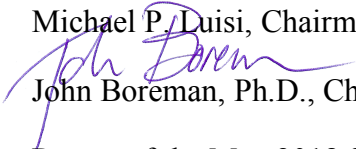




## Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | G. Warren Elliott, Vice Chairman  
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

# MEMORANDUM

**Date:** 18 May 2018  
**To:** Michael P. Luisi, Chairman, MAFMC  
**From:**  John Boreman, Ph.D., Chair, MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee  
**Subject:** Report of the May 2018 SSC Meeting

The SSC met in Baltimore on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2018. The main objectives of the meeting were to develop new ABC specifications for Atlantic Mackerel in light of the results of the recent SAW/SARC benchmark assessment and affirm (or develop new) ABC specifications for Longfin Squid, *Illex* squid, Butterfish, Surfclam, and Ocean Quahog based on data updates (Attachment 1). Other topics discussed at the meeting included a presentation and discussion of the MRIP transition to new sampling designs for the catch and effort surveys and a report from the SSC panel assigned to review the proposed re-design of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Survey.

A total of 14 SSC members were in attendance each day (Attachment 2), which constituted quorums. Also attending were MAFMC staff, staff from the NEFSC and NMFS Headquarters, and representatives from VIMS, Pew, SeaFreeze, Lund's Fisheries, Sea Watch International, Wallace and Associates, and the Garden State Seafood Association. Documents referenced in the report and associated meeting presentations can be accessed via the SSC's meeting website (<http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2018/may-8-9>).

## MRIP Fishing Effort Survey Update

Kelly Denit and John Foster (NMFS Headquarters) briefed the SSC on the status of implementing the new fishing effort survey under the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), as well as progress in calibrating MRIP data collected on catch and effort using new survey designs with the time series of data from previous years (1981-2017). The main part of the discussion and questions from the SSC centered around factors influencing or driving the large increase in effort estimates between the old coastal household telephone survey and the new fishing effort (mail-in) survey. The "gate keeper" effect caused by the telephone survey (person who answered the phone) biased how that survey got to anglers in a household; the mail-in survey allows for a more complete survey coverage and has a much higher response rate. Discussion also addressed how the new intercept and mail-in surveys will lead to improvements in the precision of the catch estimates, and how the new survey weights the sampling of households with licensed fishermen versus the general population of households in coastal states.

The SSC was re-assured that the calibrated estimates linking the data currently being collected under the new MRIP catch and effort surveys with the data series dating back to 1981 will be released on July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

## Atlantic Mackerel

Kiersten Curti (Northeast Fisheries Science Center) presented the most recent benchmark assessment for Atlantic Mackerel, which was approved by the SARC (SARC 64), followed by a summary by Jason Didden (MAFMC staff) of the fishery performance report and staff recommendations. John Boreman, who chaired the SARC review of the benchmark assessment, summarized the SARC panel findings. Besides accepting the benchmark assessment, the SARC panel concluded that the stock is currently overfished (spawning stock biomass is below one-half of  $SSB_{MSY}$ ) and experiencing overfishing (the fishing mortality rate is above the  $F_{MSY}$  threshold). Dr. Curti provided stock biomass projections for several management scenarios, including a five- or seven-year stock rebuilding strategy, based on the biological reference points in the benchmark assessment.

Responses by the SSC to the terms of reference provided by the Council (*in italics*) are as follows:

*For Atlantic Mackerel, the SSC will provide a written report that identifies the following for fishing years 2019-2021:*

*1) The level of uncertainty that the SSC deems most appropriate for the information content of the most recent stock assessment, based on criteria listed in the Omnibus Amendment.*

The SSC acknowledges the tremendous progress made for Atlantic Mackerel, a stock that previously required *ad hoc* ABC specifications. The SSC accepted the overfishing limit (OFL) estimate for 2019 provided in the assessment and determined the level of uncertainty of OFL in the assessment requires an SSC-specified coefficient of variation (CV).

