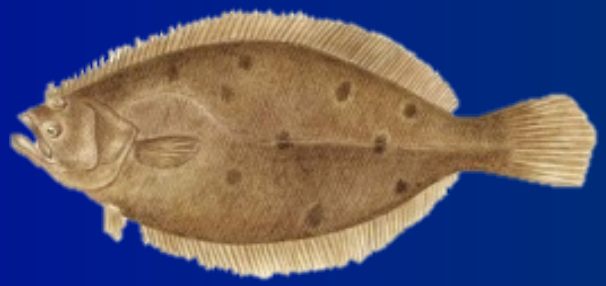
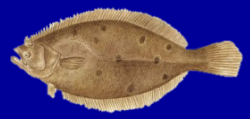
MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Summer Flounder 2020 Specifications Review



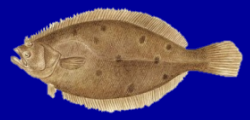
Council and Board
October 8, 2019
Durham, NC

Outline



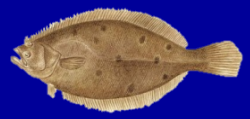
- 2019-2021 specifications recap
- Stock status & 2019 data update
- AP Fishery Performance Report
- SSC and Monitoring Committee recommendations for 2020
- Follow up on mesh size selectivity study
- 2020 recreational measures: Monitoring Committee thoughts and recent public comments

Council and Board Objectives



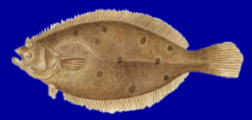
- Review 2020 catch and landings limits and commercial management measures and recommend changes if warranted

2019-2021 Specifications



- 2019 (revised) and 2020-2021 measures adopted in March 2019 based on November 2018 benchmark assessment results
  - 2019 limits revised effective May 17, 2019
  - Proposed rule for 2020-2021 published July 27, 2019; final rule will publish tomorrow
  - Next expected assessment update: 2021 to inform 2022-2023

2019-2021 Specifications

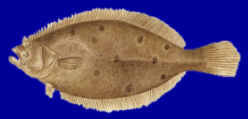


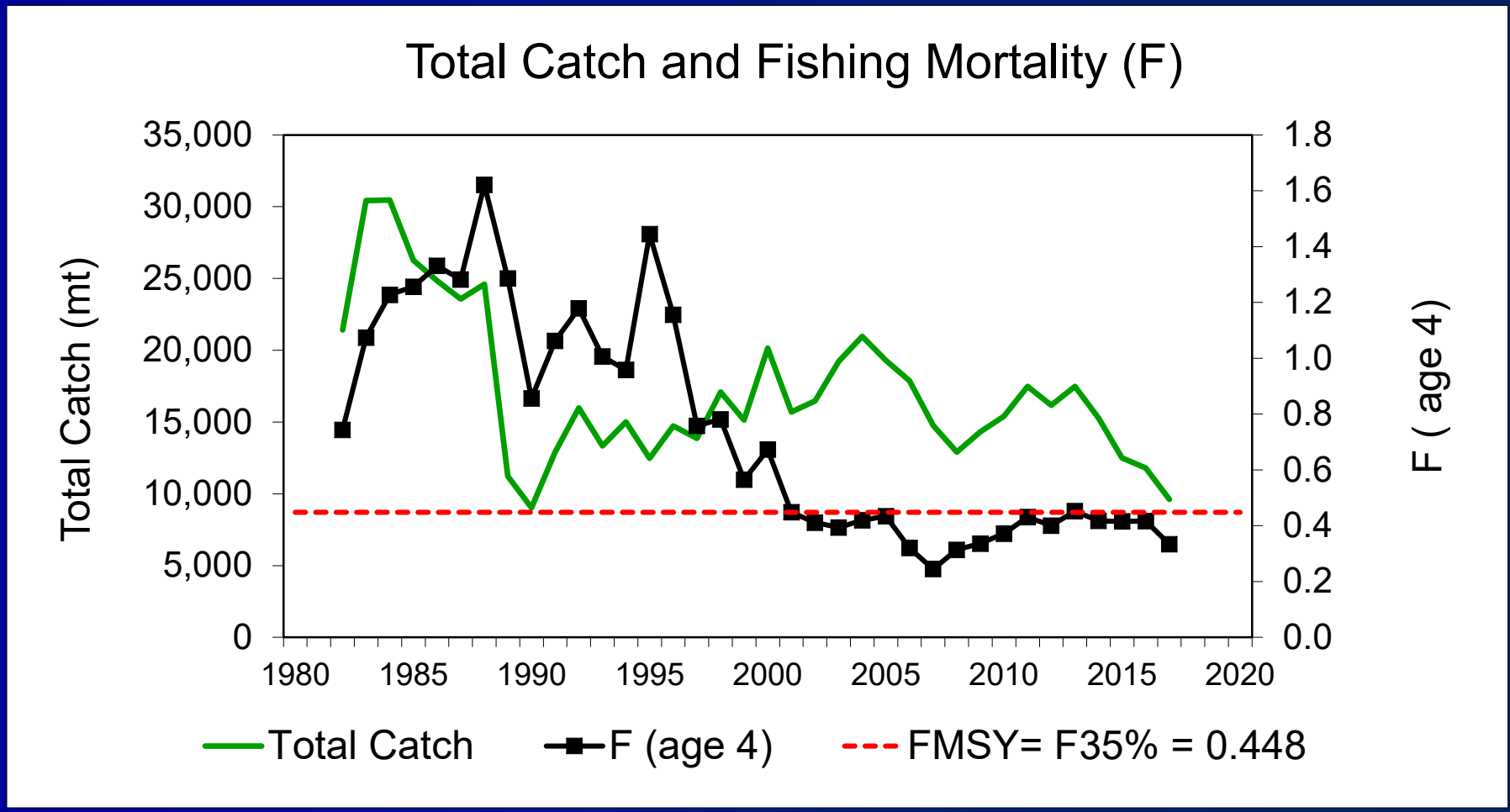
- Constant catch and landings limits set each year 2019-2021

	2019 (revised)-2021
ABC	25.03 mil lb
Commercial ACL = ACT	13.53 mil lb
Recreational ACL = ACT	11.51 mil lb
Commercial Quota	11.53 mil lb
Recreational Harvest Limit	7.69 mil lb

