

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Winter Flounder Advisory Panel

Report on Winter Flounder Specifications

For Board Consideration

ASMFC 2013 Spring Meeting

May 20, 2013

Participants

AP Members: Charlie Witek (New York), Don Swanson (New Hampshire), and Harold (Bud) Brown (Maine)

Board Member: Richie White (Winter Flounder Management Board Chair)

Staff: Melissa Yuen (FMP Coordinator)

Summary

Three members of the Winter Flounder Advisory Panel participated in a May 6, 2013 conference call to discuss winter flounder specifications for Gulf of Maine and Southern New England winter flounder. The AP members decided to submit a report with recommendations to the Winter Flounder Management Board based on the conference call discussions and additional input from AP members who were not able to make the call, via email.

AP Recommendations

The Winter Flounder AP members would like to submit the following comments and recommendations to the Winter Flounder Management Board for consideration:

1. In the final analysis, all efforts to restore the Gulf of Maine (GOM) stock have been hampered by the stock assessments. Melissa is now yet another FMP Coordinator hearing from AP members that there are no Winter Flounder available in the GOM. After discussions with Maine's scientists, AP members are confident in saying they agree with the stock's status here in Maine and the SNE Stock.

The problem with the assessments has been that the inclusion of all GOM winter flounder into a single Stock which hampers determination of the true status. Side bar discussions with several scientists basically concludes that defining distinct stocks is too difficult a task, so they stick to what they've got. I would like to see the AP make a strong recommendation to the Board, that the Board adopt and submit a letter to John Bullard (Northeast Regional Administrator) and Bill Karp (Science & Research Director at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center) requesting a detailed and comprehensive look at that issue. Allowing more landings as implemented by Frameworks 48 and 50 will just make things worse.

2. The AP wishes to call attention to the section of NMFS's National Standard 1 Guidelines and raise the question of how harvest of the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock can be increased without violating NMFS' own standard:

(30) Overfished Fishery (ii): If a stock or stock complex reached the end of its rebuilding plan period and has not yet been determined to be rebuilt, then the rebuilding F should not be increased until the stock or stock complex has been demonstrated to be rebuilt. If the rebuilding plan was based on a T_{target} that was less than T_{max} , and the stock or stock complex is not rebuilt by T_{target} , rebuilding measures should be revised, if necessary, such that the stock or stock complex will be rebuilt by T_{max} . If the stock or stock complex has not rebuilt by T_{max} , then the fishing mortality rate should be maintained at F_{rebuild} or 75 percent of the MFMT, whichever is less.

3. As indicated at the recent ASMFC public hearing in Rhode Island for Draft Addendum III to the Inshore Winter Flounder FMP, we are strongly opposed to any such relaxation of winter flounder regulations in state waters. As you know, Narragansett Bay and the RI coastal salt ponds have been closed for several years to the taking of winter flounder. These local stocks are in a near collapsed condition.

Overfishing, human induced negative environmental conditions and climate change are collectively responsible for the dramatic decline in winter flounder stocks in inshore waters. RI had an uptick in winter flounder stocks in the mid 90s, and regulations were relaxed, but very shortly thereafter, the stocks were back to near collapse.

It is good that the stocks in federal waters are improving, but to allow increased catches in state waters that can come inshore to spawn is irresponsible fisheries management. If the inshore winter flounder are ever to recover, a long range, conservative approach is necessary.

AP members on the call also brought up the issue of non-participation by AP members. They noted that since the initiation of Addendum III, today's participants in the Conference Call, along with Gary Libby from Maine prior to the last Board Meeting and George Allen's written comments, no others have been active. Therefore, the AP looks to the Board to find new members that will become involved.

The AP was pleased to hear from Melissa that the Technical Committee held a conference call to review conditions in their individual states, and that their observations are similar to those of the Advisory Panel members.

Finally, and I am paraphrasing the discussions as follows:

The AP believes that, given the severely depressed condition of both stocks (GOM and SNE/MA), the Fishery in the GOM and SNE/MA should be shut down completely and that the states should not allow landings of winter flounder harvested from the EEZ.

Respectively submitted,

Winter Flounder Advisory Panel