



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Technical Committee Meeting Summary

Conference Call
October 25, 2021

Technical Committee Members: Greg Wojcik (Chair, CT), Julia Beaty (MAFMC), Peter Clarke (NJ), Kiersten Curti (NEFSC), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC), Steve Doctor (MD), Lorena de la Garza Hernandez (NC), Karson Coutre (MAFMC), Corinne Truesdale (RI), Sam Truesdell (MA), Rachel Sysak (NY), Mark Terceiro (NEFSC), Richard Wong (DE), and Tony Wood (NEFSC)

ASMFC Staff: Dustin Colson Leaning and Savannah Lewis

Additional Attendees: Lou Carr-Harris (NEFSC), Greg DiDomenico (Lunds), Emerson Hasbrouck (Board member), Emily Keiley (NOAA), Shanna Madsen (Board member), Jason McNamee (Board member), Adam Nowalsky (Board Chair), Will Poston (ASGA), Mike Schmidtke (SAFMC), Michael Waine (ASA), and Kate Wilke (Council member)

The Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Technical Committee (TC) met via conference call on Monday, October 25, 2021 to receive a presentation on two statistical recreational harvest and catch projection models, discuss general approaches for developing 2022 recreational measures, and review updates on the Harvest Control Rule Addendum/Framework.

Presentation on Statistical Models:

Dr. Jason McNamee (Rhode Island Dept. of Environmental Management, RIDEM) presented first on the Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model (RFDM) for summer flounder and black sea bass, which he developed with collaborators Corinne Truesdale (RIDEM, Division of Marine Fisheries) and Savannah Lewis (ASMFC). The RFDM is a generalized additive model that can be used to predict future harvest or catch based on historical recreational management measures and stock population dynamic variables. The model can simulate how state or coastwide level adjustments in bag, size and season limits may affect both landings and discards for the focal species. The statistical uncertainty around harvest estimates can also be modeled. The model was constructed in R, but an R shiny app has also been constructed that allows for a more user friendly experience.

Lou Carr-Harris (NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center) presented second on the Recreational Economic Demand Model (REDM), which was developed for summer flounder. The REDM uses data from the NEFSC's 2010 North Atlantic Recreational Fishing Survey, Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data, and statistical catch at age frequencies from the NEFSC summer flounder stock assessments. The 2010 North Atlantic Recreational Fishing

Survey provides data to estimate anglers' preferences and predict behavior under different regulations, as well as fish caught and fish released across 4 survey regions: ME-NY, NJ, DE/MD, VA/NC. The REDM couples anglers' estimated preferences with a biological submodule that uses population projections from the most recent stock assessment. The model is currently simulated to match the number of summer flounder directed trips in 2019, but could be updated with projections for 2022.

These two models are being considered for use by the Council's Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) and the Commission's Plan Development Team (PDT) in the development and analyses of alternatives for the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Draft Addendum/Framework. A sub-group of the Council's Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) recently reviewed both models and indicated that there is still room for improvement for both the RFDM and REDM before they are used as the sole basis for developing recreational measures. As such, the TC agreed that if these models are used, they should be explored in combination with the traditional methods used to estimate the impacts of management measures. The TC agreed that both models would be useful for consideration in the development of recreational measures for the 2022 fishing year. However, the TC raised concerns about the time constraint considering the quick turnaround and the modelers' other priorities.

Initial Discussion on 2022 Recreational Measures

Commission staff provided a short presentation on the typical timeline for recreational specification setting along with an overview on recent years of annual recreational harvest and important data considerations. Table 1 compares recent MRIP harvest estimates for 2018-2020 to the 2022 Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL) as a potential indicator for what percentage RHL underage or overage might be expected in 2022 under status quo measures. The table also provides 2021 preliminary harvest for waves 1-4, which serves as another indicator for recent harvest trends. Council staff indicated they also plan to utilize wave 1-4 harvest to generate projections for 2022 for the Monitoring Committee (MC) meeting scheduled for November 10th. A few TC members also suggested calculating multi-year confidence intervals for all three species to aid with characterizing the uncertainty around projections. A joint distribution confidence interval would account for the uncertainty inherent in an MRIP point estimate of landings (by considering the PSE value for an individual estimate) as well as the variability in point estimates of annual landings across years when rec measures were held status quo.

