2014 Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP)
Fishery Performance Report (FPR)

The Tilefish AP met via Webinar on February 4 2014 to develop the Tilefish FPR below. This FPR represents a consensus of the Tilefish AP.

The Advisers in attendance were: Ron Callis and Dan Farham. They represent the tilefish fisheries of Montauk (commercial) and Ocean City (recreational charter). Also in attendance were Laurie Nolan, Council Member, Doug Potts of the NERO, Paul Nitschke and Barbara Rountree of the NEFSC, Douglas Vaughan SSC lead for tilefish, and Tony Kratowicz.

The charge to the Tilefish AP was to provide input on factors that have influenced catch levels over time. The following is the consensus report from the Tilefish AP.

Market Issues

Prices have increased and been strong in recent years. A major reason for this is that the tilefish industry is able to coordinate times of landings to avoid market gluts and spread tilefish landings throughout the year. The ability to do this has improved since IFQs came into place.

The price for Golden tilefish decreases when tilefish landed in the South Atlantic derby fishery enters the New York market. This typically occurs a few months out of the year as the South Atlantic tilefish fishery typically closes early in the season, due to its being a 'derby' fishery. It is likely, that as the South Atlantic Golden Tilefish Quota increases[1] and additional Golden tilefish caught in the south Atlantic enters the Fulton market, the downward pressure on the price of tilefish caught in the mid-Atlantic region will become more relevant. In addition, in late fall, striped bass also competes with tilefish in the market place. Fishermen take this into account when planning fishing activity.

Golden tilefish caught in this region are sold as whole fish through regional markets, mainly for ethnic customers. However, an increasing although small amount is going to local buyers on Long Island, where there has been an uptick in local restaurants featuring such local fishes as well as purchases by a Sea-to-Table business serving the larger region (sea2table.com).

Having a steady year round supply has helped the overall marketing development for this product. (And price increase). The market may not be able to absorb larger increases in product availability in the very short-term. At this time, an increase in supply causes a decrease in price, as seen when southern tilefish enters the New York market. Market expansion is needed to further place additional product in the market place and maintain stable prices. Over the longer-term, increases in production can improve markets.

Major costs that have risen in recent years are fuel and bait. The high cost of operating a vessel continues to place a premium on fishing as close to home port as possible.

[1] Effective October 9, 2012, the commercial Annual Catch Limit (quota) for golden tilefish increases from 282,819 pounds (gw) to 541,295 pounds (gw). Source: http://www.safmc.net/fishidandregs/fishgallery/goldentilefish/tabid/289/default.aspx

Environmental Issues

The industry has observed no tilefish aggregation changes due to changes in water temperatures, in contrast with what they observe with other fishes. The temperatures where Golden tilefish are found seem stable due to extreme depth. (Note: tilefish are generally found in rough bottom, small burrows and sheltered areas at bottom water temperatures ranging from 48.2^{o}F to 57.2^{o}F [9°C to 14°C], generally in depths between 328 and 984 ft [100 to 300 m]).

Dogfish interaction reduces tilefish catches and strongly affects where people fish. When fishermen encounter dogfish they move to other fishing areas. The dogfish interaction is mostly in the winter period. However, in recent years, dogfish presence extends past the winter time period (right until June). Skate interaction also reduces tilefish catches; this is mostly limited to the winter period. Skates can severely damage tilefish gear. When fishermen encounter dogfish or skates they move to other fishing areas.

Recreational tilefish fishermen have observed aggregations of large fish in small areas in the spring/summer time around the Wilmington canyon (>80 to 90 fathoms). Not sure if they could be spawning events. Down East, tilefish concentrate in smaller amounts because of canyons and bottom structures.

Management Issues & Management Induced Effort Shifts

The number of tilefish vessels participating in the fishery has been steady. Data showing a slight increase between 2012 and 2013 reflect participation changes in the incidental category. Since the onset of the ITQ management system, there has been no change in the number of vessels (4) that constitute the vast bulk of the landings (they constitute about 80% of the landings/IFQ allocation).

Tilefish landings are in alignment with the TAL specified for the fishery; observed differences in the data are very small. AP members believe that they are catching their allocation. It is believed that tilefish landings for the 2013 FY (1.817 m lb) reported in the Golden Tilefish AP Information Document are an underestimate of the landings and are likely to be closer the quota limit (1.995 m lb). It is believed that the reported underage (0.178 m lb) may be due to late reporting.

