

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel

*October 8, 2009
Baltimore, Maryland*

Meeting Summary

Participants

Dave Pecci (ME, rec/charter)	Lou Bassano (NJ, rec)
Peter Whelan (NH, rec/charter)	Ed O'Brien (MD, rec/charter)
John McMurray (NY, rec/charter)	Bob Fjelstad (VA, rec)
Ed Cook (RI, rec/charter)	Kelly Place (VA, chair)
Arnold Leo (NY, com)	Nichola Meserve (ASMFC)
Al Ristori (NJ, rec/charter)	Alexei Sharov (MD DNR, TC rep.)

Overview

The Striped Bass Advisory Panel (AP) met to review the summary results of the 2009 update stock assessment, review the public comment received on Draft Addendum II, and develop advice for the Management Board, due to take action on the draft addendum in November.

2009 Stock Assessment

Staff provided an overview of the data and results of the 2009 update stock assessment. A member of the Technical Committee was present to answer questions from the AP.

The following concerns with the assessment were discussed by members of the AP:

- Concern that abundance declined drastically from 2004 to 2007, that recruitment from the Chesapeake Bay has been below average for multiple years, and that the stock range appears to be contracting.
 - Concern that the economic downturn was largely responsible for maintaining a low fishing mortality in 2007 and 2008, and that F could increase substantially when the economy recovers and effort increases if the decline in abundance is maintained.
 - Concern that the SCA model assumes a constant natural mortality of 0.15, yet studies of mycobacteriosis in the Chesapeake Bay have estimated an increase in M.
 - Concern about the retrospective pattern in the assessment results from the SCA model and that managers base decisions on the most uncertain year estimates, even if the bias is in a risk adverse direction (i.e., F is overestimated and biomass underestimated).
 - Concern that estimates for illegally harvested and under-reported fish are not being made and included in the stock assessment.
 - Concern that the substantial winter fishery is not being accounted for in the stock assessment because of poor or nonexistent estimates of wave 1 harvest in several states.
- The AP remains concerned about the level of exploitation on the over-wintering grounds.

Draft Addendum II

Staff provided the presentation of the draft addendum given at the public hearings and a summary of the public comment received to date. The AP will receive a complete copy of all

submitted written comments and summaries of the 13 public hearings after the public comment period closes on October 16.

The AP was not able to reach a consensus agreement on the main option of whether to allow states to roll over unused coastal commercial quota. The majority of the AP members present supported status quo (no roll over). (It should be noted that the AP members in attendance were predominantly representatives of the recreational sector.)

The AP members provided the following reasons for their opposition to or support for allowing unused coastal commercial quota roll over:

Reasons for Status Quo

- States should show that they can harvest their quota first before asking to allow roll over
- It's a state issue to regulate the fishery properly to achieve the quota; there are examples of states that manage the fishery properly and harvest is very close to the quota each year
- Underages are occurring due to a decline in the stock, as evidenced by contractions in the range at both the northern and southern extremes; need to manage more conservatively
- Concern about "creeping" fishing mortality, i.e., each proposal for a small increase in exploitation is evaluated separately, but need a cumulative review of effects
- Evaluation of the effect of allowing roll over is based on an assessment which incorporates flawed recreational data from the MRFSS
- There is no evidence to support more striped bass are migrating and staying in the EEZ
- Consider commercial harvest under-reporting to be a major issue and allowing roll over will incentivize additional under-reporting
- There should be a state-by-state review process to permit roll over; each state should have to demonstrate that it can adequately monitor harvest and track use of the quota
- The quotas are meant to be hard limits not targets
- The public interest is served by quota underages, which help to protect the stock
- If a state has an overage, it pays it back with a quota reduction, but this does not replace the lost spawning productivity
- Multi-species considerations should not factor in to the reason for allowing roll over
- Opposition does not reflect recreational greed; would not support regulations to increase fishing mortality from either fishery; e.g., NJ anglers could harvest many more stripers under bonus program than do now
- Expected 2% harvest increase has limited economic value to the fishery
- This is a policy issue, and there is a possibility that allowing quota roll over could open Pandora's Box (e.g., when the stock re-distributes in the north, should ME and NH be able to harvest more fish since they are missing out now? Should a recreational fisherman with a two fish limit be able to harvest three fish one day if he could catch only one the previous day?)

Reasons to Allow Roll Over

- Stock is healthy, albeit subject to some natural variability, but F is well below the target F
- Allowing roll over would have a barely measurable effect on F according to the TC analysis; the expected F increase is also at the upper limit because the analysis included NJ and assumed all the unused quota would be rolled over and subsequently harvested
- Fluctuations in recreational harvest possess greater risk to exceeding F than allowing quota roll over would according to the Technical Committee
- Recreational fishery's opposition may be in self-interest

- Ability to harvest the underages would provide a significant financial benefit to commercial harvesters; the anticipated 2% harvest increase coastwide is misleading as to what it means to the individual commercial harvester

If the addendum is approved, the AP wanted to make sure that base quota pounds and roll over pounds are not distinguishable in an underage-adjusted quota. The concern was that a state (in a year with an underage-adjusted quota and another underage occurring) could try to have a larger roll over the subsequent year by saying that it had first harvested the roll over pounds before harvesting the base quota pounds.

Additional Recommendations and Requests

The AP continues to support improving the wave 1 recreational harvest estimates, specifically in VA and MD. The AP is dismayed that little or no progress has been made, despite the Commission's written support.

The AP supports addition research on mycobacteriosis in the Chesapeake Bay and other waters that the bacteria have been identified. The AP would like to see the results of the research reflected in the assessment methodologies.

The AP recommends that the Management Board approve and fund the CESS's work plan to complete a socio-economic study of the striped bass fisheries.

The AP recommends that the Technical Committee be tasked with investigating methods to estimate poaching for inclusion in stock assessments (e.g., use of law enforcement reports).

The AP recommends that the Technical Committee be tasked with evaluating potential distributional shifts of striped bass, specifically movement into the EEZ.

The AP requests a report from the Law Enforcement Committee on striped bass law enforcement effort and results at its next meeting.

The AP requests Commission staff to advise states of any vacancies on the AP and request nominations. The split of recreational and commercial representatives is still a concern to some AP members.

Agenda Items for the Next Meeting

- Methods to reduce discard mortality
- Potential regulatory revisions (e.g., slot limits)
- Individual transferable quotas

Adjourn