



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee Conference Call Summary

July 9, 2012

Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee Members: Jeff Brust, Joe Smith, Amy Schueller, Trish Murphy, Joey Ballenger, Behzad Mahmoudi, Alexei Sharov, Micah Dean, Kurt Gottschall, Rob Latour, Derek Orner, Jay McNamee, Erik Williams, Matt Cieri

ASMFC Staff: Genny Nessler, Mike Waine

Audience: Mike Prager, Ron Lukens, Joe Grist, Shaun Gehan, Dick Brame, Theresa L, Allison F, Tom Rudolph, Louis Daniel, Bill Goldsborough, Ken Hinman

Stock Assessment Update Report

- Jeff – [reviews changes to the update document – see Mike W for those changes]

ISSUE #1 - Benchmarks

- Alexei – [regarding the sentence from Section 10: "...the TC has not had the opportunity to evaluate whether selected reference points achieve a specific management goal..."] - believes we did evaluate the benchmarks, and that there is a specific management goal
- Behzad – thought Rob summarized the development of the benchmarks well at the last meeting
- Rob – tend to agree with Alexei...we did provide an analysis based on projections, which constitutes an evaluation of the benchmarks
- Matt – unfortunately, based on the results of this update, we don't have confidence in the assessment model that was used to generate those benchmarks
- Alexei – we could drop this sentence from the document...it will not impact the board's decision
- Amy – suggest changing the text to "fully evaluate"
- Behzad – [to Alexei] do you we feel we have fully evaluated the reference points?
- Alexei – yes, we provided a range of %MSP options and explained what these represented
- Louis Daniel – from a management board perspective, I'm comfortable with the $F_{15\%} + F_{30\%}$ reference points that were selected. It is understood that these are an interim step towards more ecosystem based reference points. At this point, we don't know what the "best" benchmarks should be.
- Jeff – [to Erik] since you initiated the language in this statement... any thoughts after hearing the Board perspective?
- Erik – reference points should have a science-based population dynamics goal. The board's current goal is to simply increase abundance. If population dynamics are modeled differently in future assessments (i.e. dome-shaped selectivity)...the $F_{15\%}$ benchmark may not be very meaningful
- Alexei – but the same would be true for any MSY-based reference points

- Erik – disagree, if the reference points are connected to a population dynamics-based goal, they would be robust to changes in model structure
- Micah - what about removing the part about the TC evaluating the reference points. Suggest modifying the text to “...TC wants to point out that selected reference points were not designed to achieve a specific management goal...”
- Jeff – is this acceptable?
- Alexei – feels that there *were* clear management goals
- Erik – let’s move on

ISSUE #2 – Utility of the Model for Management Advice

- TC – ok with changes

ISSUE #3 – Utility of Projections

- Alexei – believes the projections are not biased after ~3 years. They are more useful than the proposed *ad hoc* methods to set harvest limits
- Jeff – did you not agree at the last meeting that the projections should not be used to set TACs?
- Alexei – believes they could be used, but not in the traditional way of setting TACs
- Rob – the TC’s reservations with projections were based on the lack of confidence in the assessment model. The population response you see in the projections is a function of the assumptions we’ve made (on stock-recruitment relationship, selectivity, etc)....the projections are essentially a deterministic outcome of these choices.
- Jeff – should anything be added to this section?
- Rob - no
- Alexei – still believes the projections are insensitive to the recruitment assumption, but let’s move on

ISSUE #4 – Aerial Survey

- Alexei – no changes, but an aerial survey will likely not be forthcoming in the near future. We should be prepared to investigate an alternative way to address the lack of an adult index.

OTHER ISSUES (previously identified by Alexei)

- Jeff – [goes through Alexei’s comments...see Mike W for those edits]

Response to Board Tasks

- Jeff – [goes through letter from the TC in response to Board’s tasks]
- Jeff – [to Louis] have you had a chance to read this document?
- Louis – no, but the Board understands that the TC believes overfishing is occurring, yet it is unclear to what extent. We were looking for auxiliary information to help decide whether to move to some modest cut in harvest early and hold it till the outcome of an expedited

benchmark, which the board will likely push for. Given that the outcome of this update casts a “wide dark shadow” over the previous benchmark...can we glean a stock status from the previous benchmark’s results?

- Matt – we are fairly sure that overfishing is occurring
- Louis – so are we saying that overfishing is *likely* occurring?
- Alexei - yes
- Rob – in the federal system, when an update fails, we go back to the previous peer-reviewed and accepted assessment, which would be the 2009 benchmark.
- Alexei – the reasons we are not confident with the current assessment are 100% applicable to the previous assessment
- Rob – disagree, the additional 3 years of input data are more in opposition than previous years’ data
- Mike – we need to focus on the current update, not dwell on the previous benchmark
- Louis – so, which is a better approach: rely on the last assessment or follow *ad hoc* measures?
- Jeff – let’s wait for Matt’s review of *ad hoc* measures
- Alexei - [regarding task 3a] - wants to add in something about the JAI, and that some regional JAI’s are more consistent with the age structure data
- TC – [has similar discussion as in previous meetings about whether it’s useful to include state-specific JAIs]
- Alexei – can’t believe there is such a hesitancy to provide recruitment input data
- Louis – whether it’s correct or not, that is the perception of the board...that we’ve been studying this stock for years, and now there is a hesitancy to say much of anything about the stock
- Erik – to be fair, we have really only collected fishery catch-at-age data over the history of this stock. We don’t have any reliable coastwide indices. So, we really don’t have all that much information on this stock
- Jeff – [regarding statements about stock status and reference points] - $SSB_{med,t}$ means threshold & SSB_{med} means target?
- Amy – yes
- Jeff – that needs to be checked throughout the document, I may have switched them in a few places

