



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 9, 2011
TO: Skate Oversight Committee
FROM: Skate Plan Development Team
SUBJECT: Specification package advice

At its recent meetings, the PDT discussed three management issues because action might be taken on them at your next meeting to include in a specification package or framework adjustment. These issues are related to the PDT's recommendations on ABC specifications, monitoring of skate catch to determine whether accountability measures are required, and the updated status of several skate species.

The PDT suggests that the Council re-consider the reduced skate wing possession limit for vessels using gillnets to fish for skates while using a Category B day-at-sea (DAS). In Amendment 3, the Council made the skate wing possession limit for these vessels consistent with the 220 lb. skate wing possession limit for vessels using trawls on a Category B DAS. This action was taken to reduce fishing pressure on winter skate, which was then thought to be overfished. The skate wing possession limit for vessels using trawls on a Category B DAS was originally set at 220 lbs. by the Multispecies FMP to reduce fishing pressure on regulated groundfish, but apparently this was less of a concern for gillnet vessels which target different regulated multispecies. Therefore, the Skate PDT recommends that the Council consider changing the specification for gillnet vessels to become consistent with and float with the skate wing possession limit for all other vessels (currently 2,600 lbs from May 1 to August 31 and 4,100 lbs. from September 1 to April 30).

The PDT recommends that no action be undertaken at this time to change the prohibition on landings barndoor skate. The status as of fall 2010 (1.11 kg/tow 2008-2010 average biomass) is that barndoor skate has not reached the 1.62 kg/tow target. Furthermore, the Skate Complex FMP is unclear about the duration of the barndoor skate rebuilding program, because the rebuilding potential of barndoor skate could not be predicted and a generation time was unknown. If the default 10-year rebuilding schedule applies, then the minimum practical fishing mortality should be maintained until barndoor skate is rebuilt. At a minimum, this means that landings should be prohibited, especially if discard mortality is low. More work (equivalent to a

benchmark assessment) is needed to define a rebuilding schedule that differs from the 10-year default, before the Council should consider allowing retention of barndoor skate.

Last, the PDT recommends consideration of ways that discard estimates and landings data could align with the fishing year for at least monitoring purposes. At the present time, monitoring to determine whether accountability measures are necessary rely on fishing year landings and calendar year discards. For 2010, landings for May 1 to April 30 were available (although partially incomplete for January 1 to April 30), but discards were estimated and applied for January 1 to December 31, 2010. Calendar year data necessary to estimate discards became available in April. Data needed to estimate discards in January 1 to April 30, 2011 will not become available until spring of 2012, much too late for this specification package. Changes to address this problem could include one or more of the following: data processing steps to accumulate data on a fishing year basis, changes to the specifications development cycle, and/or (gulp) changes to make the fishing year consistent with the calendar year.

The PDT also notes that the bait/wing fishery allocation in Amendment 3 did not include skate transfers at sea for bait. Due to the addition of transfer at sea landings to historical skate bait fishery landings, an adjustment of the current TAL allocation between the wing (66.5%) and bait (33.5%) fisheries may be warranted. An adjustment using historical landings proportions would increase the proportion of TAL allocated to the bait fishery and reduce the proportion allocated to the wing fishery. A framework adjustment would be necessary if the Council wishes to make any changes to this allocation of allowable landings.