

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Coastal Sharks Technical Committee

July 15, 2009

Conference Call Summary

Present: C. Vonderweidt (ASMFC), Greg Skomal (MA DMF, Chair), Jack Musick (VIMS), Clark Gray (NC DMF), Bryan Frazier (SC DNR), Wilson Laney (USFWS), Karyl Brewster Geisz (HMS), Russ Babb (NJ DFW), Angel Willey (MD DNR), Julie Neer (SEDAR), Mike Frisk (Stony Brook U)

The Coastal Sharks Technical Committee (TC) convened via phone conference on July 15, 2009 to review a North Carolina Memo dated July 6, 2009, revisit Draft Addendum I to the Interstate Fisheries Management Plan (Addendum I) for Atlantic Coastal Sharks and evaluate a Maine *de minimis* proposal dated June 30, 2009. Technical Committee opinion is as follows.

North Carolina Memo: Addendum I to the FMP for Atlantic Coastal Sharks

Clark Gray of North Carolina Department of Marine Resources presented this memo to the TC. The memo investigates two concerns that North Carolina fishermen voiced during the public hearing for Addendum I. 1.) Allowing at-sea processing of smooth dogfish is essential to the delivery of a fresh product; 2.) The 95% to 5% carcass to fin ratio was developed for large coastal shark (LCS) species and is inappropriate for smooth dogfish.

North Carolina trip ticket data indicates that landings of sandbar sharks in the targeted smooth dogfish fishery do not occur and the majority of smooth dogfish landings happen in March – May when sandbar landings are close to zero. In addition, sandbar sharks are usually landed using longlines while smooth dogfish are landed with gillnets. Trip ticket reports also indicate that the average fin to carcass ratio for smooth dogfish ranges from 9.2 – 11.3% rather than the 5% option in Addendum I.

The TC had the following comments on the memo:

Part 1: Allowing at sea processing

- The majority of the TC is concerned that the trip ticket data are not cross checked or validated with a second data source. The trips could have sandbar sharks mixed in with smooth dogfish. With such a high volume fishery and lack of validation it is impossible to tell if this data are accurate.
- The majority of the TC is concerned that this analysis is specific to North Carolina but there is a directed commercial fishery in Virginia (and other states) as well.

- If the trip ticket data could be verified, there is potential for a seasonal allowance for the removal of smooth dogfish fins during March – May which is the peak fishing period for smooth dogfish and has little overlap with sandbar sharks. Such a seasonal closure may reduce the chances that fishermen will land sandbar sharks as smooth dogfish.
- All members of the TC, with the exception of the North Carolina representative, are opposed to allowing commercial fishermen to remove the dorsal fins and tail of smooth dogfish.

Part 2: Smooth dogfish fin to carcass ratio

- The TC agrees that the 5% ratio is inappropriate for smooth dogfish because their bodies are longer and leaner than the LCS that were used to determine the 5%. Further analysis is necessary to determine the best ratio for smooth dogfish.

Draft Addendum I to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Coastal Sharks

The North Carolina Memo did not change the opinion of the majority of TC members from the consensus they reached during the June 5, 2009 conference call.

For Issue 1, Smooth Dogfish Finning and Identification, the TC members (with the exception of the NC representative), agree that the compromise option allowing removal of the head, pectoral, and pelvic fins will allow fishermen to process the sharks and also minimize enforcement loopholes (see TC Meeting Summary June 5, 2009 for more detail). The NC representative prefers Option B which allows commercial fishermen to remove the fins and would like the fin to carcass ratio to be increased to 9 – 11%. He believes that there is little incentive to ‘cheat’ the rules because dealers are certified in identification and the benefit of landing sandbar sharks is minimal compared to the risk of large fines and loss of permit.

The TC spent little time revisiting Issue 2 or 3 with all members agreeing that removing recreational possession limits is unlikely to cause a strong negative impact on smooth dogfish stocks (see TC Meeting Summary June 5, 2009 for more detail).

The TC reviewed some bycatch data between the June 5 and July 15 call. There is still consensus that the 2 hour net check is necessary to protect at-risk species. The TC considers Atlantic Sturgeon to be particularly vulnerable to gillnet bycatch because harvest is primarily from state waters and data shows incidental catch in January and February in North Carolina and Virginia.

Maine *De Minimis* Proposal

The TC recommends that the Board grant Maine *de minimis* status as long as they implement all measures contained in this letter. Maine does not harvest many sharks and implementing the measures in the letter is likely to provide sufficient regulation to ensure that the goals and/or objectives of the FMP are met.