



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop PDT Meeting

April 4, 2019

Conference Call

The Scallop PDT met by conference call on April 4, 2019 to: 1) Receive an update on the timeline of Amendment 21 (no discussion planned); 2) Review Committee tasking to mitigate impacts of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder; 3) Begin developing PDT recommendations for the 2020/2021 Scallop RSA research priorities.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Jonathon Peros (PDT Chair), Sam Asci, Dr. Naresh Pradhan, Dr. Bill DuPaul, Travis Ford, Ben Galuardi, Tim Cardiasmenos, Carl Wilson, Danielle Palmer, Dr. Dvora Hart, and Dr. Cate O’Keefe. Mr. Vincent Balzano, Scallop Committee Chair, also participated. Several members of the public also joined the call.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- By consensus, the PDT recommended forwarding FW29 accountability measure analyses aimed at mitigating impacts on Georges Bank yellowtail flounder to the Committee for consideration in an upcoming action.

The call began at 1:05pm. Following roll call, Council staff reviewed the 2019 scallop work priorities before discussing Amendment 21. The 2019 Scallop work priorities include regulatory requirements of setting specifications for FY2020 and FY2021 (default), supporting the scallop RSA process, estimate flatfish bycatch, specifying allocation review triggers. Other work items include addressing Northern Gulf of Maine scallop management, LAGC IFQ trip limits, the evaluation of rotational management, and an action to mitigate impacts on Georges Bank yellowtail flounder.

Amendment 21: Council staff provided the PDT with an update on the Amendment 21 process and explained that the action is focused on 1) Northern Gulf of Maine management measures, 2) LAGC IFQ possession limits, and 3) the one-way transfer of IFQ from LA with LAGC IFQ to LAGC IFQ-only permits/vessels. Staff indicated that ten scoping hearings were held between late February and early April, and that the comment period would close at 5pm on April 15, 2019. The PDT did not discuss specifics of A21 since the comment period was still open.

Mitigate Impacts of Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder: Council staff explained that the Scallop Committee had tasked the PDT with examining options for reducing bycatch of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (GBYT) by exploring: 1) time area closures; 2) hanging ratios down to 1.5:1. Staff explained that the 2019 GBYT sub-ACL for the scallop fishery had declined from 2018 (33 mt to 17 mt), and reviewed measures that the Council has taken to mitigate impacts on this stock over time. NOAA Fisheries also transferred 18.53 mt of GBYT from the scallop fishery to the groundfish fishery after projecting that the scallop fishery would not catch the entire sub-ACL for FY2018 (33 mt). The PDT noted that the scallop fishery would likely exceed its FY2019 sub-ACL if a 15,000 lb trip had been allocated to CAII. The PDT also noted it was unlikely that the total U.S. FY209 ACL of Georges Bank yellowtail would be exceeded due to the scallop fishery.

In response to the Committee tasking, Council staff presented analyses from FW29 that looked at bycatch reductions from time/area closures, and dredge hanging ratios used in the fishery ([see Framework 29](#)). Some members of the PDT felt that not much of a reduction in bycatch would be expected by moving from a 2:1 to 1.5:1 hanging ratio.

The PDT discussed the idea of increasing observer coverage if a trip to CAII is allocated in the future. Increasing observer coverage could improve the precision of bycatch estimates. The group noted that coverage in access areas is generally between 10-15%, and felt that this level of coverage was generally reasonable. NMFS staff explained that they try to utilize most of the observer set-aside funds that are available in a given year, and noted that there are times when the specified coverage is higher than required by SBRM.

The PDT also discussed how bycatch triggers are currently used. The group noted that in-season triggers and closures had been used in the past. The reactive AMs that are currently in place make determination of implementing an AM based on reliable data. While this determination can be made in-season, an AM is only implemented at the start of a fishing year.

Key points from PDT discussion:

- The PDT noted that the Committee tasking was looking for proactive ways to reduce bycatch on GBYT.
- The Council developed several options for reducing GBYT bycatch in Framework 29 that included seasonal closures and gear restricted areas. The Council selected GRAs as preferred in that action. The PDT recommends reconsidering the seasonal closure options for Closed Area II and Closed Area II extension that were developed in Framework 29.
- In terms of enforcement, time/area closures on eastern Georges Bank would likely be enforceable. However, a seasonal GRA with a different hanging ratio would be more difficult to monitor and enforce.
- The Council could recommend coverage rates for specific access area trips in a framework action. This may be worth revising after the 2019 surveys are complete.

Next Steps:

- By consensus, the PDT supports forwarding time/area closure analyses prepared during Framework 29 to the Scallop AP and Committee for consideration in an upcoming action.

- Council Staff will contact Dr. David Rudders and the Coonamessett Farm Foundation regarding the results of gear modifications to reduce bycatch.
- Council staff will begin work on a memo to the groundfish PDT for the SSC meeting where GBYT is discussed.

2020/2021 RSA Priorities: The Council will set 2020/2021 RSA research priorities at its June meeting. To support this process, the Scallop PDT plans to develop research recommendations, along with the Scallop Committee and Advisory Panel. Staff explained that an RSA Share Day has been planned for May 21, 2019. At the time of the call, the 2019/2020 awards had not been officially announced.

The PDT reviewed areas that had been recommended for intensive and broadscale surveys in 2019 and 2020. The group noted that most of the resource had been identified for “intensive” surveys, in addition to broadscale surveys. There was some question as to why specific open areas were identified for intensive surveys. The PDT’s discussion compared the relative importance of some open areas to the fishery from a production/exploitable biomass perspective (Long Island vs. Great South Channel).

Key Points from Discussion:

- One suggestion was to modify the survey priority language to suggest industry-based surveys of areas where recruitment is observed in the 2019 surveys.
- The PDT felt that rotational areas that are likely to open have a higher priority for intensive surveys than intensive surveys in open areas.
- CAI may not be a candidate for intensive access area surveys in 2020 because it is likely to close in 2020 after being allocated in FY 2018 and FY 2019.

Next Steps:

- Council staff will update last year’s (2019/2020) RSA research priorities for surveys with PDT recommendations from this call and circulate for editing through correspondence.
 - Staff will update the survey recommendation graphic based on this input.
- Once the recipient’s of 2019/2020 awards are announced, Council staff will circulate a document for editing through correspondence.

Other Business: The PDT briefly discussed how fishing in the NLS-West was going. Mr. Tyler Staples from the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) reported that vessels were seeing catches rates of roughly 100 bushels in 20 minute tows, and that scallops were around 100 mm. Mr. Vincent Balzano explained that he was catching his NGOM limit (200 lbs) in 2 or 3 short tows, with some star fish, crabs, and shells mixed in. The meat counts were between 12 and 14 to a pound.