



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: May 3, 2021
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, Staff
Subject: Butterfish, Longfin, and *Illex* ABCs¹ – Staff Recommendations

Butterfish

As part of the specification process for butterfish, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted. The butterfish fishery is currently under multi-year specifications for 2021-2022. The Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) is projected to increase from 11,993 metric tons (MT) in 2021 to 17,854 MT in 2022, based on previous SSC recommendations. After a review of the available information, staff recommends no changes to the previously-recommended 2022 ABC. A research track assessment is currently underway.

Longfin Squid

As part of the specification process for longfin squid, the SSC and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2022 specifications is warranted. The longfin squid fishery is currently under multi-year specifications for 2021-2023. The ABC (23,400 MT) is not proposed to change from 2021-2023 under the multi-year specifications, based on previous SSC recommendations. After a review of the available information, staff recommends no changes to the previously-recommended 2022 ABC.

¹ An Atlantic mackerel management track assessment is underway, and should be available for SSC review and ABC-setting at the July 2021 SSC meeting.

Illex Squid

As part of the specification process for *Illex* squid, the SSC and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modification of the 2021 specifications is warranted, and to set 2022 specifications. The *Illex* squid fishery is currently under single-year specifications for 2021. The current ABC is 30,000 MT, set in 2020 after review of various analyses conducted by the Council's *Illex* quota working group. Several of those analyses are informing the current *Illex* research track assessment (RTA). The Council's *Illex* working group identified environmental drivers as a likely useful medium-term avenue of inquiry to inform quotas, and is tracking related work being conducted via the RTA. Two working papers extending analyses considered in 2020 are included for SSC review.

2020 *Illex* landings totaled 28,135 MT, a record high for this fishery in U.S. waters. The fishery closed August 31, 2020, at a time of high weekly landings (in a very similar fashion as 2019).

To prepare for the SSC meeting, Council staff also considered the previous working group products, recent landings, the Council's recently-updated risk policy, and the ABC control rule, which tends toward more caution with higher uncertainty. Given these considerations, staff requested that Dr. Paul Rago review and update relevant previous analyses and consider the outcomes those analyses might suggest regarding a 10% increase in ABC to 33,000 MT. A 10% increase was identified by Council staff as an incremental approach while the RTA is ongoing, which acknowledges both the recent strength of the fishery and the Council's risk policy and ABC control rule.

Based on Dr Rago's analyses, which are supported by additional analyses from a group led by Dr. John Manderson, staff concludes that a 10% ABC increase to 33,000 MT is consistent with the Council's risk policy and would be unlikely to cause overfishing. This ABC would be for 2021 and 2022. The Environmental Assessment for the current specifications considers an ABC range of up to 40,000 MT, so if updated recommendations result from the May 2021 SSC meeting, NMFS may be able to implement changes for the 2021 fishery. Staff anticipates another review process would occur in 2022 depending on the results of the 2021 RTA.