

June 2017 Council Meeting Report

June 6 – 8, 2017

Norfolk, Virginia

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's June 2017 meeting in Norfolk, VA. Presentations, briefing materials, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's website at www.mafmc.org/briefing/june-2017.

Atlantic Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs

2018-2020 Specifications

The Council received a presentation on the most recent stock assessments for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog. Both assessments concluded that overfishing is not occurring in the most recent year and that the probability of either stock being overfished is low. Staff reviewed the regulatory history, fishery performance, and advisory panel recommendations for both fisheries. Last year, surfclam and ocean quahog specifications were developed for 2017-2018, with the expectation that a new stock assessment could allow 2018 measures to be revised as needed. This year, staff recommend specifications be set for 3 years. Based on the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Council adopted the following specifications for 2018-2020:

	Year	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Annual Catch Target (ACT)	Commercial Quota
Atlantic Surfclams	2018 - 2020	29,363 mt	29,363 mt (3.4 million bushels)	26,218 mt (3.4 million bushels)
Ocean Quahogs	2018	44,695 mt	Maine ACT: 524 mt	Maine Quota: 499 mt (100,000 ME bushels)
	2019	44,146 mt		
	2020	45,783 mt	Non-Maine ACT: 25,400 mt	Non-Maine Quota: 24,190 mt (5.3 million bushels)

**mt = metric ton*

Surfclam Overfishing Limit

The most recent benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic surfclams specified biological reference points as ratios rather than absolute values. Although the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring, the SSC determined that the overfishing limit (OFL) reported in the assessment was unreliable and decided not to specify an OFL. In the absence of an OFL, the SSC recommended setting the surfclam ABC based on maintaining catch levels that allow for the 26,218 mt quota which has been in place since 2004. Members of the surfclam fishery have expressed concern that the lack of an OFL could jeopardize the industry's certification with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). In response to these concerns, the Council agreed to have the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Committee meet with assessment scientists and other technical experts to review the issue further. The Committee is expected to report back to the Council at the next meeting in August.

Excessive Shares Amendment

The Council reviewed and approved a scoping document for the Excessive Shares Amendment to the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The amendment will consider measures that define what constitutes an excessive share in the SCOQ Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) program. This is necessary to

ensure that no individual, corporation, or other entity acquires an excessive share of SCOQ ITQ privileges. In addition, the amendment will consider potential revisions to the goals and objectives for the SCOQ FMP.

Scoping hearings will be held July 10-17, 2017, and written comments will be accepted through July 21, 2017. Additional information is available on the Council's website at <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/scog-excessive-shares-amendment>.

Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish – 2018-2020 Specifications

Atlantic Mackerel: 2018 will be year 3 of 2016-2018 Atlantic mackerel specifications. The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the Atlantic mackerel fishery and recommended no changes to the 2018 specifications, which are summarized in the table below.

<i>Summary of 2018 Atlantic Mackerel Specifications</i>	
Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)	19,898 mt
U.S. Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	11,009 mt
Recreational Annual Catch Target	614 mt
Commercial Annual Catch Target	9,294 mt
Domestic Annual Harvest (DAH)	9,177 mt

Butterfish: The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the butterfish fishery and adopted multi-year specifications for 2018-2020. The most recent assessment update indicates that butterfish is not overfished and no overfishing is occurring. Based on the SSC's recommendations, the Council adopted ABCs of 17,801 mt for 2018, 27,108 mt for 2019, and 32,063 mt for 2020. The 2018 ABC represents a 42% reduction from the 2017 ABC of 30,922 mt. This reduction was recommended based on low recent recruitment and lower abundance indicated in the assessment update. The Council adopted an ACT of 16,199 mt for 2018, resulting in a Domestic Annual Harvest (DAH) of 12,093 mt. For 2019, the Council adopted an ACT of 25,075 mt and a DAH of 20,061 mt. For 2020, the Council adopted an ACT of 32,063 mt and a DAH of 23,752 mt. The Council adopted a butterfish mortality cap of 3,884 mt for all three years.

