

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

American Lobster Addendum XXVII Plan Development Team

Meeting Summary

Webinar

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Attendance: Caitlin Starks (Chair, ASMFC), Kathleen Reardon (ME), Corinne Truesdale (RI), Bob Glenn (MA), Alli Murphy (NOAA), Emilie Franke (ASMFC)

The Plan Development Team (PDT) met to continue the development of Draft Addendum XXVII on biological resiliency in the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) Stock. First the TC Chair gave an update on the status of analyses being performed by the TC to provide advice to the PDT on appropriate management measures to increase the biological resiliency of the stock. The TC has reviewed previous analyses to estimate projected impacts of various gauge size changes on catch (in numbers and weight) and spawning stock biomass (SSB). However, there was concern among TC members that the offshore fishery in Lobster Conservation and Management Area (LCMA) 3 was considerably different from the full stock model and, thus, may have inaccurate results due to a mis-parameterized simulation model. To address this, the TC agreed to perform further analysis for LCMA 3 to tune the population simulation model to match the catch characteristics of the LMA3 fishery, under the assumption that a simulation model that could reproduce the catch characteristics of the fishery may more accurately project changes in the fishery given changing management measures. Due to TC workloads this analysis has not yet been completed but is expected soon.

Next the PDT discussed two alternatives for how to structure the proposed management options in the addendum. The PDT reviewed the previous options they developed, which included “packages” of management triggers and the measures that would be implemented as a result of reaching that trigger. Concerns were raised that some of the options to standardize measures within or across LCMAs did not meet the goal of increasing resiliency. The group acknowledged that the Board prioritized increasing resiliency over standardization, but the document could consider options that accomplish both objectives; they agreed that the document should be clear as to what objectives each proposed option is intended to accomplish. The PDT preferred the second draft option structure, which arranges the options into 4 issues:

1. Standardizing some measures upon final approval of addendum
2. Establishing management triggers to automatically implement measures to increase biological resiliency
3. Management measures that would be automatically implemented at defined triggers
4. Spatial implementation of management measures in LCMA 3

The PDT provided additional guidance on the options to be considered in the document. First, they agreed that more than two trigger levels should be proposed to give the Board a broader range of options from very conservative (trigger related to Fishery/Industry Target reference

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point) to less conservative (trigger related to Abundance Limit reference point). They noted that the document should provide more description and explanation of the biological risks and rewards associated with the trigger options, or else they may be viewed as arbitrary levels. Kathleen noted that the regime shift analysis in the assessment could be used to better explain the trigger levels.

With regard to the management measures that should be included in the document as options, the PDT discussed that the most effective way to impact the stock resiliency seems to be to increase the minimum size in LCMA 1, given that is where the large majority of landings occur, and that the minimum size in LCMA 1 is still several millimeters under the size at 50% maturity. They also noted that increasing minimum size should increase yield in weight, whereas decreasing maximum size would reduce yield. The PDT agreed that for the measures options, minimum and maximum size should be dealt with separately, and that it would be best to put forward a set of Area-specific measures and a set of standardized measures. For the Area-specific measures, the PDT noted that depending on the TC analysis, it may be beneficial to consider an option in which the minimum size in Area 1 is increased while the maximum size in Area 3 is decreased, given differences in catch composition between the area. There was some disagreement among members about whether there is a scientific basis for using a tiered approach where less restrictive measures would be implemented at a more conservative trigger, and more restrictive measures would be implemented at a second less conservative trigger level, given uncertainties about the stock-recruit relationship. Ultimately the group agreed to keep this approach on the table since it was desired by the Board, and will look for additional feedback at the next Board meeting.

The PDT members each provided approximations of how long it would take their states or agencies to implement management measures, both at the time the addendum is approved, and when a management trigger is met. These approximations were based on a tentative timeline of addendum approval in February 2022, followed by evaluation of management triggers in October of each year when the TC provides annual index data to the Board. There may be a need for multiple states to write the trigger mechanism into their regulations so that they can quickly implement management measures when they are triggered. The following timelines were estimated for implementing management measures:

- **Maine:** The minimum and maximum gauge size are regulated in statute; meaning a change to these would have to go through the state legislature. The amount of time required to change the statute depends on whether it is initiated in the first or second session of the legislature, and this could take up to 20 months. It may be necessary to remove the minimum and maximum gauge size from statute to implement a management trigger.
- **New Hampshire:** It will likely take around 2 months to make changes such as gauge or v-notch regulations.
- **Massachusetts:** Once the addendum is approved, it could take 4-6 months to get the regulations through the state's public process.

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- **Rhode Island:** From February 2022, it is estimated it would take around 4 months to implement measures.
- **NOAA Fisheries:** It would take about a year to implement new regulations, and the intention would be to write the triggers into federal rulemaking.

The PDT also noted that consideration should be given to how long industry would need to obtain new gauges if the size is changed. For example, if a new minimum size is established that is not currently being used in any of the management areas, a new gauge would have to be manufactured, which could take more time; alternatively, if the minimum size changes to something that is already being used, less time would likely be needed to produce new gauges because it would simply be a matter of increasing supply. Timing will depend on the demand and supply for different gauge sizes and the manufacturers. The PDT also stated that it would make the most sense to implement new measures resulting from a management trigger at the beginning of the season rather than in the middle of the season.

The PDT is seeking additional information and Board guidance regarding the questions below:

- Considering pros and cons of a tiered approach to management triggers and measures, is the Board still interested in using this approach?
- Are there any trigger levels the Board would consider too aggressive (i.e. the trigger may already be met) or not precautionary enough?
- If a trigger mechanism is implemented through final approval of the addendum, will the states be able write the established triggers into their rulemaking? Or would rulemaking to implement new management measures have to occur *after* a trigger is met?
- Are there limitations to the range of gauge sizes the Board is willing to consider?