



February 2018 Council Meeting Report

February 13-15, 2018

Raleigh, NC

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's February 2018 meeting in Raleigh, NC. Presentations, briefing materials, and webinar recordings are available on the Council website at www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2018.

Black Sea Bass Recreational Management Measures

2018 Recreational Management Measures

The Council took final action on 2018 recreational black sea bass federal water measures. The Council initially considered these measures at the December 2017 meeting but delayed action to wait until the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) approved new management approaches for state water measures in 2018. At their February meeting, the Board approved regionally allocating the coastwide Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL) based on a combination of exploitable biomass information from the latest stock assessment and historical harvest. Three regions were established (MA-NY; NJ; DE-NC), and each region will develop recreational management measures to achieve their respective regional allocations. The combination of both state and federal water recreational management measures is meant to achieve, but not exceed, the 2018 RHL of 3.66 million pounds. The Council recommended the removal of the current fall closure which would result in the following 2018 federal water measures: a season from May 15 – December 31, a 15-fish possession limit and 12.5-inch TL minimum size.

Wave 1 Fishery and LOA Framework

The Council discussed the direction and future implementation of a recreational black sea bass Wave 1 (January-February) fishery. For 2018, the Council had previously approved a February 1-28 fishery through the recreational specification-setting process. Only the states of Virginia and North Carolina ultimately participated in the 2018 fishery. For future years, the Council is considering opening the Wave 1 fishery under a Letter of Authorization (LOA) program which would allow any vessel owner to participate in the Wave 1 fishery provided they obtain and abide by all requirements contained within an LOA. After a lengthy discussion regarding recreational black sea bass management priorities the Council agreed to consider a Wave 1 fishery in 2019 through the recreational specification process, as occurred in 2018. Staff resources will prioritize other recreational management initiatives while the development of an LOA program will continue for potential implementation in 2020.

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial Accountability Measures Framework

The Council took final action on a framework to modify the commercial accountability measures (AMs) for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The AMs currently in place require a pound-for-pound payback if the ACL is exceeded due to higher-than-projected discards. This framework is intended to add flexibility in the commercial AMs for these species based on stock status. The framework considered alternatives to the existing AMs, with a focus on evaluating and accounting for commercial discards with options for both (1) evaluation of Annual Catch Limit (ACL) overages and (2) responses to non-landing overages to account for the latest information and current stock status.

After considering a range of options, the Council selected a preferred alternative which would not require a payback if current stock biomass is above the target biomass and would implement more aggressive paybacks when stock conditions warrant additional protection and management response. The Council also decided to

retain the existing ACL evaluation process which utilizes a single year of commercial catch (both landings and discards) to evaluate the commercial sector ACL instead of the alternative that would have used a 3-year average discard calculation. If this action is approved by NOAA Fisheries, it is anticipated that these changes will be implemented later in 2018.

Risk Policy Framework and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)

In December 2017 the Council discussed possible changes to its Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) control rule and risk policy. The Council considered seven alternatives that were evaluated via management strategy evaluation (MSE) by Dr. John Wiedenmann (Rutgers University) and agreed to postpone final action until after the completion of additional MSE analyses which would more comprehensively account for social and economic impacts of alternative ABC control rules and risk tolerance levels.

During this meeting, the Council received presentations from Dr. Wiedenmann and Dr. Doug Lipton (NOAA Fisheries) on current model development and research that would integrate more comprehensive social and economic analyses into an MSE model. The Council provided feedback on the ongoing work and agreed to continue MSE model development with a focus on incorporating social and economic factors in a more comprehensive manner, with an initial focus on summer flounder. Based on some of the initial MSE results, the Council may also explore different risk policy approaches depending on species life history.

