

Coastal Sharks Technical Committee Consensus Recommendations:
Coastal Sharks Fishery Specification Recommendations
July 16, 2008

Present: Jack Musik (Chair VA), Greg Skomal (Vice-Chair MA), Chris Vonderweidt (ASMFC Staff), Karyl Brewster-Geisz (NOAA HMS), Bryan Frazier (SC DNR), Julie Neer (SAFMC), Michael Luisi (MD DNR), Wilson Laney (FWS), Scott Newlin (DE DFW), Jeff Tinsman (DE DFW), Fritz Rohde (NC DMF), Brent Winner (FL FWC).

The Coastal Sharks Technical Committee (TC) convened via phone conference to give recommendations for smooth dogfish quota and possession limits; small coastal sharks (SCS) possession limits; large coastal sharks (LCS) possession limits; and pelagic sharks possession limits. A smooth dogfish vessel-trip analysis was completed by a member of the TC prior to the call. The smooth dogfish analysis and a HMS retention limit analysis summary were distributed to the TC for discussion on the call.

SMOOTH DOGFISH:

The TC recommends that the ASMFC does not set a quota for smooth dogfish and sets a maximum possession limit of 1,000 lbs.

There is currently no assessment for smooth dogfish. As such, the TC is unable to determine an appropriate quota. The TC feels very strongly that running a smooth dogfish assessment should be top priority.

In the absence of any assessment, the TC suggests setting a precautionary possession limit that will have *minimal impact* on the existing smooth dogfish fishery. Elasmobranchs such as smooth dogfish are particularly vulnerable to overfishing (and slow to rebuild) because they are long lived, late to mature, and have few offspring. Fishermen often intercept pregnant smooth dogfish females during their migration, which may be creating a skewed sex-ratio. A precautionary approach may prevent the same problems (both socially and biologically) that have emerged in the spiny dogfish fishery due to a large abundance of males and few females. The TC also noted that the decline in mean landings per trip in the past few years could be a symptom of a declining stock.

93-95 % of all smooth dogfish trips over the last three years have landed less than 1,000 lbs. Setting a maximum possession limit of 1,000 pounds should have a minimal impact on the current smooth dogfish fishery and is considered precautionary by the TC. Several TC members originally suggested setting a maximum possession limit of 500 pounds because 88 – 90% of all smooth dogfish trips over the last 3 years landed fewer than 500 pounds. These members said that they could accept 1,000 lbs since this amount was still precautionary. They noted that setting a maximum of 500 lbs (as opposed to 1,000) could have a much more significant benefit to smooth dogfish stocks than the benefit of increasing to 1,000 lbs would have on the fishing community (between 3 – 7% of the total trips landed more than 500 lbs during the last 3 years).

SCS, LCS, and PELAGIC SPECIES GROUPS

The TC recommends a maximum possession limit of 33 fish for the LCS Species Group until 2012 with no possession limit for the SCS or Pelagic Species Groups. These recommendations are consistent with current NMFS specifications through 2012.

The TC endorses the NMFS stock assessments and trip limit analysis that are based on the assessments. The TC also agrees that having different possession limits in federal and state waters will create enforcement loopholes that could possibly undermine the rebuilding goal of this FMP. The NMFS LCS possession limit is designed to keep the fishery open year round and a higher limit could allow fishermen in southern states to harvest the entire quota before the sharks migrate north and become available to fishermen in the northern states.

OTHER BUSINESS

The TC recommends that the Board include language to allow possession limits to be set for up to 5 years. Discussing possession limits annually is unnecessary because these limits are based on assessments that are only run every 3-5 years.

The TC would also like to recommend that the Board allow HMS Shark Research Permit Holders exemptions from quota, possession limit, size limit, gear restrictions, seasonal closure restrictions, and species restrictions. This research fishery is designed to fill in data gaps and will aid future assessments. Allowing these vessels to fish in state waters and during the seasonal closure does not pose a threat to shark populations, nor will it impact the quota of the directed commercial fishermen.