



SK #2

New England Fishery Management Council

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 John Pappalardo, *Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

May 20, 2011

To: Science and Statistical Committee (SSC)
From: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director
Subject: Acceptable Biological Catch recommendations for Northeast Skate Complex for fishing Years 2012 - 2013

Background

The Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP) uses a three year running average of fall and spring (for little skate) survey biomass to determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC). In setting the ABC for the 2010 and 2011 fishing years, Amendment 3 uses the 2006-2008 surveys by applying the catch/biomass median values which were derived using data processing methods developed by the Data Poor Assessment Workshop and analytical methods approved by the SSC in April 2009.

Using these approved methods, presented to the SSC in January 2009 (Background Document 7), future biomass tended to increase more often than not and by a greater amount when the catch/biomass ratio was less than the median, and vice versa. Based on this analysis, the SSC approved using the median catch/biomass ratio and the three year average stratified mean survey biomass for setting an aggregate skate ABC. The Skate ABC was approved using 2006-2008 FSV Albatross indices in September 2009 (Background Document 8) and corrected in April 2010 (Background Document 9). The three year biomass average used in the ABC calculation was not at the time updated with 2007-2009 data, because only calibrations for little and winter skate were available and there were some outstanding issues from the September 2009 SSC review that remained to be resolved.

At its April 2011 meeting, the SSC approved the use of Method 1 to calibrate stratified mean skate biomass to FSV Albatross units and the use of consistent survey strata to estimate ABC (Document 2). The Skate PDT report (Document 1) updates the survey information through fall 2010 using the approved calibration method.

Landings data were updated through fishing year 2010 and discards were estimated through calendar year 2010 to estimate a 2008-2010 dead discard rate and apply it to the 2012-2013 specifications. New landings data from reported skate transfers at sea for bait had not been previously recognized in the assessment or previous specifications. In this report, the additional source of mortality has been added to the specification calculations and would be monitored against the TALs beginning in 2012. In 2010, the landings and catch did not exceed thresholds that would have triggered post-season accountability measures. In-season accountability measures were triggered on September 3, 2011 and prevented the skate wing landings from

exceeding the TAL beyond an acceptable amount (105% of the TAL). The PDT also reviewed recent little and winter skate discard mortality research on commercial fishing trips and is recommending using the new mortality estimates in the ACL specifications.

The PDT is also presenting new estimates of ABC precision, but a full risk analysis is difficult to develop because there is no skate OFL specification in terms of mortality or catch. Therefore, although the analysis provides an estimate of scientific uncertainty, it is not being proposed as a basis for choosing an ABC that differs from the deterministic calculation presented in Document 1.

After the SSC has recommended an ABC, the Council will identify management measures that should be adjusted in the specification package, or possibly in a framework action. In either case, the final specifications for fishing years 2012-2013 and measures would be approved by the Council at its September 2011 meeting and would be implemented on May 1, 2012.

Terms of reference for setting Skate ABCs:

1. Recommend ABC for the skate complex for fishing years 2012-2013

Primary documents:

1. 2012-2013 Skate Complex Allowable Catch Limit Recommendations, May 2011
2. SSC report on Calibration Methods for Setting ABCs for the Northeast Skate Complex, April 26, 2011

Background documents: (numbered from the April 12-13, 2011 SSC meeting):

7. SSC review of skate ABC, April 2010
8. ABC and Overfishing Definition update approved by SSC February 2009 (SSC Recommendations on Skate Amendment 3)
9. Skate rebuilding catch limit re-analysis - January 2009

Figure 1. Diagram of skate ABC/ACL specifications