Council Habitat Update

Council staff provided an update on the development of a Northeast regional habitat assessment, including a summary of recommendations from the first meeting of the regional habitat steering committee. The Northeast regional habitat assessment is a collaborative effort to describe the quantity and quality of key marine fish habitats in the Northeast region. This project will involve compiling new and existing habitat information and identifying habitat information gaps. Three key areas have been identified to support the integrated habitat assessment: (1) an inshore assessment, (2) an offshore assessment, and (3) an evaluation of the “fish habitat footprint” for key fish species and species groups. Project teams will be formed to develop work plans for each component of the assessment, and work is expected to begin in July 2018.

Staff provided an update on offshore wind development in the region and discussed options for Council engagement in offshore wind issues. The Council voted to support the collaborative approach described in the staff memo, that will involve working with both the New England Council and the NOAA Fisheries “Wind Team” to examine the social, economic, and ecological impacts of wind energy facilities in the region, commenting on specific upcoming BOEM projects, and developing a web-based “living report” with analyses, maps, and products to enable more effective engagement on offshore wind issues. The Council also passed a motion to submit a letter to the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce requesting that: (1) no new wind energy areas be sited, nor project designs finalized, until the study (collaborative work) is complete and fisheries impacts can be properly evaluated, and (2) request that NOAA adopt a more active role in working with BOEM to effectively site future wind energy projects.

The Council also received an overview of fish habitat projects of interest occurring in the region that were highlighted by the NOAA Fisheries Habitat Conservation Division in a written update.

North Atlantic Right Whales

Dr. Michael Asaro, from NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Office, presented on the North Atlantic Right Whale Five-Year Review, the re-initiation of Endangered Species Act Section 7 Fishery Biological Opinion, and the formal consultation process. In October 2017 NOAA Fisheries released the results of a five-year review of North Atlantic right whales, conducted as a requirement of the Endangered Species Act. The review indicated that the population has been in decline since 2010 and that the status of North Atlantic right whale recovery has not improved since the last 5-Year Review was conducted in 2012. Specifically, the report found that North Atlantic right whales are experiencing a low rate of reproduction, longer calving intervals, declining population

abundance, continued mortality from vessel and fishing gear interactions, changes in prey availability, and increased transboundary movement and risk. Because of the significant change in the status of the species, NOAA Fisheries has reinstated formal consultation on a number of federal fishery management plans (FMPs), including 5 of the Council's 7 FMPs. Dr. Asaro provided an overview of the formal consultation process and discussed a range of gear modifications and technology developments that could potentially reduce whale entanglements.

Climate Change and Fisheries

Bradford Dubik, a PhD candidate at Duke University, presented on his research examining long-term trends in average commercial fishing location for summer flounder since 1996. Vessel Trip Report data indicate that many states have seen a Northward shift in their permitted vessels' average fishing location, likely due in part to changes in the range and center of biomass of summer flounder.

Dr. Jim Morley presented the results of his research with colleagues at Rutgers University to predict geographic range shifts for hundreds of marine species in the Atlantic and Pacific. Using long-term ecological data, the researchers developed thermal habitat models which were coupled with various future greenhouse gas emission scenarios to produce a range of possible future outcomes for each species. Dr. Morley provided an overview of the projected shifts in distribution for Mid-Atlantic species. These projections offer fishery managers a tool for identifying species, fisheries, and management efforts that are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Other Business

Ricks E Savage Award

Former Council member Howard King was named this year's recipient of the Ricks E Savage award. The award is given each year to a person who has added value to the MAFMC process and management goals through significant scientific, legislative, enforcement, or management activities. In 2017, Mr. King completed a 9-year term on the Council. Mr. King retired in 2007 as Director of Fisheries Service for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources following a 41-year career in fisheries science and management. "Howard King has served this Council with tremendous leadership both on the Council and as our liaison at the New England Council," said Council Chairman Mike Luisi.



From Left: Council Executive Director Chris Moore, Vice-Chairman Warren Elliott, Howard King, and Chairman Mike Luisi

Next Meeting

April 10-12, 2018
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