<i>Summary of 2018-2020 Butterfish Specifications</i>			
	2018	2019	2020
ABC	17,801 mt	27,108 mt	32,063 mt
ACT	16,911 mt	25,075 mt	28,857 mt
DAH	12,093 mt	20,061 mt	23,752 mt
Butterfish Cap	3,884 mt	3,884 mt	3,884 mt

Longfin and *Illex* Squid: The Council reviewed fishery performance and stock status for longfin and *Illex* squid and adopted multi-year specifications for 2018-2020. Based on the recommendations of the SSC, the Council voted to maintain most measures for both fisheries. The longfin squid DAH was increased slightly due to the assessment update indicating lower discarding in recent years. These specifications are summarized in the table below. Please refer to the Squid Amendment summary below for information about proposed changes to Trimester 2 management measures.

<i>Summary of 2018-2020 Longfin and <i>Illex</i> Squid Specifications</i>		
	Longfin Squid	<i>Illex</i> Squid
ABC	23,400 mt	24,000 mt
DAH	22,932 mt	22,915 mt

Squid Amendment

The Council approved the Squid Amendment to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP. The amendment includes measures to reduce latent (unused or minimally used) permits in the longfin squid fishery and modify management of longfin squid during Trimester 2. Below are summaries of the issues addressed and the Council's preferred alternatives. Additional details and background information about this action are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/newsfeed/2017/mid-atlantic-council-approves-squid-amendment>.

Longfin Squid Moratorium Permit Requalification: The Council voted to allow current longfin squid/butterfish limited access moratorium permits to retain their permits if they landed at least 10,000 pounds of squid in one year from 1997 to 2013. This would reduce the number of moratorium squid permits by more than 40% but would not affect vessels that have been historically active in the fishery. Moratorium permit holders that do not requalify to retain the longfin squid moratorium permit would be eligible for a permit that allows a 5,000-pound longfin squid trip limit when the fishery is open. In addition, the Council recommended separating the butterfish part of the longfin squid/butterfish moratorium permit to allow current moratorium permits the opportunity to continue to target and land butterfish.

Longfin Squid Moratorium "Permit Swap": The Council approved a one-time "permit swap" opportunity which would allow owners of multiple longfin squid moratorium permits as of May 26, 2017 to swap active requalifying and non-requalifying moratorium permits among their vessels.

Longfin Squid Incidental and Open Access Permits: The Council voted to replace the current open access incidental longfin squid permit with a limited access incidental permit. Qualifying vessels must have landed at least 5,000 pounds of longfin squid in one year from 1997 to 2013. Currently about 1,400 vessels possess open access incidental permits, and about 325 are expected to qualify for the limited access incidental permit. The daily trip limit for the incidental permit would remain at 2,500 pounds. In addition, to minimize regulatory discarding of squid bycatch, non-qualifying vessels would still be able to obtain an open access permit that would allow up to 250 pounds of longfin squid per trip.

Trimester 2: To avoid future excessive longfin squid catch during Trimester 2, the Council voted to reduce the longfin squid trip limit to 250 pounds per day for all permits once the Trimester 2 quota has been reached. This is a 90% reduction from the current post-closure trip limit of 2,500 pounds. The Council will also continue to work with relevant states to encourage them to match this limit after such a closure.

Illex Squid Moratorium Permit Requalification: Based on recent low landings and low participation in the Illex squid fishery, the Council recommended no changes to the current limited access permit system.

River Herring and Shad

The Council reviewed an annual River Herring and Shad (RH/S) progress update, including operation of the RH/S cap for the Atlantic mackerel fishery which was previously implemented at 82 mt for 2016-2018. No changes were recommended by the Council. The RH/S Committee will review additional bycatch and abundance information for river herring and shad at a future meeting.

Risk Policy Framework

The Council was briefed by staff on the status of the Risk Policy Omnibus Framework Action. In 2010, the Council approved an Omnibus Amendment which implemented mechanisms to specify ABCs, ACLs, and accountability measures for all managed resources contained within its six FMPs to bring them into compliance with the new requirements of the Magnuson Stevens Act Reauthorization of 2007. This Omnibus Amendment contemplated a Council review of the ABC control rules it established after five years of implementation in cooperation with its SSC. As a result, the Council has initiated an Omnibus Framework Action to provide for a review of the ABC control rule framework and risk policy it established in 2010 and to recommend any changes, as appropriate. This action is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

Cooperative Research in the Mid-Atlantic

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) recently undertook an independent review of the Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP). The review evaluated the effectiveness and success of the NCRP in three areas: 1) High quality science; 2) Effective engagement; and 3) Integration within NEFSC scientific programs. Jon Hare, director of the NEFSC, presented a summary of this review and the NEFSC's response to the report's recommendations. Based on the findings of the review, the NEFSC has identified 24 action items for improving the NCRP. Work in response to those action items has already begun and will continue through the upcoming years.

