

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Coastal Sharks Technical Committee

October 15, 2010

Conference Call Summary

Present : Greg Skomal (Chair, MA DMF), Jack Musick (VIMS), Karyl Brewster-Geisz (NMFS HMS), Brent Winner (FL FWC), Julie Neer (SAFMC), Russ Babb (NJ DFW), Clark Gray (NC DMF), Bryan Frasier (SC DNR), Scott Newlin (DE DFW), Karen Capossela (MD DNR), and Chris Vonderweidt (ASMFC Staff).

The Coastal Sharks Technical Committee (TC) convened via phone conference to make recommendations for coastal sharks specifications in 2011. The Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks allows the Spiny Dogfish & Coastal Sharks Management Board (Board) to set a quota for smooth dogfish only, and possession limits for the Large Coastal (LCS), Small Coastal (SCS), Pelagic and Smooth Dogfish Species Groups for up to 5 years. The FMP specifies that the TC will review the best available data and make quota and possession limit recommendations to the Board prior to specifications being set. The Board set a 33 fish possession limit for LCS species in 2010.

Coastal Sharks Specifications

The TC recommends continuing with a maximum possession limit of 33 fish for the LCS Species Group for the 2010 fishing season and no other measures.

The meeting began with NMFS HMS staff presenting the TC with an overview of the proposed 2011 federal specifications. Proposed specifications include: a January 1 opening date (or as close as possible to January 1 after publication in the federal register and required comment period) with unlimited possession for SCS and Pelagic species groups; a 33-fish LCS possession limit with a July 15 opening date with an alternative that would allow NMFS to modify the LCS possession limit through in-season actions to allow fishermen equitable access to the resource throughout the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic regions. Smooth dogfish are not currently managed in the EEZ and, as such, possession is unrestricted.

NMFS HMS staff also summarized public and HMS Advisory Panel comments heard at hearings and meetings conducted to date regarding the LCS opening: open the season on Jan 1 since FL fishermen do not have an opportunity to fish in July; open the fishery on July 15; and use the flexible trip limits to open the fishery on Jan 1 until a certain percentage of the quota is taken, reduce the trip limit to zero until the fish have migrated north, then raise the trip limit back to 33

sharks. Some of those commenting also stressed that if NMFS implements flexible trip limits to re-create bi-annual seasons, dealer reporting must be accurate and timely.

The TC agrees that a 33 fish LCS possession limit is appropriate because this amount worked reasonably well in 2009 and is most likely to be consistent with federal regulations. Consistent specifications in state and federal waters are important for shark management to minimize confusion for fishermen and law enforcement officers.

The TC noted that in-season adjustments to possession limits is incompatible with many states current possession limit regulations. The majority of state regulations in the ASMFC management unit specify a 33-fish possession limit. Changes to possession limit regulations in these states will have to be made through the regulatory process, which can take several months for many states. If federal possession limits are adjusted in-season, state and federal possession limits will be inconsistent. Consistency between federal and ASMFC regulations is one of the Goals and Objectives of the ASMFC FMP. The TC suggested that HMS staff monitor the fishery and include variable possession limits as part of future rulemaking.