



Final Scallop PDT Meeting Summary

Tuesday, May 21, 2013
Mariners House - Boston, MA

PDT members in attendance: Deirdre Boelke, Demet Haksever, David Rudders, William DuPaul, Dvora Hart, Chad Keith, Emily Gilbert, Travis Ford, Brian Hooper, Kevin Kelly, and Lyle Kessler.
5 members of the public attended in the audience

Purpose of Meeting: Discuss several aspects of FW25 alternatives: 2013 CA1 access area trips, AMs for southern windowpane flounder, and other measures. Review updated CASA results and discuss management uncertainty related to setting catch limits for FW25.

Framework 25 Measures

Staff reviewed the updated outline for FW25. The PDT discussed that the same approach used for the last few years for setting ABC would be used again. Dr. Hart will include all available survey data as well as fishery data through 2013 to help set 2014 OFLs and ABCs. Ideally, the PDT will meet in July to review survey results, again in August to review combined biomass estimates and a draft ABC, and the SSC will meet in early September to approve ABC.

The PDT also discussed the additional measures added to FW24 specifications – measures to address 2013 access area allocations in Closed Area I. The PDT reviewed a letter from the public about concerns related to observer compensation for access area trips with lower catch rates. The PDT discussed that if about 10% of the 2013 CA1 trips are observed that will impact about 12 vessels (118 total trips assigned). Rather than revamping how compensation is awarded for this small number of trips the PDT discussed that a more direct way to address these concerns may be to simply provide access for these trips at a more advantageous time or area.

The PDT discussed possible inclusion of four options for 2013 Closed Area I trips.

1. No Action – 2013 trips would expire at the end of FY2013
2. 2013 trips could be used in FY2014
3. 2013 trips could be used in FY2015
4. Unused CA1 trips be moved to a different area fished in FY2015 or FY2016, area to be determined in a future action

The fourth option is more complex and it was noted that future ACLs may need to be adjusted to account for these trips whenever they are permitted. The PDT discussed that if no access areas are suitable for this effort shift it is possible the effort could be moved to open areas, but the compensation rate would need to be conservative to prevent unintended consequences on the resource in open areas as well as other segments of the fishery. Two ideas were discussed. First, vessels could be granted additional open area DAS (i.e. 3 DAS for FT vessels); or a vessel could be granted an LOA with a possession limit to fish in open areas (13,000 pounds for FT vessel) to reduce uncertainty. The PDT discussed that more thought should go into this and the PDT will revisit this discussion on a future conference call.

FW25 could include 2 alternatives for NGOM TAC, or just No Action (70,000 pounds). One PDT member noted that there was a decent set of small scallops observed on Cashes in the 2013 spring trawl

survey. The PDT discussed that those scallops should be monitored in future years to see what comes of that recruitment.

SNE/MA windowpane flounder AMs

Staff reviewed a background document on WP flounder catch in the scallop fishery. The PDT discussed that two possible AM alternatives could potentially be developed – seasonal area closures and seasonal gear restricted areas. The PDT discussed two possible methods for identifying WP hot spots that could be used for both types of alternatives: 1) a method similar to what the GF PDT did in FW47; and 2) identifying hotspots using summarized observer data from 2006-2011 binned several different ways. Specifically, wp catch data will be summarized for the SNE/MA stock only, and will be summarized by statistical area as well as ten minute square. All wp catch will be summarized three ways: total sum of catch per area from all tows, mean catch per tow in each area, as well as discarded wp to kept scallops for all tows per area. The PDT will review the updated maps at a future date and discuss the best way to identify hot spots for potential AM areas. The PDT next reviewed observer data summarized by depth and season. These data support that in warmer water SNE/MA windowpane are found in more shallow depths. As water cools, windowpane move deeper, and in the winter months they are more scattered by depth (Figure 1).

Based on these results the PDT supports potential adoption of a season for either an area closure of gear restricted AM for windowpane, i.e July-October. Furthermore, it may be possible to further refine the AM by depth so that the AM area could include more shallow waters in July and August when bycatch rates at that depth are higher, and then expanded to the full area during September and October when windowpane move deeper.

The PDT also explored possible adoption of a gear restricted area AM for windowpane. Mr. Farrell Davis from CFF gave a presentation on preliminary results from a 2012 RSA project focused on gear modifications to reduce finfish bycatch. Mr. Davis explained that preliminary results suggest that several modifications to the bag design (shorter apron and a reduced hanging ratio of 1.5 meshes of twine top to every ring on the dredge) help reduce windowpane catch. Dr. Rudders is going to take the data from about 1.5 trips from the study that used consistent gear modifications, about 160 tows, and test whether the differences are statistically significant. The PDT will review the results and determine whether there is enough information to support consideration of a gear restricted area AM at this time, or if further research is needed before potential implementation of such a measure.

The PDT also discussed that if a gear modification alternative is considered, one possible addition could be elimination of trawl gear in the wp hot spots. It was noted that trawl gear has a higher bycatch rate than dredge gear, so eliminating trawl gear in wp hot spots could reduce catch further.

Updated CASA Model (2012)

Dr. Hart reviewed updated estimates of biomass and fishing mortality using data through 2012. Since the last benchmark assessment (2010) three full years of observer, survey and fishery data have been added 2010-2012. Total biomass in MA and GB are almost unchanged from 2011, but exploitable biomass is down in MA. Fishing mortality increased on GB, and fishgin effort shifted there from the MA for the first time since 2006. Fishing mortality increased in MA as well, MA catch declined but F actually higher because there is less exploitable biomass is in that area overall. Therefore, overall F increased compared to recent years (0.377). This estimate is just below the overfishing threshold of 0.38. Total F was about 0.32 in 2010 and 0.33 in 2011. There is very strong recruitment in the MA, but the PDT does expect the

estimate for 2012 to decrease after additional observations are added to the time series. Recruitment on GB was lower in 2012 compared to previous years.

