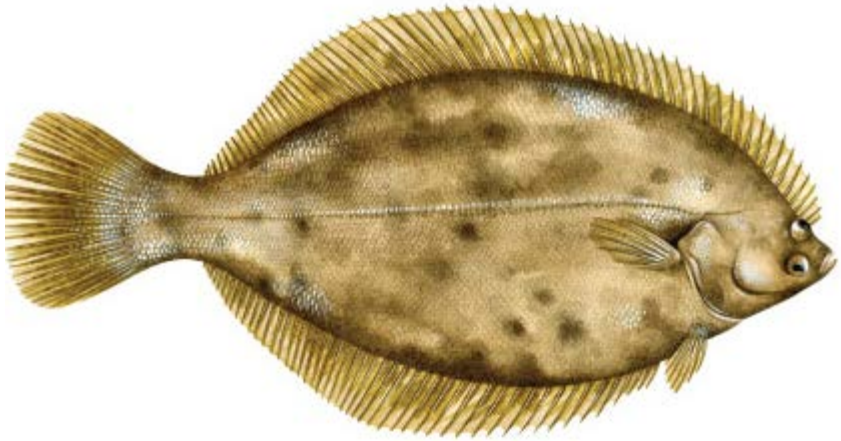
Rhode Island Winter Flounder Proposal: Aggregate Limits



Winter Flounder Management Board
Spring 2018

Overview

- RI submitted a proposal requesting consideration of aggregate weekly limits in the SNE/MA commercial winter flounder fishery
- At the February Meeting, the Board tasked the TC with investigating potential impacts of the proposal
- Today, Board will consider a response to this proposal
  - Overview of Current Measures
  - Review RI Proposal
  - TC Report
  - LEC Report
  - Consider Board Action

Current Possession Limit

- Addendum I (2009) implemented a 50 lb/day possession limit in the SNE/MA commercial fishery
  - In response to depleted condition of SNE/MA stock
  - At the time, Board did consider a moratorium; however, there were concerns about discarding and the collection of fisheries-dependent data
  - Intent to: “achieve the lowest possible F rate while minimizing economic and social impacts”; “solely to allow for bycatch”
- In 2013, NOAA removed moratorium in federal waters
  - Allowed for directed harvest of winter flounder
  - 50 lb possession limit in state waters remained

RI Proposal

- Propose aggregate weekly limits in the SNE/MA commercial fishery
- Intended to:
  - Provide greater flexibility to state waters fishermen and increase efficiency (similar amounts of fish in fewer trips)
  - Reduce bycatch generated in state-waters fisheries
  - Allow federally permitted vessels to pursue other species in state waters without being constrained by a low winter flounder possession limit
  - Even the playing field between state vs. federally permitted harvesters in the winter flounder fishery

RI Proposal

Three options presented in proposal:

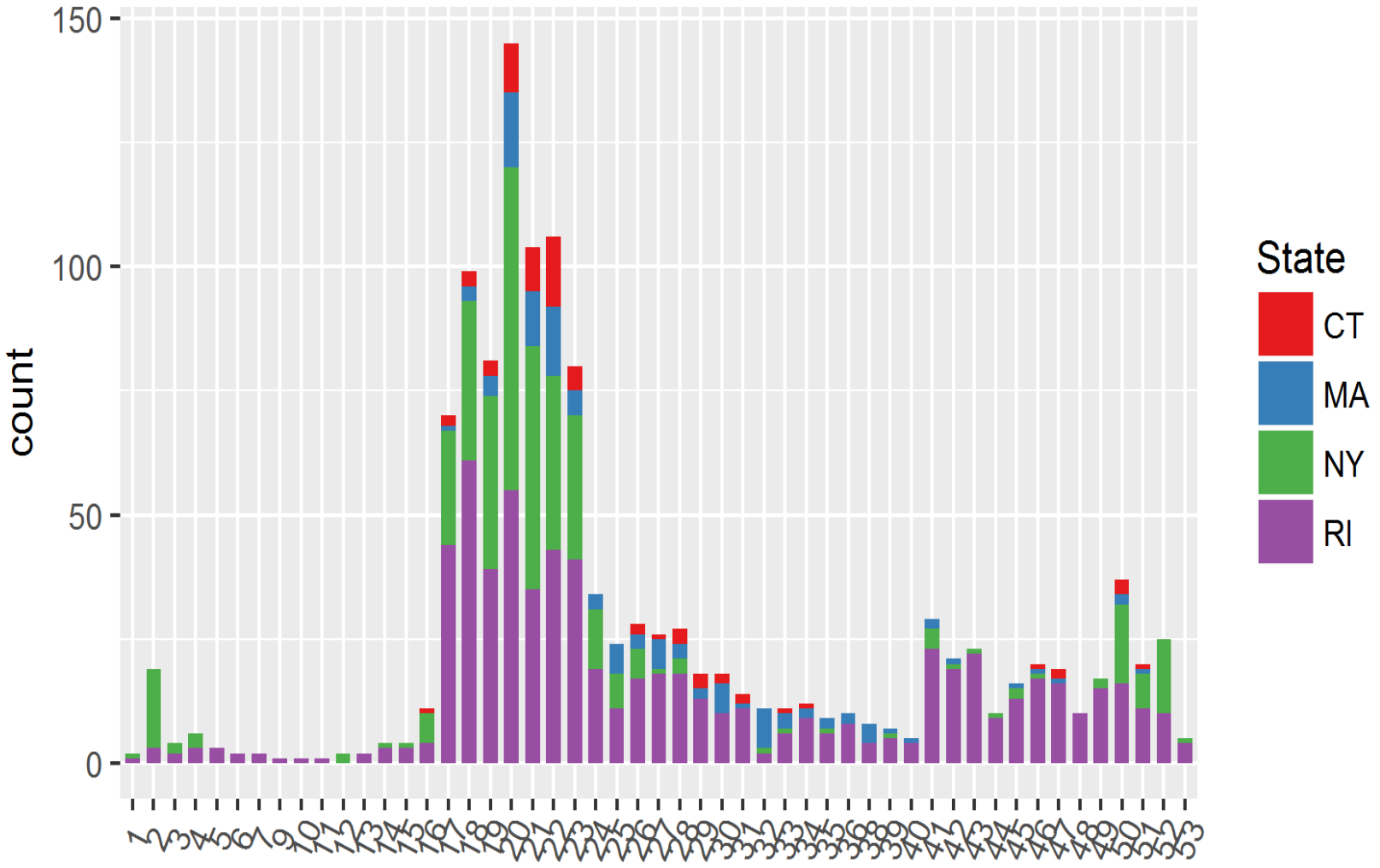
1. 250 lbs/week limit year round
2. 350 lbs/week limit between April-June and November-December; limit would remain at 50 lbs/day during other months
3. 250 lbs/week limit year round with development of permit program that would require captains to report daily via SAFIS and acquire vessel monitoring hardware

