



## **MSB Monitoring Committee Meeting Summary - *Illex***

**March 18, 2022**

*Webinar*

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Monitoring Committee met on March 18, 2022 at 1:30 pm. The purposes of this meeting were to develop recommendations regarding 2022 *Illex* Specifications and Mackerel Rebuilding. Given the different topics, two summaries were created – this summary is for *Illex*.

**Monitoring Committee Attendees: Jason Didden, Carly Bari, Lisa Hendrickson, Kiersten Curti, Daniel Hocking, and Julia Beaty.**

**Other Attendees: Greg DiDomenico, Aly Pitts, Meghan Lapp, Pam Lyons Gromen, Katie Almeida, Sonny Gwin, Zachary Greenberg, Kelly Whitmore, Purcie Bennett-Nickerson, Dan Farnham, Melanie Griffin, Megan Ware, and Will Poston.**

The MSB Monitoring Committee discussed 2022 *Illex* Specifications in light of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) increasing the 2022 *Illex* Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) from 33,000 metric tons (MT) to 40,000 MT. The Monitoring Committee agreed that maintaining the current 4.61% deduction for expected discards seemed appropriate (the average of the 2017-2019 discard rates; range was 3.66%-5.51%). This would yield a commercial quota of 38,156 MT (i.e. for 2022 *Illex* specifications, ABC = 40,000 MT, IOY = DAH = DAP = 38,156 MT).

The Monitoring Committee discussed two options for the closure threshold: either staying with a 94% of quota closure threshold, which would increase the closure buffer to 2,289.4 MT or maintaining the same buffer size as 2021: 1,889 MT. Staff noted that the full quota was not harvested in 2020 or 2021, but there were overages in 2018 and 2019. Discussion noted that improved projection approaches and reporting have both been in place since July 2021 but that it would take a number of years to know if a 94% closure threshold will consistently under-achieve the quota.

With the improved projections (accounting for reporting lag) and improved reporting (48-hour dealer reporting after July 15), a 1,889 MT buffer might be sufficient, but it will be more likely to result in a quota overage than the current 94% closure threshold. If we had a 1,889 MT buffer, and went 3,693 MT above the buffer (worst case in last 5 years), that could lead to a 4.5% ABC overage in 2022 if our discard set-aside is precise.

Remaining catch reporting and closure implementation lags in this high volume fishery, coupled with uncertainty/variability regarding annual productivity, are likely to cause *Illex* to be continue to be difficult to monitor. Daily landings can be as high as 998 MT per day based on recent fishery performance. Given the race to fish before the quota closes, an ABC overage could occur with the higher 94% closure threshold if circumstances were similar to 2019. Given the charge to

the Monitoring Committee to make recommendations that ensure specifications are not exceeded, the Monitoring Committee found no strong rationale to recommend a change from the current 94% closure threshold until more years' closure performance with the recently improved projecting and reporting circumstances can be evaluated.

Public comment summary:

-Industry is committed to adhere to the 48-hour reporting requirements in order to just access 100% of the quota, which supports jobs and economic activity.

-A request was made for similar treatment as black sea bass, in terms of concern (or rather lack thereof) about potential overages in a productive stock - plus *Illex* appears lightly exploited.

-There's a risk of going over or under but less than the full quota has been caught the last two years.

-Closure performance in recent years has been better than other fisheries, and the strengths of the current monitoring need to be understood as well as any potential monitoring challenges (e.g. the successful closures the last two years). The concerns voiced by the Monitoring Committee as justifying setting aside additional quota for a closure buffer are unnecessary.