

2017 Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel (AP) Fishery Performance Report (FPR)

The Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel (AP) (<http://www.mafmc.org/advisory-panels/>) met August 24, 2017 to develop the Fishery Performance Report (FPR) below. The meeting was conducted via internet webinar and facilitated by Jason Didden, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) coordinator. The advisors who participated were:

James Fletcher
Scott MacDonald
Peter Moore

Jan McDowell
Doug Feeney

Additional participants included:

Amanda Cousart
John Boreman
Katie Alemeida
Fiona Hogan
MJ DeBrosky
Angel Willey

Cynthia (?)
John Whiteside
Kirby Rootes-Murdy
Max Appleman
Stew Michels

The fishery performance report's primary purpose is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) because of the potential importance of this and related information for determining Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs). The goal is to allow comparing and contrasting of the most recent year's conditions and fishery characteristics with previous years. First an overview of recent fishery data was provided by Jason Didden, and then trigger questions were posed to the AP to generate discussion. The trigger questions were:

- *What factors have influenced recent catch?
 - Markets/economy? – Environment?
 - Fishery regulations? – Other factors?
- *Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
 - Gear regulations and exemptions? -Trip Limits? -Others?
- *Where should the Council and Commission focus their research priorities?
- *What else is important for the Council and Commission to know?
- *Are there any recent major changes in this fishery?

The input from the AP begins on the following page. The information in this FPR does not represent a consensus, but rather a summary of the perspectives and ideas that were raised at the meeting.

General

- Quality is critical for maintaining price and the existing market. Large trips may have trouble maintaining product quality.
- The regional differences in the fishery mean that any changes (e.g. trip limits) have the potential to differentially impact different areas.
- Flooding processors with lots of spiny dogfish will harm the market. The fishery has appeared stable up until recently, but there is currently (August 2017) a substantial drop in prices at least for some harvesters. See what happens with new rules (higher trip limits and rules allowing dual-targeting of monkfish and dogfish).
- A contrary, minority perspective was also voiced: Developing new markets (Asia/Africa, pet food) will require lower, not higher prices, and manipulating price (by limiting catch & trip limit) to address small boat concerns hinders the possibility of greater overseas markets.

Factors Influencing Catch

- Markets are crucial to getting prices high enough to stimulate fishing activity. Low catches relative to the quota in recent years are due to low prices/effort. Some European markets constraints have been mitigated, others persist.
- Fishery needs help from other institutions (Council, NOAA, etc.) on building the market.
- A new processor entered the market in 2016, and their stocking of product and low prices selling into Europe is negatively impacting the market and current prices.
- There may be some spiny dogfish landings in Europe in the future related to retention rules, which may impact demand for imports.
- Abundance does not currently drive catches; boats have no problem obtaining their trip limits.
- There are relatively few boats willing to go out for dogfish at current prices, but a small price increase could change that (see Cape Cod info below)
- European markets are shifting away from sharks, limiting US dogfish exports to Europe.
 - o The Shark Alliance did not promote European boycotts of US spiny dogfish/other legally caught sharks (though other entities seek/have sought to do this).
 - o Europe seems to have the U.S. figured out in terms of pricing, while traditional European demand may be declining due to changing tastes.
- General sentiment about sharks and shark fins have hurt the market and created barriers to shipping (about 19 container lines have adopted internal policies to not carry any shark products and there are bans in several states). There is interest in purchasing spiny dogfish internationally but ENGO opposition as well, despite MSC certification and the sustainability of the U.S. East Coast spiny dogfish fishery.
- Market & regulatory issues discourage new processors. The one New York processor closed after Hurricane Sandy – market issues discouraged their re-entry.
- The web of federal, state, and international rules (on fishing and sales) discourage entry into the processing sector generally. The Council processes, and favoring of small boats and a few processors, have exacerbated and perpetuate these issues. A variety of factors are restricting development of the fishery in southern areas, including state regulations in

Virginia and North Carolina. The current regulations, especially trip limits, eliminate the possibility of developing an industrial (pet food applications) market.

- There is concern by others that large-scale landings could negatively impact the fresh market.
- Virginia had another mild winter and boats fished through the winter (including Jan & Feb), improving early 2017 landings (but possibility limiting N. Carolina landings)
- On Cape Cod:
 - 2015: 18-22 cents per pound; 2016: 20-24 cents, 30-34 cents if trucked to New Bedford. They have seen more vessels participating.
 - Prices are declining in mid-2017.

Input on Regulations

- Some advisors would like to see a slow and steady approach that does not create large changes in catches and/or prices.
- Raising trip limits may collapse prices if additional markets are not developed.
- An occasional trip limit for trawlers (X/ month or quarter) around 20,000-40,000 pounds could help develop new markets and provide opportunity for different vessels
 - A double limit once a week was raised as an alternative possibility
 - Regarding different kinds of trip limits, enforcement/monitoring needs to be ensured.
 - In the past some in Massachusetts have been interested in a seasonal (October through December) trip limit increase that would not hurt smaller boats in the summer or crash the market.
 - There was concern that such adjustments could substantially hurt more southern ports, and more details would be needed to evaluate.
- At least one advisor is interested in allowances to harvest male dogfish in excess of the typical trip limit and possibly a separate quota (which is currently made up of mostly female dogfish). An advisor noted that males can be targeted currently. STAFF NOTE: A male only fishery would need an Amendment and/or benchmark assessment but recent research suggests it may be feasible.
- It would be useful to have a NE permit covering smooth dogfish to reduce regulatory burdens. The current process causes unnecessary frustration.

Research Priority Ideas

- Domestic (human and/or animal food) and/or non-European markets.
 - o Lack of southern processor(s) is an issue restricting southern landings.
- Separation of spiny and smooth dogfish in NOAA trade database (buyers in particular may want to know) and ground-truthing of this database by NOAA Fisheries/Council, etc. NOAA cannot separate spiny and smooth dogfish – this is a code by another international trade agency – a petition could be made but may not be successful given the relatively low value of dogfish.
- Longer term tracking of export trends. <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/foreign-trade/applications/trade-by-product>
- Better tracking of dogfish used/sold as fertilizer.
- Investigate ways to increase the quality of meat (i.e. how can it be processed on deck, etc.), which in turn would increase the price of the product. If we can get the price higher this would have a snow ball effect on the market.
- New benchmark assessment needed including:
 - o Exploration of how spiny dogfish recovered so much faster than predicted.
 - o Increased engagement with fishermen as part of scientific research.
 - o Better estimate of the population of male dogfish and availability of dogfish to the relevant surveys generally. Recent low datapoint not reflective of what AP members see on the water – the bottom survey is most likely missing most dogfish.
 - o Obtain reproductive and other biological information across the range of the species before the next assessment.
 - o Prioritize the biological information that needs updating before the next assessment.

Other Issues Raised

- There needs to be a clear division of male and female dogfish in terms of the assessment, catch limits, and monitoring.
- Consider having NAFO manage the fishery outside the EEZ to facilitate the creation of a male-only fishery.
- There was a concern voiced over the process previously used to change the trip limit on the ASMFC side of things in terms of public notice – this was passed along to ASMFC staff.
- A name change for spiny dogfish (“chipfish” has been suggested in addition to “cape shark”) could help the market, and could allow access to a prison protein market (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122290720439096481>).
 - o Other advisers noted that “Cape Shark” is an approved market name (http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/fdcc/?set=seafoodlist&id=Squalus_acanthias&sort=SLSN&order=ASC&startrow=1&type=basic&search=dogfish)