TC Report - Overview

- TC met via conference call on March 6th and April 17th to analyze potential impacts of the proposal
- Data used in the analysis:
  - 2014-2016 trip-level landing reports for state-only permit holders (MA through NJ)
  - Includes any trips which landed at least 1 pound of winter flounder, as well as species name and poundage of other species landed on trip
  - Vessels with federal permits not included since those vessels are limited by hard quotas

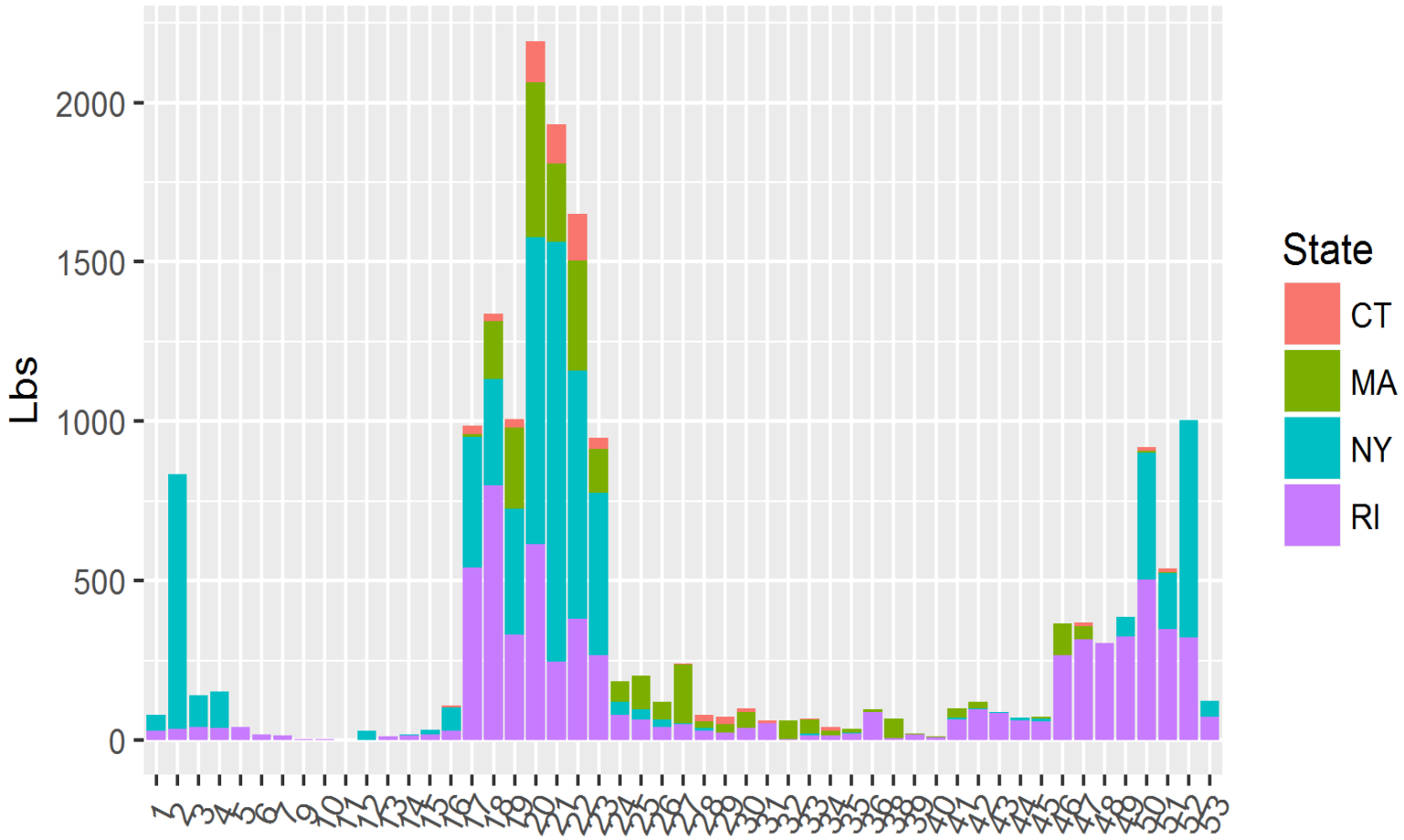
TC Report - Trends

2016 Winter Flounder Trips

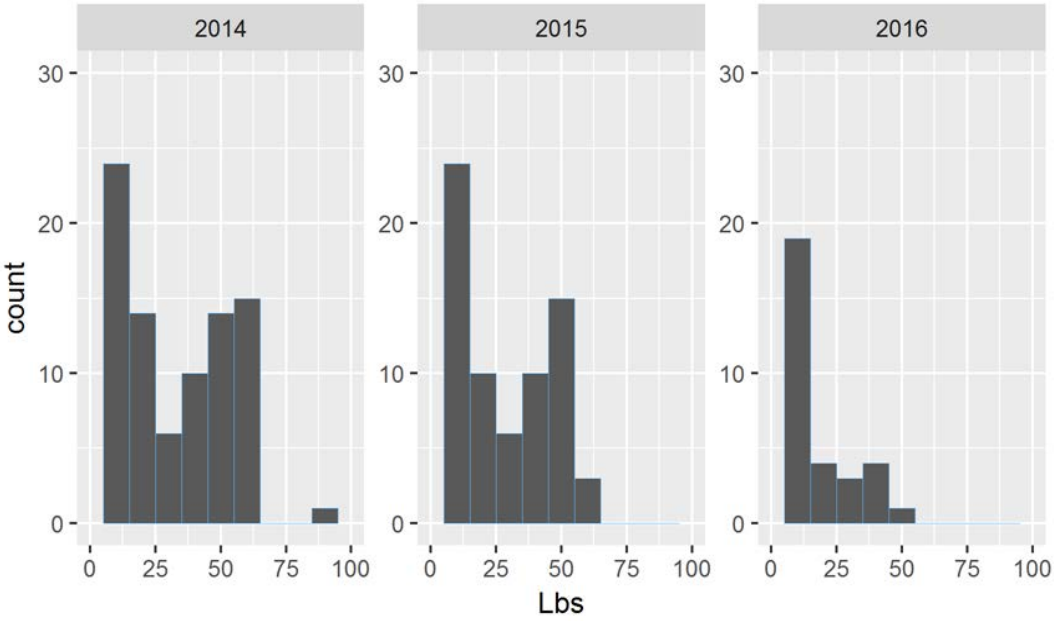


TC Report - Trends

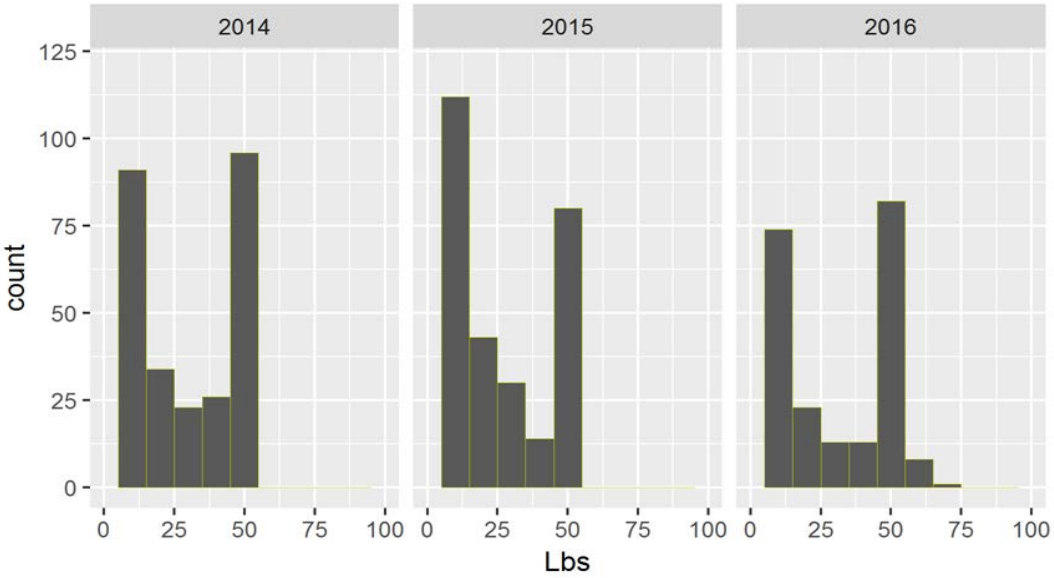
2016 Winter Flounder Landings



TC Report - Trends

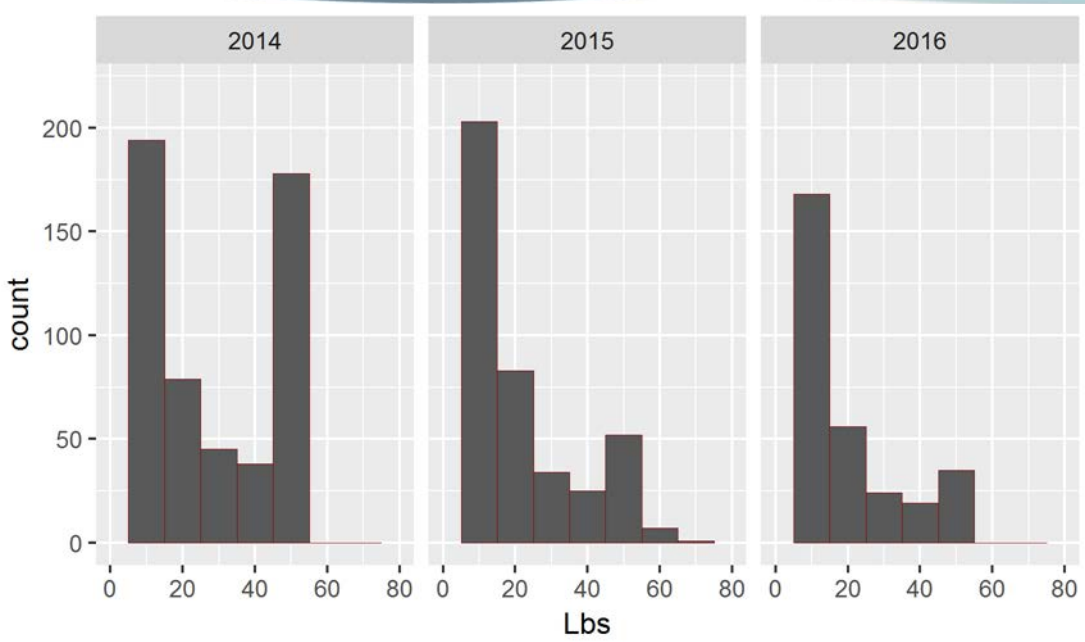


Connecticut

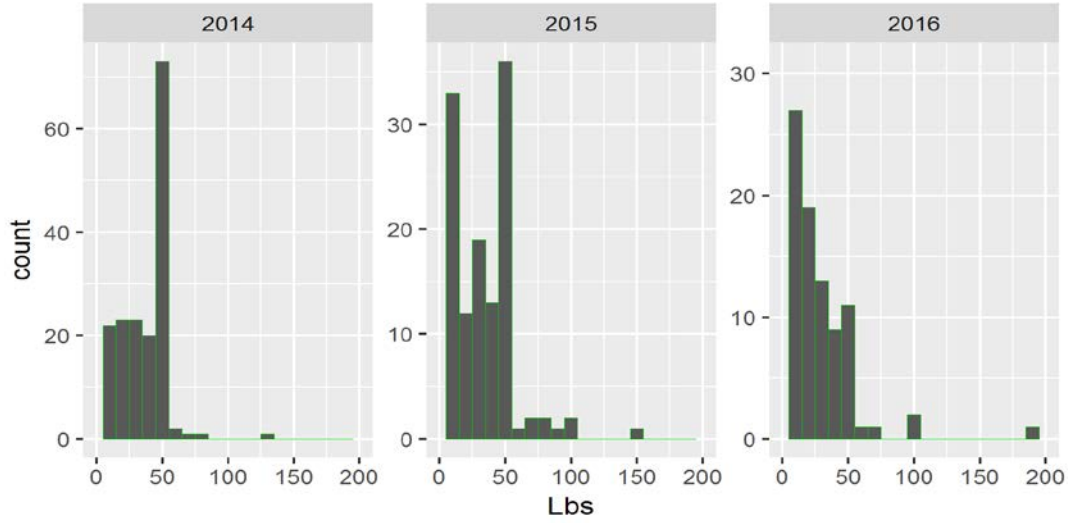


New York

TC Report - Trends

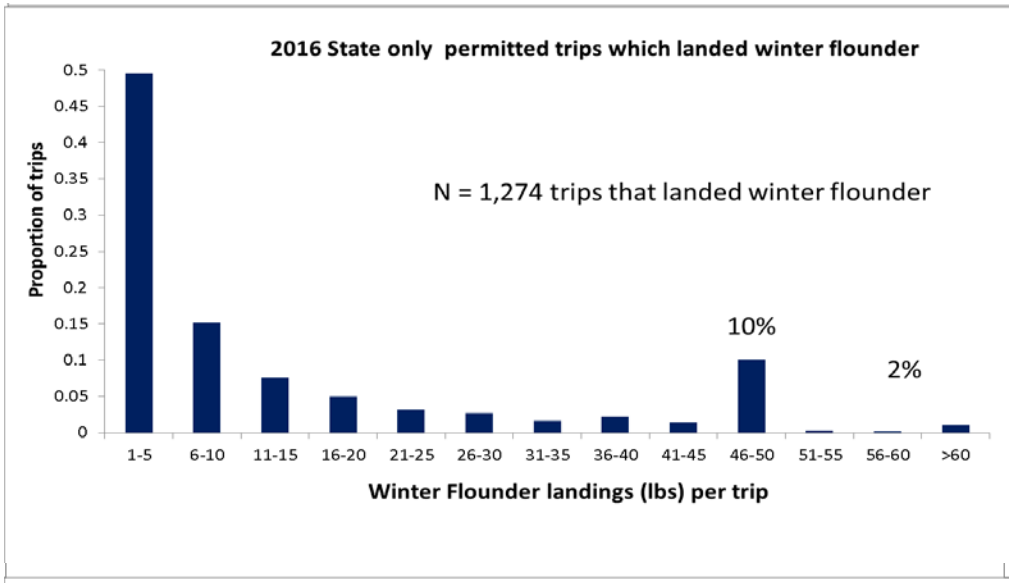


