

April 2016 Council Meeting Report

April 11 – 14, 2016

Montauk, New York

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's April 2016 meeting in Montauk, New York. Presentations, briefing materials, and audio recordings are available on the Council's website at www.mafmc.org/briefing/april-2016.

Blueline Tilefish Amendment

The Council approved measures to establish management of blueline tilefish in federal waters off the Mid-Atlantic and New England coasts. Since June 2015, the portion of the fishery north of North Carolina has been managed under emergency measures including a commercial trip limit of 275 pounds (gutted) and a recreational bag limit of 7 fish per person the Mid-Atlantic. These measures are set to expire on June 3, 2016. The Blueline Tilefish Amendment includes measures to incorporate blueline tilefish as a managed species in the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the amendment would establish a separate blueline tilefish management unit in Federal waters north of the North Carolina/Virginia border extending up to the boundary with Canada. Below is a summary of key measures approved by the Council.

Acceptable Biological Catch: Based on the recommendation of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Council adopted an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 87,031 pounds for 2017.

Allocations: The Council voted to allocate 73% of total allowable landings to the recreational fishery and 27% to the commercial sector. This allocation was based on the median of annual commercial-recreational catch ratios from 2009-2013.

Commercial Measures: The Council adopted a commercial trip limit of 300 pounds gutted weight (head and fins must be attached). In addition, the amendment would require a joint golden/blueline tilefish open access commercial permit to retain blueline tilefish, subject to the applicable trip limit. Standard reporting of catch would be required for commercial vessels and dealers landing blueline tilefish.

Recreational Measures: For the recreational fishery, the Council recommended an open season from May 1 to October 31, when blueline tilefish are available to most anglers throughout the Mid-Atlantic. Recreational bag limits would be set at 7 fish per person for inspected for-hire vessels, 5 fish per person for uninspected for-hire vessels, and 3 fish per person for private vessels. In addition, the Council recommended mandatory permitting and reporting of golden and blueline tilefish for both for-hire and private recreational fishing in order to develop better information on recreational tilefish landings in the Mid-Atlantic.

The public will have an opportunity to comment on the measures recommended by the Council during the comment period associated with the NMFS proposed rule. Publication of the proposed rule is expected this summer. Additional background information and documents related to this amendment are available at www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish.

Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment

The Council reviewed a range of alternatives for inclusion in the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. After considering input from the Unmanaged Forage Fishery Management Action Team, the Ecosystems and Ocean Planning (EOP) Advisory Panel, the EOP Committee, and members of the public, the Council modified several alternatives and voted to move forward with public hearings. More information about the dates and

locations of public hearings will be posted to the Council's website. The main issues and alternatives addressed in the amendment are summarized below.

List of Unmanaged Forage Taxa: The Council modified the list of taxa under consideration for inclusion in the amendment. The revised list of taxa can be found at:

http://www.mafmc.org/s/2016-04-14_Unmanaged-Forage-Taxa.pdf.

Management Alternatives (excluding chub mackerel): The Council approved management alternatives to designate these taxa (excluding chub mackerel) as Ecosystem Components (ECs) in the Council's existing FMPs and either prohibit their harvest or allow an incidental possession limit. The Council approved incidental possession limit alternatives of either 1,500 pounds of any of these species per trip or 1,700 pounds for all of these species combined per trip.

Chub Mackerel: Because there is an existing directed fishery for chub mackerel in the Mid-Atlantic, the Council decided to consider a wider range of management options, including designation as an EC, management as a stock in the fishery, or with neither designation using the discretionary provisions of FMPs allowed for under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). The Council approved a range of alternatives for annual landings limits and incidental possession limits for chub mackerel. The annual landings limits are based on historical landings and range from 900,127 pounds per year to 5.25 million pounds per year. They are meant to be fishery-wide landings limits, rather than per vessel landings limits.

Development of New Fisheries: The Council approved management alternatives for the development of new fisheries. One alternative would require use of an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) prior to development of a new fishery. The Council approved an alternative for Council review of EFP applications prior to review by the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). An additional alternative would require consideration of a stock in a fishery designation prior to allowing a new fishery for any species included in the amendment.

Geographic Scope: The Council approved alternatives to define the geographic scope of the amendment (i.e. the management unit), and alternatives related to permitting, reporting, and monitoring of landings of unmanaged forage species.

Golden Tilefish – 2017 Specifications

The Council reviewed golden tilefish specifications for the 2017 fishing year, which were originally established in 2014 as part of multi-year specifications for the 2015-2017 fishing years. After considering recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, Tilefish Monitoring Committee, and Tilefish Advisory Panel, the Council recommended no changes to the following 2017 specifications:

- **Allowable Catch Limit (ACL):** 1.898 million pounds
- **Total Allowable Landings (TAL):** 1.887 million pounds
 - **TAL for the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fishery:** 1.793 million pounds
 - **TAL for the Incidental Fishery:** 94,357 pounds

Golden Tilefish Framework 2

The Council selected preferred alternatives for Framework 2 to the Tilefish FMP and approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. If approved, the framework would:

- allow for discards to be deducted from the specific component of the commercial sector generating them;
- eliminate IVR reporting requirements in the golden tilefish fishery;
- prohibit vessels from fishing more than one golden tilefish IFQ allocation at a time;
- require golden tilefish to be landed with the head attached;

- restrict the golden tilefish recreational fishery to rod and reel only, with a five hook limit per rod; and
- require that incidental permit holders do not possess golden tilefish at the time of landings in excess of 25% of the total of all combined species landed.

