



## Bluefish Monitoring Committee & Bluefish Technical Committee Meeting Summary March 24, 2023

**Monitoring Committee and Technical Committee Attendees:** Karson Cisneros (MAFMC), Chelsea Tuohy (ASMFC), Amy Zimney (SC DNR), Cynthia Ferrio (GARFO), Eric Durell (MD DNR), Michael Celestino (NJ DFW), Jim Gartland (VIMS), Joshua McGilly (VMRC), Rich Wong (DNREC), Tony Wood (NEFSC), Sandra Dumais (NY DEC), Nicole Lengyel Costa (RI DMF), Sam Truesdell (MA DMF), David Behringer (NC DMF), Kurt Gottschall (CT BMF), Halie O'Farrell (FWRI), Brooke Lowman (VMRC), Kevin Sullivan (NHFG), Katie Drew (ASMFC)

**Other Attendees:** Greg DiDomenico (Lund's Fisheries), Mike Waine (ASA), Nichola Meserve (Board Member), Will Poston (ASGA), Chris Batsavage (Council and Board Member), Julianne Grenn (VIMS), Simon Brown (MD DNR)

The Bluefish Monitoring Committee (MC) and the Bluefish Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on Friday, March 24, to develop potential methods for applying a buffer between sector specific annual catch limits (ACLs) and annual catch targets (ACTs) to account for management uncertainty. The MC and TC reviewed buffer examples in other fisheries, recent bluefish overages by sector, discussed methods for buffer calculation, and discussed information that would be helpful for inclusion in the staff memo for specifications. For simplicity, the joint MC and TC are referred to as the MC throughout the summary.

### **Summary**

MC members first discussed the compliance and enforcement aspect of the recreational bluefish fishery. The Coast Guard results provided showed there were no bag limit violations on all their boardings where recreational bluefish were targeted from 2019-2022. An MC member felt those numbers were encouraging; however, they were interested in more information on potential violations discovered by state enforcement throughout the region. They **recommended that compliance information from state and federal enforcement entities be included in the July staff memo** when considering management uncertainty. Enforceability of measures was also discussed as a potential source of uncertainty and one MC member noted that the New England Fishery Management Council includes this among other considerations when determining a management uncertainty buffer.

The MC also discussed the uncertainty surrounding recreational discards given that there were previously two disparate discard estimates used in the stock assessment and management. Starting in 2023, both GARFO and the NEFSC will use the same recreational discard estimate that comes from the most recent stock assessment. MC members felt that it would be helpful to compare expected

versus observed discards in recent years, however given the change in methodology with the new assessment, the previously recommended expected discards would not be comparable to the new estimates. They noted that this can be evaluated in future years. The new time series of estimates can be used to evaluate discard variability in general, as well as look at how accurate it may have been to use previous year(s) estimates to predict discards for the following one or two years. MC members **recommended including a range and standard deviation of discard variability in the July staff memo** along with the typical recent fishery performance moving forward.

One MC member suggested calculating the confidence bounds around the harvest estimate (similar to methods used in the recreational harvest control rule) and using that to qualitatively provide context for uncertainty around the estimate. This calculation would be intended as a piece of information to be factored in with the other potential contributors to uncertainty. Another MC member agreed with this approach.

Given the variety of factors that can contribute to management uncertainty, MC members **recommended the development of a decision matrix that includes qualitative and quantitative information for each sector.** This matrix would capture quantitative metrics such as discard variability, harvest/discard prediction performance (when applicable), and confidence intervals on harvest estimates. The matrix would also include more qualitative information such as any recent compliance, reporting, or monitoring issues. The MC discussed that the Scientific and Statistical Committee uses a matrix to account for scientific uncertainty surrounding the overfishing limit (OFL) and that could be used as an example when developing this matrix. In addition, more exploration into the ways other regions address management uncertainty can be useful when developing the matrix. For example, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council uses a modified control rule to get from the ACL to ACT. Overall, it was concluded that staff would develop an outline of a management uncertainty matrix, potentially working with a subgroup of interested MC members, and solicit feedback from the MC.