Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

PRESS RELEASE

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Summer Flounder Changes on the Way

The Mid-Atlantic Council, together with four of its Committees, met in Kitty Hawk, NC October 10-12, 2006. In addressing its first order of business, Council members elected Pete Jensen as Chairman and Dr. Gene Kray as Vice-Chairman for the upcoming Council year. Both members were present at the meeting and immediately assumed office following their election. In addition to the election of officers, two new members were sworn in as Council members. Ed Goldman will occupy the obligatory seat for New Jersey (replacing Tony Bogan), and Jeff Deem the obligatory seat for Virginia (replacing Bob Pride). In addition, both Dennis Spitsbergen of North Caroline and Laurie Nolan of New York were reappointed to third terms as At-Large Council members.

On Wednesday, October 11, the Council received a review of the "2006 Summer Flounder Assessment Update" from Dr. Rich Methot of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Science and Technology. After addressing the terms of reference for this review and listening to the update provided by Dr. Methot the Council took action to adopt spawning stock biomass in lieu of total stock biomass as the appropriate proxy for the summer flounder stock rebuilding biomass target (i.e., the biomass that will support maximum sustainable yield). The Council's action recognized that the availability of this new and updated science better satisfied the Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 2 requirement that the Council use the best science available in managing its fishery resources. The consequence of this action is that the agency will likely be proposing a summer flounder total allowable landing (TAL) level for the 2007 fishing year of anywhere between 12.9 million and 14.2 million pounds. The Council took no action to change its August position of recommending a summer flounder TAL of 19.9 million pounds for the 2007 fishing year.

The draft version of Amendment 14 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan was presented to the Council for its approval to go to public hearing. The Council voted to take Amendment 14 to public hearing. However, it was also recommended and adopted that the proposed change from total stock biomass to spawning stock biomass as the Bmsy proxy for summer flounder be incorporated into this Amendment. This action will delay the hearing process for Amendment 14. Public hearings related to the scup rebuilding schedule and new Bmsy proxy for summer flounder will be announced in the near future as part of the Amendment 14 review process. It is now anticipated that Amendment 14 will be reviewed and approved by the Council in February 2007.

The Council continued its review of Amendment 15 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass FMP with the intent of reducing the number of management actions to be included in this Amendment. At this time the number of management actions to be considered by the Council has been reduced from 28 to seven. The seven measures still being considered for action include: summer flounder commercial...
allocation; management of the summer flounder recreational fishery; scup commercial allocation; management of the scup recreational fishery; black sea bass commercial allocation; rollover of unused quota; and, limitations of vessel replacement upgrades.

The Council also requested that NMFS implement a technical clarification in the 2007 specifications for summer flounder, scup and black sea bass. The clarification would replace the current language contained in Title 50, Section 648.104(b)(2) with the following language: "Vessels fishing with trawls as described below (fly net), provided that no other nets or netting with mesh smaller than 5.5 inches (14.0 cm) are on board:"

The Council also approved the public hearing draft for the Omnibus Amendment regarding Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodologies (SBRM). Public hearings on this Amendment will be held at the December Council meeting in New York City and at the New England Council's November meeting in Gloucester, MA. Following these opportunities for public comment, it is anticipated that the Council will review all comments (verbal and written) and take action to submit the Omnibus Amendment for Secretarial approval at its February 2007 meeting in Wilmington, DE.

The Council also reviewed Framework 1 to its Surfclam and Ocean Quahog FMP. The Framework would require the adoption and use of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on all boats in the surfclam/ocean quahog fleets. Alternatives were also presented that would implement electronic reporting for vessels. However, the NMFS recommended that the electronic reporting requirement in the Framework be withdrawn as the agency does not have the resources or infrastructure to support such a system at this time. Hence, at its December meeting the Mid-Atlantic Council will determine whether or not to require the adoption and use of VMS only. It was noted by the NMFS Regional Administrator that the agency currently has the authority to implement electronic reporting systems.

The Council's Research Set-Aside Committee (RSA) met and established the Council's research priorities for the 2008 RSA request for proposals. The Protected Resources Committee (PR) met and announced the formation and establishment of the first Advisory Panel (AP) to the Committee. Initial appointments to the AP include: Peter Moore (Massachusetts), Kim Durham (Riverhead Foundation, New York), Andy Reed (Duke University, North Carolina), William McClellan (University of North Carolina at Wilmington), Charles Locke (North Carolina), Greg DiDomenico (Garden State Seafood, New Jersey), and Jeremy Firestone (University of Delaware). The Law Enforcement Committee met and selected one recipient for the Council's 2006 Fishery Achievement Award (FAA). The recipient will be recognized publicly at the Council's December meeting. On the last day of the Council meeting, the Council's Executive Committee met to review the 2007 annual work plan, and select the Ricks E Savage Award winner. Like the FAA recipient, this individual will be recognized at the Council's December meeting.

The Council also received a number of oral reports. These reports included a presentation by Leslie Ann McGee of the New England Council regarding that Council's Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and Essential Fish Habitat Activities; a presentation by Dr. Thomas Nogi of the NMFS regarding recent environmental conditions in the Mid-Atlantic region and implications for fish stocks in relation to climate change; and, a presentation by Loretta O'Brien of the NMFS regarding mean weight and length review of three selected fish stocks common to east coast fisheries.