Summer Flounder Advisory Panel
Meeting Minutes
August 30, 2006
Division of Fish and Wildlife
Wakefield, RI

There were 28 people in attendance (*primary advisory panel member; [A] alternate member)
David Preble, Chairman
Ken Ketcham, RIMFC
Stephen Parente, RIMFC
Jerry Carvahlo
Dean Pesante*
Maurice Leblanc*
Bob Morris*
Carl Granquist*
Jim O'Grady*
Paul Laflamme[A]
Frank Blount*
Jim Low*
Al Conti*
Chris Brown*
Ed Cook*
Robert Mattiucci[A]
Nancy Scarduzio, RIDFW
Brian Murphy, RIDFW

Update on most recent stock assessment

D. Preble started the meeting with a review of the most recent stock assessment for summer flounder completed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (see attachment for summary). In discussion following D. Preble's summary, B. Mattiucci questioned when the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) would set obtainable goals. This question was in reference to the current biomass target of 204.2 million pounds for the summer flounder stock along the Atlantic Coast. D. Preble indicated that the target level has been questioned and may not be a realistic goal. F. Blount stated that the current biomass target is a problem for management and in order to meet the timeline goals established in the management plan the quota would have to be reduced by approximately 75% in 2007. He also stated that NMFS was recently charged to investigate whether the biomass target should be adjusted. Discussion proceeded in regards to the retrospective bias evident in the assessment, which produces an overestimate of the most recent biomass level. A likely explanation for the bias is underestimation of discards. D. Preble encouraged the advisory panel to make suggestions on how to deal with the current issues regarding summer flounder management.

Issues for change in RI summer flounder management

Members of the panel presented several suggestions concerning quota management in 2007. C. Brown stated that the time of year where most difficulties arise is during the summer. He suggested time/area/gear closures as a method to deal with the reduced quota because it provides stability to the fishery if the closure is known ahead of time. One suggestion was closure on Fridays and Saturdays with a reasonable possession limit such as 300 pounds during the remaining five days. He stated that 50 pounds is not a viable limit. He also proposed an aggregate landing program during the summer with the condition that participants during the winter aggregate landing program would not be able to participate during the summer. He indicated that this would prevent trip boats from fishing nearshore. B. Matiucci proposed dividing the quota equitably throughout the year. Specifically he proposed, dividing the quota equally into each month of the year and then set seasons that would receive a portion of the quota equivalent to the number of months in the period. J. Lowe verbally presented proposals being developed by the Rhode Island Commercial Rod and Reel Association (RICRRA). The first proposes combining the summer I and II period allocations and the second proposes dividing the quota equally into the existing periods. He also stated the association has developed a proposal for gillnet regulations which was discussed by Industry Advisory Committee and will be forwarded to the RIMFC at its next meeting. G. Carvahlo proposed having a possession limit necessary to keep the fishery open all year with a minimum of 100 pounds. A portion of the discussion was focused on how to make upcoming cuts in the quota equitable among user groups. All agreed that the deductions should be distributed equally but not the means by which it is done. Some felt redistributing fish into summer periods would be fair since it is already beset with closures while others felt all sectors would take an equal cut with the current allocation scheme. F. Blount commented that the federal government uses control dates to limit access, which involves establishing a future date as the beginning of a qualification period.

J. O'Grady asked the chairman what his intentions are regarding the proposals. D. Preble responded that the ideas presented would be forwarded to the Council via the minutes and then back to the panel for a formal endorsement. J. O'Grady replied that it is premature to discuss reallocation and possession limits since a quota has not been established.

Other suggestions included increasing the commercial minimum size, minimum hook size, dividing the quota among gear types. In regards to increasing the minimum commercial size one criticism was that it leads to higher discards. B. Morris's suggestion on a minimum hook size would theoretically reduce discards in the hook and line fishery which all agreed is higher than currently estimated. The use of circle hooks was also discussed. One criticism of circle hooks is that they are designed to release fish and those fishing commercially intend on keeping the catch. K. Ketchum proposed dividing the quota between different gear types such as trawl, gillnets, rod and reel and other gear types.

There was a lengthy discussion on gillnets prompted by reference to a proposal from RICRRA. J. Low briefly outlined the proposal. D. Preble reviewed current gillnet

regulations. The main difference between the proposal and current regulations are the marking requirements and the proposal to prohibit the setting of gillnets at night. D. Pesante stated that preventing gillnets at night would destroy their fishery and it's absolutely necessary to set at night for species such as monkfish and fluke. J. Low then suggested removing gillnets when fluke fishery is closed. D. Pesente responded that gillnets designed for fluke are removed but continue to use gillnets designed specifically for other species. B. Mattuccii questioned if there were limits on the number of nets a person could deploy. According to the regulations, a net or a series of nets strung together should not exceed 300 feet if deployed within Narragansett Bay and 600 feet if deployed outside of the Bay. As far as the number of nets a person can deploy, there are no direct limits but there is a provision preventing a gill net to be set within 2,000 feet of another net which indirectly limits the number of gillnets a person can set. In response to some the complaints presented by J. Lowe, panel members were convinced that it was mainly an enforcement issue, which led into a general discussion on enforcement. The panel was aware that many of the violations that occur are due to a lack of enforcement and also that the number of enforcement agents has declined over the years while their list of responsibilities has grown. The suggestion was made for people to report violations when witnessed. An individual responded that in their experience has been unable to respond because they are either not in the area or short of staff. Another suggestion was if many people call to report the same complaint then perhaps enforcement would respond.

D. Preble stated that his intention is to bring the ideas proposed regarding the fluke fishery to the RIMFC via the minutes at the next meeting and then continue the process at the September 18 advisory panel meeting with votes on any completed proposals. He also clarified that none of the proposals brought forth were endorsed by the panel but were simply placed on the table for discussion and to forward to the Council.

Proposals

- Time/area closures; two week closures; summer aggregate landing program
- Combine summer I and II allocations
- Divide quota equally into existing periods
- Establish minimum hook size; circle hooks
- Control dates
- Seasons allocated quota proportionate to number of months in season with each month receiving 1/12th of the total quota
- Allocate quota to gear types
- Require landings to be coded (SAFIS) by gear type by January 1, 2007