

ASMFC Weakfish Technical Committee Meeting Meeting Summary

**Baltimore, MD
January 15 – 16, 2002**

Participants:

Desmond Kahn, DE
John McClain, NJ
Vic Crecco, CT
Najih Lazar, RI
Douglas Vaughan, NMFS
Alice Weber, NY
John Galvez, USFWS
Clif Tipton, USFWS
Janaka de Silva, FL
Jim Uphoff, MD
Rob O'Reilly, VA
Louis Daniel, NC
Geoff White, ASMFC
Laura Lee, ASMFC
Carrie Selberg, ASMFC

Agenda:

The Weakfish TC added two things to the printed agenda including a Virginia bycatch issue and Rob O'Reilly giving follow-up from last year's TC meeting.

VA By-Catch Issue:

R. O'Reilly outlined an issue Virginia is having with bycatch. A trawl fisherman targeting Croaker is catching a significant amount of Weakfish that are undersized. Staff indicated that this issue was raised at the Board meeting and has been included in the Public Information Document for Amendment #4.

Minutes:

The minutes from the May 2001 Technical Committee meeting were approved as written by Jim Uphoff in a June 21, 2001 memo to the TC.

Assessment:

D. Kahn explained to the technical committee that the stock assessment subcommittee had been reviewing portions of the updated assessment over the previous day. He updated the group on the status of updating the assessment. The 1999 update was completed. The 2000 update was not yet completed and was missing the 2000 NMFS Fall trawl survey information and the catch at age information for New England needed to be revised.

The TC reviewed the 1999 ADAPT VPA output. They noted the stock numbers that have been steadily increasing and the fishing mortality that has been steadily decreasing. It indicated that the average F in 1999 was 0.18 that is down from the peak of 2.52 in 1984. The TC noted that the stock seemed to have started its recovery before the mandatory management measures put in place in Amendment #3.

The TC indicated that the terminal year F of this assessment is most likely overly optimistic. The retrospective analysis indicates that the model is underestimating F and overestimating stock size.

The TC discussed some concerns that the catch was declining in the face of lower F's. They indicated this could be a problem with the model or could be due to other environmental factors.

The TC discussed future work. V. Crecco indicated he would do the relative exploitation work. J. deSilva was going to re-run the ICA model as discussed in the stock assessment subcommittee meeting. J. Uphoff was going to do the ASPIC work. D. Kahn was going to finish updating the assessment and provide a summary and presentation to the Board after a TC conference call to approve the 2000 updated assessment.

North Carolina Recreational Regulations:

The Weakfish Board requested that the TC review North Carolina's recreational regulations which allow the angler to choose between a 12 inch/four fish bag limit and a 14 inch/ten fish bag limit on any given day. Louis Daniel explained to the Technical Committee that this was put into place because the fishermen in NC had been requesting changes between the two options over the past several years. NC felt that because both of these scenarios were considered equal in Amendment #3 and both had been outlined as options in their original plan that this was an acceptable situation. L. Daniel outlined the tickets written in NC under different rules. In 1999 when the state instituted a rule change between the two options, 148 tickets were written. In 2000, when there was no rule change, 193 tickets were written. In 2001 when the rule was changed to include the angler choice, 161 tickets were written.

The TC discussed highgrading and several TC members thought that anglers who would do this would do it regardless of if the choice were offered. A. Weber indicated that they had explored this in NY with bluefish and

decided against it because they concluded that it did not result in the necessary reduction.

Several technical committee members did not feel that this was a technical issue but rather an enforcement issue.

TC members felt there were many indirect effects of implementing measures such as this including law enforcement concerns, confusion to the public, and the possibility of more catch. Overall the TC did not feel that they had enough information to outline any technical problems at this time.

Monitoring Requirements for Amendment #4:

D. Kahn explained that while he was updating the assessment he realized that there were large gaps in the data. Amendment #4 is a good opportunity to outline needed monitoring requirements to fill in these gaps.

The TC agreed that some level of sampling of commercial landings should be required in Amendment 4 through the following statement: Any state whose landings are greater than 2 percent of the 2000 coastwide commercial landings will be required to monitor significant commercial fisheries in their state and required to provide the Weakfish TC with adequate information of their catch. They agreed that the stock assessment subcommittee should develop the details of this if the Board indicates this could be a part of Amendment #4.

