



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 9, 2022
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: *Illex* ABC – Staff Recommendation

As part of the specification process for *Illex* squid, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council will review the most recent information available to determine whether modifications of the 2022 *Illex* Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and other/or specifications are warranted. 2023 specifications will be considered later in the year after a management track assessment is completed. A research track assessment for *Illex* was being reviewed at the same time this memo was created, but the research track assessment process is not generally designed to immediately inform management.

The *Illex* squid fishery is currently under single-year specifications for 2022, and the current ABC is 33,000 metric tons (MT). The current ABC was set in 2021 after review and SSC endorsement of a 10% ABC increase. Analyses conducted by Dr. Paul Rago under contract with the Council supported that 10% increase. Dr. Rago recently updated those analyses with a wider range of potential ABC modifications for this meeting, which the SSC was consulted about, as requested (12/14/2021 email).

2021 *Illex* landings totaled approximately 30,714 MT, a record high for this fishery in U.S. waters. The 2021 fishery closed August 30, 2021, at a time of high weekly landings. 2021 *Illex* landings ran about 2-3 weeks ahead of 2020 landings, and the increased ABC/quota allowed the 2021 fishery to close on nearly the same date as the 2020 fishery (the 2020 fishery was similar to the 2019 fishery). The Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel reported that 2021 market conditions appeared stable relative to 2020.

The Council's risk policy per the current regulations states:

(d) Stock without an OFL or OFL proxy.

(1) If an OFL cannot be determined from the stock assessment, or if a proxy is not provided by the SSC during the ABC recommendation process, ABC levels may not be increased until such time that an OFL has been identified.

(2) The SSC may deviate from paragraph (d)(1) of this section, provided that the following two criteria are met: Biomass-based reference points indicate that the stock is greater than BMSY and stock biomass is stable or increasing, or if biomass based reference points are not available, best available science indicates that stock biomass is stable or increasing; and the SSC provides a determination that, based on best available science, the recommended increase to the ABC is not expected to result in overfishing. Any such deviation must include a description of why the increase is warranted, description of the methods used to derive the alternative ABC, and a certification that the ABC is not likely to result in overfishing on the stock.

Dr. Rago's analysis suggests that if a 50% escapement target is appropriate and the stock is at or above Bmsy, then quotas up to 60,000 MT would be consistent with the Council's risk policy, while if the stock is at 50% of Bmsy, then the maximum quota consistent with the Council's risk policy is 47,000 MT. Dr. Rago's analysis also found that if a $F=2/3 M$ threshold is appropriate and the stock is at 50% of Bmsy, then the maximum quota would be 40,000 MT to be consistent with the Council's risk policy.

Given these findings and the current uncertainty (as of 3/9/2022) about the outcome of the *Illex* research track assessment, staff recommends an additional 10% ABC increase to 36,300 MT for 2022 as unlikely to result in overfishing of the stock, and as an incremental approach that reduces the chance of inducing large changes in fishing mortality.