Council Hosts Offshore Wind Special Session; Discusses EBFM, Commercial eVTRs, and Research Set-Aside Program Review

The New England Fishery Management Council met April 16-18, 2019 in Mystic, CT and capped off its meeting with a Special Session on Offshore Wind in the Northeast Region. The session was organized and hosted by the Council to give Council members and stakeholders the opportunity to learn more about:

- The total scope of planned offshore wind energy development in the region with emphasis on projects off New England and New York;
- The players involved and their roles in the process with an emphasis on NOAA Fisheries consultations with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM);
- Research and monitoring issues, including current federal, state, and developer-funded efforts, implications for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center’s fishery independent surveys, and regional coordination initiatives through the newly formed Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA); and
- Updates on the timing and status of specific Northeast Region projects.

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to stay engaged in tracking ongoing offshore wind developments and will continue to provide comments during appropriate opportunities along the way.

All presentations and documents are available at Special Session on Offshore Wind in the Northeast Region.
Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM)

The Council received an update from its EBFM Committee, which is working to develop an example Fishery Ecosystem Plan (eFEP) for Georges Bank. The committee’s goal is to bring a draft document to the Council for review and discussion in September.

At this meeting in April, the Council was presented with a progress report on four issues that will be part of the eFEP. These were:

• Strategies for deriving catch advice for stock complexes and allocations to fishery functional groups, with a “fishery functional group” being defined as “a group of species that typically are caught together in a particular type of gear and feed on similar food items”;
• Management options for dealing with an overfished stock that is part of a stock complex;
• Spatial management strategies and ecosystem research to conserve habitat, spawning, and protected species in an ecosystem plan; and
• Permitting and allocation strategies that would be consistent with a Fishery Ecosystem Plan.

Documents and presentations associated with all four of these topics are available at April 17 EBFM Discussion. Listen to what was said at Audio Tracks 11-14.

The EBFM Committee will continue working on the eFEP at meetings on May 28 and June 10 before providing another update to the Council when it next meets June 11-13, 2019 in So. Portland, ME.
Commercial Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTR)

Also at its April meeting, the New England Council received an overview of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s Commercial Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTR) Omnibus Framework Action.

This framework, which has considerable implications for New England fishermen, proposes to require that commercial fishing vessels with federal permits for species managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council submit vessel trip reports electronically, thereby eliminating the ability for fishermen to submit paper VTRs.

The discussion is pertinent to New England for two reasons:

• The New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils jointly manage monkfish and spiny dogfish, so the two Councils need to come to agreement on how to handle those two species in the framework; and

• Under existing reporting regulations, fishermen with multiple permits are required to abide by the “most restrictive rule.” The vast majority of New England fishermen hold at least one permit for Mid-Atlantic species (see box for list). That means if the Mid-Atlantic Council ultimately approves the Commercial eVTR Omnibus Framework Action, a groundfish or scallop fisherman who also holds a federal summer flounder permit, for example, would be required to submit eVTRs for all species because the summer flounder permit would have the most restrictive reporting requirements.

VTRs already are required in federal commercial fisheries throughout the Greater Atlantic Region. According to the Mid-Atlantic Council, the omnibus framework would not change any of the data types currently being collected on paper VTRs. Rather, the action’s main purpose is to require that these reports be submitted electronically instead of by mail through the U.S. Postal Service.

The Mid-Atlantic Council said the GOALS of the Commercial eVTR Omnibus Framework Action are to: (1) move toward reducing reporting burdens by eliminating redundancies in filling out multiple paper reports; (2) increase reporting efficiency for the commercial fleet and the National Marine Fisheries Service; and (3) decrease reporting errors.

The New England Council listened to the Mid-Atlantic Council staff’s briefing on April 16. Here is a copy of the presentation and framework document, and here’s the audio of the discussion. The New England Council asked numerous questions and agreed to schedule this topic on its June meeting agenda for a more thorough debate and to determine a course of action. Meanwhile, visit the Mid-Atlantic Council’s eVTR webpage and/or contact Karson Coutre at (302) 526-5259, kcoute@mafmc.org for more information.
Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program Review

The New England Council’s Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program Review Panel presented its final report to the Council and outlined the report’s findings and recommendations. The panel, which spent over a year conducting the review and preparing the report, was comprised of members from the Council, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office.

The Council has active RSA Programs for Atlantic sea scallops, Atlantic herring, and monkfish. The review covered three broad categories of topics:

- Program Administration;
- Program Structure; and
- Results.

Collectively, these categories addressed everything from the process used to make RSA awards, conflict of interest, and financial accountability to cost effectiveness, the number of awards per recipient, and whether the program results were meaningful for fishery management.

Next, the Council’s Scallop and Herring Committees will review the final report and provide feedback and recommendations to the Council at its June meeting. The Monkfish Committee will review and comment on the report later this summer.

A copy of the presentation, final report, and associated appendices can be downloaded at RSA Program Review. Listen to the discussion at Audio Tracks 17 and 18.

The Council also approved its list of 2019-2023 Research Priorities and Data Needs for submission to NOAA Fisheries. A copy will be posted on the Council website in the near future.

- The Council also discussed Atlantic Herring Framework Adjustment 6 during its April meeting. Details are available at Options for 2019-2021 Specifications and Revised Overfishing Definition.
- For more information on Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23 actions, visit Council Approves Wide Range of Alternatives for Further Development.

Research Set-Aside Awards in Numbers and Dollars

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2000-2018</th>
<th>Sea Scallops</th>
<th>Atlantic Herring</th>
<th>Monkfish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Awards</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Estimated Value of Research and Compensation</td>
<td>$146.3 million</td>
<td>$2.4 million</td>
<td>$22.1 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Estimated Research-Only Value</td>
<td>$34.1 million</td>
<td>$0.6 million</td>
<td>$3.8 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Ratio of Estimated Research/Total Value</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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Since 2000, the RSA Program has generated just under $40 million in research funding and roughly $170 million combined in research/compensation value.