The implementation of the IFQ system has particularly benefited those in the former "part-time" and "tier 2" vessel categories of the old limited access program. These vessels can plan their fishing activities throughout the year, rather than being forced into a derby fishery on November 1 (start of the fishing year) if they plan to harvest tilefish in a given year. These vessels participate in a number of fisheries (e.g. monkfish, scallop, and swordfish) and the IFQ system allows them to "fill in" tilefishing when it works best for them. Under the IFQ system, the former "part-time, tier 2, and full-time" vessels are working closely with each other and dealers to avoid landing large quantities of tilefish at the same time and avoid drastic price reductions.

One commercial fisherman indicated that he is using electronic VTR. He also indicated that his crew has encountered some small technical problems (e.g. transmission). These "user" issues are being addressed by the crew members and the NEFSC staff.

General Fishing Trends

CPUE is improving (catch rates improving.). However, still see variations (ups and downs) in CPUE. In the last 3 years, the length of a fishing trip has been very stable (ranging from 5.8 to 7.0 days) and shorter than the case several years before that (7 to 10 days), reflecting higher catch rates.

Observations indicate new incoming multiple-year classes; there is more of a size mix than before (healthy mix of ages). Commercial fishermen are catching a broad size distribution of fish.

Try to fish as close to port as possible. Basically, fishing in same areas all of the time; high fuel prices keep people from going further out and searching.

It was noted that in the SAW/SARC 58, after all model exploration and examination were completed, the final model terminal year was selected to be 2012 to avoid questions regarding the incomplete 2013 data. During the working group process, industry members noted an increase in the 2013 landings of small fish that were not available during the meeting. At this AP meeting, two industry members indicated that their combined landings of KKs (extra small fish ≤ 2 lb) during the first and second half of 2013 were 7,766 lb and 22,969 lb, respectively[2]. This indicates that the number of small fish landed over the 2013 year increased. It was also indicated that industry has seen new recruitments in the fishery in the later part of 2013 and now in 2014.

Fishermen are not moving around much as they are finding a healthy mix of animals in traditional fishing grounds. However, there are areas that are thought to have more quantities of larger fish than smaller fish that could be targeted if needed.

One fisherman indicated that this winter season his crew has encountered fewer tiles during a single run as compared to last winter and that trip duration is slightly longer. The same individual stressed that the composition of the catch (mix sizes) is still very healthy. Another fisherman indicated that the weather has been a major concern this winter and trips may be getting longer due to windstorms and not fish availability.

The topography of the traditional fishing areas is well known and they have the advantage of little or no gear conflict, unlike some of the potential tilefishing areas which are used for other fisheries.

[2] This represented a 2% and 5% of their combined total landings during the first and second half of 2013, respectively.

Other Issues

-Sometimes, a vessel may underharvest its quota allocation due to fear of overharvesting. The AP would like to see carry-over of unused portions (with a small proportion of the cap) to the next fishing year such as it is done in the scallop fishery. It was also stated that having a carry-over of unused quota may benefit vessels that may not be able to land their entire allocation in one fishing years due to vessel repairs and maintenance.

-Reliance on fishery-dependent data to manage the fishery may be a drawback. Assessment is data poor. No survey information on size distribution.

-The industry discussed potential issues with the golden tilefish species code for the unclassified market category. In general terms, harvested tilefish are sorted by size for marketing purposes as some customer prefer a specific size over others, in addition, there is a price differential for different market size categories. The current market size categories used by the NEFSC for golden tilefish are: extra-large, large, medium, small, kitten, small-kitten, unclassified, and fillet-unclassified. Industry is concerned with moving forward/using a base age stock assessment due to dealer reporting issues by market category. It is important to ensure that market category distributions accurately reflect the landings as small, kitten, and medium market category distributions can shift from one year to the next due to the growth of a strong year class.

Industry members from New York have indicated that they market tilefish under a large/medium[3] fish category (5-7 lb) as a marketing tool thru the dealers in Fulton. Since the NEFSC did not contain a market category for fish sold as large/medium, the dealers in New York report these fish as unclassified. The unclassified market category is typically used for mix fish that may be truly unclassified fish, for example, it may be fish that was pulled from the other catch due to quality problems or very small amounts of mix size fish incidentally landed that may not require sorting by size. Industry members have stated that in RI all tilefish landed are caught incidentally by the trawl fleet and sold as unclassified fish (most of these fish are smaller in the 1.69 to1.84 lb range). On the other hand, a large quantity of the tilefish caught in NY and sold thru the Fulton market as unclassified are larger in size (5-7 lb range). As such, when looking at the size distribution of commercial landings, the medium size and large size fish are not well captured as some are reported as unclassified. The large/medium market category was historically a relatively small proportion of the catch. Council and NEFSC staff are working to address this issue by adding a market category that would capture tilefish sold as large/medium to improve the accuracy in characterizing the size distribution of the removals and tracking of year classes.