The PDT discussed several issues that will likely be explored in the benchmark assessment scheduled for 2014. First, the selectivity is different for GB open compared to GB access, so it may be appropriate to separate those areas out for the simulations. Second, biomass is lower in the MA than projected. The fishery shifted to GB in 2012 as projected, but the biomass in MA was still lower than projected. One possible cause is higher natural mortality than assumed (current model uses 15%, something higher may be more accurate). In addition, yield from MA access areas may not be optimized due to strong correlation between depth and growth rates in the MA. In the MA scallops grow faster and larger in shallow depths compared to scallops in deeper waters. Therefore, when an area reopens the fishery tends to fish harder in more shallow areas where scallops are larger and closer to shore. To fully optimize the yield from these areas the deeper areas should actually be fished harder and earlier because scallops do not grow as fast or large as they do in more shallow areas. The PDT currently uses an average depth for an access area and does not account for this phenomenon. It was discussed that the PDT should try to take this into account or even consider allocating trips in deeper waters first and then more shallow areas to fully optimize yield from these areas. It may be possible to estimate the yield lost from this using the recent HC opening as an example (2011-2013).

Dr. Hart summarized the 2013 federal survey schedule. Three legs will be conducted this year, starting on June 12 through mid-July. After the third leg the dredge equipment will be dropped off in Woods Hole and the vessel will use habcam for three days on the way back to Delaware mapping potential wind farm areas offshore. VIMS is doing five surveys this year: two in the Mid-Atlantic which have been completed already, one in CA2 north, NL, and a final survey in Delmarva in the fall. There was very little adult biomass in the MA, but recruitment from 2011 and 2012 looked good. It was noted that the open areas in the MA were in much better condition than the access areas. The PDT discussed that fishing behavior is now very different in access areas compared to open areas. Record prices and price premiums for larger scallops are keeping vessels fishing longer in access areas than in the past. The PDT briefly discussed that effort may have to be charged differently in access areas to reduce fishing mortality. The Habcam survey of CA2 north is going to occur later in June after the VIMS survey of the area. Staff will find out what the SMAST survey cruise schedule is for 2013.

Management Uncertainty

The PDT reviewed a document summarizing the various sources of management uncertainty. Amendment 15 identified a handful of sources and the PDT discussed if the magnitude of uncertainty from any of those sources has changed in the last few years under ACLs. In 2011 and 2012 the fishery stayed beneath the ACL. A buffer of about 8 million pounds each year has been set to account for uncertainty related to carryover provisions, uncertainty in catch from open area DAS, and changes in fishing behavior. The PDT has a number of conversations related to uncertainty that could be considered in FW25 to reduce uncertainty. However, at the end of the conversation most of the PDT felt that the current strategy of setting ACT below ACL is working and is adequately addressing uncertainty in this fishery.

Some ideas discussed were reducing the maximum DAS carryover to 5DAS. This could have unintended consequences on some vessels that typically carryover 10 DAS from one year to the next. For the most part the trend of carry over DAS has been similar over time, but there has been an increase in the last year of the number of vessel carrying over 9-10 DAS. The PDT also evaluated the number of access area trips carried over from one fishing year to the next. This could be a large source of uncertainty but for the most

part all access area trips are taken in the FY they are allocated, except when catch rates fall very low, typically in the terminal year of an opening. The PDT discussed that the most direct way to reduce uncertainty from this measure would be to only allocate effort up to a level that can support high catch rates. Catch projections are uncertain, but fewer trips will be broken and carried to the next year if current catch rates are high. A growing proportion of LAGC IFQ is being carried over as well. Each vessel is permitted to carryover up to 15% of their individual allocation. For the first year of the program, 2010, about 5% was carried over, and in FY2013 about 10% of the quota was carried over from FY2012. The PDT discussed that an ACT could be considered for this fishery to account for this uncertainty, but to date the LAGC IFQ fishery has not exceeded their ACL.

Finally, the PDT discussed that open area catch rates and fishing behavior have definitely changed over time. Catch rates seem to be increasing all the time and in comes cases getting above levels that are considered possible with a seven man crew. The PDT discussed that fishing behaviors may be changing in terms of crew schedules, and maybe even violations since catch rates are far exceeding previous estimates of catching capacity. The PDT is going to evaluate individual catch rates in more detail and possibly even revisit estimating shucking capacity with updated assumptions. The PDT briefly discussed that there are measures that can be taken to reduce uncertainty, improve safety, and help prevent illegal fishing activity. For example, if a vessel crosses the demarcation line and does not land it could be charged a ceiling per DAS. The PDT will review updated data with meat weights per trip and discuss further if measures should be considered or adjustments made to the estimate of open area catch.

Another way to approach this could be to run projections two different ways for the next specification package: 1) the regular SAMS run which sets ACT at F rate with 25% chance of exceeding ACL; and 2) a second run that accounts for these sources of uncertainty more explicitly. The second run would likely results in lower allocations, but lower chance of exceeding the ACL.

Scallop PDT support for Habitat Omnibus Action

Staff reviewed where the EFH and CATT process are in terms of likely alternatives. The Scallop PDT will be able to provide scallop recruitment and biomass estimates for the various areas on GB and SNE. For GOM there is more limited information, but there may be some biomass information from the state of Maine surveys as well as SMAST cruises in parts of the GOM.

The PDT will have a conference call in June and a meeting in July.

Attachment

Figure 1 – Predicted windowpane bycatch by month and depth