Scup Gear Restricted Areas Framework

The Council approved a framework action to modify the boundary of one of the region's two Scup Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs). The proposed change to the Southern Scup GRA boundary is expected to increase the availability of longfin squid to small-mesh fisheries.

Background: The Scup GRAs were first implemented in 2000 to reduce discard mortality of juvenile scup. The current GRA regulations include a Northern GRA, which is effective from November 1 through December 31, and a Southern GRA, which is effective from January 1 through March 15. Trawl vessels which fish for or possess longfin squid, black sea bass, or silver hake (also known as whiting) are required to use mesh 5 inches or larger in the GRAs during those times of the year. The scup stock has expanded substantially since the GRAs were first implemented, and analysis conducted by scientists at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center indicate that the GRAs were partially responsible for this rebuilding. In response to an industry request, the Council initiated a framework action in 2014 to address potential changes to the scup GRAs. The framework considered a range of alternatives, including modifications to the GRA boundaries and elimination of one or both GRAs.

Council Decision: After a lengthy discussion of the impacts of the proposed alternatives, the Council voted to modify the boundary of the Southern Scup GRA. The proposed change, shown in Figure 1, is based on a proposal developed by members of the Council's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel. This modification is expected to increase the amount of longfin squid available to small-mesh fisheries during January 1 – March 15 by 51%, compared to the current GRA. It is expected to reduce the amount of scup found within the Southern GRA by 21%.

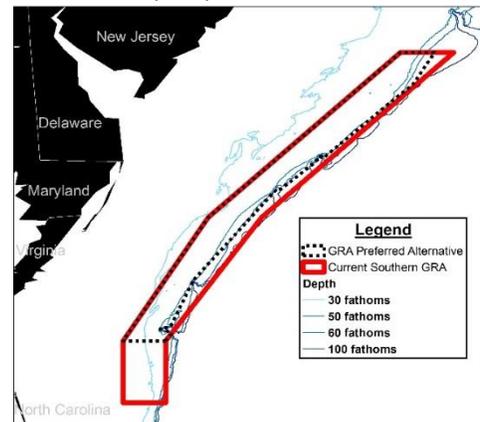


Figure 1. Proposed modification to the Southern Scup GRA boundary.

Spiny Dogfish Trip Limits

The Council considered a request from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to increase the spiny dogfish trip limit to 6,000 pounds. The rationale for this request was that the fishery is currently underutilizing the quota by a significant amount, and a slight increase in the trip limit will reduce regulatory discards, promote economies of scale, and encourage more participation in the fishery. It is not expected that an increase to 6,000 pounds would appreciably increase the risk of a fishery closure at the anticipated quota levels. After considering public comments both in favor of and opposed to the proposed increase, the Council voted unanimously to increase the federal dogfish trip limit to 6,000 pounds.

Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM)

The Council reviewed a first draft of its *Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Guidance Document*. The document is intended to provide an umbrella for coordination of ecosystem considerations across existing FMPs, with the goal of managing fisheries within a broader ecosystem context compared to traditional single species. The Council considered input from the public and provided feedback on the content and priorities for further development of the document.

Omnibus Industry Funded Monitoring Amendment

The Council's Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish Committee and River Herring & Shad Committee met jointly to discuss the Omnibus Industry Funded Monitoring Amendment and review alternatives to increase monitoring of the Atlantic mackerel fishery. The Council reviewed the Committees' recommendations and provided

direction for additional development of the document. Public hearings will be held after the Council reviews an Environmental Assessment for the amendment at the June Council meeting.

River Herring and Shad

The Council's River-Herring and Shad (RH/S) Committee, RH/S Advisory Panel, and Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Committee met jointly to reexamine the 2013 RH/S Stock in Fishery White Paper. The Committees and Advisory Panel provided direction/input to staff regarding the desired contents of an updated white paper above and beyond the Court's orders to include an environmental analysis of immediately adding RH/S "to the fishery" and managing it by use of proxies. Discussions included, but were not limited to, analyses of: TEWG actions, jurisdictional issues, shore-side monitoring and avoidance networks, study-fleet data and habitat modeling, general habitat issues, management history, management gaps, the role of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, the Council's success criteria, the historical value of RH/S, and the proposed National Standard 1 (NS1) revisions. Staff will incorporate the input received and update the 2013 RH/S Stock in Fishery White Paper accordingly.

ABC Control Rule and Risk Policy

The Council voted in late 2015 to include consideration of potential modifications to its existing Risk Policy and ABC control rule framework in the 2016 implementation plan. The Executive Committee met to review issues relative to the current risk policy and ABC control rule framework and to discuss potential solutions to the problems identified. The Committee provided initial direction to Council staff on development of this action.

Other Business

European Union Pelagic Advisory Council and EAFM: The Council received a presentation from Dr. Verena Ohms on the development of EAFM in the European Union.

November 2016 Discard Methods Workshop: Dr. Michael Lanning provided a presentation on plans for a second peer review of the in-season cumulative discard methodology used by GARFO.

National Bycatch Reduction Strategy: The Council received a presentation from Karen Abrams on NMFS' Draft National Bycatch Reduction Strategy. The Council agreed to submit a comment letter on the draft plan.