The Council also discussed the direction of the Council's long-term involvement in collaborative research.

Lobster Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Framework

Doug Potts (NMFS) gave a presentation regarding the Lobster Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Framework. The intent of this action is to specify that SBRM includes all active vessels that fish with lobster pot gear in Federal waters, regardless of whether they submit VTRs. This would allow for the implementation of an expanded sampling frame recently developed by the ASMFC, NEFSC, States, and GARFO that would use permit and dealer data to identify active vessels in the lobster fishery. The revised methodology ensures that all trips made by vessels with Federal lobster permits are in the sampling frame, thus providing a more representative sample of the fishery and reducing the potential for bias in estimates of bycatch in lobster pot gear. The action is being developed by GARFO, and the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils are expected to take final action at their respective meetings in August and September 2017.

Black Sea Bass Wave 1 Fishery

The Council discussed a motion from the May 2017 Council Meeting to initiate a framework that would consider re-opening the wave 1 (January – February) recreational black sea bass fishery to any recreational vessel, provided that they obtain and adhere to any required conditions outlined under a Letter of Authorization (LOA) issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Noting that this action could not occur before January 1, 2019, the Council considered an alternative to open the fishery on January 1, 2018. The Council agreed to consider the possibility of opening the 2018 wave 1 black sea bass fishery when the Council meets jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board in August. This action would occur through the normal specification setting process. The Council would then also continue development of the black sea bass recreational LOA framework action for possible implementation in 2019.

Monkfish Amendment 6

An update on Amendment 6 to the Monkfish FMP was presented by Joint Monkfish Oversight Committee Vice-Chair Laurie Nolan. Amendment 6 considers implementing catch shares in the monkfish fishery. Based on the recommendation of the Monkfish Advisory Panel, the Committee passed a motion during its meeting on May 24 to permanently shelve Amendment 6 and discontinue work on it. The Council briefly discussed the implications of this action and adopted a motion in support of the Committee's recommendation to shelve Amendment 6.

Other Business

Habitat Update

Council staff provided an update on several ongoing habitat initiatives, including the Essential Fish Habitat redo, the Mid-Atlantic regional fish habitat assessment project, and highlights from Greater Atlantic region on habitat activities in the Mid-Atlantic.

SOPP Revision

The Council approved a revision to the Council's Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPP) to provide employees with six weeks of paid parental leave following the birth of an employee's child or placement of a child with an employee for adoption or foster care.

Climate Velocity Over the 21st Century and Its Implications for Fisheries Management in the Northeast U.S.

James Morley (Rutgers University) presented results of a research project that is investigating climate-driven shifts in the geographic ranges of marine species. The project aims to inform the marine resource management community about the rate, magnitude, and uncertainty surrounding future distribution changes that are likely to occur as a result of climate change in the 21st century. Dr. Morley provided an overview of predictions for Council-managed species and offered guidance on how to incorporate those predictions into fisheries management. Final results are expected to be available by the end of 2017 at <http://oceanadapt.rutgers.edu/>. The principle investigators for this project are Dr. Malin Pinsky (Rutgers University) and Rich Seagraves (MAFMC).

Data Modernization in the Northeast Region

Barry Clifford (NMFS) and Mike Cahall (ACCSP) provided an update on the Fisheries Dependent Data Visioning (FDDV) Project. The goal of the project is to produce more timely and accurate fishery data while also creating more efficient reporting programs that will reduce the reporting burden for the fishing industry. GARFO has partnered with ACCSP to coordinate these collective modernization efforts, with the end goal of having ACCSP serve as the data repository for all Federally collected data sets to enable a consolidated, comprehensive, and consistent data set for all fisheries dependent data associated with a fishing trip.

2018 Council Meetings

The schedule of 2018 Council meetings is now available on the Council website at www.mafmc.org/meetings.

Next Meeting

Monday, August 7, 2017* – Tuesday, August 8, 2017

the Courtyard Philadelphia Downtown
21 North Juniper St., Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 496-3200

* NOTE: The August 2017 Council Meeting may begin on either August 7 or August 8. Please check back for updates at <http://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2017/august-2017-council-meeting>.