*2) For 3A below, if possible, the level of catch (in weight) associated with the overfishing limits (OFLs) based on the maximum fishing mortality rate threshold or, if appropriate, an OFL proxy.*

New biological reference points were proposed in the benchmark assessment, which were reviewed and accepted by SARC 64. Unable to parameterize a stock recruitment relationship, SAW 64 recommended  $F_{40\%}$  be used as a proxy for  $F_{MSY}$  and total spawning stock biomass at  $F_{40\%}$  ( $SSB_{40\%}$ ) be used as the proxy for the stock biomass reference point. The  $F_{40\%}$  value produced an  $F_{MSY}$  proxy of 0.26.

Updated projections produce an OFL of **31,764 MT** for 2019 from the  $F_{MSY}$  proxy of 0.26 applied to the projected 2019 biomass and assuming preliminary 2017 catch and expected 2018 catch. OFL will change for 2020 and 2021, based on the expected catch scenario.

*3) Provide the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the stock under the following Council risk policy alternatives for Atlantic Mackerel:*

*A. Consistent with the current risk policy typically used by the SSC, the level of catch (in weight) and the probability of overfishing associated with the ABC for the stock, the number of fishing years for which the ABC specification applies and, if possible, interim metrics that can be examined to determine if multi-year specifications need reconsideration prior to their expiration.*

Trends in the egg production ratio of northern to southern contingents suggests varying composition over time. Such differences may be attributable to varying recruitment or exploitation between contingents. Analyses of ecosystem factors suggest potential climatic influences on distribution patterns and biological production. High levels of recruitment before 1975 were not incorporated into the final model due to uncertainty about re-establishing similar levels of recruitment under current conditions. This reduces the overall estimates of  $B_{MSY}$  and associated yields.

Catches varied over nearly two orders of magnitude but have oscillated downward from the late 1960s to present. Fishing mortality has varied over an order of magnitude over the same period, but age-specific selectivity obscures the force of mortality on the population when the age composition is truncated. The recovery of the population in response to increases in recruitment and relaxation of fishing mortality suggests that estimates are reasonably accurate. Management strategy evaluations were not conducted to test the robustness of model performance under these levels of fishing mortality.

In developing its OFL CV determination, the SSC considered the following areas and make the observations noted.

**Data Considerations:** The development of a stock-wide egg production index for Atlantic mackerel constituted a major advance for this assessment. The pattern in the time series of the NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey was substantially different to the pattern evident in the stock-wide egg production index, in the catch time series, and in the abundance time series estimated in the assessment model. Tracking of cohorts in the trawl survey and total catch-at-age is detectable for strong cohorts, but occasionally inconsistent for weaker cohorts. Missing catch in Canadian fisheries averages about 5000 mt per year. Recreational catches and discards were generally a minor proportion of total removals

**Model considerations:** Three alternative age-based models were considered (ASAP, SAM, CCAM). All three models considered Atlantic Mackerel as a single unit stock and did not include any contingent dynamics known to be present empirically. The ASAP model was the preferred model for management. Over 150 model configurations of the ASAP model were evaluated in a logical progression for model identification and sensitivity.

**Retrospective adjustment:** No important retrospective patterns were apparent in the ASAP results.

**Comparison with empirical scale:** Even though an independent, empirical index of population scale is lacking (because all data are used in the assessment), the ASAP model appears to be robust with respect to both trend and scale.

**Trend in recruitment:** There was no trend in recruitment evident in the three assessment models evaluated (ASAP, SAM and CCAM). However, there were differences among the models with respect to terminal year estimates of recruitment, which were particularly important given the incomplete sampling of the 2015 year class. The ASAP model estimates of terminal recruitment were about two to three times higher than the SAM and CCAM estimates and also less precise. These discrepancies in the terminal year abundance have important implications for biomass projections. This source of model uncertainty may have substantial consequences for the reliability of the short-term projections based on the ASAP model.

**Assessment accuracy under different fishing pressures:** Although the overall trend in abundance has been a downward trend, and the overall trend in fishing pressure has been generally upwards, the SSC was convinced that there was sufficient interannual contrast in the pattern of stock biomass and fishing mortality to be informative.

