

Northern Shrimp Advisory Panel Meeting Summary

The Advisory Panel met on October 29, 2008, in Portland, Maine. The two main agenda items were (1) reviewing the previous fishing season and current assessment; and (2) discussion recommendations for shrimp management in the future. Below is a summary of that meeting.

Attendees

Advisory Panel Members

Terry Alexander, Chair

John Seiders

Gary Libby

Vincent Balzano

Brad Spear, ASMFC staff

Peter Kendall

Maggie Hunter, TC Chair

*In addition, approximately 14 people from the public attended.

2008 Fishing Season and Stock Assessment

Approximately 4,800 mt of shrimp were reported landed during the 2007-2008 fishing season. That number is expected to increase by about 5% once all landings reports are submitted. The number of boats that went fishing for shrimp this past season increased to 230 from 194 the previous season. Fishing ended by the middle of April, with a bulk of the season's landings in February. Catch rates in the fishery were down from the previous year but still above average for the time series.

The annual summer shrimp survey showed signs of a healthy stock. The 2004 year class remains strong and will be available to the fishery as a quality product for the 2009 season. The 2005 year class showed up in moderate strength, while the 2006 year class continues to appear very low. For the first time, the survey picked up a moderate 2007 year class. The TC will track that year class next year to make a clearer statement about its relative strength.

The TC is recommending that management structure a season that will result in a fishing mortality rate of no more than 0.22, which is estimated to result from a harvest of 5,100 mt for the 2009 season. The TC does not oppose another 150-day season for 2009.

Comments on 2009 Fishing Season

Panel members and the audience commented on market and processing for this upcoming season. Two main factors are working against higher prices for shrimp: less markets are open to shrimp and currency rates put the U.S. at a disadvantage in many areas. The group discussed the implications of flooding the market with product early in the season. If harvesters bring in more shrimp than can be sold, chances are prices will likely drop. This could send an unwanted message to the rest of the world that U.S. northern shrimp are available for very cheap. The AP and audience agreed that harvesters should not land shrimp unless you have a market for them.

Recommendations for the 2008-2009 Fishing Season

The AP recommends to the Section that the upcoming fishing season start December 1, 2008, and close May 31, 2009, with all days open for fishing. The Panel is recommending a May fishery for those boats that might have a market for their catch at that time. However, it is

unlikely that significant landings will occur in May. Landing of shrimp this past season ended in mid-April.

The AP is not recommending a specific season length for 2009 – 2010 at this time. The reason giving for setting seasons a year in advance was to open up markets. Clearly, this strategy has had a negligible effect, if any, on stimulating markets for northern shrimp.

Limited Entry

The AP reviewed a written summary of the Limited Entry session held at the 2008 Maine Fishermen's Forum. The Panel and audience members who spoke support moving forward with a limited entry system for northern shrimp. Several ideas were proposed for how to design such a system including: (1) setting a core season (January – March) that is available to only those fishermen with history; if the season extends before or after the core, other boats can join the fishery; (2) a tiered approach, where if you fished every year since a dragging permit was required in 1994, then you can fish 100% of the season; if you fished 10 to 14 of the last years, you can fish during 75% of the season, and so on.

The group agreed that a detailed plan could not be drafted at the meeting because of time constraints and inadequate representation to provide input. It is understood that the Section and TC are not likely to develop a limited entry proposal. The industry will have to drive this process if they want it considered as a management tool. To that end, the AP is asking for the Section's support in moving forward with developing a specific proposal.

Other Business

The NEFMC is revising its habitat plan once again. The AP would like the Section to write a letter to the NEFMC to show its support for an exemption to allow shrimp dragging in the western Gulf of Maine closed area. The Council recommended this exemption in the past, but it was not allowed by NMFS. Shrimp has been shown to be a 'low-impact' fishery.

With the development of Amendment 16, the Council is revisiting the list of exempted fisheries including shrimp that might impact groundfish populations. Associated Fisheries of Maine is confident that shrimp is still viewed as having little impact on these populations. However, it is setting up observer coverage in the fishery to show it is a clean fishery.