Landings limits are prior to any applicable overage deductions

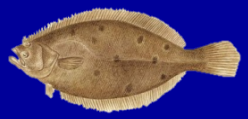
Stock Status: 2018 Assessment

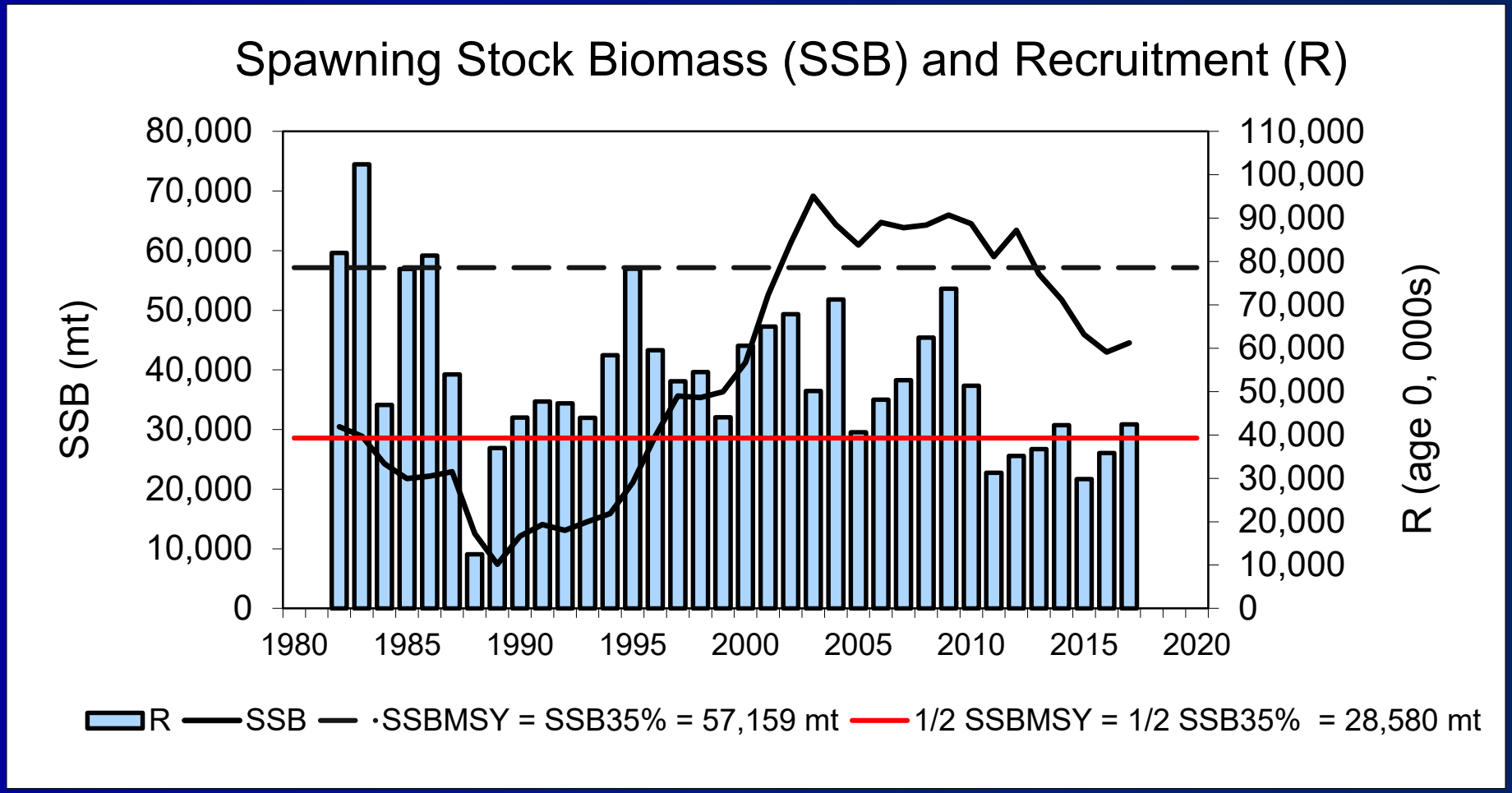




F in 2017 estimated at 25% below threshold (not overfishing)

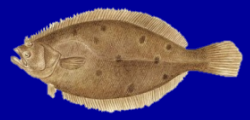
Stock Status: 2018 Assessment





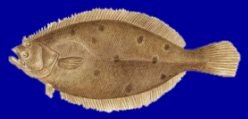
SSB in 2017 estimated at 78% of target (not overfished)

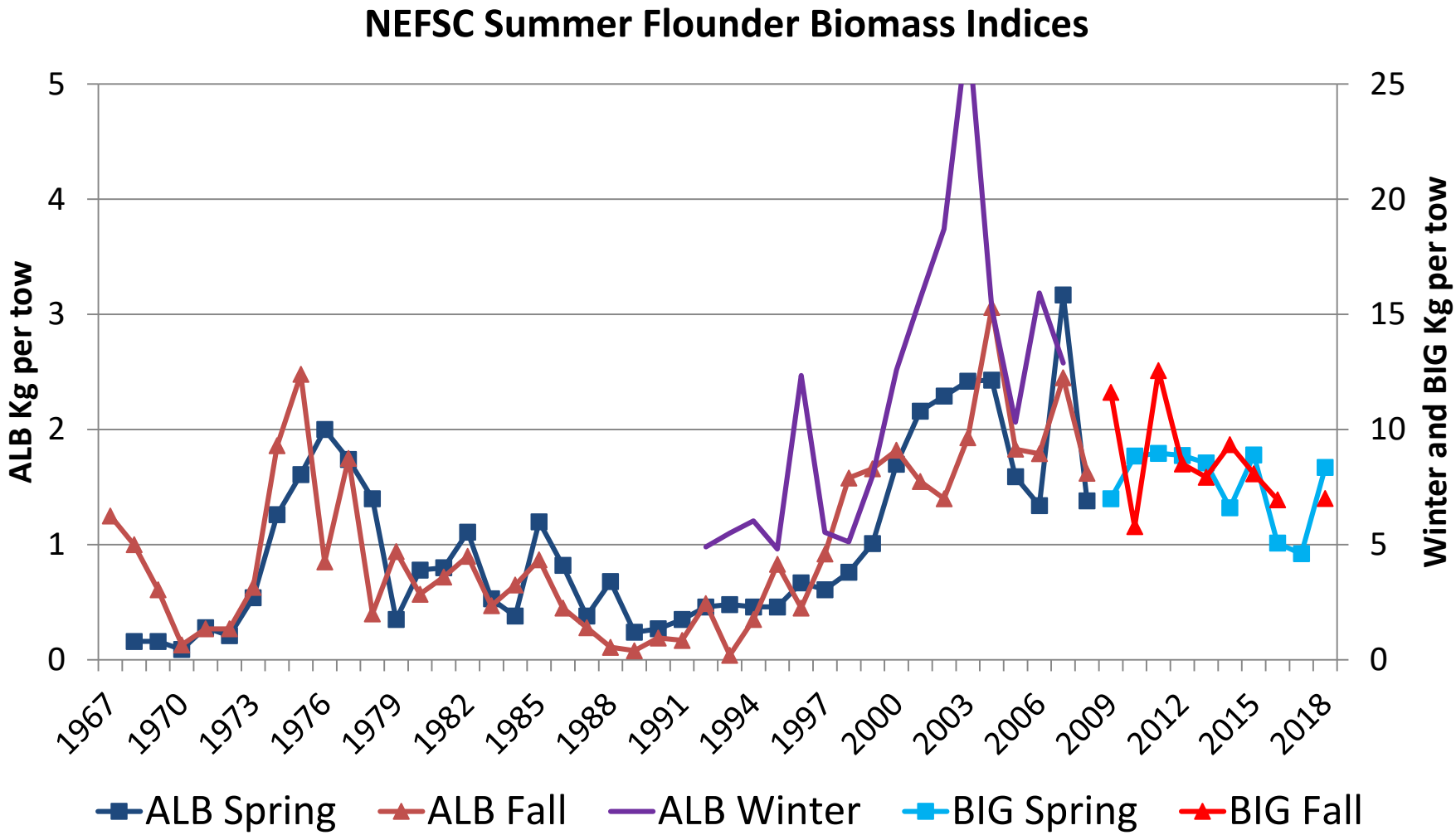
2019 Data Update



- Fishery catch and fishery independent survey data through 2018
- Survey indices show aggregate stock size increased from 2017 to 2018
- Notable fish in commercial fishery sampling:
  - Oldest fish collected to date: 20 y.o. 22-inch fish (likely male)
  - Two age 17 fish (20-in. male, 28-in. female)
  - Two very large females (31- and 32-in.; age 9)

