



## **Spiny Dogfish Fishery Performance Report August 2019**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on August 19, 2019 to review the Spiny Dogfish Fishery Information Document and develop the following Fishery Performance Report. The primary purpose of this report is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. A series of trigger questions (see below) were posed to the AP to generate discussion of observations in the spiny dogfish fishery. Please note: Advisor comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

**Advisory Panel members present:** Scott Curatolo-Wagemann, Doug Feeney, James Fletcher, Scott MacDonald, John Whiteside, Jr., Douglas Zemeckis.

**Others present:** Jason Didden, Fiona Hogan, Cynthia Ferrio, Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Brian Peede, Pat Geer, Alan Bianchi, Stew Michels, Angel Willey, John Boreman, Chris Batsavage, Nichola Meserve, Joanne Pellegrino, Yan Jiao, Sonny Gwin, Chris Hickman, Greg DiDomenico, and Ray Kaine.

### **Trigger questions:**

The AP was presented with the following trigger questions:

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets/economy, environment, regulations, other factors)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

## **Market/Economic Conditions**

An advisor noted that markets are extremely limited, though he expects to get close to the 2019 fishing year quota. Self-imposed shipping bans for shark products by the shipping industry have made transport increasingly difficult and negatively affected reaching new markets.

Another advisor stated that improving spiny dogfish demand has been a “slow-go.” Getting larger partners (Council, NOAA, MSC, etc.) could help with demand/educational efforts. One advisor suggested that changing the name would help with marketing, but others disagreed that this was a viable/useful approach, and that efforts should concentrate on educating the public that spiny dogfish is a sustainable product. Public concern about conservation of other sharks, including finning concerns, negatively impacts spiny dogfish demand without justification. NMFS staff agreed that spill-over concerns about sharks generally create confusion about whether spiny dogfish is a sustainable seafood choice. An ASMFC advisor noted that from a public relations perspective, the fishery is unfairly “bashed” despite the U.S. having one of the most restrictive shark fisheries in the world and requested a campaign to dispel misinformation about our shark management.

## **Environmental Conditions**

Advisors from VA and NC stated that weather is a major limiting factor for southern landings, and calm weather contributed to higher southern landings in the later portion of the 2018 fishing year.

An advisor from MA indicated that 2018 fishing year landings in MA were off due to skates taking over where the small boats typically fish, which limited the ability of small boats to fish for spiny dogfish. Since mid-summer 2019 there has been better availability for small boats and he expected landings in MA to be higher in the 2019 fishing year.

## **Management Issues**

An advisor noted that the trip limits (federal and state) prevent a large-scale industrial fishery and a large-scale industrial fishery should be given an opportunity, with much higher trip limits (around 30,000 pounds), and possibly separate quotas for food-fish versus industrial uses.

Several AP members recommended leaving the trip limit where it is now, and were concerned that increasing the trip limit within the time frame of the 2019-2021 fishing years, and before demand was improved, would cause problems such as landing more fish for less money, early closures, and/or small boats being driven out of the fishery (large boats could fill the quota and drive prices down).

Advisors were asked for their thoughts on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) idea to eliminate the federal trip limit and rely on the states to set trip limits to manage their state or regional quota. Only two advisors voiced opinions at this time, both against, on the grounds that doing so might disadvantage VA/NC fishermen by allowing more northern states’ participants to fully supply processors before the fish are available further south. Some concern was also expressed about all fishermen’s voices being accounted for in the ASMFC process. Council staff will forward information about ASMFC comment opportunities on this subject to the Advisory Panel.

An ASMFC advisor stated that from the NC perspective it would be useful for VA to allow fishing/landing based on a federal permit. In combination with a NC/VA shared quota this would allow higher landings. He noted that while most people in NC fish in NC state waters, and are not greatly affected by the federal trip limit, it does limit flexibility when fishermen see dogfish offshore; some years it's a major issue, some years it's not.

### **Other Issues**

An advisor expressed concern that no one is seeing (or looking for) male dogfish beyond the survey – but squid fishermen looking for squid in deep water do see dogfish. He also expressed concern that recent science indicating that dogfish spend substantial time outside the survey area or off the bottom has not yet been incorporated into the assessment of spiny dogfish. He also had similar concerns about research regarding pup production, and communicated that catching more dogfish will give other species a chance to rebuild.

Two advisors stated that encouraging the establishment of additional processors, especially in the southern region, would be useful given the shipment costs to the New England processing operations.

### **Research Priorities**

The current spiny dogfish research priorities were reviewed. The advisors were asked to provide input on the current research priorities by email. One comment was received that for the upcoming benchmark, we should look at study fleet data as it could help inform knowledge of how temperature drives distribution and on male/female distribution issues. The same advisor also asked how study fleet data is currently used for spiny dogfish science and/or management; staff will ask for input from the NMFS Science Center.