



Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Committee Meeting Summary

March 28, 2022

Webinar

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Committee met on March 28, 2022 at 1pm. The purposes of this meeting were to develop recommendations for *Illex* squid specifications and the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding public hearing document.

MSB Committee Attendees: Peter Hughes (Chair), Sara Winslow, Pat Geer, Joe Cimino, Michelle Duval, Dan Farnham, Sonny Gwin, Adam Nowalsky, Emily Gilbert, Melanie Griffin, Kris Kuhn, and Eric Reid.

Other Attendees: Jason Didden, Wes Townsend, Carly Bari, Jeff Kaelin, Greg DiDomenico, Michael Luisi, Will Poston, John Almeida, Aly Pitts, Daniel Hocking, Alan Bianchi, Purcie Bennett-Nickerson, Gerry O' Neill, Megan Ware, Meghan Lapp, Katie Almeida, Mary-Beth Tooley, Deirdre Boelke, Anna Mercer, Kelly Whitmore, Lisa Hendrickson, and Mary Sabo.

Illex – 2022 Specifications

Jason Didden of Council staff reviewed recent *Illex* fishery performance and the updated recommendations for the 2022 *Illex* Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Based on the SSC's ABC recommendation, the following motion was passed (originally from Reid/Farnham before being divided):

I move that the Committee recommends that for the 2022 *Illex* specifications $ABC= 40,000$ MT, $IOY^1=DAH^2=DAP^3=38,156$ MT.

Passed 10/0/0. This motion would implement the recommended ABC increase from the SSC (see SSC report in Committee reports). The motion includes a status-quo 4.61% deduction for expected discards to calculate the quota ("DAH"). The second part of the divided motion that eventually passed was:

I move that the Committee recommend the fishery close with a 96% directed fishery threshold.

Passed 10/0/1. Currently the fishery closes at 94% of the DAH (i.e. 6% buffer), but NMFS works to ensure that an early closure does not occur. Substantial discussion took place, focused on the tradeoff that less of a buffer means a higher chance of exceeding the quota and possibly the

¹ IOY = Initial Optimum Yield

² DAH = Domestic Annual Harvest

³ DAP = Domestic Annual Processing

ABC, while more of a buffer reduces the chance of fully achieving the quota/optimum yield. In the last four years there have been both overages and underages, with slight underages in the last two years. Recent (2021) improvements in both projecting and reporting were noted, as was the ongoing challenge in precisely closing this high volume fishery given remaining reporting lag, time for closure projecting, time for decision making, and the requirement that the fleet must be notified three days in advance of a closure. The Committee's recommendation sought to balance these risk/reward concerns, also noting: the relatively few vessels and processors, the generally consistent weekly production in recent years, the value of extra quota, the lenient treatment of other fisheries, and the recently productive state of the *Illex* fishery. In terms of weight, at the proposed new 2022 DAH, a 96% closure target (i.e. 4% buffer or 1526 MT) would translate into less buffer than 2021 (was 1889 MT) but more buffer than 2020 (was 1,432 MT).

Atlantic Mackerel – Rebuilding Public Hearing Document

Jason Didden of Council staff reviewed the rebuilding approaches contained in the draft public hearing document for Atlantic mackerel (just “mackerel” hereafter), including the 2023 ABCs that have been endorsed by the SSC under each rebuilding plan. The SSC's report details a variety of concerns and recommendations regarding mackerel rebuilding approaches, which will be further integrated into the public hearing document (the SSC report became available just after this Committee meeting). Discussion highlighted several areas for increasing clarity, including how the commercial quota results from a deduction of expected recreational catch, which will be addressed by staff during editing. There were no major concerns expressed by the Committee in terms of proceeding with public hearings (scheduled for late April 2022), but two motions were passed to focus the existing alternatives.

1. I move that the Committee recommend including an alternative in the Amendment that considers a range of recreational bag limit options of 10 or 15 fish.

Griffin/Duval - Motion carries by consensus.

The rationale for eliminating the 5-fish bag limit option was that 10 or 15 fish would still be a reasonable range given concerns about compliance, and also given the low likelihood that states would implement a 5 fish limit (having inconsistent federal and state limits would ensure additional management, enforcement and monitoring difficulties).

The MSB Committee discussed the Monitoring Committee's recommendation to take a cautionary approach to not over-predict catch reductions that may occur from any bag limit. The potential variability in recreational catch estimates, mackerel's overfished status, possible angler behavioral responses, the lack of experience with mackerel bag limits, and challenges in constraining recreational catch in other fisheries are components of the rationale for the Monitoring Committee's recommendation.

2. I move that recreational seasonal closures be considered but rejected.

Griffin/Duval - Motion carries by consensus

Discussion noted previous concerns about socio-economic impacts and potential for inconsistencies with state measures (states are unlikely to utilize closures). The Committee concluded that bag limits would be the appropriate measures to consider at this time given the rebuilding plan approaches.

Permitting Discussion

The Committee discussed that requiring vessels in the EEZ that possess Atlantic mackerel (even for bait) to have a federal permit would be a change in practice for many vessels. Different sections of the regulations create ambiguity whether this is already required. The goal is to create universal for-hire and commercial reporting of mackerel catch, but unless possession triggers permitting and reporting, then enforcement becomes very challenging. Given the overfished status of mackerel, staff suggested that one approach could be to clarify that possession of purchased butterfish and squid for bait does not trigger permitting and reporting requirements, but possession of mackerel (bait or otherwise) does trigger permitting and reporting. Open access mackerel permits are available for both for-hire and commercial participants. Staff will consider other possible solutions before the Council meeting.