



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 5, 2020
To: SSC, Council
From: J. Didden, staff
Subject: *Illex* Squid ABC

The current *Illex* acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 26,000 MT is based on the SSC's 2018 finding that landings of 24,000-26,000 MT (the highest catches in the time series to that point) do not appear to have caused harm to the *Illex* stock. The SSC judged that *Illex* has been lightly exploited historically given the relatively small portion of its range within which the commercial fishery operates.

2019 *Illex* landings totaled 27,163.5 metric tons. Given the assumed 4.52% discard rate (the mean plus one standard deviation of the most recent 10 years of observed discard rates in the last assessment), this would translate into a 2019 catch of 28,449.4 MT. Recent SBRM discard rates have been similar.

Given the fall 2019 NMFS NEFSC survey was within the range of typical variability, and the *Illex* working group materials generally support that recent landings are still unlikely to have caused harm to the *Illex* stock, an ABC of 28,449.4 MT for 2020 appears justifiable. Staff understands that there is some danger of catch "creep" if NMFS continues to have difficulty closing the fishery on time, but approaches to mitigate monitoring challenges can be addressed from the management perspective, separately from the setting of ABC.

Staff recommends that the SSC also authorize a conditional 2020 in-season increase to 30,000 MT based on a trigger from the Cusum approaches developed through the *Illex* working group. The exact trigger would be determined by the SSC after reviewing and discussing the materials from the *Illex* working group. If the 3-4 primary *Illex* processors can produce sample data voluntarily in an electronic format provided by NMFS to allow rapid analysis, NMFS already has the authority to make in-season adjustments to the *Illex* quota.

Staff recommends that the SSC also provide an identical preliminary ABC recommendation for 2021. Staff will build in additional alternatives into relevant 2021 NEPA documents, so that flexibility would be available for 2021 if a modification to the preliminary recommendation became warranted (after reviewing the 2020 season and any related future analyses).