INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Winter Flounder

Species Range
Northern shore of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to New Jersey

Management Unit
Maine through Delaware

Stock Status
There are two management units for winter flounder: Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA). Both stock units were assessed as a part of the 2017 Operational Stock Assessments conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Gulf of Maine
As of the 2017 assessment, the GOM stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring. Estimated area swept biomass from non-overlapping strata from three different surveys (Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Maine-New Hampshire, and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) was used to determine the exploitation rate and overfishing status. However, biomass reference points remain unknown and overfished status cannot be determined.

Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic
As of the 2017 assessment, the SNE/MA stock is overfished but overfishing is not occurring. SSB in 2016 was estimated to be 4,360 metric tons, which is 18% of the SSB target and 36% of the SSB threshold. The 2016 fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.21 which is 62% if the overfished threshold.

Involved States and Jurisdictions
ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, NMFS, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees
Winter Flounder Management Board, Technical Committee, Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Plan Review Team, Advisory Panel

Chairs
Board, Chair – David Pierce (2/2018); Vice-Chair – David Borden
Technical Committee, Chair – Paul Nitschke (7/2015)
Advisory Panel, Chair – Bud Brown (8/2003)

Staff Lead
Dustin Colson Leaning, dleaning@asmfc.org
Management Plan History

The Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder and Addendum I contain specific fishery management and habitat protection/enhancement measures designed to achieve the following goals: maintain winter flounder stocks in sufficient abundance to support stable, productive commercial and recreational fisheries; preserve, maintain, and enhance habitat and environmental quality necessary for optimal growth and reproduction; to the extent possible, minimize incompatibility in management practices between this and other northwest Atlantic management plans, recognizing that winter flounder stocks vary biologically and may justify differing strategies; and to the extent possible, minimize conflicts between competing uses of the winter flounder resource.

The original FMP and Addendum I called for reductions in fishing mortality on winter flounder to be achieved by August 1, 1998, and allowed states the flexibility to achieve those reductions based on the life history characteristics of the individual stocks inhabiting each region. Implementation of the plan required the interaction and cooperation of state fishery management agencies, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Commission.

Addendum II (February 1998)
Addendum II extended the implementation schedule for fishing mortality rate reductions required by the FMP and Addendum I from August 1, 1998 until January 1, 1999.

Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder (November 2005)
Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder completely replaced all previous Commission management plans for inshore stocks of winter flounder. This amendment focuses on joint management between the Commission and the Council. It was designed to rebuild and maintain spawning stock biomass at or near target biomass levels and prioritize restoration and maintenance of essential winter flounder habitat.

Amendment 1 revised the biological reference points for each stock unit setting to (target SSB) $B_{MSY} = 66.4$ million pounds (30,100 mt) and (threshold SSB) $\frac{1}{2} SSB_{MSY} = 33.2$ million pounds (15,050 mt) with a fishing mortality threshold of $F_{MSY} = 0.32$ and target of 75% of $F_{MSY} = 0.24$ for the SNE/MA stock. Revised biological reference and fishing mortality numbers for the GOM stock were set to (target SSB) $B_{MSY} = 9$ million pounds (4,100 mt) and (threshold SSB) $\frac{1}{2} SSB_{MSY} = 4.5$ million pounds (2,050 mt) with a fishing mortality threshold of $F_{MSY} = 0.43$ and target of 75% of $F_{MSY} = 0.32$.

To rebuild and maintain the biomass and fishing mortality rate targets, Amendment 1 established the following recreational and commercial management measures:
**Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stock**

**Recreational**
States in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock area must implement a 12” minimum size limit and a 10-fish creel limit. Each state in the SNE/MA stock area may have a 60-day open season for recreational winter flounder fishing. In addition, 20 days must be closed to recreational winter flounder fishing during March and April. The 60-day open season can be split into no more than two blocks.

**Commercial**
States within the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock area must implement a 12” minimum size limit, a minimum 6.5” square or diamond mesh in the cod-end, and maintain any existing seasonal closures.

The mesh size regulation includes a 100 lb. trip limit for winter flounder if smaller mesh is being used. This 100 lb. “mesh trigger” provides for the landing of a small amount of winter flounder as bycatch in smaller-mesh fisheries.

**Gulf of Maine Stock**

**Recreational**
States within the GOM stock must maintain the existing 12” minimum size and adopt an 8-fish creel limit. There are no required recreational closed seasons in the GOM stock area.

**Commercial**
States within the Gulf of Maine stock area must maintain the existing 12” minimum size limit and remain consistent with the adjacent EEZ mesh size regulations. The current mesh size in the EEZ adjacent to the states in the GOM stock area is a 6.5” diamond or square mesh in the cod-end.

States must maintain existing season closures, including any Federal rolling closures that affect state waters in the GOM stock area.

**Addendum I (May 2009)**
Addendum I to Amendment 1 was developed in response to findings of GARM III and aims to achieve F_{MSY} for the GOM stock and rebuild the overfished SNE/MA stock. Addendum I requires an 11% reduction (from 2006-2007 levels) in recreational fishing mortality and establishes a 250 pound commercial possession limit in the GOM. Measures for the SNE/MA stock include a 2 fish recreational bag limit and 50 pound commercial possession limit. The SNE/MA measures are designed to reduce F as low as possible while still allowing fishermen to keep their winter flounder bycatch.

**Addendum II (October 2012)**
The Addendum modifies the commercial and recreational management requirements for the Gulf of Maine (GOM) stock in response to updated stock status information and recent federal action to increase the GOM winter flounder state waters’ estimated harvest level. Specifically,
the commercial trip limit was increased to 500 pounds per trip and the recreational season was expanded to year round. These measures apply only to GOM state waters’ fisheries until June 1, 2013.

**Addendum III (May 2013)**
The Addendum establishes an annual specification process to set commercial and recreational management measures for the GOM and SNE/MA fisheries. Each year, with advice from the Winter Flounder Technical Committee and Advisory Panel, the Board can adjust trip limits, size limits, and seasons for the commercial fishery; and size limits, bag limits, and seasons for the recreational fishery. The Addendum will enable the Commission to respond more quickly to federal actions and changes in the winter flounder fishery.

**Current Management Measures for Winter Flounder**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Trip Limit/ Possession Limit</th>
<th>Size Limit</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Gear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOM</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>500 lbs per trip per day</td>
<td>12”</td>
<td>Maintain closures</td>
<td>Minimum 6.5” square or diamond mesh in cod-end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>8 fish</td>
<td>12”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNE/MA</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>50 lbs/ 38 fish per trip per day</td>
<td>12”</td>
<td>Maintain closures</td>
<td>Minimum 6.5” square or diamond mesh in cod-end. 100-lb mesh trigger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>2 fish</td>
<td>12”</td>
<td>March 1 – December 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Implemented in Amendment 1 in 2005
- Implemented in Addendum I in 2009
- Implemented in Addendum II in 2012; GOM trip limit increased from 250 lbs (via Addendum I) to 500 lbs.
- Varying closure dates were in place via Amendment 1, the new dates became effective through Board Action on February 2014

**Council Management**
The Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council jointly manage winter flounder with complementary management plans that regulate state and federal waters based on fisheries and the biology of winter flounder. The Council includes winter flounder as part of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP), which includes several highly valuable commercial species such as cod and yellowtail flounder. Federal management focuses on the commercial fishery because the bulk of harvest in federal waters is from that sector.

**Annual Events**
- Compliance Reports are due by November 1
- Fisheries Management Plan Review
- Specifications are reviewed and set in October by the Board.