



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Report

An update published by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council - June 2011

The Council Report summarizes major issues voted on or discussed at each regularly scheduled MAFMC meeting. The Council met most recently on June 14-16 in Port Jefferson, NY.

At its June meeting, the Council addressed issues related to Atlantic surfclams, Ocean Quahogs, Atlantic mackerel, *Illex* and *Loligo* squids, butterfish, monkfish, research set-aside, ecosystem and ocean planning, Visioning Project, Marine Recreational Information Program, special management zones, and National Standard 10.

Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs

2012-2013 Specifications

For surfclams and ocean quahogs for the 2012-2013 fishing years, the Council voted to continue the annual quota of 3.400 million bushels for the surfclam fishery, 5.333 million bushels for the ocean quahog fishery, and 100,000 bushels for the Maine ocean quahog fishery. It also recommended that the minimum size requirement of 4.75" for surfclams be suspended. In addition, when the Council considers quotas for 2013, it will consider the impacts of reopening any areas on Georges Bank.

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish 2012-2014 Specifications

The Council adopted specifications for Atlantic mackerel and butterfish consistent with its new annual catch limit (ACL) and accountability measure (AM) process for the first time. This process began with recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for an acceptable biological catch (ABC) for each species that accounts for scientific uncertainty regarding stock status and productivity. Because annual catch limits are set equal to the acceptable biological catch, if annual catch limits are exceeded paybacks will be required. To avoid such circumstances, the Council adopted annual catch targets (ACTs) to provide a buffer for general management uncertainties and other considerations not otherwise addressed in existing management measures.

Atlantic Mackerel: Based on recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and expected Canadian catch, the Council adopted a U.S. total mackerel acceptable biological catch = annual catch limit = 43,781 metric tons (mt). Catches above this limit in 2012 would have to be "paid back" pound-for-pound in 2013. To account for management uncertainty and other considerations, the Council adopted a 10% buffer for the recreational fishery and a 15% buffer for the commercial fishery, resulting in a recreational annual catch target (ACT) of 2,443 mt and a commercial annual catch target (ACT) of 34,907 mt. After accounting for discards, the commercial annual catch target yields a commercial domestic annual harvest (DAH) of 33,821 mt, a reduction of 28% from the potential harvest in 2011. The closure threshold for closing the directed commercial fishery was increased from 90% to 95% of the DAH given that some of the concerns addressed by the 90% threshold are now addressed by the specific recreational-commercial allocation. If actual recreational catch estimates exceed the recreational ACT, the National Marine Fisheries Service can close the recreational fishery.

Butterfish: Based on recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Council adopted a butterfish acceptable biological catch = annual catch limit = 3,622 mt. Catches above this limit in 2012 would have to be "paid back" pound-for-pound in 2013. To account for management uncertainty and other considerations, the Council adopted a 10% buffer, resulting in a commercial annual catch target of 3,260 mt (there is no substantial recreational fishery for butterfish). After accounting for discards, the commercial annual catch target yields a commercial domestic annual harvest (DAH) of 1,087 mt, an increase of 117% from 2011. A total of 2/3 of the ACT is set-aside for potential discards. Most trip limits were maintained for 2012 but the Council did adopt a measure that would allow up to 2,000 pounds of butterfish on a trip before 3-inch mesh is required. Currently 3-inch mesh is required to possess 1,000 or more pounds of butterfish. The 5,000 pound trip limit regardless of mesh-size will remain in place as will the existing post-closure trip limits that are triggered when the DAH is approached.

The butterfish annual catch target will also be used to set the butterfish mortality cap on the *Loligo* fishery, which directly controls the main source of butterfish discard mortality. The Council adopted measures specifying the butterfish mortality cap as 75% of the butterfish annual catch target (75% of 3,260 mt = 2,445 mt), an increase of 70% compared to 2011.

Loligo and Illex Squids: The Council adopted domestic annual harvest (DAH) limits of 22,445 mt for *Loligo* (a 13% increase) and 22,915 mt for *Illex* (a 2% decrease) consistent with the recommendations of its Scientific and Statistical Committee and after accounting for discards and other considerations. These measures would be set for 3 years subject to a positive review by the Council and its Scientific and Statistical Committee each year. Other measures for the squid fisheries were generally maintained except that a provision was added to allow jigging-only fishing for *Loligo* (no trawl gear onboard) if the butterfish cap happens to close the *Loligo* fishery. The idea behind this is that jigging is unlikely to catch butterfish and a closure of the *Loligo* fishery due to the butterfish cap could stimulate interest in experimental jigging for *Loligo*.

Monkfish

Amendment 6 Update

The Council received an update on Amendment 6 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in which the Mid-Atlantic and the New England Councils are considering catch shares management for the monkfish fishery. At the Oversight Committee meeting on June 1, the discussion included the PDT's White Paper to include ways to improve the current management regime and consideration for separating the management of the two monkfish areas (north and south). It was noted that the stocks should continue to be managed under one FMP and have the two areas managed within that FMP.

Committees and Other Business

Research Set-Aside

The Research Set-Aside Committee presented an update on the RSA program review. Staff has been reviewing the program to determine what benefits the program has produced, what should be improved, and administrative and scientific issues.

Ecosystem/Ocean Planning

The Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee provided a CIE review of NEFSC Ecosystem program/models. The Committee also discussed the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) information request for areas offshore of NJ.

Executive

The Executive Committee met to receive an update on SSC Ecosystem Subcommittee work, FMAT structures and function, purpose and need for the listening sessions at each Council meeting, an overview of the CCC meeting held in May 2011, and the budget.

Other

In addition to the Committee meetings and regular Council business, the Council received presentations from Jeff Tinsman of the DE Department of Natural Resources; Bill Figley, former NJ Fish and Wildlife Reef Coordinator; and, John Organ of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Program regarding special management zone (SMZ) designation. The Council voted to initiate a team (including an enforcement member) to evaluate SMZs for 5 artificial reefs in DE.

The Council received an update on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP – www.countmyfish.noaa.gov) from Gordon Colvin of NMFS and Jason Didden of MAFMC staff which included MRIP implementation and MAFMC staff involvement in 2011 projects. There was also a presentation by Doug Christel, NMFS Policy Office, regarding revising National Standard 10. National Standard 10 promotes safety issues at sea.

The Council held their second Public Listening Session the evening of June 15. Council and NMFS representatives were on hand to answer questions and take comments on a host of issues related to Council and NMFS management from those in attendance as well as webinar participants. The Council will continue to hold Public Listening Sessions at every Council meeting on Wednesday evening's beginning at 5 pm.

The Council bid farewell to Council members Patrick Augustine and Dr. Gene Kray. Mr. Augustine served as a member on the Council for three consecutive terms for a total of nine years. Dr. Kray served as a member on the Council for 8 years. He was first appointed to the Council in 2003 to fill a seat vacated early by the PA member. After filling the early vacated seat for the end of the term, he was then appointed to the Council in 2005 as the PA obligatory member and served two consecutive terms.

Materials on the Web

Meeting materials related to the above issues and any presentations that accompanied the briefings provided to the Council at its June meeting are located on the Council's website at www.mafmc.org. Audio files of the full meeting discussions will be posted at <http://mafmc.org/actions/audio/audio.htm>.

**Next Council Meeting - August 16-18, 2011
Wilmington, DE**