

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee Conference Call Summary

June 15, 2012

Attendance

SAS – Micah Dean, Behzad Mahmoudi, Jeff Brust, Erik Williams, Alexei Sharov, Matt Cieri, Amy Schueller, Joe Smith

ASMFC – Mike Waine, Genny Nesslage, Toni Kerns

Public – Bill Goldsborough, Shaun Gehan, Judd Crawford, Pete Jensen, Ken Hinman

Biological Reference Points

- Erik – have heard from Genny & Alexei on reference point language, but want to hear from others for a clear consensus
- Erik – issue on the table: current F reference points don't match old biomass reference points, we need to explain the issue to the board
- Behzad – we also need to question whether F15% as a proxy for MSY is scientifically appropriate
- Erik – if we are silent on F15% as a suitable proxy in this report, it will be perceived as an implicit endorsement. If we have a problem with it, we should say so here
- Behzad – we (as the TC) have been involved in the development of the new BRPs for a year now. Do we have the time to fully discuss an appropriate reference point now?
- Genny – this committee was tasked with developing a new MSP-based F reference point...wasn't directed to develop a new biomass reference point, but at last board meeting it was identified that the biomass reference point should correspond with the new F reference point
- Behzad – Don't we have a joint group tasked with developing new reference points for menhaden?
- Alexei – on a TC conf call last year, we all were included in the discussion of the pros and cons of the reference point options.
- Behzad – is there a report from that call?
- Alexei – yes, see the ASMFC website
- Genny – this seems off topic, we need to come up with a current reference point, not solve the ecological reference point issue
- Alexei – we provided projections and calculations of the reference point options, and the board selected F15% and F30%. At the time, no one objected to the choice of these reference points...although there were no explicit approval of the selections. It would be awkward to now put in a report that we are uncomfortable with the new reference point.

- Erik – Alexei is correct that we have not approved a particular reference point. Our task was to evaluate a suite of options & let the board select one. We were never asked to develop what we thought would be the most appropriate.
- Genny – in that report we had strong caveats with the MSP reference points [*Genny reads from the document*].
- Alexei – so are you saying that these reference points are inappropriate for management use right now?
- Toni – in the document, it is clear that the options that were developed were chosen by the board, not developed by the TC
- Alexei – those reference points have been selected with the guidance of this committee (TC)...is the TC now saying there are serious doubts about their appropriateness?
- Matt –is this even something we should be talking about in an update?
- Erik – we shouldn't be debating the best reference point here, since we haven't been asked what we think the best reference point is.
- Erik – can we put up the language referring to reference points?
- [*Mike puts up the reference point language from section 10 of the update report*]
- Jeff – should we include the previous text about MSP caveats that Genny just read?
- Erik – this might be a good idea
- Alexei – we don't have a consensus on the appropriateness of these reference points...but it's late in the game to have a discussion about best reference points. It's probably best to be left for a benchmark.
- Erik – The TC hasn't been asked to recommend a most appropriate reference point, and we don't endorse the ones that were selected.
- Behzad – that's good, can we just say that?
- [*Mike W wordsmiths the reference point paragraph in section 10*]
- Alexei – worried that it sounds like we are challenging the board decision, that we don't like their choice
- Behzad/Matt – don't feel that way, it's more that the TC has not had the opportunity to (hasn't been asked to) evaluate the most appropriate set of reference points for this stock
- Matt – to be Frank, none of us feel that MSP reference points are good in the long term...this is why they were meant to be an interim measure until we can proceed with ecosystem-based reference points.
- Genny – thinks that we should include something that explains %MSP based reference points relationship to MSY
- Alexei - do you have suggested text?
- Behzad – thinks we are fine without additional text
- Erik – now that it's more apparent that MSY isn't necessarily a goal of ASMFC, maybe this additional text is unnecessary.