Rhode Island

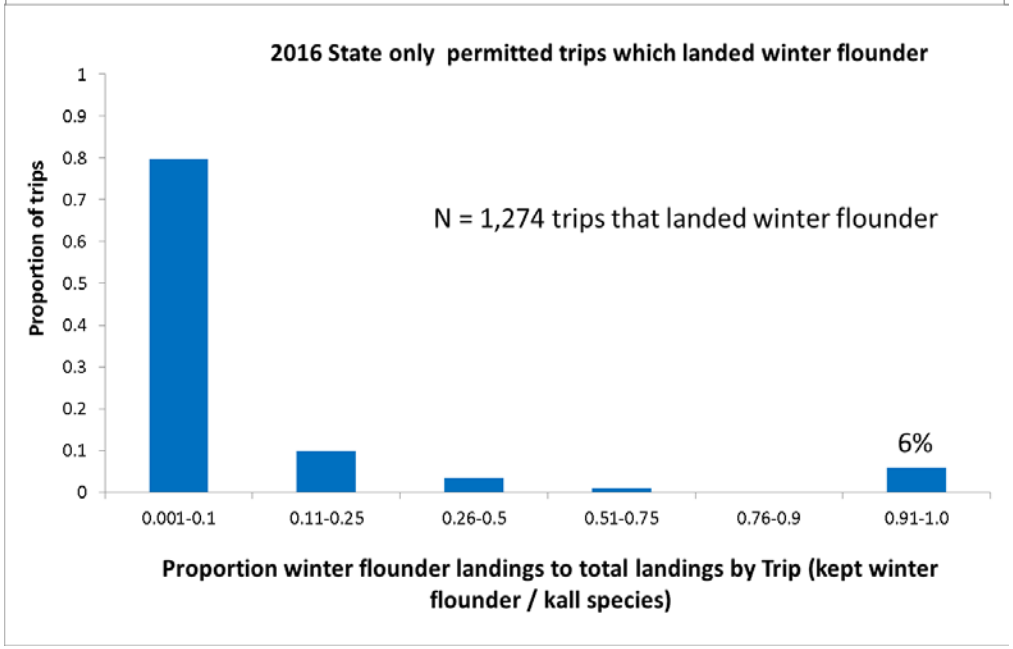


Massachusetts

TC Report – Directed Effort



Distribution of winter flounder landings per trip



Proportion of winter flounder compared to total landings on trip

TC Report - Projections

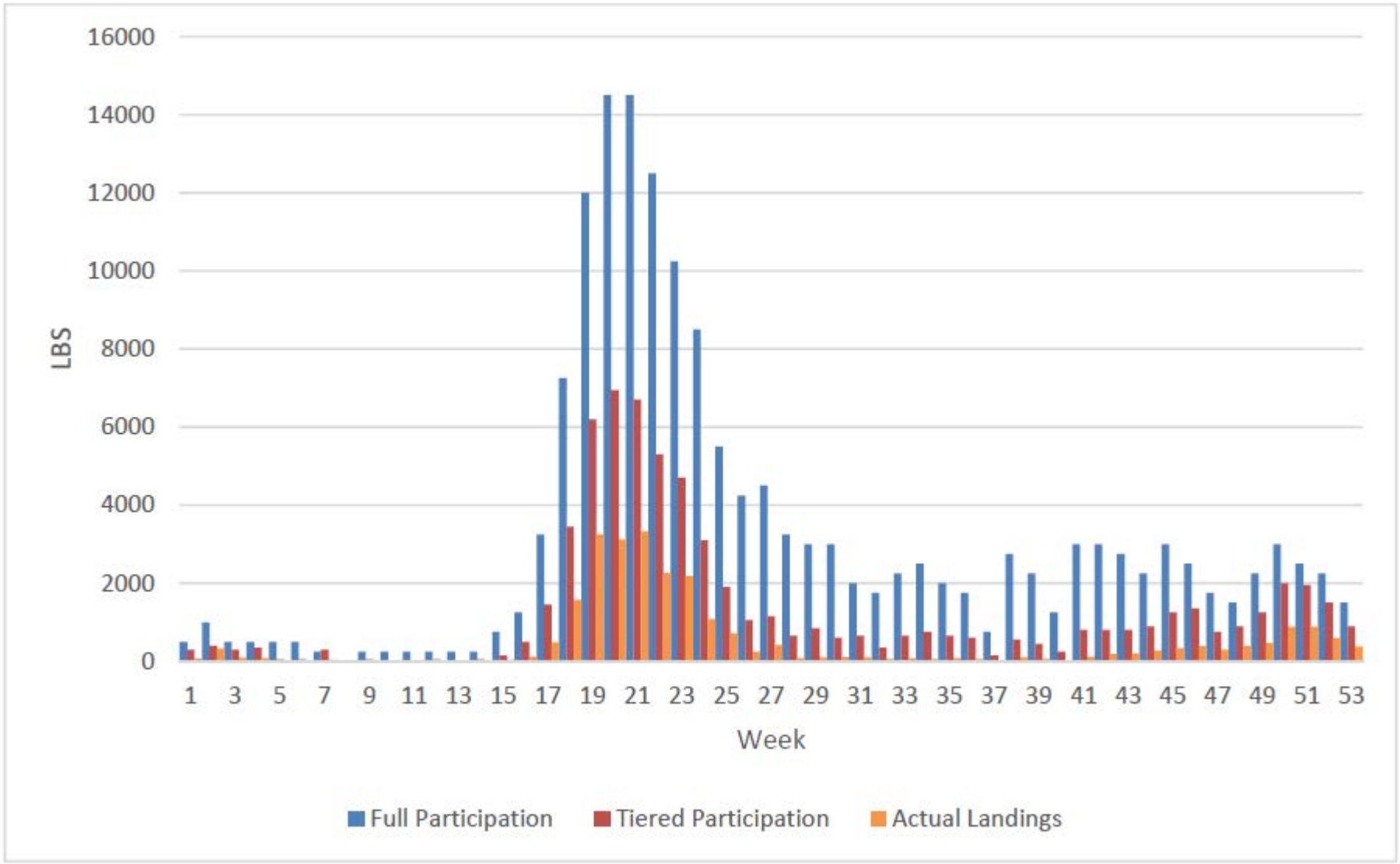
- TC attempted to predict changes in fishermen behavior under aggregate weekly limits
- Two projections considered
  1. 250 lb per week limit
  2. 350 lb per week limit between April – June and November- December; during all other months there is a 50 lb per day possession limit
- Two scenarios considered for each projection
  1. Each harvester lands the full aggregate limit in a given week (full participation)
  2. Harvesters who landed >50 lb in a week will land the full aggregate limit; harvesters who landed <= 50 lb in a given week will land 50 lb per week (tiered participation)

