



**Bluefish Advisory Panel  
Meeting Summary  
July 28, 2021**

**Advisory Panel Members (MAFMC and ASMFC):** Mike Plaia, Frank Blount, Jim Kaczynski, Philip Simon, Willy Goldsmith, Paul Lane, Mike Waine, Eric Burnley, Victor Hartley, William Mandulak, Ben Vuolo, Steve Heins, Jason Mleczeko, and Charlie Locke.

**Others in attendance:** Matthew Seeley (Council Staff), Mary Sabo (Council Staff), Dustin Colson Leaning (ASMFC), Chris Batsavage (MAFMC), David Stormer (MAFMC), Greg DiDomenico (Lunds), Jessica Valenti, James Fletcher (UNFA), and a few unknown individuals (no identification or call-in numbers).

The Bluefish Advisory Panel (AP) met on Wednesday, July 28th from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. The goal of the meeting was to discuss the AP process, review recent fishery performance (2020), review the recent management track assessment, and review the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Monitoring Committee (MC) recommendations.

This AP meeting was the first meeting where new AP members were introduced to the bluefish specifications process. Staff presented and summarized what it means to be an AP member, the expected role to be filled, and the difference between this meeting, as it compares to AP meetings where ample time is spent developing the Fishery Performance Report. Below are individual AP questions and comments on fishery performance, the current management measures, and the recommendations provided by staff, the SSC, and MC.

Willy Goldsmith – Can we compare early waves’ landings for 2021 to 2020 and 2019 to see what the impacts of the bag limit changes are on landings? Answer: These sorts of comparisons will occur with the Monitoring Committee at their November meeting prior to when the Council and Board take action on recreational management measures in December.

Philip Simon – Should we be concerned about the RHL overage and how it relates to the rebuilding plan? Answer: We need to be concerned with any overages, as they will impact the quotas and management measures in future years, as well as the expected duration of the rebuilding plan.

Bill Mandulak – I fish primarily from the beach in northern NC on the Outer Banks near Hatteras, and bluefish are a substantial part of my (and other’s) harvest. In recent years, I have seen a fairly substantial decline in abundance.

Mike Waine – Can you explain how the 2020 RHL overage affects the 2022 specifications? Answer: Total catch was estimated at 19.93 million pounds, which exceeds the 16.28 M pound

ACL by ~22%. The regulations stipulate that a pound for pound payback is warranted in the next fishing year. The accountability measures have been incorporated into the 2022 specifications and the 2022 RHL includes those reductions.

Jim Kaczynski: The 200,000 MT SSB target is at a level where bluefish biomass has never been before. Can you offer some insight on where this estimate came from? Answer: This value is a biological reference point that is direct output from the management track stock assessment. As the assessment is updated, this target may be adjusted to reflect any model adjustments/revisions.

Philip Simon – I challenge the impact of ever decreasing quotas and RHLs on "fixing" the perceived low SSB and R numbers seen over the last 30 years, and, I challenge that SSB and R values that have guided fishery management have changed substantially at all. However, I understand that things might change, including the SSB threshold and target values, as a result of the upcoming management track assessment.

Greg DiDomenico – Why are sector transfers not allowed this year? Answer: The new amendment details transfers can not occur when the stock is either overfished or experiencing overfishing. Additionally, we anticipate the recreational sector fully landing the RHL, therefore there would be no quota to transfer.

Willy Goldsmith – Just to clarify are the new RHLs based on the rebuilding plan? Answer: Yes. How do we factor in the likelihood that the 2021 RHL will have an overage into future specifications? Answer: The Monitoring Committee will take up this discussion at their specifications meeting next year once we know if any overages did actually occur.

Greg DiDomenico – Should we expect an overage in 2022 for bluefish, and if so, will the measures change? Answer: Given the current trends and small quotas for 2021, it is possible. Again, the Monitoring Committee will take up this discussion at their specifications meeting next year once we know if any overages did actually occur.

Captain Victor Hartley – The for-hire sector has to get separated from the private anglers through a formal sector separation process.

Paul Lane – In NC, bluefish are bycatch in the mackerel fishery. A reduction of allocation from 17% to 14% is harmful to the commercial fishery. Why do we not have census data from the recreational fishery, especially for bluefish which is overfished? Answer: MRIP data is what we are currently using to monitor the recreational fishery. All data will be thoroughly reviewed prior to the research track assessment scheduled for 2022.

Bill Mandulak – Sounds like a lot of folks who are able to catch large bluefish are offshore. Are there efforts to quantify offshore abundance? Answer: Currently, there are no surveys addressing offshore abundance. This has been a consistent research recommendation to help improve our understanding prior to the 2022 research track assessment.

James Fletcher – P.L 109-479 Every saltwater angler was supposed to register! In NC, recreational landings will triple as Oregon inlet improves. Small for-hire recreational landings will also triple.

Also, the national park closing beach access for bird hatching lessens beach driving. When beach driving occurs in towns and the national seashore, recreational landing will go out of site.

Mike Waine – Asked about for-hire estimates used in the stock assessment and how they are compared. Answer: MRIP estimates include for-hire landings. Vessel trip report (VTR) data may also be incorporated.

Charlie Locke – We are held to trip tickets and VTRs and I think the recreational side should be held to the same standards. Until the recreational side is held to the same catch accounting standards there should not be any reallocation.

Captain Victor Hartley – The for-hire fleet is going to look for a bag-limit increase. They would be ok with a minimum size limit if it meant having a larger bag limit.

James Fletcher – Could a hook size or total length measures be utilized to reduce discards for recreational? Answer: Those are both measures that can be discussed by the Monitoring Committee.

Bill Mandulak – Discard mortality rates (15%) are a little high compared to other fisheries. What is the opportunity for examining that and researching how to reduce that? Treble hooks are quite destructive and have a high mortality. I am interested to find out what other measures could be implemented to reduce mortality.

Willy Goldsmith – The 3 and 5 bag limits represent a de facto reallocation. This should again be part of the Monitoring Committee conversation in regard to fairness and equitability. The for-hire sector should either be completely separated with their own ACL or not have separate measures at all.

### **Emailed Comments**

TJ Karbowski – Plenty of bluefish this year due to the abundance of forage fish. Various year classes represented. No regulation changes necessary either way up or down. If a further bag or size reduction is necessary via the data than a separate "for-hire" category is absolutely imperative for the industry to stay in business.