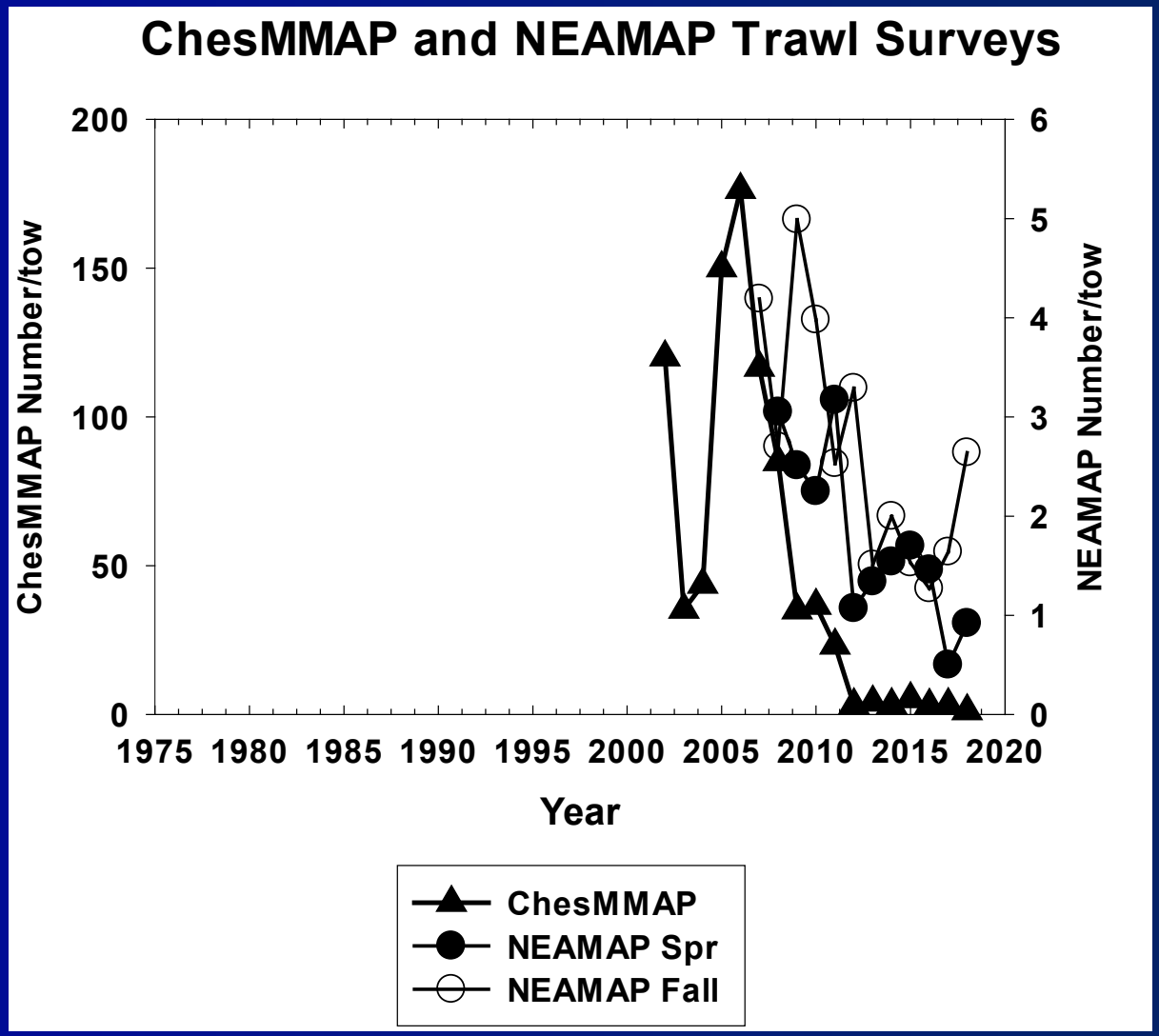
2019 Data Update





MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2019 Data Update



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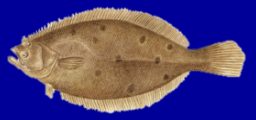

