Striped Bass Advisory Panel
December 18, 2002
Sheraton Warwick, Rhode Island

Biological Reference Points

⇒ **Fishing Mortality Threshold F=0.41**

Already agreed on by the AP during a previous meeting.

⇒ **Fishing Mortality Target**

Majority F=0.30
Minority F=0.25

- Appears as though MA is looking for an increase in commercial, NY & RI will follow suit.
- Take into consideration the TC recommendation to be careful selecting the F target because of the uncertainty associated with the stock assessment.
- *Board needs to look at those species that serve as forage to striped bass (i.e. Menhaden)*

Option 2 (F=0.25):

- Marching orders in Amendment 6 are to grow out the older year classes.
- Favor Option 2 because of the 3-year planning horizon, growth overfishing. Too much pressure on those fish that would be the fish of tomorrow. (but don't have a major problem with F=0.30)
- '93s are providing a decent year class but worried about depending on one year class, so we should ratchet back to be sure there is a good balance of larger fish to carry us over potentially rough times in the future.
- State of NH wants to support an F of 0.25 or lower.

Option 3 (F=0.31):

- More and more fish offshore as the stock increases, believes the stock is more robust than we are currently seeing because surveys don't capture what is happening offshore.
- What price to do you want to pay to increase the older striped bass? To accelerate the growth of these larger fish it will be at the expense of several groups of fisherman (i.e. subsistence fishermen), all to benefit the fishermen targeting trophy fish.
- We are still building up the biomass at this fishing mortality.
- With the F=0.31, the highest level of SSB on record, and to protect one species may be at the expense of other species in the same ecosystem (declines in bluefish and flounder in NY).
- Option 2 would wipe out the flexibility for the Board to increase the allocation to either sector.
- To maintain a balance in biomass and to great rid of the long lean fish for those fatter fish (carrying capacity).
- Studies show that fish aged with scales were aged younger than they really were…so there are older fish out there.
- Want to favor Option 2, but the ecosystem needs a stronger forage base (Menhaden) to support a large biomass of striped bass, until then must support Option 3.

⇒ **Biomass Target & Threshold**

AP Consensus: Strategy 1, Total Biomass, & 2, Female Spawning Stock Biomass, used simultaneously

Use both strategies 1 and 2 in Amendment 6. Strategy 1 the stock may bounce around, but as long as the lower level of biomass can be explained and there are triggers in place that say the total stock needs to be under the target for several years.

Triggers link both biomass and fishing mortality reference points. There would have to be a problem for a couple of years in a row according to both reference points.

80% of the striped bass caught in Chesapeake Bay are males, sometimes as high as 95%. Chesapeake Bay does not target the females.

Already a built in mechanism for limiting the pressure of the stock through fishing mortality rate, don't really need a biomass reference point.

Strategy 2 (female SB reference points) because its not as volatile, as the total biomass reference points which may bounce around a bit.

Using both adds another level of risk aversion. There really isn't a downside.

Stock Rebuilding Program

⇒ **Stock Rebuilding Targets**

Majority: Option 1. Rebuild to target level

Minority: Option 3. Rebuild biomass to a point halfway between the target & threshold

- Option 1 rebuild to the target level. Follow NMFS technical guidance which says that rebuilding must occur when the stock is approve the threshold.
- Option 2.
- Option 1: Rebuild to a point that find provides some room bouncing around, gets you away from the emergency level (target). If rebuild to the emergency level, stock may be in trouble all over again in a short period of time.
- Option 1.
- Option 3. Is a happy compromise and leaves the stock at a level that means it is healthy.
- Option 1. Target is where we should be rebuilding.

⇒ **Stock Rebuilding Schedule**

AP Consensus: Should be addressed at the time the TC, AP & Board deems there to be a problem

- Option 1 because Option 2 may mean moratorium on fishing.
- Option 2 does not provide an actual number and leaves a lot of leeway.
- Option 2: If we set a time limit on how long it takes to rebuild and we have a difficult time achieving that threshold, that may result in a moratorium.
- No Option: Address the rebuilding schedule issue when there is a problem, difficult to determine how to address the issue when we are not faces with the problem.
- Leave it to the Board to decide when there is a problem.
- Fishing won't stop under the 10-year rebuilding period, the fishery won't have to shut down entirely, only reduced.

Bycatch Reduction Program

The Advisory Panel supports the implementation of a bycatch monitoring & research program, and a subsequent bycatch management program. These bycatch programs should be implemented for both recreational and commercial fisheries.