Alternatives to Projections for Setting Quotas

- Matt – [gives presentation of examples from other fisheries]
- Alexei – so are we more comfortable with this *ad hoc* approach or using the projections from the previous benchmark?
- Matt – this approach is what has been used in similar situations throughout the country
- Erik – the difference with this situation is that we stand a good chance of producing a better assessment with the next benchmark. In many cases, there is little hope of achieving a better stock assessment in the short term.

- Louis – according to scuttlebutt (blogs, etc), there is a sense we've got to do *something*...given that biomass is at an all-time low and the age structure is truncated. Does the TC at least agree with these statements about the stock?
- Erik – the problem is that we can't agree with those statements...the low biomass could be explained by the retrospective pattern, and the contracted age structure could be explained by a dome-shaped selectivity.
- Louis – given that we wouldn't have a new benchmark for 3 years, what does the TC recommend as the most appropriate course?
- Jeff – the Board has requested options...does the TC feel that what Matt has presented is useful?
- Joe S - [regarding the precautionary multiplier] - suggests providing more options between 0.75 and 1.00
- Rob – endorses this as a valid concept. There are multiple management objectives that are being discussed, which contributes to the confusion about how to proceed. If we are heading down the road of managing for ecosystem services and we want to get from $F_{8\%}$ to $F_{15\%}$, then some reduction in landings is warranted
- Matt – most SSCs around the country do this in increments of 25%...but there is no reason why you can't choose other values
- Behzad – [to Louis] - do you need a more formal assessment of these concepts?
- Louis – the way it is presented is good, but more options would be helpful
- Jeff – propose we put this table [of precautionary multipliers] from Matt's presentation forward, with more options (0.8, 0.9) and still recommend for an expedited benchmark assessment
- Matt – [to Louis] - do you need a preferred option from us?
- Louis – no, and It doesn't appear you'd be able to come to consensus anyway
- Matt – can we decide to suggest a 3 or 5-yr average?
- Jeff – first, can we add a caveat that says the closer you get to 1.0, the higher the probability that overfishing will continue?
- Louis – it would be nice to know what the projections from the 2009 benchmark model suggest would be required to end overfishing
- Matt – don't think you should use the projections from the 2009 model. You'd be ignoring all the data that has occurred in the past 3 years
- Mike – the PDT's plan was to include the projections from this update as a potential option to set the quota, as well as Matt's table of ad hoc options. Are you suggesting that we also include the projections that have already been done from the 2009 model?
- Jeff – yes. That work has already been done & previously presented to the board
- Mike – [to Matt] - regarding the *ad hoc* approach, since the councils are required to set a quota...how often do they often re-evaluate this precautionary multiplier?
- Matt – it's usually based on the specifications cycle...for Atlantic herring, it's a ~3 yr cycle
- Jeff- does the group agree to add a couple points to Matt's table and include some 09 model projections?
- TC – agreed

Mismatch between F and SSB reference points

- Jeff – [goes through document describing the issue]
- Jeff – anyone have issues with this?
- TC – no comments...document accepted as is

Minutes from 6/25 Meeting in Raleigh, NC

- Jeff – any edits to minutes from last meeting?
- TC – no comments...draft minutes accepted as is

Public Comment

- Ken H – very pleased that a good range of options will be presented to the board, including the *ad hoc* precedents, and the 2009 projections. Thinks that the reference point mismatch needs to be addressed... happy to see that the TC is recommending that we move to a SSB_{15/30%}, which would put us in an overfished status. Good work so far.
- Mike P – heartening to see the SAS and TC go through so much protracted, sincere & studied debate...pushing for an expedited benchmark is the best option
- Ron L – concerned with the assumption that overfishing is “likely” occurring. We really don’t know which direction the population is going. There are good reasons why there are more fish available (artificially low landings in prior years resulting from plant caps, a recent increase in landings, selectivity issues). Since 2008 was one of those years where the landings were truncated (capped by plant)...it completely makes sense that the 2009 benchmark is unreliable for making projections. Agree with statements made about the impacts that overly precautionary cuts would have on the industry
- Tom R – appreciate Matt’s review of examples of *ad hoc* management in data poor situations. The background material as to where *ad hoc* multipliers came from is really important to include.
- Tom R - [To Matt] - is there a way to assign a probability of success to the different multipliers?
- Matt - No
- Tom R - Therefore, it would be helpful to have the 2009 projections, which do assign probabilities of success for comparison. A wide range of options would also be useful...perhaps go with the list of multipliers that has been used by SSCs in the past (0.25, 0.5, 0.75, 0.85, 1.0).