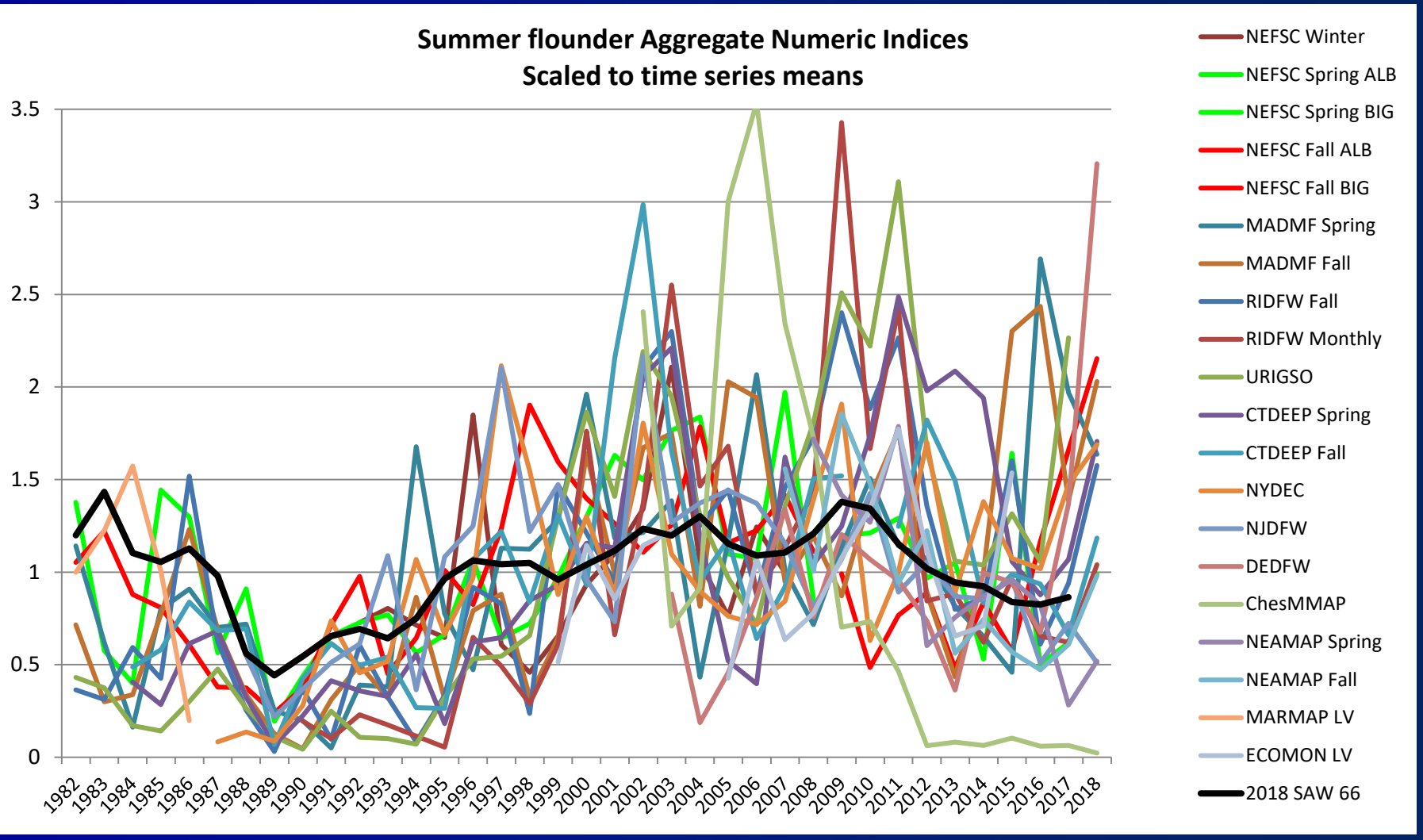

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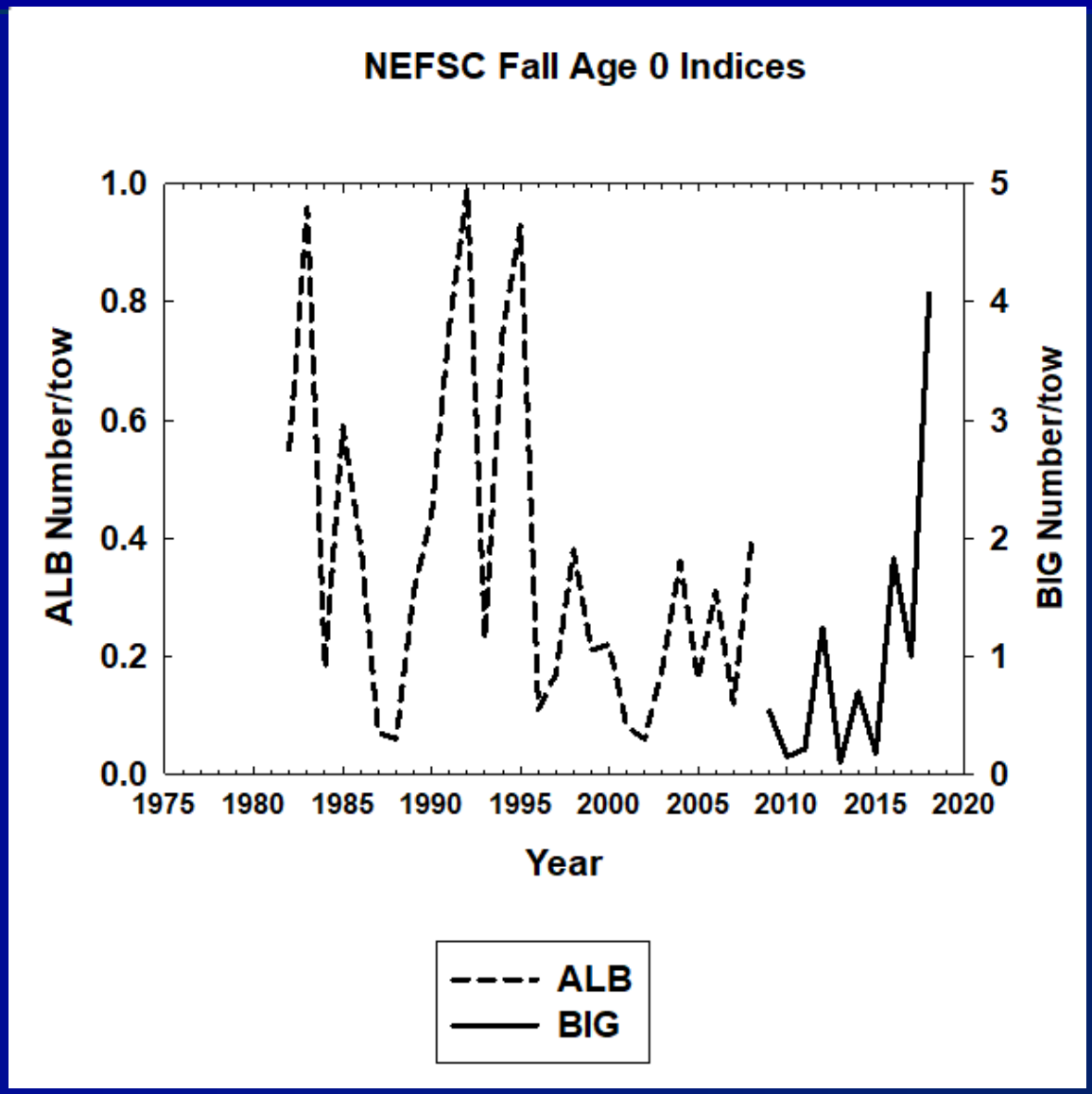

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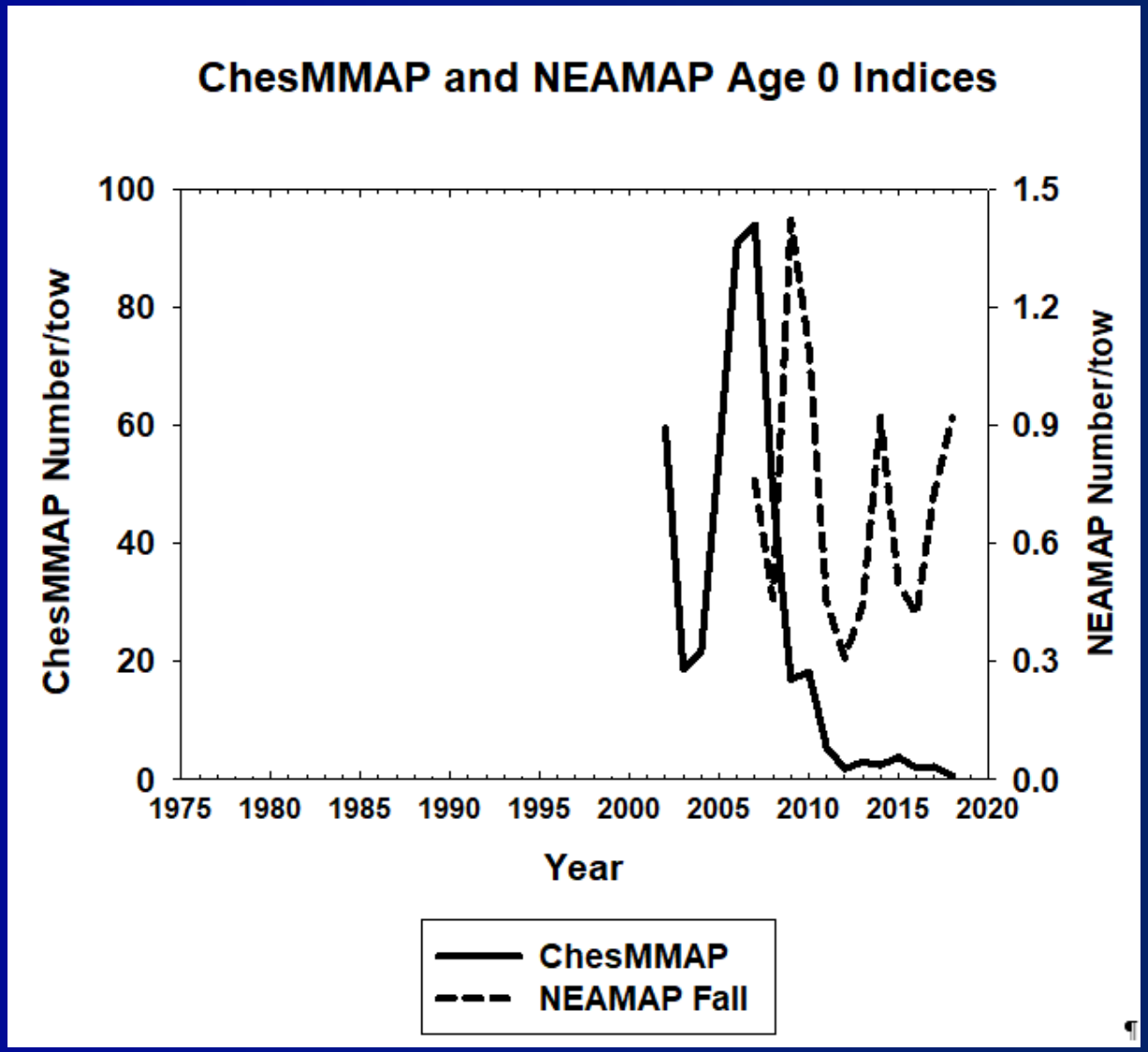