Landings Information:

The TC discussed the discrepancy between the landings that the National Marine Fisheries Service reports and that the States report. Some members

indicated a few of the problems may be due to including various Potomac River landings in the wrong state. D. Kahn asked each state to compare their landings to NMFS and attempt to work out any differences.

Commercial Reference Period:

At this time, the states' reference period is represented by the average 1990-92 landings, except for NJ and DE which utilize the 1989-91 reference period.

An attempt was made to design a 1981-85 reference period for the commercial fishery, as the T.C. has long advocated that reference period for the recreational fishery. The reason the 1981-85 period was chosen is that it represents more of an equilibrium condition of the population, in comparison to the early 1990's. By the early 1990s the stock was more eroded in terms of abundance and distribution of numbers by age classes (juvenescence had progressed).

Average commercial landings by gear, month and state for the 1981-85 period were assembled, and several problems emerged. First, gear types for some states had changed in terms of importance to the fishery. Second, it could not be adequately determined how to effect a 33% reduction in the fishing mortality rate for the 1981-85 period, using mainly seasonal closures. One problem was the change in the fisheries for some states, from 1981-85.

Additionally, the fishing mortality rate average roughly 1.7 for that period, so a 33% reduction seemed to have little relevance to the target of Amendment No.3 or the target proposed for Amendment No. 4. In any case, there should be a technical effort to improve upon the current basis for managing

commercial fisheries (closed seasons or areas coupled with minimum size limits). The concern with the Amendment No. 3 management measures are that seasonal and area closures are extensive (e.g. the target reduction in F was ahead of schedule). There is also a by-catch and discard issue associated with extensive closures. In addition, seasonal migration patterns of weakfish are not static, but the closed seasons are, and commercial fishermen are subject to ultra-variable, interannual harvesting opportunities.

Research Needs:

Research Needs for each species are updated on an annual basis by the plan review team. The PRT asked for input from the Technical committee on updating this list. The TC discussed the importance of only having a few research needs listed under 'high' priority. They moved three of the current high priority needs to the low category and left three. The high priority needs that were left included collecting catch and effort data including both size and age information especially in northern areas, develop latitudinal/seasonal/gear specific age length keys for the coast, and derive estimates of discard mortality and the magnitude of discards for commercial gear types. The TC moved one medium research need to high concerning updating the scale – otholith comparison. They deleted two research needs that were no longer appropriate issues or were not considered to be research needs but instead functions of the TC. Staff will revise the research needs for weakfish based on this discussion.

Annual State Report Format:

The PRT noted in the Annual compliance report that the state reports varied widely in amount of information included and format. They also noticed that the reports did not feed well into the stock assessment process. The Board asked the TC to outline a standard format for these reports. Staff presented an ASMFC basic format for reports. The TC decided to use this as a base for formatting requirements. The TC decided to have staff to request that this be used as the standard format by each state. Staff will also outline any Weakfish specific requirements. The TC also requested that time series survey data be included in tables and the young of the year be in geometric mean.

ASMFC Weakfish Technical Committee Meeting Conference Call Summary

February 1, 2002 – 10:00 AM

Participants:

Desmond Kahn, DE
Vic Crecco, CT
Louis Daniel, NC
John McClain, NJ
Najih Lazar, RI
Douglas Vaughan, NMFS
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Updated Stock Assessment:

D Kahn opened up the call by saying he had completed a VPA run and sent it out to the Committee earlier in the week which has the NMFS Fall survey and updated New England information. That morning he had completed the run with the Seamap information and would send that out after the meeting. The TC reviewed the VPA output that had a terminal F of 0.21 and continued the trend of decreasing F and increasing stock size.

Overall the TC felt the 2000 updated assessment showed positive signs. The TC noted decreasing F and increasing stock size. They felt there were increasing trends in the various stock indices. They indicated that F had been reduced significantly since the 1980's. The TC believes that the stock is in good shape but is still recovering.

The TC reviewed the retrospective analysis. They discussed a graph J.

Uphoff had prepared outlining the retrospective bias. They did not see convergence until 1992 or 1993. They indicated that F is being underestimated. However, even if the F is doubled it is still below the target in Amendment 3 of 0.5 and perhaps closer to 0.3.

D. Kahn indicated he was going to correct one problem that had been identified with the input data and include more Seamap information and send out the revised VPA run to the Committee later in the day. The TC did not feel that these changes would drastically alter the output and was comfortable reviewing this material via email and sending back any comments to D. Kahn.