- Behzad – this information will come up in the benchmark process anyway

Projections

- Erik – are we OK with the projection paragraph?
- Alexei – this paragraph has a very negative connotation...that we're basically saying that the projections cannot be used.
- Matt – disagree. Everything in the paragraph is the truth
- Alexei – *[question to group]*: With respect to projection results, do you find them useable for management right now?
- Erik/Amy/Matt/Behzad – no
- Behzad – are there any couple of years in the last 10 years that are unbiased enough to be used for projection?
- Alexei – the bias is unimportant here. We simulate the population dynamics at various constant landings scenarios...the projection outcomes will remain relatively unaffected, regardless of the bias. I don't remember anyone seriously objecting to the projections as they were being developed. Keep in mind we've presented projection results twice now. Regardless of the bias, the level of increase is relatively large for relatively low levels of removals.
- Matt- but recruitment is also affected
- Alexei – not in the way we've specified recruitment
- Alexei – if we don't have trust in the projections, we should just say it
- Behzad – but do we really want to use these projections to set hard TAC?
- Erik – that's the key problem...these projections are subject to all the problems we've identified with the assessment model.
- Toni – *[question to group]*: do you think these projections are giving you accurate probability levels of achieving the reference points?
- Matt/Erik - No
- Matt – I don't believe we can put forward with any certainty a particular probability level of achieving the reference points.
- Alexei – believes we are being dishonest by saying that we don't believe our projections now, after we've spent the last year developing them
- Erik – we only had strong concerns with these projections after we discovered the major issues identified in this update
- Toni – these issues aren't deal breakers for using projections from an assessment with retrospective bias in other fisheries (e.g. fluke)
- Erik – the difference here is that we can't address the bias at this point, just describe the issues we've uncovered

- Alexei – So, this projection cannot be used to set specific values of TAC due to retrospective pattern, recruitment uncertainty, etc...but there is a value in the projections in understanding the expected response of the population
- Behzad/Erik – *[to Alexei]* so what is your problem with the document as it's currently written?
- Alexei – to Amy, if you change the 2012 stock size by 50%, would you expect the outcomes to change dramatically?
- Amy – The problem is we don't know how much of an effect the bias is having.
- Erik – the reference points were chosen ad hoc, so this is a technical overfishing determination. If the TC was tasked to come up with its own determination of overfishing, we would have worked to develop what we feel are the most appropriate reference points.
- Erik – perhaps the way forward is to include the projections in the document, but also include this paragraph stating that due to major concerns, they shouldn't be used to set TACs
- Micah – comfortable with this approach. With the issues we've recently uncovered in this update, it's unclear where we're at currently (in the terminal year), so it seems unlikely we will be able to use projections to provide a probability of achieving the benchmarks. But the general relationship between altering landings levels and the relative population response may still be informative.
- Toni – but if the projections can't be used to set TAC, what is the board to do?
- Erik – proceed to an expedited benchmark
- Alexei – if we have problems with the projections, we should make them known now
- Jeff – If this goes before the board in August, they will likely still kick back to us for catch reduction options to choose from
- Toni – everything so far has been clear that projections were to be used for setting quotas...be prepared to offer other solutions
- Matt – the problem is that we've uncovered major problems with the tool we were planning on using to determine status & do projections
- Behzad – we can do another benchmark, but we need to give the board some information about what we expect to address in the benchmark.
- Matt – we can inform them that our primary tool is broken. They can use it on a qualitative level, but that we should do a benchmark to fix the tool so that it can be used in the future.
- Erik – getting back to report, any other issues with the language as written?
- Jay – agrees with the text as written, but also agrees with some of what Alexei has said...from experience, the menhaden projections, although flawed, are actually of higher quality than with other species, which *are* used for management measures.
- Erik – consensus on report language?

- *[silence]*
- Erik – I'll take the silence as a consensus

Public Comments

- Judd – the commissioners have a goal of growing the biomass of menhaden. We have a peer reviewed model, and the SAS has done a more thorough than necessary review of it. Although it has problems, it's not any worse than with other assessments. Be careful with language that doesn't offer the board any ability to manage.
- Ken – *[gives history of board/tc interaction and development of reference points]* Board went down the road of MSP reference points because the TC originally offered the approach.