**Simulations/ MSE:** No MSE was conducted.

**Ecosystem factors accounted:** The assessment assumed a constant  $M = 0.2$  for all ages and across time. However, the role of Atlantic Mackerel as an important forage species suggest this assumption introduces uncertainty into short-term population projections.

Collectively, the attributes of the Atlantic Mackerel assessment suggest a high degree of confidence in the results, but the SSC expressed particular concern about the reliance of the OFL on a moderately high and uncertain terminal year recruitment estimate in the ASAP model; comparably high estimates were not obtained in the SAM or CCAM models. Furthermore, lack of confirmation of the strength of the 2015 year class in commercial landings or bottom trawl surveys suggests that a CV of 100% is appropriate for estimation of ABC.

Based on the assumption that the OFL CV is 100% with a lognormal distribution, and a typical life history, the ABC recommendations for 2019-2021 are as follows:

2019: **19,025 mt**,  $P^* = 0.269$

2020: **26,183 mt**,  $P^* = 0.333$

2021: **33,001 mt**,  $P^* = 0.386$

Interim metrics:

- Age structure in the fishery, as well as the survey
- Continued evidence of the influence of the 2015 year class (and other strong year classes)
- Egg index

- Fishery performance reports (especially factors influencing catch)

*B. Consistent with the Council's proposed risk policy change for using a 5-year Atlantic Mackerel rebuilding timeline (see staff memo), the level of catch (in weight) for the stock associated with a 5-year rebuilding fishing mortality rate, the number of fishing years for which the ABC applies and, if possible, interim metrics that can be examined to determine if multi-year specifications need reconsideration prior to their expiration.*

[The SSC notes that both options B and C (Options 2 and 3 in the staff memo) suggest a more aggressive harvest policy than the Council would use under the P\* approach for both an overfished stock and for a stock at or above its target biomass. Both options result in a smaller difference between the ABC and OFL than the SSC would recommend under the standard risk policy for a stock above its target biomass.]

ABCs for 2019-2021 based on a 5-year rebuilding F ( $F = 0.237$ ):

2019: **29,184 mt**

2020: **32,480 mt**

2021: **35,195 mt**

Interim metrics:

- Age structure in the fishery, as well as the survey
- Continued evidence of the influence of the 2015 year class (and other strong year classes)
- Egg index
- Fishery performance reports (especially factors influencing catch)

*C. Consistent with the Council's proposed risk policy change for using a 7-year Atlantic Mackerel rebuilding timeline (see staff memo), the level of catch (in weight) for the stock associated with a 7-year rebuilding fishing mortality rate, the number of fishing years for which the ABC applies and, if possible, interim metrics that can be examined to determine if multi-year specifications need reconsideration prior to their expiration.*

ABCs for 2019-2021 based on a 7-year rebuilding F ( $F = 0.252$ ):

2019: **30,868 mt**

2020: **34,016 mt**

2021: **36,551 mt**

Interim metrics:

- Age structure in the fishery, as well as the survey

- Continued evidence of the influence of the 2015 year class (and other strong year classes)
- Egg index
- Fishery performance reports (especially factors influencing catch)

*4) The most significant sources of scientific uncertainty associated with determination of OFL and ABC.*

- The estimated size of the most recent year class in the assessment (substantially higher than most recent recruitments) drives assumptions about rebuilding times, OFLs, and ABCs;
- Conversion of egg survey results to the spawning stock biomass estimate;
- The assessment is sensitive to the distribution of Atlantic Mackerel, which has been changing and may continue to change;
- Trawl survey representation of abundance and age structure;
- The assumption of fixed natural mortality rate and data gaps associated with major predators of mackerel; and
- Missing catch information from bait and recreational fisheries in Canada.

*5) Ecosystem considerations accounted for in the stock assessment, particularly with regard to Atlantic Mackerel's role as forage for predators in the Mid-Atlantic, and any additional ecosystem considerations that the SSC took into account in selecting the ABC, including the basis for those additional considerations.*

An ecosystem criterion was applied in determination of OFL CV (but was not the primary consideration). The SSC did not include specific ecosystem considerations in the ABC.

