

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Meeting Summary

- Webinar -

Friday, March 19, 2021

1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

This document summarizes the discussions of the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) which convened via webinar on March 19, 2021. A summary of key discussion points, recommendations, and action items is included. This summary does not capture every comment or discussion point and included comments may not represent consensus.

I. Participants

A. NTAP Members:

Name	Affiliation
Anna Mercer	NEFSC
Phil Politis	NEFSC
Jon Hare	NEFSC
Dustin Gregg	MAFMC Stakeholder
Frank Mirarchi	NEFMC Stakeholder
Robert Ruhle	ASMFC Representative
Terry Alexander	NEFMC Member
Wes Townsend	MAFMC Member
Anthony DiLernia	MAFMC Member
Mike Pol	NEFMC Scientist
Tim Miller	NEFSC
Vito Giacalone	NEFMC Stakeholder
Pingguo He	NEFMC Scientist
Vincent Balzano	NEFMC Member
Chris Parkins	ASMFC Representative
Dave Goethel	NEFMC Stakeholder
Chris Roebuck	MAFMC Stakeholder
James Gartland	MAFMC Scientist

B. Other Participants:

Name	Affiliation
Katie Burchard	NEFSC
Andy Jones	NEFSC
Paul Rago	SSC
Kelly Whitmore	DMF
Ryan Silva	GARFO
Melanie Griffin	

II. Summary Discussion Points by Agenda Topic

A. Welcome, Introductions, Logistics

Wes Townsend welcomed everyone, and Terry Alexander quickly stepped through the Agenda topics for the meeting.

B. NEFSC NTAP Lead Update- Led by Jon Hare

Jon Hare announced that an offer has been made for the PEMAD Division Chief position and is expected to start in May. The person who fills this position will serve as the replacement for Wendy Gabriel who retired at the end of the calendar year of 2020. Once this position is officially onboard the NEFSC NTAP team will discuss NEFSC's leadership of and participation in the NTAP. Jon Hare will stay involved with the NTAP at least through this transition period, which could be much of this calendar year.

The NEFSC provides the scientists who conduct surveys on the NOAA Ship Bigelow including the bottom trawl surveys however another part of NOAA, the Office of Marine and Aircraft Operation, operates the research vessel and is responsible for sea day allocation. The allocation of sea days continues to decrease as does the NEFSC budget allocation making sea days for science outside the required surveys more difficult. The NEFSC recently was awarded some additional funds for dedicated research which will focus on the intersection of offshore wind energy development and fisheries surveys. The NEFSC is working with NEFMC, which is leading a working group to develop a sea scallop survey strategy aimed at developing terms of reference that focus on wind energy issues. The NEFSC's Cooperative Research Branch is working with ASMFMC to explore opportunities to use industry-based surveys to adapt fisheries research in the face of offshore wind energy. Finally, the NEFSC is planning to work with SMAST on a survey design simulation.

There was a short discussion stemming from a Panel member's request for more information about the ICES Working Group on Northwest Atlantic Ecosystems Observations (WGNAEO), which was established to develop a plan that coordinates the NEFSC's and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Maritimes Regions spring bottom trawl surveys on eastern Georges Bank and Gulf of Maine. Jon Hare responded that as far as he understands, the DFO is starting to plan for a new survey vessel and the working group was established through ICES to serve as a formal platform for those conversations. It was shared that the working group is broader than just surveys and is looking at all ecosystem observations collected in the Northwest Atlantic. Phil Politis is the US chair of that group. Phil noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DFO was unable to access their research vessel to do any shakedown cruises. The last meeting was in February 2020 to hash out some initial concepts. The group is planning to meet in May and will determine what is feasible, what the capabilities of their vessels are, and how that compares to the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow. It was noted that the DFO has recently built two new Coast Guard fishery survey vessels.

C. NTAP Research Priority Vote- Led and facilitated by Matt Seeley.

Matt Seeley began by giving a brief overview of past NTAP research priority voting. A discussion of why Panel members voted on the research priority that they chose followed. Some Panel members believed the core mission of the NTAP is to explore methods to improve the performance of the at-sea operations of the NEFSC bottom trawl survey and favored research focused on this topic as their number one choice. This perspective was further supported by a Panel member pointing out the expertise of the members of the Panel being focused on gear performance rather than statistical methods and study design. It was voiced and supported by several Panel members that the NTAP should focus on spatially discrete surveys for specific stocks and that the NTAP could be used to discuss how this could be designed to be conducted on industry vessels.