TC Report - Projections

- Calculations based on pooling all 2014-2016 states' data by year and breaking the pounds of winter flounder caught by participant/trip into week sized bins
- For scenario 1, multiply each participant in a given week by the aggregate limit and sum
- For scenario 2, participants grouped into two tiers (those that landed > 50 lbs in a week and those that landed <=50 lbs in a given week).
  - Participants in tier 1 multiplied by the aggregate weekly limit
  - Participants in tier 2 multiplied by 50 lbs

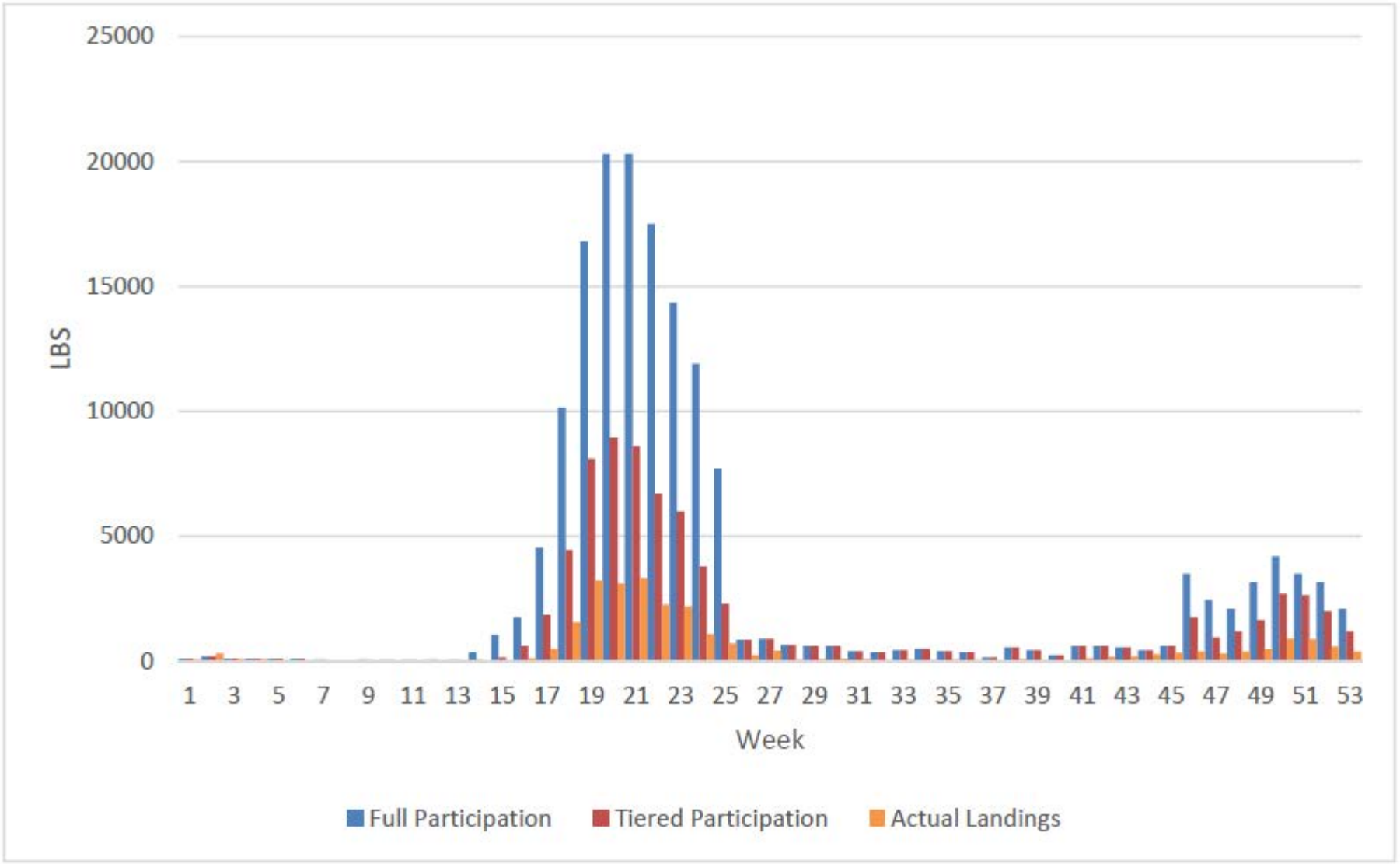
TC Report - Projections

250 lb/week aggregate limit



TC Report - Projections