Working papers prepared for the assessment addressed habitat changes, changing availability, and changes to the fishery. The information contained in the working papers provided useful background for the assessment and contributed to the model identification process, as well as the decision on which portion of the recruitment time series to use.

The SAW 64 did not explicitly account for predation mortality in the assessment. Ancillary analysis contained as a working document and considered by the working group indicated low incidence in the diets of fishes sampled within the NEFSC bottom trawl survey. Predation by highly migratory species, sharks, marine mammals, and birds remains unknown.

*6) Prioritized research or monitoring recommendations that would reduce the scientific uncertainty in the ABC recommendation and/or improve the assessment level.*

The SSC supports all of the recommendations from SAW/SARC 64. In particular, the SSC recommends continuing the U.S. component of the Atlantic Mackerel egg survey so that the range-wide egg index can be updated and used in future assessments. This recommendation requires a continuation of the work done to identify and quantify Atlantic Mackerel eggs collected in the survey. Continuing collaboration with both the fishing industry and Canadian scientists to maintain the assessment is also recommended by the SSC.

In addition, the SSC recommends:

- Ensuring all components of the fishery (e.g., emerging jig fishery) are sampled biologically;
- Investigating acoustic survey methods for Atlantic Mackerel;
- Investigating methods for using the egg survey as an absolute estimate of spawning stock biomass; and
- Investigating eDNA methods for Atlantic Mackerel.

7) *The materials considered in reaching its recommendations.*

- SAW 64: Summary Report / Assessment Report / Panelist Reports
- Atlantic Mackerel Data Update for 2019 Specifications
- Mackerel Rebuilding Memo for Council
- Mackerel Projections (P\*) (Excel file)
- Mackerel Projections (rebuilding) (Excel file)
- 2018 Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish AP Fishery Information Document
- 2018 Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish AP Fishery Performance Report
- MSB Staff Memo

All documents listed above are available on the SSC meeting website:  
<http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2018/may-8-9>

8) *A certification that the recommendations provided by the SSC represent the best scientific information available.*

To the best of the SSC's knowledge, these recommendations are based on the best available scientific information.

## ***Illex* Squid, Longfin Squid, and Butterfish**

Jason Didden (MAFMC staff) presented the data updates prepared for *Illex* squid, Longfin Squid, and Butterfish prepared by the NEFSC, along with the respective fishery performance reports prepared by the advisory panel. The 2017 fall NEFSC survey indices for the three species were not computed because a substantial proportion of habitat was not sampled (vessel mechanical problems). Landings of *Illex* squid increased in 2016, and in 2017 reached the third highest level (22,516 mt) since the 1987 origin of the US fishery, and the fishery was closed in September 2017 when 95% of the annual quota was met. The 2017 preliminary landings statistics for Longfin Squid, while incomplete, were down from 2016 by about half. Landings of Butterfish in 2017 were 3,666 mt, the highest since the resumption of the directed fishery; estimates of fishery discards for 2017 were not available in time for the SSC meeting. Based on this information, as well as the information contained in the fishery performance reports, the SSC concluded that no adjustments to the standing ABC recommendations for *Illex* squid, Longfin Squid, and Butterfish were necessary for the 2019 fishing year.

## **Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs**

Dan Hennen (NEFSC) presented survey and fishery updates for Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog, and Jessica Coakley (MAFMC staff) summarized the fishery performance reports and MAFMC staff recommendations. Based on the information presented, the SSC concluded that no changes to the standing ABC recommendations for the 2019 fishing year were necessary for either species.

Following his update of the survey and fishery catch information for Surfclam, Dan Hennen presented a method he developed for calculating a proxy for the Surfclam OFL. Several SSC members expressed interest in working with Dan to refine the method so it can be considered for use with a P\* approach to estimating an ABC. Pending approval from the Council and NEFSC, a joint SSC/NEFSC working group will be established for this project with delivery of the results at a future SSC meeting.

