



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116
E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 13, 2013
TO: SSC Members
FROM: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Groundfish Assessment Timing**

1. On November 21, 2013, the Northeast Region Coordinating Committee (NRCC) will meet to discuss the timing of assessments. There are important issues that need to be resolved with respect to groundfish assessments in 2014 and beyond (either operational or research/benchmark). The NRCC discussions could be better informed with input from the SSC on the quality of information needed to set ABCs.
2. While ABCs for most groundfish stocks are identified through 2015, there are three stocks that do not have a 2015 ABC: GOM winter flounder, GB winter flounder, and pollock. The Northeast Multispecies FMP does not include a provision that carries forward an ABC should a new one not be identified. If an ABC is not specified for a stock, groundfish fishing in the relevant stock area would not be allowed. A brief overview of stock and assessment status for these stocks is shown in Table 1. In addition, there may be several other stocks that the NEFMC wants to have assessed in 2014 in order to revise 2015 ABCs (for example, SNE/MA winter flounder and GOM haddock).
3. At the spring NRCC meeting the NEFMC suggested that assessments be completed for five or six groundfish stocks in 2014 with the rest of the stocks to be assessed in 2015. This was intended to address NEFMC needs as well as spread out the assessment workload for the NEFSC over two years. The NEFSC prefers, however, to update all the assessments for groundfish stocks at the same time. In order to meet the need for new 2015 ABCs this means the assessments must be done in 2014. The NEFSC has offered to perform these assessments in November 2014. Since the assessment reports would not be delivered until January 2015, this would be too late to implement new ABCs by May 1, 2015. As a result, the NEFSC's proposed assessment schedule was not agreed to and further discussions will be held at the November NRCC meeting.
4. One option that might be considered would be to carry-forward into 2015 the 2014 ABCs for the three stocks that do not have a 2015 ABC; other ad hoc approaches could also be considered for a 2015 ABC. Catch and survey information for the years since the assessment could be reviewed for a qualitative update of stock status. If this is done, the assessments could be performed in late 2014 as suggested by the NEFSC, and any new ABCs could be implemented during 2015 through an interim or emergency action or in 2016 through the normal specification process.

5. A key factor in evaluating this approach is whether the SSC would be willing to base a 2015 ABC on assessments that have a terminal year of 2009 (pollock) or 2010 (GB and GOM winter flounder). In the past the SSC has not been willing to base ABCs on medium-term projections, loosely defined as 4 to 6 years beyond the terminal year of the assessment. Indeed, in 2011 the SSC refused to base ABCs for 2012 through 2014 on the GARM III assessments with terminal years of 2007, and recommended using 2012 ABCs based on GARM III (terminal year of 2007) while updated assessments were performed in 2012 . The current situation differs in that updated assessment results would be available before FY 2015 and if those results indicate that the ABCs are inappropriate an in-season adjustment could theoretically be made. The reality is that reducing an ABC during a fishing year would be very difficult and probably would not happen until FY 2016; an increase is easier to adopt in-season.
6. Ultimately this approach may not be supported by the Council but knowing the SSC's reaction will help guide the NRCC discussion. It makes little sense for the NRCC to discuss or adopt an approach that will not be acceptable to the SSC to set 2015 ABCs.

Table 1 – Overview of most recent assessments of three stocks that do not have a 2015 ABC

Stock	Terminal Year	Assessment Type/Results	Status	Comments/Key Uncertainties
Pollock	2009	ASAP 215% SSB _{MSY} 28% FMSY	Not overfished/No overfishing	Large cryptic biomass in assessment due to dome shaped selectivity in survey and fishery
GOM Winter Flounder	2010	Swept-area biomass for 30+ cm fish Unknown biomass status 13% FMSY	Undefined/No Overfishing	No biomass reference point; results contingent on catchability assumptions; ASAP model rejected
GB Winter Flounder	2010	VPA 96% SSB _{MSY} 36% FMSY	Not overfished/No Overfishing	Estimation of S-R relationship difficult w/o external information