed areas. However, some members still support that setting specifications for two years is preferable with the understanding that the Council can always initiate a subsequent action if necessary. But there are overall timing concerns that need to be addressed with this process related to survey results timing and delayed implementation. The PDT plans to have a future agenda item highlighting the various timelines and constraints related to framework development and implementation.
9. Specific to FW24, the PDT recommends that Delmarva not open until May 2014 to minimize incidental mortality and prohibit fishing before meat weights are highest, regardless of whether FW24 is a one or two year action. The PDT has concerns that the biomass projected for Delmarva in 2014 will not be as high as current estimates, so delaying effort in that area will help increase biomass.
10. The PDT also developed specific language to clarify "payback" measures developed by the AP. Examples have been developed to illustrate what measures would be in place if a vessel fishes default 2013 allocations from FW22 before FW24 replaces those allocations (May 2013). The PDT agrees that an additional incentive needs to be added to reduce incentive to fish FW22 HC trips in March and April before FW24 reduces access to that area, particularily for small dredge vessels. Therefore, the PDT recommends that the 10DAS payback may need to be increased since 10 DAS for a small dredge vessel may work out lower than one 18,000 pound trip in Hudson Canyon. The PDT will identify a higher value for the Committee to consider.

Yellowtail flounder catch estimates

11. Assumptions for the projections: D:K ratio from most recent data available (March-August 2012 data for GB access areas and FY2011 for all other areas); YT and scallop projections from most recent assessments – for GB YT used to Rho split series with adjustment, which has low YT biomass in 2012 but the biomass improved in 2013 and beyond. For SNE/MA the YT biomass is relatively flat. Open area catch is estimated to occur about 50% in the SNE/MA YT stock area, 30% in CC/GOM stock area, and 20% in GB YT stock area based on the estimate of exploitable biomass in each area. Finally, for the high and low estimates the PDT combined the biomass estimate at the 10^{th} percentile for YT with 90^{th} percentile scallop biomass to produce the low bycatch estimate, and for the high the reverse was done (90^{th} percentile of YT biomass combined with 10^{th} percentile for scallop biomass).
12. Range of 2013 GB YT catch estimates is 87mt to 176 depending on the specification alternative. That equates to 40-82% of the US TAC for GB YT (215 mt). The PDT suggested a small adjustment to

Alternative 4 to further reduce YT catch (reduce trip limit from 20,000 pounds to 18,000 pounds); so the final estimate of YT catch will be less for that option. Range of SNE/MA YT catch is 28-39 mt for 2013, and the total ACL for SNE/MA YT is 653 mt.

13. PDT raised concerns that the YT estimates are likely underestimates since scallop biomass is getting depleted in the access areas. Also, in 2012 the areas will be open in the fall when bycatch rates are higher, so the overall D:K ratio for 2012 may be higher than the estimate being used from Mar-Aug 2012. However, if FW24 closes the areas in the fall bycatch should be reduced compared to allowing fishing in the fall.
14. The PDT discussed that even Alternative 4 estimates more GB YT catch than the Council may ultimately allocate the scallop fishery. Therefore, it may be necessary to implement additional measures to help reduce YT bycatch in 2013. A seasonal closure in open areas during high bycatch months could help reduce total YT catch. It was suggested by a member of the audience that closing waters SE of CA1 in the spring and SW of CA2 later in the summer/fall would help reduce open area bycatch of YT. The PDT is going to discuss if this can be developed further in FW24.
15. For GF Framework 48 the Scallop PDT should try to provide catch estimates of Northern and Southern windowpane flounder since that action is considering allocating a sub-ACL of southern windowpane flounder.
16. Overall, the PDT discussed that their preferred alternative for FW24 specifications is Alternative 2. Alternative 2 and 4 have slightly higher total revenues in the long term, but Alternative 2 minimizes losses in the short term, particularly 2013. However, due to the very low GB YT available in 2013 (215 mt for the US share), the PDT supports that Alternative 4 may be the most realistic alternative when other issues are taken into consideration like YT bycatch. Alternative 4 projects 73 mt of GB YT catch, 40% less YT than Alternative 2 at 134 mt.