## **New Design for Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Survey**

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is proposing changes to the design of the NEFSC's Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Survey as developed by a working group (WG) of NEFSC and MAFMC staff, academic partners, and other interested parties. The goals of the proposed changes are to improve the precision and utility of survey data used in stock assessments and to use survey resources more efficiently. NEFSC requested the MAFMC to have its SSC review the proposed new survey design to ensure that it will assist the SSC in development of scientific advice and improve management of the clam resources by the Council.

In the March 2018 SSC meeting, Larry Jacobson and Dan Hennen (NEFSC) presented an in-depth description of the proposed survey changes, their basis, and the anticipated improvements in scientific information resulting from the new survey design. Subsequently, an SSC Review Panel, comprising Ed Houde (Chair), Olaf Jensen, Rob Latour, and Mike Wilberg, undertook a detailed review of the proposed changes, based on the following terms of reference jointly developed by the NEFSC and SSC:

- 1A. Will the alternative survey design options recommended in the NEFSC report substantially improve 1) survey data, 2) stock assessment model results, and 3) management advice for surfclams and ocean quahogs?
- 1B. Review the report's justifications, evaluations, and recommendations to conduct separate surveys for surfclams and ocean quahogs. Will the recommended design improve the Council's ability to assess and manage these resources?
2. Are recommended options for the redesign of the NEFSC clam survey appropriate based on 1) life history and biology of surfclams and ocean quahogs, 2) ongoing climate induced distributional shifts, and 3) fishery patterns? Do answers differ for surfclams and ocean quahogs?
3. Critique the report's recommendations for surfclams and ocean quahogs, with respect to proposed changes in survey scheduling and the reduction in survey spatial coverage.



4. Review and evaluate proposed stratifications in the sampling design recommended by the NEFSC WG. Are the recommended strata, primarily defined by depth and location, appropriate or would an alternative stratification plan, e.g., based on clam abundances, be preferable?
5. Will the proposed changes in the surfclam and ocean quahog survey compromise ability to utilize the lengthy historical time series of survey data in future assessments?
6. Will the recommended changes in survey design affect observation and estimation of biological characteristics, such as length-weight relationships and growth rates? What are the likely effects?

In this meeting, Ed Houde presented the following findings of the Review Panel:

- The WG's proposed design revises the current survey design, resulting in substantial reductions in area covered by the survey, and proposes separate surveys for Surfclam and Ocean Quahog in contrast to the current combined-species survey.
- The Review Panel, while in overall agreement with the WG's recommended new design, recognized that alternative design approaches could have been considered.
- The new design proposes a survey frequency similar to that currently conducted for Surfclam, which will increase precision of the surveys, improve estimates of abundance, and is likely to improve management advice for this species. Improvements for Ocean Quahog and utility for management are likely, but less certain because of reduced frequency of the proposed surveys for this species.
- Alternative approaches to survey designs were noted by the Review Panel and discussed relative to the design-based approaches proposed by the WG. The Review Panel recommended model-based spatial simulations be undertaken to support longer-term consideration and research on survey design for the clam species.
- The Review Panel also noted that the WG had not considered habitat and environmental variables (beyond location and depth) to optimize survey design. The WG argued that its recommended stratification largely avoids discontinuous strata, but the Review Panel noted that such stratification has merit under some circumstances.
- The Review Panel believes that multivariate techniques for survey optimization (i.e., finding a design that minimizes some combination of the variances for both species) are available that could have been tested to define an appropriate base case against which to compare a survey design in which each species is surveyed separately. Further research and in-depth consideration of alternative stratification schemes is recommended.
- The Review Panel believes there will be little loss of historical information if the new survey design is adopted. It also is unlikely that there will be a loss of biological data and information.
- It is noted that, if the new proposed survey design is adopted, a change in stock assessment schedules for Surfclam and Ocean Quahog will be necessary. Current assessments are conducted on a 3-4-year timetable. If the new design is adopted, assessment for Surfclam would be conducted every four years and that for Ocean Quahog every six years.
- The WG believes that a decadal reconsideration of survey design will be adequate for these species. This may be sufficient, although some evaluation is desirable. The Review Panel recommends that a new Term of Reference be added to the stock assessment protocol for these species that addresses the possible need for re-evaluation of survey designs during deliberations for each stock assessment.