350 lb/week aggregate limit April – June and Nov - Dec

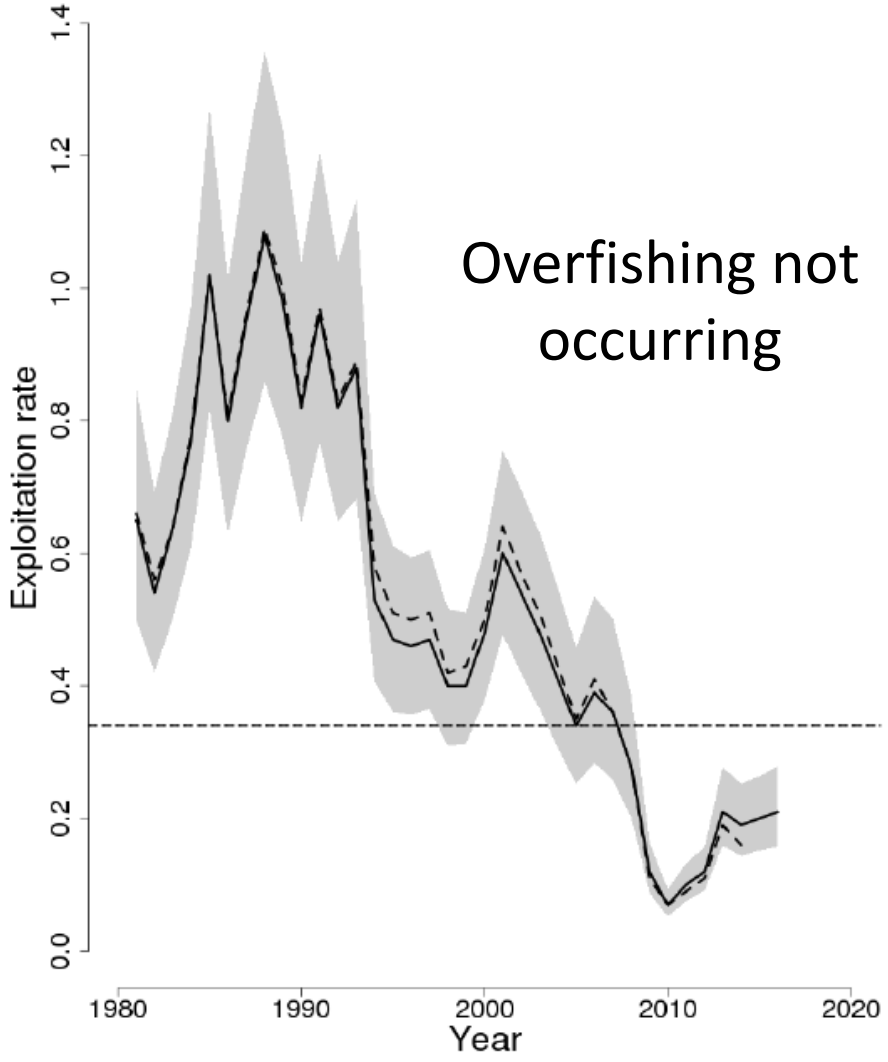


TC Report - Discussion

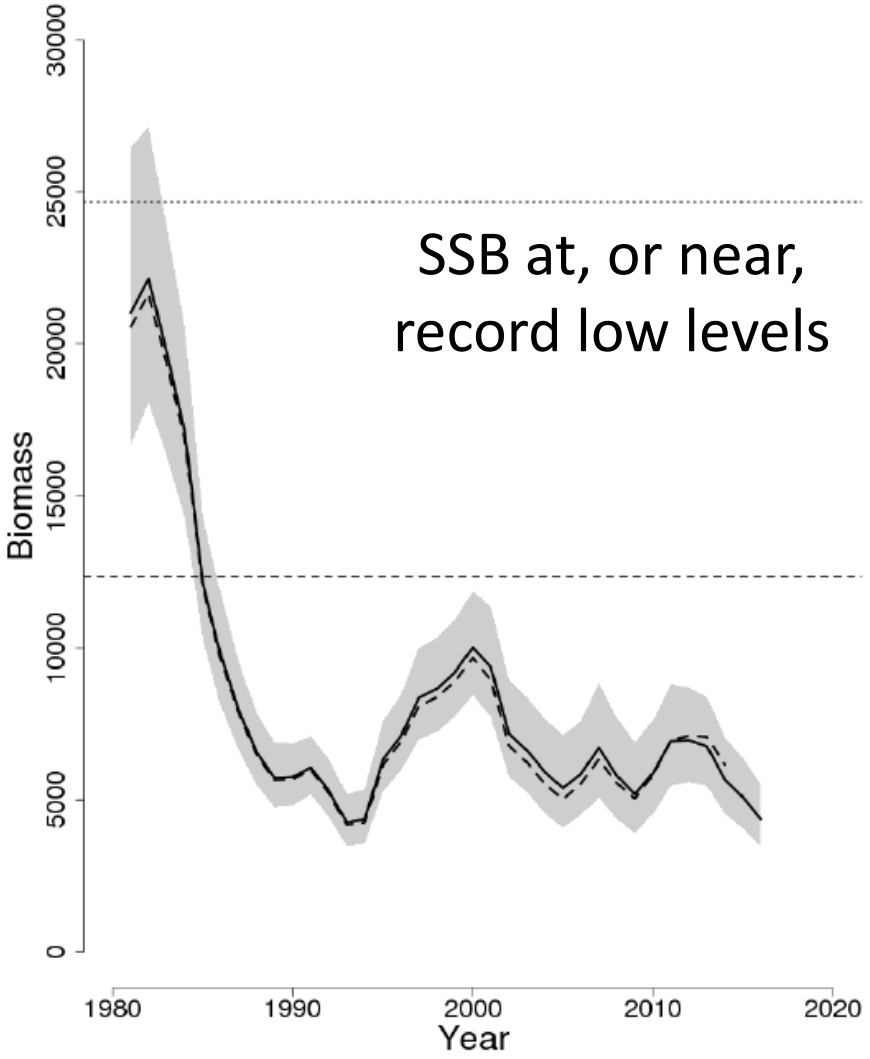
- Based off projections and current low levels of targeting in the SNE/MA winter flounder fishery, the TC does believe that the behavior of state-waters fishermen will change and landings will increase under an aggregate weekly limit
- Influence of aggregate weekly limits on discards is hard to predict
  - If there is greater incentive to catch the full limit, there may be more fishermen harvesting at, or near, the weekly limit
  - Could perpetuate regulatory discarding