Georges Bank Access Area Seasonal Restrictions

17. The PDT reviewed the existing range of alternatives and discussed that none of the alternatives (1, 2, 3B, or 4) effectively combine seasons with high YT bycatch and low scallop meat weight. The PDT would prefer if an alternative could better combine the objectives of reducing YT bycatch and reducing scallop fishing mortality by limiting fishing during low scallop meat weight months. The PDT is not supportive of the AP recommendation (Option 3B) because it has the potential to increase impacts on scallop fishing mortality compared to No Action. Instead, the PDT requests that the Committee reconsider Option 3A, and maybe even slightly revise it based on additional input from the Scallop and GF PDT.
18. The PDT discussed that because open areas and access areas are managed so differently it is important to consider the impacts of seasonal fishing in access areas. Specifically, since access areas are managed under a possession limit a vessel can take as long as it wants to harvest that poundage. But in open areas a vessel is charged DAS, so there is incentive to fish during the times and in areas with highest yields. If a vessel decides to fish in open areas during lower meat weights that only impacts their catch, but if a vessel fishes during lower meat weight months in access areas it impacts all vessels because more scallops are killed for the same poundage. Now that the YT bycatch TAC has been lifted from GB access areas there is less incentive to fish in those areas in the summer when scallop meat weights are higher. For example, in CA2 scallop meat weights grow mid-April and peak in June and July and then decline the rest of the year.
19. The PDT plans to refine Alternative 3A again by conference call and will present another option for the Committee to consider. It may be possible to integrate input from the GF PDT as well. The GF PDT had a meeting on Oct 12 and their input on this subject is: *For CAII, from the standpoint of groundfish bycatch, the months of May, June, and July appear to be those most likely to minimize catches of YTF and windowpane flounder. For YTF, the months of August – November should be avoided to reduce catches of YTF. For WINP, the months of March and April should be avoided.*

LAGC YT AMs

20. The PDT reviewed D:K ratios by TMS for LAGC vessels by gear type from 2006-2001 observer data. It was discussed that there is insufficient data for the LAGC trawl fleet to identify more refined areas and seasons in order to identify a YT AM. Furthermore, closing a portion of a statistical area likely has similar effects of closing an entire statistical area since the places where scallop fishing occurs within a statistical area is typically only a small portion of the larger area.
21. Therefore, the PDT believes that a seasonal gear restriction over a larger area (i.e. 612 and 613) may be the most effective AM for the LAGC trawl fleet given the limited amount of observer data available to identify more refined measures. The model the PDT worked on for D:K ratios overall in SNE suggested that bycatch rates are highest in the spring.
22. A subset of PDT members are going to work on these measures further and bring final alternatives to the PDT to review by conference call later in October.

Preliminary discussion of scallop abundance in and around EFH closed areas

23. The PDT had an initial discussion about recent surveys of CA2 north. The EFH Omnibus process may incorporate some of these findings to help define future EFH areas. Therefore, the Scallop PDT discussed the data available and plans to work with the EFH Tech Team in the coming months to provide information about scallop abundance and potential impacts of alternatives under development.
24. VIMS presented results from their survey of CA2 north and surrounding areas (July 2012). Most of the resource was in the HAPC and northern edge with a little recruitment in the HAPC as well. Center of CA2 dominated by larger older animals (140mm), shoal area in open areas also had larger animals (125mm), and HAPC had multiple year classes (mostly 110-140mm). Estimate of exploitable biomass for the three sub areas are: 942 mt for center of CA2, about 3,000 mt for shoal area in open areas, and 8,900 mt for the HAPC. However, there were some deformed scallops in the HAPC (apple shaped) so there may be quality issues. Surprisingly there were not many gray meats or parasites, but there was evidence of worms in some of the shells in the north and some of the scallops were stringy, so the actual percent that is harvestable may be lower than the estimates suggest. Researchers suggested that access to this area may need to be done slowly at first, possibly an experimental fishery and some PDT members supported the idea of keeping part of the area closed so controlled research studies on fishery impacts could be done.
25. SMAST presented survey results for CA2 north and surrounds as well as just north of the CA1 access area that is currently an EFH closed area. Some of this information is already being used directly by the Habitat tech team but the Scallop PDT will use these data to further illustrate potential impacts and potentially develop new scallop access areas.
26. Karen Bolles from Habcam team presented preliminary results of the Habcam survey of CA2 north. Habcam surveyed the same area as VIMS in 2012 as well and repeated some stations. They have processed 1 out of every 100 images and developed scallop abundance maps. The team also plans to develop sediment maps for this area for the Habitat Tech Team.
27. The PDT discussed that it may also be possible to get some bycatch information from the VIMS survey as well as the deferral dredge time series. Habcam data may also be able to provide some information about the fish present in the various areas.
28. If the Habitat tech team is interested the NEFSC survey data has noted “trash” on all tows on the scallop survey for years. It would be possible to quantify the amount of trash in terms of dominant, present or absent per tow of the federal dredge survey.

The PDT will have a conference call on October 22.