

COUNCIL REPORTS/NEFMC
CCC Meeting
April 30-May 3, 2012

I. Status of FMPs

- ACLs – AMs
 - ACLs and AMs have been implemented for all 38 stocks managed by the NEFMC or jointly with the MAFMC (excluding Atlantic salmon which is exempt from the new MSRA requirements).
 - Out of 50 ACLs set for individual stocks or stock complexes in the most recent two years, only 2 of the ACLs have been exceeded. (However, several sub-ACLs have been exceeded and these problems are being addressed through timelier monitoring).
- Stock status
 - Overfishing status
 - No overfishing for 21 of 38 stocks
 - Unknown overfishing status for 4 stocks
 - Overfishing of 13 stocks
 - Stock biomass status
 - 23 stocks are either rebuilt or not overfished (excluding Atlantic salmon)
 - 2 stocks – status with respect to overfished is unknown
 - 13 stocks are overfished
 - Miscellaneous
 - All stocks that are either overfished or subject to overfishing are managed under the Northeast Multispecies FMP
 - Most but not all stocks classified as overfished also are subject to overfishing

II. Endangered species concerns are requiring more Council and Council staff time to address

- Modifications to RPMs for sea turtle takes in the scallop fishery have required substantial Council and plan team time.
- The Council anticipates spending substantial effort to address upcoming RPMs for sturgeon mainly in coastal fisheries and has delayed other priorities as a result.
- The Council may have to spend additional effort to deal with the possible listing of river herring and new RPMs for harbor porpoise.

III. Observer coverage

- The cost of observer coverage has become a critical issue in the Northeast. This is a problem in the multispecies fisheries because of the relatively small scale of fishing operations and depressed revenues due to management restrictions. Next May, federal funding for observer coverage, which was provided as an incentive for boats to fish under catch shares, will be greatly reduced. Many owners of small boats have reported that because they cannot afford the observer coverage levels required by the management system they will be shut down. So far, no one has figured out a solution to this enormous problem.
- *A national policy on observer funding is needed?*

IV. Science issues

- We are experiencing persistent negative retrospective patterns in the assessments for many Northeast groundfish stocks over the past decade, particularly for key cod and flounder stocks. These have resulted in managers setting catch levels too high despite adhering to scientific recommendations. As a result, the Council has drastically cut catch limits for stocks that scientists thought were rebuilt only several years earlier. This has resulted in growing distrust of the science between commercial and recreational fishermen.
- Projections for assessments based on data more than 3 years old have been unreliable and the demands of setting ACLs for multi-year time periods exceed the ability of the assessment process. As a result, the NRCC (the Councils, NMFS and ASMFC) have agreed to transition to a new assessment process. However, it is not yet clear whether the new process will meet the scientific information needs for setting ACLs given the constraints on NEFSC resources.
- There is need to incorporate ecosystems considerations to improve the overall performance of fisheries management. Several scientists have pointed out that it may not be possible to meet the information requirements of MSA for each individual stock.

V. OIG Audit

- The OIG audit may require staff time and resources that could not be adequately taken into the Council priority setting decisions.

VI. Touchstone Consulting Group's Management Report – (Review of the New England Fishery Management Process)

The Council has responded to the report's recommendations in several ways:

- The development of draft FMP performance indicators designed to utilize readily available information to measure success. The Council also has held a public workshop to review the performance of sector management in the multispecies fishery and plans a similar process for reviewing the performance of its IFQ program in the Sea Scallop FMP.
- Improving transparency through listening sessions, webcasting meetings (already underway at the time of the report) and steps to improve public outreach.
- Initiating Phase 1 of an EBFM FMP based on the recommendations of an SSC whitepaper. Phase 1 will include the public in setting goals and objectives.
- The staff will work with the NMFS Northeast Regional Office and the Touchstone Consulting Group to identify ways to improve the Council's plan development process, in particular how to improve collaboration between Council, NERO and NEFSC staff in writing documents and in meeting NEPA requirements.