Management Program Implementation

⇒ **Planning Horizon**

AP Consensus: Unanimously supports Option 1: a 3-year management planning horizon with management measures maintained for three years.

⇒ **Allocation**

AP Recommendation: Option 1 (10 in favor, all recreational), Option 5 (3), Option 12 (4)

2 advisors in favor of status quo would be willing to concede to a modest increase in the coastal commercial fishery without trying to advise on where the increase would come from.

Option 1: Coastal commercial quota allocation status quo

- Concerned about the resource. Increasing the commercial harvest may be at the expense of the resource because larger, older fish are removed from the population.

Option 4 or 5: Increase in the coastal commercial quota

- Allocation should not be a decision based on politics, it should be a decision based on equitability.
- The only segment of this fishery that has not gotten an increase is the coastal commercial sector since the implementation of Amendment 5. Even with a 30% or 64% increase to the coastal commercial fishery does not compare to what the recreational fishery harvests.

Option 12: Status quo on the allocation of the striped bass catch plus a 30% increase in the coastal commercial fishery.

- In order for this to happen, you need to take small fish harvested from the Bay to harvest the large fish in the coast. An increase to the coastal commercial fishery is a direct negative impact on the availability of fish to the recreational fishery, which depends on the available biomass.
- An increase to the coastal commercial would not be a perceivable impact.

⇒ **Minimum Size Limits**

AP Recommendation: 2 at 28" and if a state currently fishing at 1 fish at 28" it will be up to the Board to deal with exceeding the target fishing mortality rate)

- Fishermen from the Bay sat at the dock for 5 years. The Bay deserves the credit.
- If states were allowed to harvest to the full capacity of Amendment 5, there would be overfishing occurring. Amendment 6 needs to prevent this from happening.
- A minimum size limit in the Bay would be detrimental to not only the commercial fishery, but also the recreational fishery and the subsistence fishermen.
- Current minimum size limits with the ability to go to an 18" minimum size if a state so desires.
- When the problem arises (all states change regulations to allow for the harvest at full capacity allowed under Amendment 5), then the Board should deal with the problem of exceeding the fishing mortality target.
    - In the future who will have to take the hit when the target is exceeded? Do those states that have been more conservative (i.e. NY, NH and MA at 1 fish) need to be more conservative still in order to meet the necessary reduction (along with all those other states)?

- Those who made the sacrifice earlier should not have to make a further sacrifice later if the fishing mortality is exceeded. The fishery would not be in its present condition if it was not for these states.
- States that have been conservative in the past want credit for doing so (i.e. Bay's 5-year moratorium).

⇒ **Recreational Fisheries Management Measures**

Mandatory use of Circle Hooks – more education.

- Circle hooks mean a big savings of fish (by reducing hooking mortality) while still getting the fish.
- Many states are already encouraging the use of circle hooks through brochures.
- How should circle hooks be enforced? And how are circle hooks defined?
- People are trying circle hooks on their own.
- Making circle hooks mandatory is going to raise a lot of questions and be a terrible problem with law enforcement
- There needs to be more education on the use of circle hooks.

Prohibition of the use of treble hooks

- Barbless hooks in spawning season in PRFC jurisdiction, NJ Delaware River, and PA.

Prohibition on the use of treble hooks while bait fishing for striped bass – more education.

⇒ **Commercial Fisheries Management Measures**

AP Recommendation: All Commercially caught fish should be tagged.

- Commercially caught fish should continue to be tagged.
- Massachusetts is the only state that is not tagging the commercially caught fish.
- Encourages high grading in states like VA where the tags are part of the ITQ system.
- Tags should also be used for fish caught recreationally.
- Adding another burden to a state that already monitors the system well.

⇒ **Conservation Equivalency**

AP Recommendation: After one year, the state will need to prove that the plan continues to be conservative (11 in favor, 3 abstentions).

⇒ **Recommendation for Actions in Federal Jurisdictions**

AP has on two other occasions recommended that the EEZ remain closed.

- With a commercial cap and enforcement in the EEZ, harvesting in the EEZ would not penalize the resource conservationally.
- This is a recovered resource, there is a lot of waste occurring in the EEZ because of discards, there will not be an increase in harvest with the opening of the EEZ because the commercial fishery is capped.
- For the present, the EEZ should remain closed pending the spatial distribution study results.