



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Tautog Technical Committee Meeting Summary

Conference Call
June 1, 2018
2 - 3 PM

Technical Committee Members: Sydney Alhale (VA), Coly Ares (Vice Chair, RI), Linda Barry (Chair, NJ), Tiffany Cunningham (MA), Sandra Dumais (NY), Garry Glanden* (DE), Craig Weedon (MD)

*attended in place of Scott Newlin

ASMFC Staff: Caitlin Starks, Katie Drew, Jessica Kuesel, Mike Rinaldi

On June 1, 2018 the Tautog Technical Committee (TC) convened via conference call to discuss several items, each summarized below.

Discussion of Sampling Requirements

At the October 2017 meeting, the Board tasked the TC to investigate the biological sampling needs to support continued regional stock assessments for tautog, and recommend any revisions to the biological sampling requirements. In recent years, some states have had difficulties collecting the 200 samples required under Addendum III to the Tautog FMP. The TC discussed the sampling requirements, specifically the potential for a regional versus state requirement, the challenges states are facing with sampling, and geographic differences that should be considered.

The TC generally supported the idea of exploring a regional sampling requirement. One member suggested developing a target number of samples for each region, and then having states within a region determine how to divide sampling between them. Coly Ares commented that a regional requirement aligns with the stock assessment structure, and there is a need to determine a minimum number of samples needed for each age-length key (ALK) for each region. Sydney Alhale commented that it would not be feasible to coordinate closely with neighboring states because VA sampling occurs whenever dealers indicate they have available fish. One member commented that using a percentage of overall landings or harvest to determine the number of samples needed per region or state (rather than a fixed number) would make it difficult for states to meet the requirement. Several members and staff voiced concern that moving to regional sampling requirements could reduce the quantity of samples and negatively impact the assessment.

Sandra Dumais commented that in NY it is easier to collect samples from Long Island Sound than from the South Shore in the NY-NJ Bight region because there is more variability and more dispersed markets on the Bight side. When samples are taken from markets, it is not always possible to track which region the fish came from. NY has also had difficulties getting their required samples because it seems some dealers are selling tautog racks, and some party boats keep the racks for bait.

Tiffany Cunningham commented that there is some geographic variability in length at age for MA, and suggested the TC look at length-age distributions by state to identify differences. She also volunteered to do some analysis to determine the effect of sample size on ALKs. Staff also noted more samples are

needed from smaller fish to have a better distribution of samples for the ALKs; states should target their efforts to sample the ends of the length range to better fill in the ALKs.

There was also a discussion about alternative sampling sources and ageing structures that could be used to augment biological sampling. Staff suggested that samples could be sourced from fishery independent (FI) surveys as well as from the fisheries; some members commented that killing fish from FI surveys for sampling is not preferable, but using pelvic spines to age the fish might be a non-lethal option. Though it was noted that opercula are the preferred structure, the TC was generally interested in pursuing the feasibility of using pelvic spines as an ageing structure for tautog. ASMFC staff agreed to inquire about adding this topic to a future ageing workshop, as using this structure would require further verification and training.

The TC did not come to a conclusion on the appropriate sample requirement for tautog, but agreed to continue investigating the issue and follow up with a recommendation.

Review Commercial Tagging Program Draft Guidelines

Staff presented a draft document regarding implementation recommendations for the commercial harvest tagging program required by Amendment 1. The document intends to provide guidelines for the states to follow when implementing the program. Staff requested that the TC read and provide feedback on whether the draft guidelines are reasonable or need further development.

Elect Vice Chair

Coly Ares was nominated as Vice Chair. She accepted the position with no objection from the TC members present.