June 2019 Council Meeting Summary

June 4-6, 2019
New York, NY


Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

2020 Specifications Review

The surfclam and ocean quahog (SCOQ) fisheries are approaching the third year of multi-year specifications previously set for the 2018-2020 fishing years. The Council reviewed updated catch and landings information for both stocks, as well as recommendations from staff, the surfclam and ocean quahog AP, and the SSC, and determined that no changes to 2020 measures are warranted. To maintain the current measures, the Council also voted to recommend suspending the minimum shell length for surfclams in 2020. These specifications are described in detail in the final rule published February 6, 2018: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/02/06/2018-02321/fisheries-of-the-northeastern-united-states-atlantic-surfclam-and-ocean-quahog-fishery-2018-2020.

Catch Share Program Review

Council staff presented a summary of public comments received on the Review of the SCOQ Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Program. This report was structured around NMFS Procedural Instruction 01-121-01, Guidance for Conducting Review of Catch Share Programs, and constitutes the first program review for the first Limited Access Privilege Program developed in the country. After reviewing public comments, the Council voted to submit the SCOQ ITQ Program Review package to NMFS. In addition, the Council tasked staff to work with NOAA Fisheries to further develop potential actions identified as part of the review for consideration in the Council’s 2020 implementation plan. The full report is available at http://www.mafmc.org/s/SCOQ-ITQ-Program-Review-Final-20190517.pdf.

Excessive Shares Amendment

The Council reviewed the Draft Public Hearing Document for the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Excessive Shares Amendment and considered recommendations from the SCOQ Committee. Although there was some discussion of removing Alternatives 5 and 6 from the document, the Council ultimately voted to approve the public hearing document for public hearings without modification. The Council is planning to hold four public hearings for this action during a 45-day comment period beginning August 1, 2019. Public hearing dates and locations will be posted on the Council’s Website. Additional information about this action can be found at http://www.mafmc.org/actions/scoq-excessive-shares-amendment.

Atlantic Surfclam Research for Great South Channel Habitat Management Area

Ms. Michelle Bachman (New England Council staff) provided an update to the Mid-Atlantic Council about recent activities by the New England Council to develop research objectives for the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area.

SSC Overfishing Limit (OFL) Coefficient of Variation (CV) Guidelines

Dr. Tom Miller (SSC Vice-Chairman) presented an overview of the guidelines and process the SSC will use when assigning a coefficient of variation (CV) value to estimates of the overfishing limit (OFL) when the SSC makes
acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for Council-managed species. The development of this guidance document was part of the Council’s ongoing review of its risk policy and ABC control rule and is intended to provide a clear, consistent, and transparent process in documenting SSC conclusions regarding the scientific uncertainty of the OFL estimate. The Council approved the guidance document for use, and the new process will be used by the SSC at their September 2019 meeting when they make ABC recommendations for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish.

**Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish**

**2020 Specifications**
The Council reviewed Atlantic mackerel, squid, and butterfish (MSB) specifications for 2020, which were previously established as part of multi-year specifications. For squid and butterfish, the Council did not recommend any changes. For Atlantic mackerel, the Council recommended that the 2020 ABC be maintained at the 2019 level, which is a 10% reduction from the earlier multi-year recommendation for 2020. Forgoing a higher ABC in 2020 increases the likelihood of achieving the current rebuilding schedule for Atlantic mackerel (June 2023). An assessment update is expected in 2020 and will inform specifications in future years. The Council will revisit the river herring and shad (RH/S) cap for the 2020 mackerel fishery at the August 2019 meeting and requested that the MSB Monitoring Committee evaluate possible modifications to the 2020 RH/S cap. The Council decided to take no action on possible modifications to the 2019 RH/S cap, which has already closed the Atlantic mackerel fishery at a relatively small portion of its 2019 quota in order to limit RH/S incidental catch.

**Illex Working Group and Amendment Update**
The Council received an update on a working group tasked with improving quota-setting methods for Illex squid. Also related to Illex, the Council reviewed scoping comments on an Amendment that will consider modifying the Illex squid permitting system as well as the MSB plan’s goals and objectives. No specific actions were needed for these agenda items, and development of both efforts will continue throughout 2019.

**MAFMC 2020-2024 Strategic Plan**
As part of the process for developing its next strategic plan for the years 2020-2024, the Council has been gathering stakeholder input through an online survey, Advisory Panel and SSC meetings, public feedback sessions, and discussions with management partners. Stakeholders have been asked to comment on how the Council has performed under its current strategic plan and what issues should be addressed in the next plan. During the meeting, the Council reviewed a summary of themes and recommendations that emerged from this process. These results are described in detail in the “Stakeholder Input Report” available at www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan. In the coming months, Council staff will develop a strategic plan framework for Council consideration at the August 2019 meeting.

**NMFS Northeast Regional Strategic Plan**
Dr. Jon Hare (NEFSC Science and Research Director) presented a draft Greater Atlantic Region Geographic Strategic Plan, which is being developed jointly by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. This plan was developed as part of a national effort to move toward joint regional plans, as opposed to individual plans for regional offices and science centers. All of the regional plans will share the same strategic goals as the NOAA Fisheries National Plan. The Council reviewed the region-specific issues, challenges, and risks identified in the draft plan and agreed to follow up with a formal comment letter.

**Unmanaged Species Landings Update**
The Council reviewed a report on commercial landings of species that are not managed in the northeast region by the Mid-Atlantic, New England, or South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, or by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The report also included landings of species managed as ecosystem components through the Council’s Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The report did not show any notable increases
in landings of species caught predominantly in federal waters. The Council will receive annual updates on this report.

**NEFSC Fishery Monitoring and Research Division**
Several staff members from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented an overview of the recently created Fishery Monitoring and Research Division (FMRD). The Division focuses on the collection and use of information from commercial and recreational fisheries to inform fisheries science and management. In addition, Division programs foster engagement between the NEFSC and industry in the development of technology and data products to improve fisheries reporting and availability of data to fishermen, scientists, and managers. The Division includes the Research Set Aside Program, Dockside Monitoring Pilot Program, and Cooperative Research and Fisheries Sampling Branches.

**Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team Report**
The Council received an update on the outcomes of the April 23-26, 2019 Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) meeting in Providence, RI. The goal of the meeting was for team members to identify and recommend modifications to the Take Reduction Plan to further reduce impacts of U.S. fixed gear fisheries on large whales and reduce mortality and serious injury to right whales. The meeting resulted in a package of recommended measures that would achieve at least a 60 percent serious injury and mortality reduction goal in each of the New England lobster management areas. Scoping by states and NMFS will occur over the summer, and a DEIS and proposed rule is anticipated late in the calendar year.

**Ricks E Savage Award**
Former Council staff member Rich Seagraves 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. Mr. Seagraves retired in 2018 following 26 years of employment with the Council. In his role as Senior Scientist, he served as the liaison with the Scientific and Statistical Committee and oversaw Council activities related to a range of issues, including research planning and prioritization, protected resources, climate change, and collaborative research. Mr. Seagraves was the staff lead on development of the Council's Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Guidance Document

---

**Next Council Meeting**

**Tuesday, August 13, 2019 – Thursday, August 15, 2019**

Courtyard Philadelphia Downtown
21 N. Juniper St., Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-496-3200