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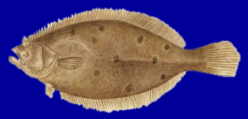
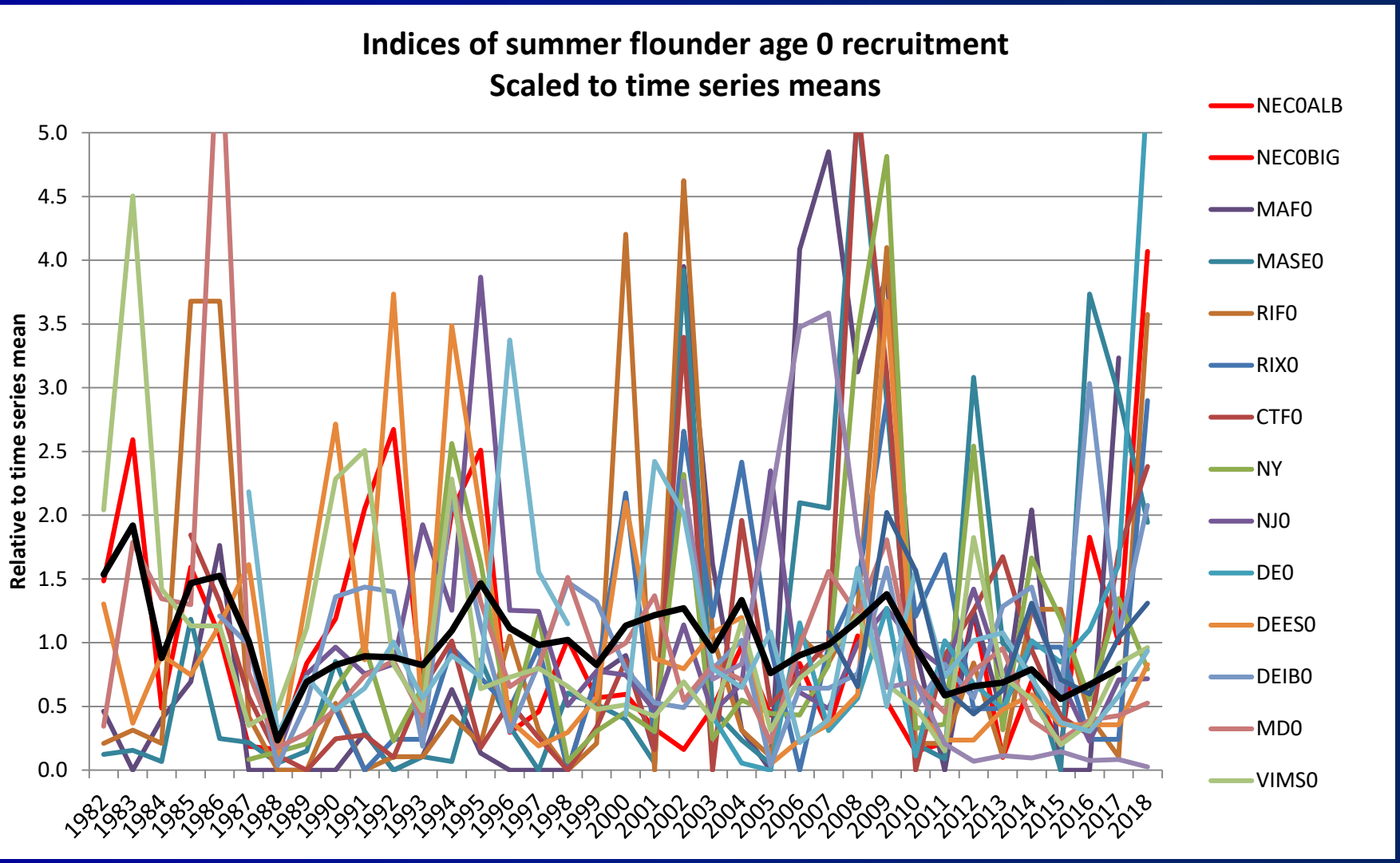
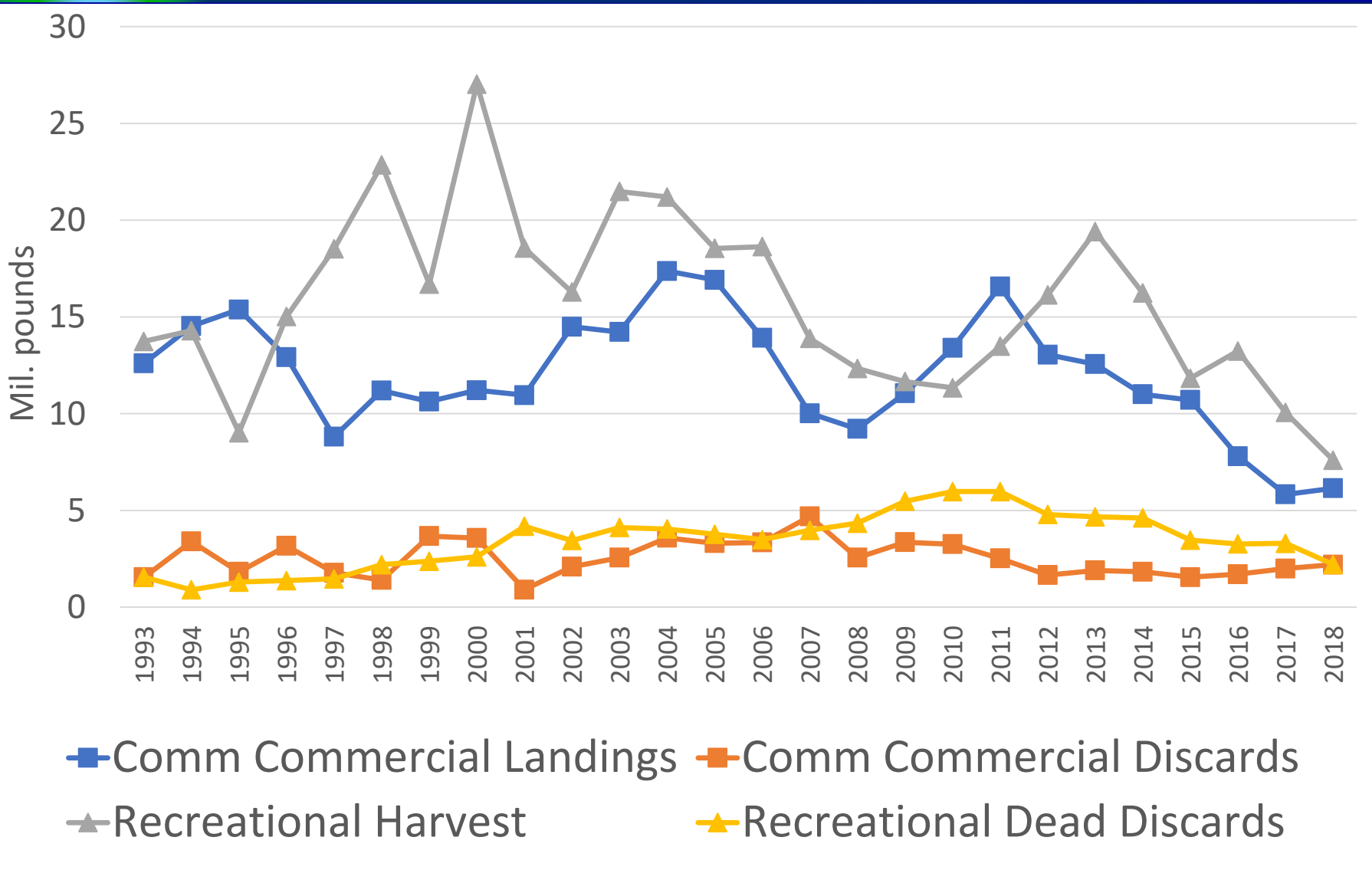