In addition to its findings, the Review Panel provided ten short- and longer-term recommendations to the NEFSC WG for its consideration.

A main topic of SSC discussion of the Review Panel's report was the potential impact on the clam dredge survey (as well as the clam fisheries) of proposed wind farms and associated transmission cables that are contemplated for the Northeast US Continental Shelf, which could be extensive. SSC members also expressed concern about "edge effect" in the survey caused by a shift in distribution of Surfclam and Ocean Quahog induced by climate change. Dan Hennen responded that the overlap of sampling strata for Surfclam with those for Ocean Quahog would enable detection of such an effect, and the survey design could be adjusted accordingly.

The SSC endorsed the report from the Review Panel and agreed to adopt it as a product of the committee. The SSC also looks forward to seeing the formal response from the NEFSC to the report's findings and recommendations.

c: SSC Members, Warren Elliott, Chris Moore, Brandon Muffley, Jason Didden, Jessica Coakley, José Montañez, Kiersten Curti, Dan Hennen, Kelly Denit, John Foster, Jan Saunders

**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting**

8-9 May 2018  
Baltimore, MD

**Agenda**

**Tuesday, May 8, 2018**

10:00 MRIP FES update (K. Denit/J. Foster)

11:00 Atlantic Mackerel benchmark assessment; Council rebuilding framework (K. Curti/J. Didden)

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Develop Atlantic Mackerel ABC recommendations

- Current risk policy approach and rebuilding plan options

3:00 Illex, Longfin Squid, and Butterfish data and fishery updates; review of implemented 2019 ABCs (J. Didden)

5:00 Adjourn

**Wednesday, May 9, 2018**

8:30 Surfclam and Ocean Quahog data and fishery update; review of implemented 2019 ABCs (D. Hennen/J. Coakley)

11:00 NEFSC clam dredge survey SSC Working Group review (E. Houde)

12:30 Adjourn

MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee  
8-9 May 2018  
Baltimore, Maryland

Meeting Attendance

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
<i>SSC Members in Attendance:</i>	
John Boreman (SSC Chairman)	NC State University
Tom Miller (SSC Vice-Chairman)	University of Maryland – CBL
Mark Holliday	NMFS (Retired)
Sarah Gaichas	NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Ed Houde (5/9 only)	University of Maryland – CBL (retired)
Lee Anderson	University of Delaware (retired)
Mike Wilberg	University of Maryland - CBL
Brian Rothschild	UMass Dartmouth (retired)
Rob Latour	VIMS
Olaf Jensen	Rutgers
Dave Secor	University of Maryland - CBL
Paul Rago	NMFS (retired)
Yan Jiao	Virginia Tech
Cynthia Jones (5/8 only)	Old Dominion University
Wendy Gabriel	NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center
<i>Others in attendance:</i>	
Jessica Coakley	MAFMC staff
Jason Didden (5/8 only)	MAFMC staff
Brandon Muffley	MAFMC staff
José Montañez	MAFMC staff
Chris Moore (5/9 only)	MAFMC staff
Kiersten Curti (5/8 only)	NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Dan Hennen (5/9 only)	NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Greg DiDomenico (5/8 only)	Garden State Seafood Association
Jeff Kaelin (5/8 only)	Lund's Fisheries
Kelly Denit (5/8 only)	NMFS Headquarters
John Foster (5/8 only)	NMFS Headquarters
Jay Peterson (5/8 only)	NMFS Headquarters
John Manderson (5/8 only)	NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Doug Christel (5/8 only)	NMFS GARFO
Purcie Bennett-Nickerson (5/8 only)	Pew Charitable Trust
Guy Simmons (5/9 only)	SeaFreeze
Roger Mann (5/9 only)	VIMS, Council member
David Wallace (5/9 only)	Wallace and Associates
Tom Alspach (5/9 only)	Sea Watch International