

**ASMFC Weakfish AP
Meeting Summary
November 7, 2002**

ATTENDEES:

AP members

Wayne Lee (chair)—NC
Brad Loewen—NY
George Scocca—NY
Rob Christensen—NJ
Chuck Law—NJ
Marvin Kahl (proxy for Gerry Blakeslee)—
DE
George David Bradley—PRFC
Robert Pride—VA

Ernie Bowden—VA
Fred Kinard—SC

Public

Michael Doble—RFA

ASMFC Staff

Carrie Selberg
Braddock Spear

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING:

To review and choose management options posed in draft Amendment #4 for the Weakfish Management Board's consideration at its next meeting on November 20th.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section 2.6.1 Triggers, Targets and Schedules for Rebuilding

Fishing Mortality Threshold:

The AP recommends that trigger for the fishing mortality threshold be **Option 2** -- if the threshold is exceeded in any two consecutive years. They supported this option because of their concerns with the retrospective bias of the stock assessment.

Spawning Stock Biomass Threshold:

The AP recommends that SSB be rebuilt within 4 years or less if it falls below the threshold (**Option 3**). Some AP members indicated that the fecundity of the species would allow rebuilding within this timeframe and that if the SSB drops below the threshold there are significant problems.

Section 3.0 Monitoring Program Specifications/Elements

The AP recommends that states be *required* to collect otolith and length data (**Option 1** for all three landings amounts specified). They feel this data is necessary. However, one AP member had concerns about the cost to the states for such a requirement.

Section 4.1 Recreational Fisheries Management Measures

Creel Limit/Minimum Size Options:

When considering only the Options in the Public Hearing Draft:

A majority of the AP support **Option 4** regional regulations with a bag limit of 7 with a minimum size of 12” in the south and 14” in the north (one AP member only supports this if the line is between MD and VA).

A minority of the AP members support **Option 3** (one AP member only supports this if the line is between MD and VA).

However, some AP members did not support any of these options.

When considering all of the Options in the PDT Options Paper:

A majority of the AP supports **Option 5** with a minority supporting **Option 3** if the line is drawn between the MD and VA border.

However, some AP members did not support any of these options. Some AP members had concerns that Option 5 did not go to public hearing.

Additional Option:

Overall the AP was not satisfied with the options in the public hearing draft and PDT Options paper. The AP has the following new recommendation: **a coastwide 10 fish bag limit with a 12” minimum size**. If the Board would like a regional split, the northern region would have a 14” minimum size with the line between MD and VA. One AP member did not agree and believes it is late in the process to bring forward an additional option and is concerned that the TC finds this option likely to exceed the proposed target fishing mortality. The AP indicated that SSB is at high levels, fishing mortality is at low levels, and stock size is 3.5 times higher than when Amendment 3 was implemented. The AP also noted that the recreational catch per unit effort is low and no one envisions a significant change even with a 10 fish bag limit.

Northern/Southern Region:

The AP was divided between **Option 2** (line between VA and NC) and **Option 3** (line within MD). Those in support of Option 2 indicated there should be a biological justification for the split and the TC has indicated there is a justification at this line. Those in support of Option 3 support the Chesapeake Bay in one region and believe the Chesapeake Bay has smaller fish.

Reasonable Maximum Creel Limit:

The AP recommends **Option 1** with a reasonable maximum creel limit of 10 fish.

Multiple Creel Limit/Minimum Size Combinations within a State:

Seasonal:

The majority of the AP recommends **Option 2** (States many have only one combination) and a minority recommends **Option 1**. The minority spoke in favor of flexibility for states while the majority felt it led to confusion.

Area:

The AP was evenly divided between the two Options.

Angler Choice:

The AP recommends **Option 2** (States may have only one combination) and expressed concerns with anglers culling.

Additional Recreational Item:

The AP recommends adding language to Amendment 4 to read “Recreationally caught fish can not be sold.” The AP believes that this should be a compliance element of Amendment 4.

Section 4.2.1 Bycatch

Overall Bycatch Allowance or Sliding Scale of Bycatch

The AP was divided between **Option 1** (150 pounds) and **Option 2** (300 pounds). Those in support of option 2 did not believe the increase would lead to a directed fishery, expressed concern with regulatory discards, and felt an increase would lead to more information on bycatch for the TC. Some in support of option 1 did not feel that the commercial bycatch should be increased while the recreational fishery is facing reductions. The AP does not support a sliding scale of bycatch for reasons including people may waste resources by catching fish they do not want to increase the weight of their landings.

Commercial hook and line:

A majority of the AP supports **Option 1** (status quo) with a minority supporting **Option 3** (20% of landings). Some of the AP members supporting Option 1 believe that this is a bycatch allowance - not closed season allowance. Members in support of Option 3 believe that these commercial fishermen should have the an opportunity to be a part of fishery during the closed season and this options allows this in a limited manner.

Options for the Southern Shrimp Fishery:

The AP recommends **Option 4**.

Section 4.2.2 Minimum fish Size

Trawl Minimum Size:

The AP recommends **Option 3** (Tolerance up to 300 fish). However, the AP recommends eliminating the percentage and just including the limit of 300 fish.

Section 4.2.8 Bycatch Reduction Devices

Bycatch Reduction in Pound Nets:

The AP Recommends **Option 2** (Provide Incentive). A pound net fishermen from PRFC who uses these escape panels explained that he used these panels and found them to work very well from him. He explained the PRFC incentive program and thought it was successful. He indicated that he thought it was critical that this be an incentive based program rather than required because these panels need further testing in other areas and may not be suitable for certain areas or fishermen. A New York pound net fishermen concurred and indicated that these would be problematic for his fishery because they would let many of the fish he is targeting escape. He added that they do not have as many smaller weakfish in their area. The AP recommends if these were to become required that they only be for the states south of New York (**Option 2**).

Section 4.5.3 De minimis

The AP recommends **Option 2** and believes it should be rounded to 100,000 pounds. They preferred the fixed amount.

Section 4.9 Recommendations to the Secretaries

The AP recommends Option 2 but suggests adding additional language to read “landings in a de minimis state must be limited to the closed season bycatch allowance.”

Additional AP Deliberations:

Additional Commercial management Measures (PDT paper):

The AP discussed the PDT paper section on additional commercial management measures. The AP does not believe it is necessary to pursue any additional management measures at this time. Reasons include a decline in commercial landings, a market limited fishery, limited entry in many states, and measures in Amendment 3 that appear to be working. However, one AP member indicated that the Board should monitor commercial landings to ensure that the landings do not skyrocket.

Allocation (PDT Paper):

The AP does not believe allocation should be addressed in Amendment 4 and does not believe the ASMFC should begin work on an Addendum to address allocation. AP members expressed dissatisfaction with other fisheries that are managed with quotas and caps and do not believe allocation is a concern that needs to be addressed for weakfish.