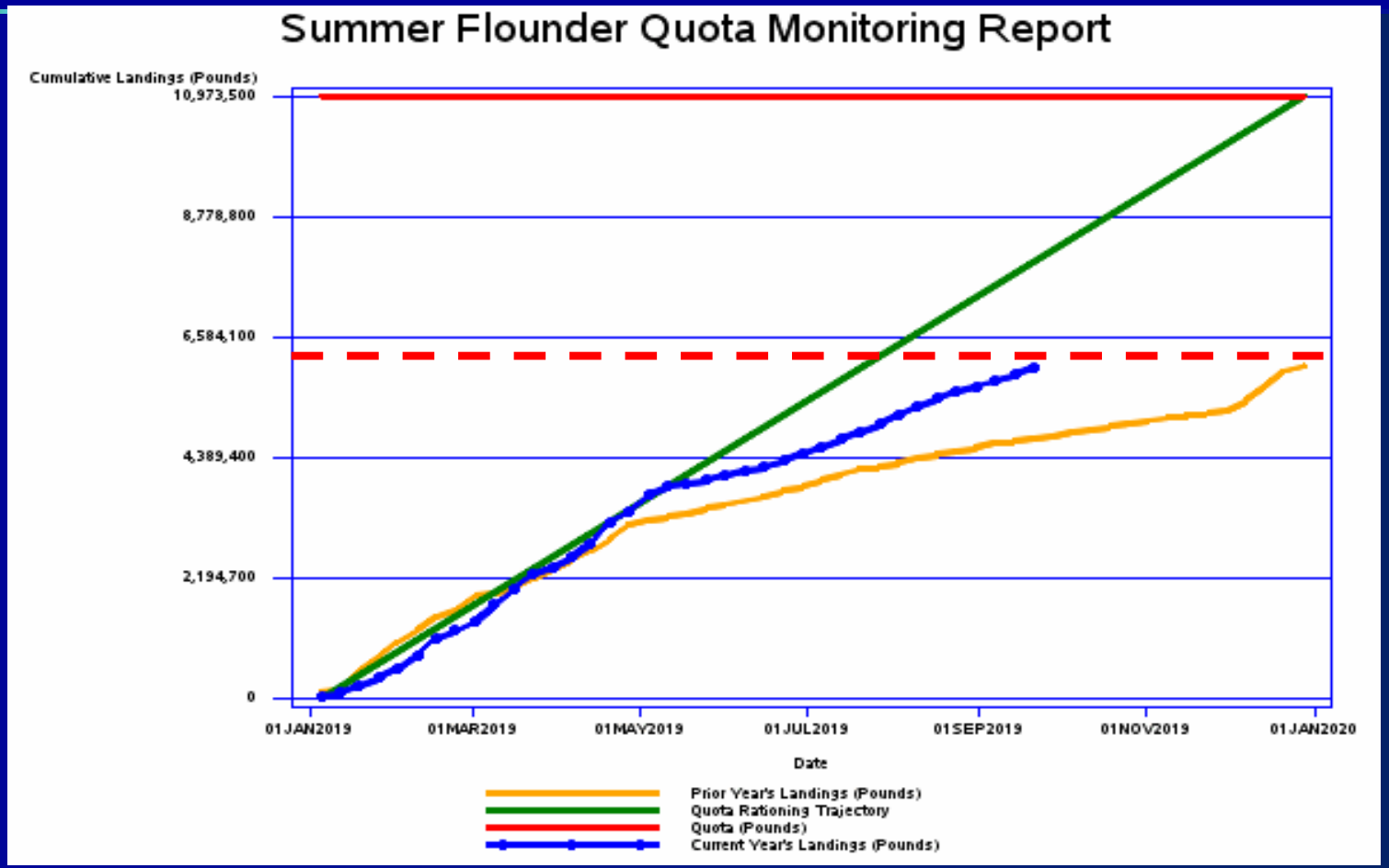
Fishery Landings and Discards



Fishery Performance

Year	Comm. Land. (mil lb)	Comm. Quota (mil lb)	Comm. % Over/ Under	Rec. Harvest OLD MRIP (mil lb)	RHL (mil lb)	Rec. % Over/ Under	Rec. Harvest NEW MRIP (mil lb)
2014	11.07	10.51	**+5%**	7.39	7.01	**+5%**	16.24
2015	10.68	11.07	**-4%**	4.72	7.38	**-36%**	11.83
2016	7.81	8.12	**-4%**	6.18	5.42	**+14%**	13.24
2017	5.83	5.66	**+3%**	3.19	3.77	**-15%**	10.06
2018	6.14	6.44	**-5%**	3.35	4.42	**-24%**	7.60
5-yr Avg.			**-1%**			**-11%**	

2019 Commercial Quota Monitoring



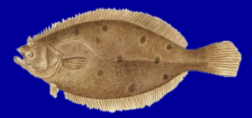
This time last year: 73% of quota harvested through Sept. 22, 2018
This year: 55% of quota harvested through September 21, 2019

Preliminary MRIP Estimates Through Wave 3

State	Preliminary Harvest (lb)
MASSACHUSETTS	11,613
RHODE ISLAND	402,311
CONNECTICUT	73,945
NEW YORK	586,433
NEW JERSEY	522,033
DELAWARE	32,961
MARYLAND	36,706
VIRGINIA	116,161
NORTH CAROLINA	21,915
TOTAL	1,804,078

23% of revised 2019 RHL (7.69 mil lb)

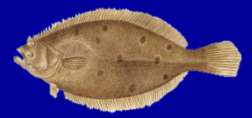
AP Fishery Performance Report



Market and Economic Issues

- Past 2-3 years, increase in discards of jumbo fluke on commercial vessels
  - Lower market demand/price
  - Occurring on vessels with conveyer sorting systems, releasing fish in good condition

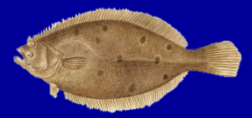
AP Fishery Performance Report



Environmental and Ecological Issues

- Water quality concerns
  - Last year, NEAMAP survey hit a dead zone off NJ
- Timing of trawl surveys should be improved to reflect changes in spawning behavior
  - Small fluke recently caught in small mesh off Ocean City/Baltimore Canyon; recruitment event not captured by surveys?

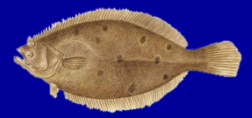
AP Fishery Performance Report



Environmental and Ecological Issues

- Expect lower recreational estimates in 2019 compared to last year given colder/wetter spring this year

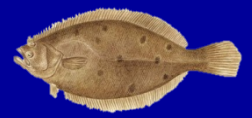
AP Fishery Performance Report



Management Issues

- New MRIP estimates "ludicrous" (e.g., shore mode now estimated to catch twice as much as party/charter mode)
- Sector allocation issues aren't a "new situation": large recreational overages in late 90s/early 2000s meant actual landings were rarely 60%/40% even under old estimates

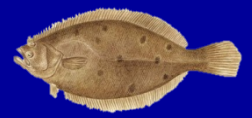
AP Fishery Performance Report



Management Issues

- Summer flounder recreational management concerns
  - Stock increased under lower size limits; decreased under higher limits. Should revert to measures used under rebuilding.
  - Frustration with difficulty finding keeper fluke and high rec. discards.
  - Suggestions: lower minimum size limits, slot limits, cumulative length limit with mandatory retention.