Table 1. Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Harvest by Year Compared to 2022 RHL.
Harvest and RHL in millions of pounds.

| Year | Black Sea Bass | | Scup | | Summer Flounder | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------|--------------------|------|--------------------|-------|
| | MRIP Landings (lb) | RHL | MRIP Landings (lb) | RHL | MRIP Landings (lb) | RHL |
| 2018 | 7.92 | 3.66 | 12.98 | 7.37 | 7.60 | 4.42 |
| 2019 | 8.61 | 3.66 | 14.12 | 7.37 | 7.80 | 7.69 |
| 2020 | 9.05 | 5.81 | 12.91 | 6.51 | 10.06 | 7.69 |
| 2021 | 7.55 prelim w1-4 | 6.34 | 11.81 prelim w1-4 | 6.07 | 5.12 prelim w1-4 | 8.32 |
| 2022 | | 6.74 | | 6.08 | | 10.36 |
| 2018-20 Avg. MRIP landings | 8.53 | | 13.34 | | 8.49 | |
| % Difference from 2022 RHL | 27% | | 119% | | -18% | |

After viewing the harvest trends for scup and black sea bass, the TC discussed potential harvest reduction strategies. To help Council staff prepare for the upcoming MC meeting, the TC recommended Council staff first prepare harvest reduction analyses for bag limits, minimum sizes, and season individually. In addition, the TC recommended conducting at least one hybrid approach with combined adjustments to all three management measures that meet the projected reduction required.

The TC provided several ideas specific to analyzing seasonal closures. One TC member proposed exploring seasonal closures for scup during the spawning season. Scup spawning stock biomass is still approximately twice the target level, but recruitment in recent years has been below average causing biomass to retreat back towards the target. This concept would aim to simultaneously reduce harvest while also protecting spawners. The TC discussed the pros and cons of adjusting seasonal closures such that at least one of the three species' seasons remain open at all times of the year. A potential benefit of this approach is that anglers would always be able to fish for at least one of these three recreationally important species throughout the year, which could lead to increased angler welfare, while one potential drawback of this approach is that it could unintentionally increase discards of either scup, summer flounder or black sea bass during the seasonal closures since all three species are often targeted by similar gear configurations and are located in similar habitats.

Several TC members said that there are numerous reasons why status quo measures may be appropriate for scup and black sea bass. Foremost, spawning stock biomass is approximately twice the target for both stocks. One TC member said the recent high recreational harvest demonstrates high demand for recreational fishing opportunities. In contrast, recent commercial harvest of scup and black sea bass have underachieved the annual quota. This TC member also said each sector's demonstrated quota needs should be considered and the recreational sector's demonstrated need provides a level of justification for the recreational sector not taking a reduction in the form of more restrictive measures. Another TC member pointed out that the commercial sector's needs may not be accurately represented due to the

unusual market conditions that occurred in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19. The TC also acknowledged the 2020 data challenges that were a direct result of COVID-19 closures and the increased uncertainty in predicting future years of harvest. While not discussed in detail at this meeting, the economic impact of significant reductions in measures is another consideration that has been used as justification for keeping measures status quo in previous years. Lastly, the TC recognized that the ongoing Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment and the recreational reform initiative's Harvest Control Rule Addendum/Framework may factor into decisions on recreational measures for 2022. Neither management action will be implemented in time for 2022 recreational measure development, but both may be implemented for 2023. Final action has yet to be taken on either action, and potential impacts to recreational fisheries management in 2023 and beyond are unknown. The development of both actions have factored into the Board and the Council's past decisions to maintain status quo measures instead of implementing severe restrictions on recreational measures. In summary, the TC's conversation served as a primer for the conversation that will follow at the upcoming MC meeting.

Overview of the Harvest Control Rule

Commission staff presented updates on the Commission and Council's Harvest Control Rule Addendum/Framework which is one management action under the Recreational Reform Initiative. Staff presented the proposed options still under development by the FMAT/PDT. The Board and Council are scheduled to consider the Draft Addendum for public comment this winter, which would enable the action to stay on track for 2023 implementation. TC members and members of the public asked a few clarifying questions regarding the timeline for implementation, application to other recreational reform issues, and progress on developing accountability measures for the Harvest Control Rule. In response to the last question, staff offered that accountability measures are still under development and that the exact application of the RHL for each of the harvest control rule options is still being considered and discussed at both the FMAT/PDT and Board/Council level. The most recent version of the [Harvest Control Draft Addendum](#) that was presented at the Commission's Fall Meeting provides a more thorough review of progress on this action.