



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

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 15, 2022
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: 2023 preliminary specifications for *Illex* squid

Executive Summary

The 2022 Research Track Assessment peer reviewers concurred with the *Illex* working group that the *Illex* stock “was lightly fished in 2019.”

The 2022 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for *Illex* recommended by the SSC and the Council was 40,000 MT. Staff recommends a preliminary ABC of 40,000 MT for 2023 to be revisited in March 2023 after the NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center updates relevant analyses.

Additional information on fishery performance and past management measures can be found in the 2022 *Illex* Fishery Information Document created by staff and the 2022 *Illex* Fishery Performance Report developed by the Mackerel-Squid-Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel (AP). There is also additional input on *Illex* from the MSB AP for early 2022 at the end of the 2022 Butterfish Fishery Performance Report.

The Council will meet in August 2022 to review the recommendations of the AP, the SSC, the MSB Monitoring Committee, as well as receive input from the public. The Council will then recommend catch and landings limits and other management measures for 2023, which would be preliminary and subject to an in-season adjustment in early 2023.

Current Measures and Review of Prior SSC Recommendations

The last setting of *Illex* specifications occurred early in 2022, and the SSC utilized a series of analyses to recommend a 40,000 MT ABC for 2022. From the 40,000 MT ABC for 2022, 4.52% would be set aside for potential discards, and the remaining catch constitutes a quota of 38,156 MT.

The directed fishery operates under limited access, and open access/incidental permits are limited to 10,000 pounds per trip. The directed limited access fishery does not start with trip limits, but the fishery is slowed with a 10,000-pound trip limit for all permits once 94% of landings are projected to have occurred. This threshold has been recommended by the Council to increase to 96% this year (NMFS decision/rule pending).

Recent Catch and Landings

Landings have been high and quotas were reached from 2017-2021. See Figure 1 in the *Illlex* Fishery Information Document for additional information. The 2022 *Illlex* Fishery Performance Report documents industry perspectives on why recent landings have been high. In addition, the 2022 Butterfish Fishery Performance Report (see *Illlex* section near end) documents industry perspectives on why 2022 *Illlex* landings have been lower to date compared to recent years.

Stock Status and Biological Reference Points

The 2022 Research Track Assessment peer reviewers concurred with the *Illlex* working group that the *Illlex* stock “was lightly fished in 2019.” The reviewers noted that “the term ‘lightly fished’ needs to be interpreted with caution since it has no specific definition relating to sustainable exploitation.”

Staff Recommendation

There is not much new information regarding *Illlex* compared to March 2022 when the SSC set the 40,000 MT *Illlex* ABC for 2022. Staff recommends maintaining 40,000 MT as a preliminary 2023 ABC, and then revisiting the *Illlex* ABC for 2023 in March 2023, after 2022 data can be used to update relevant analyses. As part of the 2023 specifications for *Illlex*, staff plans a broadened range of ABCs in associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, which should facilitate rapid modification of the 2023 *Illlex* specifications if appropriate.