



New England Fishery Management Council

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To: Tom Nies, Executive Director
From: Scientific and Statistical Committee
Date: December 2, 2013

Subject: Gulf of Maine haddock OFLs and ABCs, and 2015 ABCs for pollock, Gulf of Maine winter flounder and Georges Bank winter flounder.

The SSC met on November 15, 2013 to address the following term of reference (TOR):

Recommend an OFL and ABCs for the Gulf of Maine haddock stock consistent with the fishing mortality limit (FMSY or its proxy) and the ABC control rule or rebuilding program for fishing years 2013-2015.

Additionally, the SSC was asked to comment on its likely willingness to recommend 2015 ABCs for pollock, Gulf of Maine winter flounder and Georges Bank winter flounder in 2014 in the absence of new stock assessments.

The SSC considered the following documents in its deliberations:

1. Gulf of Maine haddock update, NEFSC- Assessment or Data Updates of 13 Northeast Groundfish Stocks through 2010, dated March 2012; available at: <http://nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd1206/>
2. SSC memo to NEFMC re Groundfish ABC for FY2013-2015, dated September 24, 2012
3. Groundfish PDT memo to SSC re GOM haddock ABCs/OFLs, dated November 5, 2013
4. Groundfish PDT memo to SSC re Haddock spillover, dated August 8, 2013
5. SSC memo to NEFMC re Spillover of haddock between Georges Bank and Gulf of Maine stocks, dated September 3, 2013

Members of the fishing industry report that haddock are more widespread in the Gulf of Maine (GOM) than is reflected by current status determination and catch limits, due in large part to a strong 2010 year class. This motivated the Council to task the SSC with reconsidering the ABC for GOM haddock. Those observations were reported to the SSC directly by industry members during public comment at the meeting. However, the PDT concluded that, although there are early indications that the 2012 year class might be strong, available data suggest that the 2010 year class is moderate and that the outcomes of the 2012 update assessment remains the best estimate of stock status. Therefore, the PDT recommended that the existing OFLs and ABCs for the stock not be changed. The SSC concurred with this conclusion.

The SSC did note that the autumn 2013 trawl survey data will provide additional insights into the strength of both the 2010 and 2012 year classes, the latter of which is only beginning to recruit to the fishery and therefore should have minimal influence on status and catch. However, the SSC also concluded that the most effective means of utilizing recent survey data will be to input those data

into an assessment update. Therefore, the SSC recommends that an assessment update be considered for 2014. This recommendation was bolstered by an observation from the PDT that the time taken to complete its extensive recent analyses of GOM haddock was comparable to that required to conduct an assessment update and would have been better devoted to that end.

The SSC discussed other types of information that could have been considered in addressing this TOR, such as economic data, spatially explicit patterns, and others. However, processes by which those types of information would be formally considered in developing catch advice do not yet exist. The SSC suggests that additional analyses and information be more formally considered, and recommends developing the mechanisms for doing so. One approach might be to develop fishery status reports of the sort used by MAFMC and to include those alongside stock assessment reports among SSC meeting materials.

With respect to 2015 ABCs for pollock, GOM winter flounder and GB winter flounder, the SSC expects that it will not be willing to develop new ABCs based on projections without additional information on landings and survey results to corroborate the predicted trends. However, we note the PDT's comment that the time required to provide that breadth of analysis was comparable to what would have been needed to complete an update, and therefore recommends that new assessment updates be considered. In the absence of assessment updates or other information and analyses, it is likely that 2014 ABCs would simply be carried over to 2015.

Summary of recommendations

- 1. GOM haddock OFLs and ABCs for 2014-2015 should not change from previous catch advice. OFL recommendations remains 440mt for 2014 and 561mt for 2015, and ABC recommendations remain 341mt for 2014 and 435mt for 2015.**
- 2. The most effective means of considering new survey data that might suggest stronger year classes in 2010 and/or 2012 is to incorporate those data into an assessment update.**
- 3. Mechanisms are needed to consider other types of information and analyses in a formal, rather than ad hoc, manner.**
- 4. The SSC is unlikely to recommend new ABCs for pollock, GOM winter flounder and GB winter flounder in the absence of updated information (e.g., survey result) or assessment updates.**