A discussion emerged on the NEFSC's option to decouple the Albatross and Bigelow time series, and the impact this has on being able to make functional changes to the gear. One Panel member expressed concern that if we are not going to decouple the time series then we cannot make physical changes to the gear because we cannot go back and calibrate to the Albatross. Other Panel members implied that we would not need to calibrate to the Albatross and instead would just need to calibrate to the current bottom trawl survey gear. It was noted that any gear operations change we might propose at this point would have a small effect, not a quantum change in our perception of the relative abundance of different stocks sampled by the surveys. It was asked whether there is a rule based on the number of years for when decoupling of the two surveys can occur. Jon Hare replied saying that the time series was decoupled in the summer flounder benchmark assessment. It was also mentioned by another Panel member that decoupling the time series has also been used in the past during at least the bluefish and mackerel assessments. The current stock assessment approach that the NEFSC takes is being redone and decoupling of the time series would be decided by either the Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) or by a working group for the research track assessment process. Decoupling the Albatross/Bigelow time series was also recommended by the Cod Task Force and the NEFSC is currently determining if there is funding to support research on decoupling the Albatross/Bigelow time series for different stock assessments. Jon Hare explained that the NEFSC would gather information from its assessment scientists on decoupling the Albatross/Bigelow time series and get it to the panel.

It was mentioned that evaluating the feasibility of incorporating gear changes into the survey operations could be useful in determining how surveys can operate in and around wind energy areas.

It was proposed and supported without opposition that the NTAP move forward with research investigating the impact of a restrictor rope on the catch rate, catch composition, and size distribution of a bottom trawl survey. This type of work would address two NTAP Charter objectives: 1) Evaluate the potential to complement or supplement current NEFSC surveys and 2) Understanding the trawl gear performance and methodology. Discussion focused on the

specifics of the research, including the platform to be used for the research. The research cannot be conducted on the Bigelow. It was recommended by the Panel that the NTAP utilize the NEAMAP vessel F/V Darana R and the VIMS NEAMAP team, as they are familiar with the gear and could conduct the research coincident with the NEAMAP survey, which would provide cost-savings (equipment and staging).

NTAP Concluded:

- 1) The next NTAP research priority would be “Quantifying the impact of a restrictor rope on the composition, rate, and size distribution of catch derived from a bottom trawl survey”

Action Item:

- 1) The Science Center will put together information regarding decoupling the Albatross/Bigelow time series that has been done and will distribute to the Panel.
- 2) NTAP Co-Chairs will bring the NTAP research priority to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils at the upcoming meetings in April for approval.

D. Revisions to the NTAP Charter led by Co- Chairs Terry Alexander and Wes Townsend.

Potential NTAP Charter revisions were discussed at the NTAP meeting held on January 31, 2021 and tabled for further discussion at this meeting. Time on the upcoming April MAFMC Council meeting was reserved for the Council to review/approve suggested changes to the NTAP Charter. The Charter discussions focused on section 3: ‘Organizational Structure’ of the NTAP Charter where it is documented that ‘the NTAP shall report directly to the Fishery Management Councils (Councils) and the NTAP’s recommendations will be forwarded by the Councils’ to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) only upon the approval of both Councils’. It was noted that although this structure is written out in the Charter, NTAP has not always used this structure. Some panel members expressed that there are times when this structure should be utilized but also some non-process situations when it likely isn’t necessary. Some panel members suggested that we leave the existing language in the Charter but add an ‘action plan’ section. Some language was drafted and discussed for this new section. Panel members asked for more time to think through and requested that revised documents be distributed via email for the panel to review and provide feedback. One panel member suggested that everyone remember past research interests they wanted considered but might have been outside of the original scope of NTAP when reviewing and suggesting changes to the Charter.

Action Items:

- 1) Terry will let the NEFMC know we won’t be ready to discuss any possible changes to the Charter during April meetings and will work to circulate documents for panel members to review and provide feedback on before the June Council meetings.

E. Other Business: Led by Co-Chairs Terry Alexander and Wes Townsend.

It was concluded that the Co-Chairs (Terry Alexander and Wes Townsend) would bring a formal motion to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils to support NTAP pursuing research on the behavior of catch related to the use of a restrictor cable. The NEFSC will be ready to act to allocate the research funds appropriately. Matt Seeley will send a memo to the Councils before the April meetings reporting the status of revisions to the charter.

Interest in participation of the NTAP research working group was polled. Existing membership in the NTAP research working group was maintained.

There was discussion about the vessel platform that will be used for the newly prioritized restrictor cable research. It was acknowledged that before committing to work with NEAMAP, NTAP would need to discuss with NEAMAP Program leadership (Rob Latour, Jim Gartland).

The timing of the restrictor rope research was briefly discussed, and it was acknowledged that the research would not be able to be conducted in 2021 due to fieldwork restrictions associated with COVID-19. Thus, fieldwork would be targeted for 2022. It was also noted that the NTAP research working group will need to discuss and define who will analyze the data and develop the research report/publication.

A Panel member expressed their interest in face-to-face meetings and asked when we can resume to in-person meetings. It was explained that NEFSC staff have not received Federal guidance to resume in person meetings but are hopeful these restrictions will be lifted by the end of the 2021 calendar year. Funding for in-person may also be challenging given reductions in the NEFSC budget

Action Item:

- 1) James Gartland will seek approval of restrictor cable work from supervisor at VIMS.
- 2) Matt Seeley will draft a circulate Memo for Councils
- 3) Terry and Wes bring a formal motion to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Councils to support NTAP pursuing research on the behavior of catch related to the use of a restrictor cable.