April 2012 Council Meeting Summary

This summary addresses the major issues voted on or discussed at each regularly scheduled MAFMC meeting. The Council met most recently on April 10-12, 2012 in Duck, NC. Based on stakeholder input received during our visioning project, this meeting summary now contains additional information detailing why some actions were taken by the Council. Please contact us if you have any questions or need additional clarification.

At its April meeting, the Council addressed issues related to tilefish, spiny dogfish, squid, mackerel, butterfish, surfclams, ocean quahogs, Atlantic Sturgeon, ecosystems and Ocean Planning, and research set-aside.

**Tilefish**

**Harvest Levels and Management Measures**

The Council voted to approve an annual biological catch (ABC)/annual catch limit (ACL)/annual catch target (ACT) equal to 913 metric tons (2.013 million pounds) and to set the total allowable landings (TAL) at 905 metric tons (1.995 million pounds) for the 2013-2014 fishing years. The Council agreed to continue with current regulations of an 8-fish recreational bag-size limit per person per trip and a 500 pound incidental trip limit. It was also agreed that no TAL be made available for the Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program until the next benchmark stock assessment for tilefish is completed and the Council has completed the review of the RSA program. The SSC will revisit its ABC recommendation for tilefish next year, and will be paying particular attention to: (1) the length-frequency distribution of the commercial catch, especially with regard to signs of strong incoming recruitment; (2) any significant changes in the spatial or temporal distribution of fishery effort; and, (3) any significant changes in the discard pattern or amount. These or other factors may cause the SSC to change its ABC recommendation for the 2014 fishing year. The next golden tilefish benchmark stock assessment is scheduled for December 2013 (SARC 57).

**Spiny Dogfish**

**Amendment 3**

The Council voted to approve the set of alternatives for analysis in Amendment 3 to the Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) as recommended by the Fishery Management Action Team. Amendment 3 addresses four issues: 1) establishing a small research set-aside (RSA) allowance; 2) updating EFH definitions; 3) maintaining existing management measures until replaced through rulemaking; and, 4) modifying the commercial quota allocation scheme.

**Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish**

**Framework 5**

The Council voted to approve Framework 5 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) FMP for Secretarial submission. Framework 5 addresses changes to the scope of individuals who would be allowed to conduct vessel hold measurements as required under Amendment 11 to the MSB FMP. This framework will prohibit discrimination against equally qualified marine professionals so it will not make it burdensome for vessels to obtain vessel hold requirements by unnecessarily limiting the number of individuals who may be contracted to perform measurements.
Framework 6
The Council voted to approve Framework 6 to the MSB FMP for Secretarial submission. Framework 6 provides a more clearly defined management process when applying the Council risk policy and describes the limited circumstances under which acceptable biological catch (ABC) can be increased for stocks without status determination criteria on overfishing. This framework action will apply to all six Council FMPs and all Council species except squids and monkfish.

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Reopening of Georges Bank
The Council recommended the Assistant Administrator (AA) open the area known as Cultivator Shoals on Georges Bank as soon as possible. At its February 2012 meeting, the Council requested the AA impose additional conditions on reopening any area closed due to PSP with the requirement that vessels landing surfclams or ocean quahogs from the area follow the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) PSP testing protocol.

Atlantic Sturgeon

Endangered Species Act (ESA) Listing
The Council discussed the recent ESA listing of Atlantic Sturgeon and the possibilities for management measures that would reduce fisheries interactions with Atlantic sturgeon. The Chesapeake Bay, New York Bight, Carolina, and South Atlantic distinct population segments (DPS) of Atlantic sturgeon was listed as endangered, while the Gulf of Maine DPS was listed as threatened. Bycatch was identified as a risk to the persistence of Atlantic sturgeon in the Northeast Region and a constraint on the recovery of Atlantic sturgeon populations. The Council also agreed to form an Atlantic Sturgeon Advisory Panel and will advertise for advisors.

Committees and Other Business

Ecosystem and Ocean Planning
The Committee received a presentation from Roger Pugliese of the South Atlantic Council (SAFMC) on deep-sea coral activities in the South Atlantic. Michelle Bachman of the New England Council (NEFMC) also gave a presentation on deep-sea coral protection zones and management measures. The Council voted to initiate a plan amendment to protect deep sea corals within the Mid-Atlantic Council management boundary. They also voted to initiate the development of a memorandum of understanding with NEFMC and SAFMC to coordinate broad scale deep sea coral management measures.

Executive
The Council voted to move forward with the Executive Committees recommendation to accept the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management guidance (EBFM) document including its Goals and Objectives, and Purpose and Needs Statement. The Goal Statement is "to manage for ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources while maintaining ecosystem productivity, structure, and function". The Committee discussed transition strategies to move to EBFM and ABC control rules, ACLs, and overfishing level (OFL) buffers that would be included in the document. Draft Terms of Reference (TORs) for guiding ABC recommendations recommended by the SSC were also discussed. Doug Potts from NMFS provided an update to the Committee on the next steps for Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM). Options from the FMAT regarding the SBRM will be reviewed by the Council at their June meeting.

Research Set-Aside
The Committee discussed the possibility of the Council administering the RSA program, integrating the SSC into the RSA research prioritization process, and alternatives to improve the RSA program. A letter from NOAA General Counsel indicated that there was no authority for the Council to run a research program. The
letter also stated that the NOAA determination that the RSA program must be administered as a grants program has not changed and that the Council lacks the authority under current federal law to either administer the program directly or through third party contractual agreements. The Committee agreed to continue to develop mechanisms to incorporate the SSC into the research prioritization process and in the review/approval of future projects. The Committee also agreed to continue to develop solutions which address administration and enforcement issues related to the RSA program.

Public Listening Session - Offshore Renewable Energy
Brian Hooker, Will Waskes, Jenn Golladay, and Brian Krevor of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), Office of Renewable Energy Programs, provided updates on offshore renewable energy activities for the MAFMC. The overview included state-by-state and regional updates, studies on impacts of electromagnetic fields and fish acoustics, measures to address potential use conflicts, and a study evaluating the socio-economic impact to fishing from offshore wind energy development. The group also provided updates on outreach efforts including briefings held, stakeholder discussions, events, participation of Council staff and NMFS, and BOEM State/Federal Renewable Energy Task Forces. BOEM is engaged in siting offshore renewable energy facilities along the Atlantic seaboard and would like input from fishers regarding offshore renewable energy. For more information visit:  http://www.boem.gov/Renewable-Energy-Program/index.aspx

Swearing in of New Council Member
Frances "Dewey" Hemilright, Jr. was sworn in on April 11, 2012. Dewey is a commercial fisherman from Kitty Hawk, NC. He will fill the obligatory Council seat for NC formerly held by Jule Wheatly.

Materials on the Web
Meeting materials related to the above issues and any presentations that accompanied the briefings provided to the Council at its April meeting are located on the Council's website at www.mafmc.org. Audio files of the full meeting discussions will be posted at http://mafmc.org/actions/audio/audio.htm.

Next Council Meeting - June 12-14, 2012
New York, NY