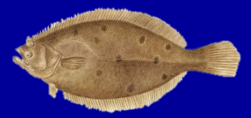
AP Fishery Performance Report



Management Issues

- Two advisors: total length limit should be tested rather than continually dismissed
  - One response: difficult to enforce, especially on party boats
- Request for 100% retention in both sectors/prohibition on discards
  - One response: can't compel people to keep fish they don't want

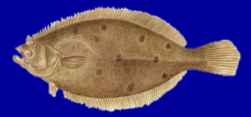
AP Fishery Performance Report



Management Issues

- Flexibility needed in recreational size limits for upper Chesapeake Bay to allow more retention, similar to different size limits by area for Delaware Bay

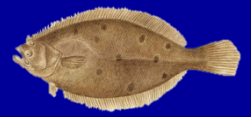
AP Fishery Performance Report



General Recreational Fishing Trends

- Past few years in MA: seeing fewer keeper fluke inshore in rec. fishery likely due to higher temperatures; need to go further offshore for keepers
- Fishing difficult in southern NJ in recent years
- NY fishing variable by location
- Keepers difficult to find near Block Island

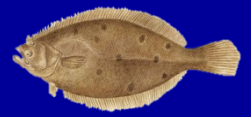
AP Fishery Performance Report



Research Recommendations

- Updated research on discard survival, including variation with temperature, depth, and other variables
- More tagging research to evaluate discards (vs. cage studies which do not account for modified predation and feeding)
- Research into spawning behavior and stock structure of summer flounder

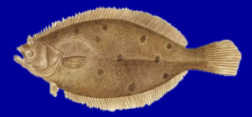
AP Fishery Performance Report



Research Recommendations

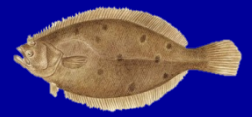
- Research into recreational gear impacts on discard mortality, including use of circle hooks
- Study on history of management successes/failures for the recreational fishery; factors influencing angler behavior and effort
- Full audit of fishery participation in rec. and commercial fisheries, including reporting and permitting requirements

Written Comments



- Three NC advisor comments: address/eliminate discards
  - High rate of dead discards are causing waste in commercial and recreational fisheries
  - Allow or require retention of anything caught (eliminate min. size)
- One advisor: Stock enhancement should be explored for summer flounder

Written Comments



- Fluke fishing in southern NJ worsening each year; low for-hire revenues, low angler satisfaction
  - Suggests slot limits, lower shore size limit, gear regs to reduce recreational discard mortality
  - More research into recruitment trends, spawning and migration patterns

Written Comments

- Memo submitted as public comment detailing concerns with summer flounder management and stock dynamics
  - Regulations have created an age and gender imbalance in SSB and negatively impacted recruitment
  - Recreational catch limits and commercial catch sizes must come down
  - Closure for spawning biomass should be considered

SSC ABC Recommendation

- No changes to previously adopted 2020 ABC

	OFL	ABC	ABC F	P*
2019 (revised)	13,609 mt (30.00 m lb)	**11,354 mt (25.03 m lb)**	0.364	0.372
2020	14,034 mt (30.94 m lb)		0.351	0.351
2021	14,367 mt (31.67 m lb)		0.342	0.336

Monitoring Committee

- No changes to 2020 sector specific catch and landings limits

	2019 (revised)-2021
ABC	25.03 mil lb
Commercial ACL = ACT	13.53 mil lb
Recreational ACL = ACT	11.51 mil lb
Commercial Quota	11.53 mil lb
Recreational Harvest Limit	7.69 mil lb

MC Recommendation: Mesh and Fish Size Regulations

- **No changes to:**
- Minimum fish size (14”)
- Seasonal mesh size thresholds (200 lb Nov 1-Apr 30; 100 lb May 1-Oct 31)
- Exemption programs (Small Mesh Exemption Program and flynet exemption)

MC Recommendation: Minimum Mesh Size

- Minimum mesh size (5.5” diamond/6.0” square)
  - Considered in Council-funded study to determine mesh selectivity for fluke/scup/sea bass (Hasbrouck et al. 2018)

Mesh Size Study Results

- Current 5.5” diamond and 6.0” square regs. may not be equivalent
  - 6.0” square appears closer to 5.0” diamond
- 2018 meeting: Some MC concern about retention of undersized fish with 6.0” square; suggested exploring phase out of 6” square

Mesh Size Study Response

- MC agreed that before pursing specific changes to min mesh sizes:
  - Fishing industry feedback should be sought
  - Additional analysis should be done
- Additional analyses and industry input originally planned for summer 2019; delayed due to other priorities

Black Sea Bass and Scup

- 4.5” or 5” diamond mesh could be common min mesh size for scup and BSB
- Further exploration of biological and economic impacts needed
  - What are the expected biological and economic impacts of moving to either 4.5” or 5” common mesh?
  - What are the benefits of common mesh regulations?
  - What are the costs associated with transitioning net requirements?

Monitoring Committee Comments (2019)

- Still worth exploring; interested in seeing additional analyses and especially in industry input
- May be a lower priority relative to other more pressing management issues

Mesh Sizes: Advisory Panel Comments

- Two advisors stated that this should not be a high priority in the near term
  - Mesh size regulations should be considered once new MRIP and resulting allocation issues are addressed
  - Discards are complicated issues due to multiple driving factors; SCeMFiS has funding for discard analysis of demersal species

Mesh Sizes: Advisory Panel Comments

- One advisor said this should be the highest priority for the Council and Board; should be uniform 5” (or 4.5”) size for all three species
  - With corresponding changes in size regulations
  - Summer flounder now growing and maturing more slowly, measures should be re-evaluated

Mesh Sizes: Advisory Panel Comments

- One advisor said a common minimum mesh size for black sea bass and scup would be very beneficial
- Minimum mesh decreases should have corresponding minimum fish size decreases to turn discards into landings
- Re-rigging a vessel is expensive; costs need to be considered

Next Steps: Mesh Regulations

- Council/Board feedback on whether this is a near-term priority for further exploration
- If so, next steps would be:
  - Refine specific analysis questions for Monitoring Committee and questions to ask industry
  - Seek industry input (survey, meetings, other mechanisms)
  - Revisit with Monitoring Committee and Council/Board at time TBD

Monitoring Committee Comments: 2020 Recreational Measures

- Staff requested feedback on possibility of exploring new approaches to recreational measures
  - E.g., slot limits, more truly regional measures, other substantial departures from current measures
- MC is supportive of exploring new ideas, with some reservations about technical and practical elements of implementation
  - Past analyses have shown slot limits would need to be very narrow with restricted season/bag to constrain to RHL

Monitoring Committee Comments: 2020 Recreational Measures

- Size limit alternatives could provide more equity in angler access along coast, but should consider potential biological impacts of increased harvest of smaller fish that may not have yet spawned
- Maximum size limits can currently be implemented by states but not in federal waters; pending implementation of Framework 14 (final rule timeline unclear)

Recent Public Comments on Rec Measures (Supplemental Materials)

- ~20 written comments received last week from NJ anglers regarding summer flounder management
- Concern with high harvest of large females due to high size limits & effect on stock
- Support for slot limit regulations/lower minimum sizes
- Support for ban on commercial trawling in spawning areas during winter spawning season

