



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

Date: September 2, 2022
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Jason Didden, staff
Subject: 2023 Spiny Dogfish Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)

Executive Summary

In 2018 spiny dogfish was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, and estimated to be at 67% of its biomass target. The 2022 data point for female spawners, which is the driver for spawning stock biomass in the last assessment, is the lowest in the time series.

The Spiny Dogfish Research Track Assessment Peer Review has been delayed until late 2022, so the current plan is to set 1-year (2023) specifications. A Management Track Assessment is expected in 2023.

The 2021 fishing year continued a declining landings trend. However, 2022 fishing year landings to date appear similar to 2021. This memo uses updated landings information from the new Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) which indicates higher (6%-13% annually) landings than previously estimated.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) will meet in October 2022 to review the recommendations of the AP, the SSC, the Monitoring Committee, and input from the public. The Council will then recommend catch and landings limits and other management measures for the 2023 fishing year. The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) will take similar action in December 2022.

Staff recommends a 2023 ABC of 8,284 MT (18.3 million pounds), which would likely result in a U.S. commercial quota of 4,785 MT (10.5 million pounds) after accounting for other sources of mortality.

Current Measures and Review of Prior SSC Recommendations

The last setting of spiny dogfish specifications occurred in 2020 for the 2021 and 2022 fishing years. The resulting 17,498 MT (38.6 million pounds) ABC and 13,408 MT (29.6-million pounds) quota was a result of the then current assessment and the Council's risk policy, which is designed to avoid overfishing and achieve optimum yield. Once the coastwide quota is caught, federal waters are closed for possession of spiny dogfish. If the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is exceeded, overages are deducted as soon as possible from the ACL for a subsequent fishing year. In 2021 the Councils (MAFMC and NEFMC) voted to increase the trip limit for spiny dogfish to 7,500 pounds, which was implemented for the 2022 fishing year.

Recent Catch and Landings

Recent landings peaked in 2012 and declined to about 5,175 MT (11.4 million pounds) in 2021. These updated landings numbers are outputs of the new CAMS database that accounts for “orphan VTRs” that don’t appear in traditional dealer landings totals. The Fishery Performance Report documents industry perspectives on why recent landings have been low relative to quotas, including market constraints and other fishing opportunities.

Stock Status and Biological Reference Points

In 2018 spiny dogfish was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, and at 67% of its biomass target. A research track assessment is underway. There are some preliminary indications that stock productivity may have been overestimated in previous assessments and the 2022 data point for female spawners, which is the driver for spawning stock biomass in the last assessment, is the lowest in the time series.

Staff Recommendation

Given the date of the last assessment and the uncertainty about the outcome of the current research track assessment, staff notes the Council’s risk policy amendment advises more precautionary ABCs as assessment uncertainty increases.

Staff observes that as the fishery re-established in 2006-2010, the survey biomass trend was relatively stable (Figure 1, 2022 Fishery Information Document). CAMS landings over this period averaged 4,785 MT (10.5 million pounds), about 7.5% less than 2021 landings of 5,175 MT (11.4 million pounds). Based on the current uncertainty with the ongoing assessment and declining trawl index trends, an ABC resulting in 4,785 MT of landings appears to be a reasonable recommendation at this time. After accounting for other sources of mortality, the associated ABC would be 8,284 MT (18.3 million pounds). Other sources of mortality include U.S. discards, recreational harvest, and Canadian landings.¹ If the upcoming assessment indicates the initial 2023 ABC is substantially too high or too low, an in-season action could be considered.

Staff concluded that this “reverse engineering” approach is more appropriate than starting with average total dead realized catch over 2006-2010. With discards and Canadian landings both lower recently, if one starts with the 2006-2010 total catches there would not likely be any constraint on U.S. landings in 2023 after the various deductions for quota determinations are made. Some precautionary constraint on landings appears warranted to staff at this time, which would be achieved by the recommended ABC.

¹ 2017-2019 data were examined due to discard availability for that time period. 2017-2019 U.S. dead discards averaged 3,368 MT (range 2,829-3,786 MT). 2017-2019 Canadian landings averaged 45 MT. 2017-2019 recreational harvest averaged 86 MT.