TC Report - Discussion

2017 Stock Assessment



Overfishing not occurring



SSB at, or near, record low levels

TC Report - Discussion

The TC notes additional items for the Board to consider:

- An aggregate weekly limit may result in increased fishing by federally permitted boats in state waters
- Increased landings from state permit holders could alter the state waters subcomponent as well as sub-ACLs for federally permitted vessels
  - State waters sub-component based on 3-year average of landings
  - Increases in state water sub-component may be compensated by decreases in federal ACLs
- For some states, including RI, winter flounder is not a limited entry fishery

LEC Comments

- LEC discussed RI Proposal at May 1st meeting
- RI currently enforces aggregate limits in the summer flounder fishery
  - Permit holder must meet specific requirements, including a background check
- LEC does highlight that aggregate weekly limits take away the ability for dockside enforcement (ability to see and act)
  - Requires enforcement personnel to check SAFIS and/or harvester log books to corroborate landings; may have to leave site of inspection
  - Greater burden on enforcement resources
- Of the three proposals, prefer Option 3 (vessel monitoring and permit program)
  - Would like to see background checks in addition

Questions?

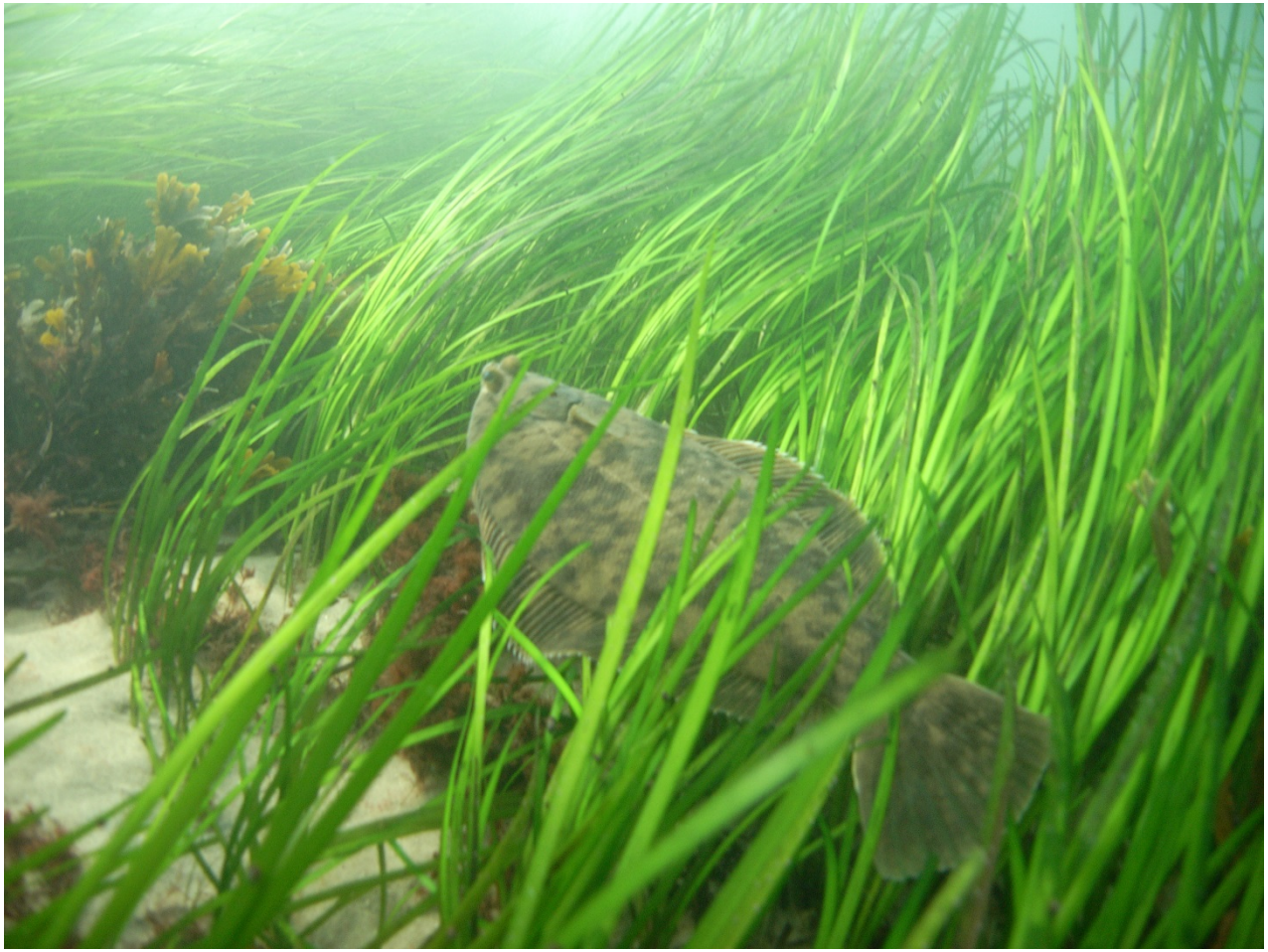


Photo Credit: Cornell Cooperative Extension Eelgrass Program