

Monkfish Amendment 6 Update
November, 2012

Changes to Council membership resulted in 4 new members, including Terry Alexander, Matt McKenzie and John Quinn (NEFMC), and Tony DiLernia (MAFMC). Tom Dempsey has replaced Mark Alexander as chair, and Lori Nolan replaced Howard King as vice chair.

The Monkfish Oversight Committee and Advisory Panel met jointly on August 8. Staff is in the process of scheduling another joint meeting. Prior to that meeting, the MAFMC is planning to hold a workshop to hear stakeholder concerns about current monkfish management and what they think could be done differently.

At the August 8th meeting, the Committee reviewed the draft range of alternatives prepared by the Plan Development Team (PDT), and focused on those that would modify the current DAS and trip limit system, including DAS leasing. The Committee also clarified its intent with regard to sector management alternatives in Amendment 6, that they should address incorporating monkfish into groundfish sectors, rather than establishing stand-alone monkfish sectors. The Committee also recognizes that most of the support for incorporating monkfish into sectors is in the Northern Management Area, and, consequently, the PDT has been working on approaches to a hybrid system, with sector options in the north and maintenance of the current system (with modifications as needed) in the south, with a focus on addressing the needs of vessels that fish in both areas, either on the same trip or on different trips.

Amendment 6 also proposes consideration of Individually Transferrable Quota (ITQ) management for monkfish. The PDT is preparing a strawman range of alternatives for Committee discussion, but is also raising some fundamental questions about how such a system would work. Namely, the PDT will ask the Committee to clarify its intent with regard to eligibility for initial allocation, eligibility to acquire and hold ITQ shares after the initial allocation, and qualification to land ITQ fish (e.g., can anyone get access to quota and land monkfish, or does the vessel have to have a limited access permit?). The answers to these questions will significantly narrow the possible range of alternatives, and expedite the full development of the ITQ system.

In light of the original FMP goal “to allow the traditional incidental catch of monkfish to occur”, and National Standard 9, which requires FMPs to minimize discards to the extent practicable, the

PDT is seeking Committee guidance on how to address the substantial incidental catch of monkfish, both by limited access permit holders and open access incidental-catch permit holders, under either catch share proposal (sectors or ITQs). Focusing the catch share program solely on the directed monkfish fishery, will allow the incidental catch component to continue, and minimize the potential for discards. Further, such an approach will minimize the risk that the lack of access to quota by either sector vessels or vessels in other fisheries with an incidental catch of monkfish will result in a closure of that fishery. As with the ITQ eligibility questions, the Committee's response to this issue will greatly simplify the plan development process, and reduce the number and complexity of alternatives for consideration.

Pending the progress at the next couple of Committee meetings, the timeline currently anticipates that the Councils consider approving a range of alternatives to take to public hearings in the spring of next year. The PDT expects to take about 8 months to one year for DEIS preparation and approval. Final approval and implementation dates are contingent on several factors, namely, if NMFS needs to conduct a referendum (in the case that ITQs are adopted), if the Councils are required to address Atlantic sturgeon bycatch in a shorter time frame, or, if a new assessment indicates that stock status has changed to the point where immediate action is needed to stop overfishing or implement a rebuilding plan.