



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

New England Update August 2022 Council Meeting

Prepared By: Jason Didden, Council Staff

Overview

Several issues under consideration at the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) may affect the Mid-Atlantic. Among these include: Monkfish Framework/2023-2025 Specifications, potential winter flounder accountability measures for the squid fishery, New England's response to the Sturgeon Draft Action Plan, and next steps regarding the surfclam and ocean quahog fishery and Nantucket Shoals.

Monkfish Framework (FW) / 2023-2025 specifications

Pending results of the monkfish "assessment" (calculates the recent survey trend as an adjustment factor) and the NEFMC's Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) setting of an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) in October 2022, the Councils will need to set 2023-2025 specifications. Changes to trip limits and/or days at sea limitations are also being considered to reduce discards and increase landings, particularly in the Southern Monkfish Management Area. The action may also adjust minimum gillnet mesh size. The NEFMC has discontinued considering alternatives that would have required use of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) across the fishery. The NEFMC is expected to take final action at its December 2022 meeting, with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) taking final action the following week. The Plan Development Team (PDT) and Monkfish Committee have been developing ranges of options for the various measures, but until the assessment results are better known (i.e. will 2023-2025 ABCs/landings limits be higher or lower?), it is challenging to contextualize the impacts from changes to fishery measures. Variability in discards has historically made it difficult to set aside an appropriate amount of catch for discards, and the PDT continues to explore the performance of various approaches. The [Monkfish Committee \(Mid members include P Hughes, D Farnham, D Hemilright, P Risi, D Stormer\) and Advisory Panel will meet again on August 30, 2022.](#)

Staff recommendation: Stay tuned for further developments. Staff and Committee members will remain engaged.

Potential winter flounder accountability measures for the squid fishery

Amendment 16 to the Groundfish Plan stated that: “for the category described as ‘other non-specified’, catches will be monitored and if the catch rises above five percent accountability measures will be developed to prevent the overall ACL from being exceeded.” Per the attached letter, the NEFMC may consider a Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder sub-ACL for small mesh fisheries via FW 65 to the Groundfish Plan. The NEFMC has invited the MAFMC to “consult with us on establishing the AM for small mesh fisheries under their purview.”

NMFS/PDT analyses have noted relatively substantial winter flounder catch in the “Squid” fishery. Staff understands that the PDT is further investigating the nature of that catch. Based on previous analyses (e.g. Squid Amendment 20) Mid-Atlantic staff believes that the overall catch estimate is reasonable, that the “Squid” winter flounder catch is almost exclusively in the longfin squid fishery, and mostly during Trimester 2 in southern New England. Those previous analyses were based on 2007-2015 data and will need to be refocused and updated to identify the current discard patterns. [The Groundfish Committee will discuss this issue on September 15, 2022.](#)

Staff recommendation: Stay tuned for further developments. Because it appears possible that the NEFMC will set up a sub-ACL for winter flounder that will impact the longfin squid fishery, ongoing engagement through the Committee and PDT processes appears warranted. Depending on the outcome of pending late August 2022 ABC-setting for winter flounder, setting aside enough winter flounder in the “other” category could also prevent the overall ACL from being exceeded.

NEFMC’s response to the Sturgeon Draft Action Plan

There was substantial discussion at the last NEFMC meeting on what action might need to be considered by the Councils once the Sturgeon Action Plan is finalized. Some reduction in sturgeon bycatch will be necessary, but it is not currently clear how much reduction will be required, and the Final Action Plan (expected September 2022) may or may not specify an exact needed reduction. The Councils can either initiate an action for 2023 to address sturgeon bycatch reduction, or NMFS will, and the implementation deadline is May 2024. It is not clear what, if any, impact there might be from the recent Court invalidation of the 2021 Biological Opinion due to right whale issues. (See Executive Director’s tab for additional information on ongoing protected resource issues.)

Staff recommendation: Stay tuned for further developments.

Next steps regarding the surfclam and ocean quahog fishery, and Nantucket Shoals

This item is in reference to the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area, which, overlaps Nantucket Shoals. The NEFMC’s [Habitat Committee will meet Thursday, August 18, 2022](#) to discuss related analyses and PDT input. The NEFMC will discuss in September, and this issue could factor into the NEFMC’s 2023 work priorities discussions.

Staff recommendation: Stay tuned for further developments.



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, Chair | Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director

July 22, 2022

Dr. Christopher Moore
Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Suite 201, 800 N. State Street
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Dear Chris:

The Council initiated Framework Adjustment 65 (FW65) to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) fishery management plan at its April 2022 meeting. As part of the framework, the Council is considering adopting additional measures to promote rebuilding of Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder. The Council may develop a sub-annual catch limit (ACL) and establish an accountability measure (AM) for other federal fisheries catching SNE/MA winter flounder.

At its meeting on June 29, 2022, the Council agreed by consensus to the following motion:

That the Council write a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council informing them of our intention to consider a Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder sub-ACL for the small mesh fisheries and inquire if they would like to consult on establishing the AM for those small mesh fisheries under their purview.

The recent 2022 management track assessment of this stock suggests it may not be overfished, but its official status has not yet been changed. Even if it is, Amendment 16 states that: *for the category described as “other non-specified”, catches will be monitored and if the catch rises above five percent accountability measures will be developed to prevent the overall ACL from being exceeded.* GARFO’s year-end catch reports indicate catches of SNE/MA winter flounder from the squid fishery have exceeded 5% of total catches in recent years, FY2017-FY2020, and increased over this time period (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1- SNE/MA winter flounder catch (mt) in the squid and squid/whiting categories of the other federal fisheries sub-component. Groundfish fishery catch shown for comparison. Source: GARFO year-end catch reports FY2017-FY2020.

Fishing Year	Groundfish Fishery	SQUID	SQUID/WHITING
2017	409.3	35.2	2.9
2018	250.7	47.9	3.2
2019	143.8	66.4	4.8
2020	103.2	57.2	4.8

Table 2- SNE/MA winter flounder percentage of total catch (%) in the squid and squid/whiting categories of the other federal fisheries sub-component. Groundfish fishery shown for comparison. Source: GARFO year-end catch reports FY2017-FY2020

Fishing Year	Groundfish Fishery	SQUID	SQUID/WHITING
2017	74.3	6.4	0.5
2018	63.0	12.0	0.8
2019	48.7	22.5	1.6
2020	44.2	24.5	2.1

Based on this information, the Council may consider a SNE/MA winter flounder sub-ACL for small mesh fisheries in FW65. If a sub-ACL is established, an AM will also be necessary. As a result, we would like to invite the MAFMC to consult with us on establishing the AM for small mesh fisheries under their purview.

Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Nies
Executive Director