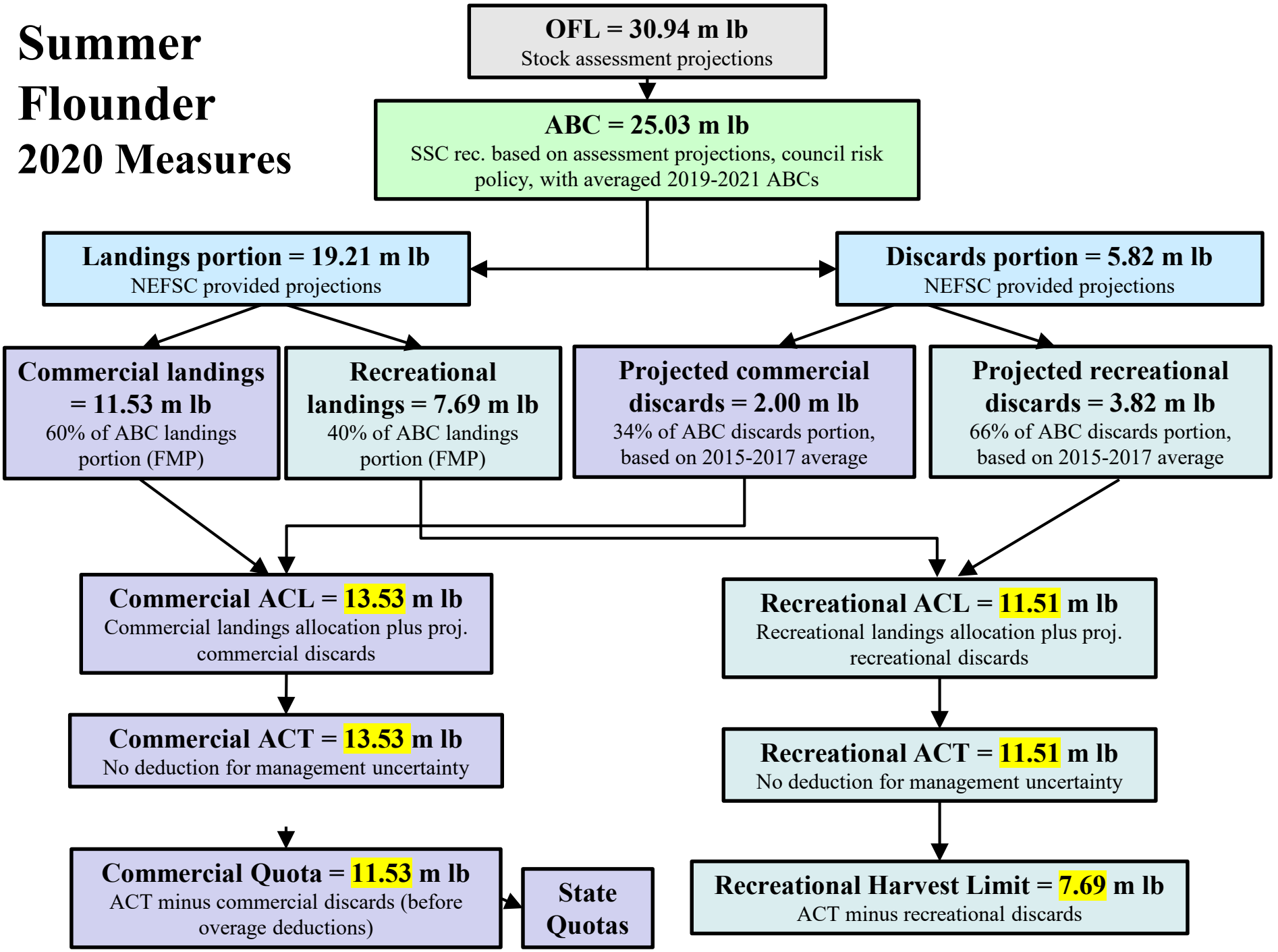
Decision Points

- Any changes to 2020 catch limits or commercial measures?
- Feedback on next steps and timing for mesh size analysis?

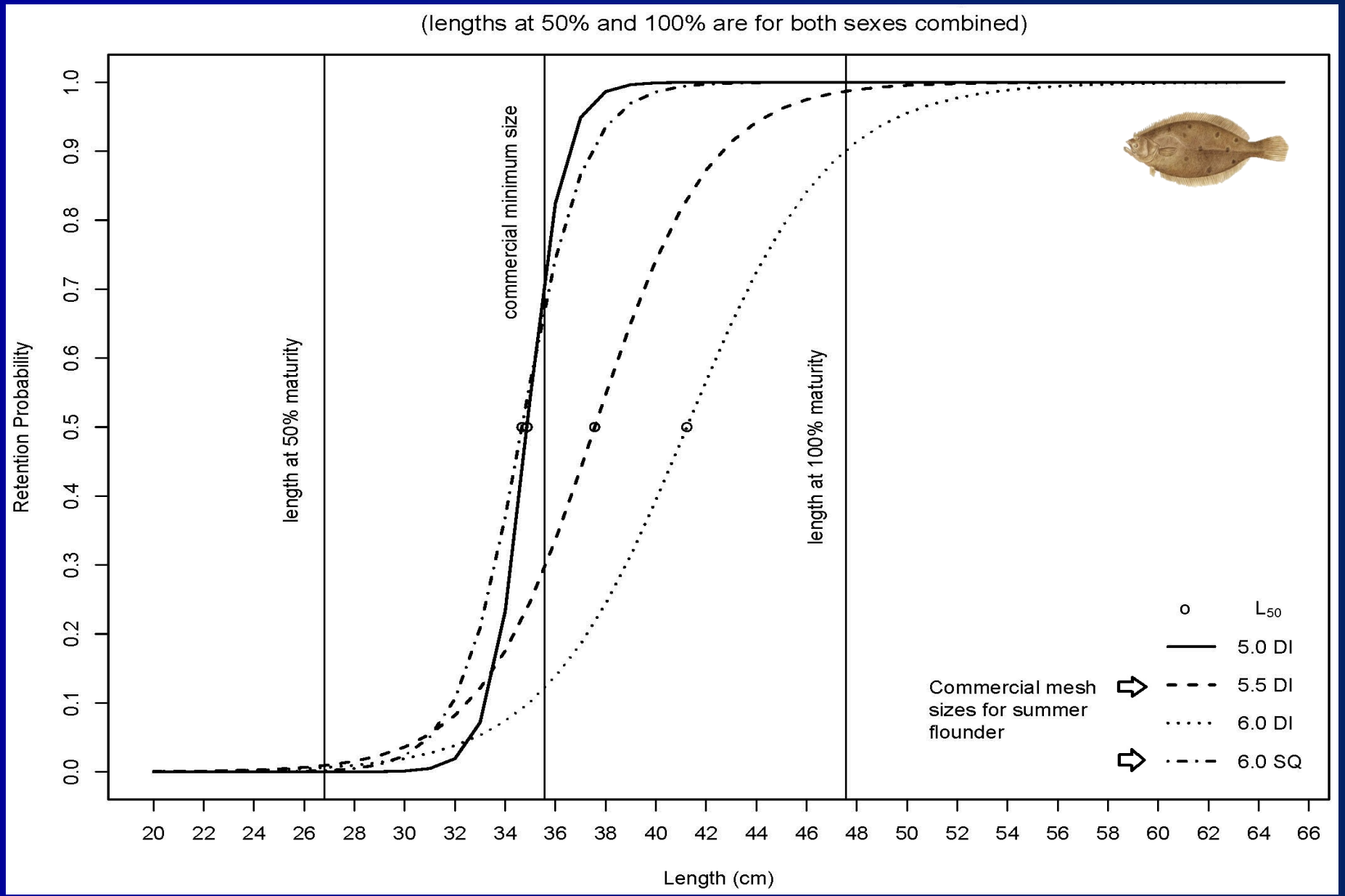
	2020
OFL	30.94 mil lb
ABC	25.03 mil lb
Commercial ACL = ACT	13.53 mil lb
Recreational ACL = ACT	11.51 mil lb
Commercial Quota	11.53 mil lb
Recreational Harvest Limit	7.69 mil lb

EXTRA SLIDES

Summer Flounder 2020 Measures



(lengths at 50% and 100% are for both sexes combined)



Catch Limit Performance

	% of Commercial ACL	% of Recreational ACL	% of ABC
2018	109%	78%	96%
2017	121%	110%	107%
2016	102%	145%	120%
2015	96%	85%	92%

Commercial Accountability Measures

- In-season
  - State closures if state quota exceeded
  - Federal closure if inaction of one or more states will cause commercial ACL to be exceeded
- Post season
  - Commercial catch evaluated against ACL for single most recent complete year
  - Landings overages deducted from state quotas
  - Overages driven by discards
    - If overfished/rebuilding: payback of exact amount
    - If B is between target & threshold (and not rebuilding):
      - No payback required if ABC not exceeded
      - Scaled payback if ABC is exceeded
    - If B is above target: no payback required

Recreational Accountability Measures

- No in-season closure authority
- Post season
  - 3-yr avg recreational catch evaluated against 3-yr avg ACL
  - Response if triggered:
    - If overfished/rebuilding: payback of exact amount
    - If B is between target & threshold (and not rebuilding):
      - Adjustments to recreational measures the next year
      - If ABC exceeded: scaled payback and adjusted rec measures
    - If B is above target: adjustments to rec measures