-Constant harvest strategy seems to be working and rebuilding the fishery. Industry would like to see status quo landings in the near future given healthy trends in the catch.

[3] Extra-large fish are >25lb; large = 7-24 lb; medium = 3.5-5 lb; small and kittens = 2-3.5 lb; and extra small and tiny are <2 lb. Market category names small and extra small are used in Ney Jersey while kittens and tiny are used in New York. The NEFSC aggregates both small and kittens when looking at the size distribution of commercial landings.

-One headboat captain indicated that he has seen about 6 headboats[4] fish for tilefish in mid-Atlantic canyons[5]. Two of the boats (out of Ocean City) conduct direct tilefish fishing trips. While the other four boats may catch tilefish while targeting tuna or swordfish (i.e., when the tuna limit has been reached, on the way out or on the way in from a tuna/swordfish fishing trip, or at any time when tuna/swordfish fishing is slow). During the winter period there are no tilefish party/charter boat trips as dogfish are just too abundant.

-One headboat captain fishing out of Rudee Inlet indicated that while they do not run tilefish fishing trips they catch them sometimes (they target blueline tilefish and groupers). However, they have noticed that they are not seeing as many large golden tilefish (>25 lb) as they used to. He also indicated that they are not seeing as many large blueline tilefish as before either. This could be an issue with fishing pressure he stated. The group discussed the fact that fish in the southern canyons (Norfolk, Washington) tent to aggregate in "smaller spots" of about 2 or 3 football fields in size and fishing pressure can be too much and need to wait several months before you go back there to fish again. The group discussed how this contrasts with the wide open areas where the commercial fishery operates in in the northern part of the range (e.g., statistical area 537 - Atlantis and Block Canyons; statistical area 616) where tilefish are found in wide open areas in contrast to "smaller spots" where some recreational fishing occurs in the south. Commercial fisherman indicated that the Montauk fleet has seen an increase in the amount of blueline tilefish caught (ranging from 600 to 1500 lb per trip) and that the recent decrease in the amount of large blueline tilefish found in the south (i.e., Rudee Inlet) may be due to warmer water temperature and changing migratory patterns. Blueline tilefish harvested by the Montauk fleet are shipped to the Fulton market.

-There has been an inflection in the landings patter of incidental tilefish landings from late March to early April 2014 according to the NERO "Incidental Tilefish Quota Monitoring Report[6]." Advisors are concerned about directed trip in the incidental category by non-trawl vessels.

[4] According to the AP member, one boat is from Montauk, 2 from New Jersey, and 2 from Maryland. He could not remember where the remaining boat was from.
[5] Note: It is not likely that all six boats would fish in the canyons on the same day. And when scheduling trips, these boats would schedule at most one trip per week.
[6] Source: NERO. As of week ending January 25, 2014. Data reported January 29, 2014.

Montanez, Jose L.

From: davearbeitman@comcast.net
Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2014 4:09 PM
To: Montanez, Jose L.
Subject: Re: Tilefish Advisory Panel Webinar

Jose,
I would really like to see the recreational bag limit for golden tilefish to be increased from 8 fish to 12 fish. There seems to be no scientific reason for the lower bag limit and no indicators that a larger bag limit would be harmful to the overall biomass.
Thank you,
Dave

From: "Jose L. Montanez" <jmontanez@mafmc.org>
To: davearbeitman@comcast.net
Sent: Sunday, February 16, 2014 12:28:36 PM
Subject: RE: Tilefish Advisory Panel Webinar

Hello Dave,

We had the AP meeting on February 4 (http://www.mafmc.org/council-eveharmful to thents/201424tilefish-advisory-panel-webinar) and the FPR was updated. I have attached the final report for you to see.

Also, the SSC and Tilefish Monitoring Committee will be meeting in March to address ABC levels and other management measures for the 2015-2017 period. See below for additional information.
http://www.mafmc.org/council-events/ssc-meeting-1
http://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2014/tilefish-monitoring-committee-meeting

If you have questions please write or call me.

Brest,

-jm

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