

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel Report

September 29, 2009

The Advisory Panel met on September 29th to review recent landings and research efforts, to comment on Draft Addendum IV, and to make recommendations to the Board. Panel members in attendance represented the conservation community, commercial harvesters (for bait and reduction), bait dealers, and recreational fishermen. The meeting was held at the Norfolk Airport Hilton Hotel in Norfolk, Virginia. The following is a summary of the meeting.

Attendees

Advisory Panel Members

Bill Windley (MD), Chair
Ron Lukens (VA)
Brian Tarbox (ME)
Jeff Kaelin (NJ)

Jennie Bichrest (ME)
Ken Hinman (VA)
Thomas Ogle (SC)
Brad Spear (ASMFC), Staff

Ed Cherry (NJ) called in to the meeting, but the layout of the room and connection problems prevented him from participating in the meeting.

Rob Latour (VIMS) participated as Chair of the Technical Committee.

FMP Review

Staff reviewed the latest information contained in the 2009 FMP Review including coastwide landings (bait and reduction), Chesapeake Bay reduction landings relative to the cap, and a summary of the stock assessment timeline. Jeff raised the possibility of requiring states to sample menhaden from the bait fishery. Other ASMFC species management plans include requirements for biological sampling. At this point, the NOAA Beaufort Lab accepts menhaden samples, conducts ageing, and maintains a database. As long as this program continues, states simply need to collect the samples and send them to the Beaufort Lab. Understanding that the stock assessment would benefit from a broader range of aged fish, *the AP recommends that states be required to collect bait samples based on Technical Committee designed criteria*. This is also a recommendation made by the CIE Peer Reviewers in their June 2009 reports.

Jennie and Brian committed to work together to ensure the appropriate level of samples is obtained from the bait fishery in Maine.

CIE Review of Chesapeake Bay Research Program

Staff reviewed the CIE Review summary findings and recommendations for science/research and policy/management. In response to these findings and recommendations, the AP made the following comments and suggestions:

- Old Dominion University maintains a seabird monitoring program that might be a source of data useful determining trends of seabird that eat menhaden. The determination should be made whether seabirds constitute a significant source of mortality on menhaden.

Additionally, the determination should be made to ensure enough menhaden are available as prey to support seabird populations (e.g. osprey nestlings).

- ASMFC efforts have had little to no overlap with the ecosystem-based research and analysis that is being conducted at the NMFS NEFSC by Drs. Overholz and Link.
- There is concern about the continuation of LIDAR as a tool to monitor menhaden abundance. It has similar limitations to high definition but is more expensive. Monitoring abundance with sonar was suggested as an alternative.
- While a tagging study in the 1970s and genetics studies point to menhaden being a unit coastwide stock, some AP members believe management should consider different management needs for different areas.
- There is concern about the overall research program not producing results that are applicable to management. At some point the Board will have to make a policy decision (e.g. allocation of menhaden to the fishery and to the ecosystem/predators) to address the concern of localized depletion.
- There was support for continuation and expansion of the ChesMAPP survey. The dynamics of the ecosystem are complex and require systematic monitoring in order to better understand them.
- Climate change is affecting more southern species and the southern end of species' ranges. We may be seeing a shift of more menhaden to the north.
- In order for tracing adults in the ocean back to specific estuaries, it is important to study the otolith microchemistry of menhaden in systems other than the Chesapeake Bay.
 - The AP was curious if the Beaufort Lab has a historic sample of otoliths that could help inform this issue and better understand the stock and possible sub-stocks.

2009-2010 Benchmark Stock Assessment

Rob presented an overview of the stock assessment to date. The Maryland juvenile abundance index (JAI) drives many of the model runs because of the number of fish encountered in the 1970s. The AP asks the Stock Assessment Subcommittee what the effect of scaling back those years would have on the assessment. Also, AP members were interested in how the stock assessment accounts for effort.

There was a question about why F_{msy} and B_{msy} are not used in the menhaden assessment. These metrics started out as the holy grail to evaluate stock status of fish species. One reason they aren't used in the menhaden assessment is because of the fluctuation of the weight-at-age and uncertainty in those benchmarks.

Rob explained the time and age varying natural mortality (M) accounts for predator effects on the menhaden population. But, the current assessment doesn't produce a number or abundance of menhaden that predators need as food. The Board should think of predators as another fishery. When managing two 'fisheries', the Board should allocate quota to each. Right now there is no quota explicitly left in the water for predators.

Draft Addendum IV

Three of the members in attendance support Option 1. Several additional comments were made by these members:

- The goals of Amendment 1 should continue.
- Make sure the localized depletion question is dealt with.
- Instead of adopting Addendum IV in November, the Board should initiate another addendum to set a Chesapeake Bay reduction harvest cap that accounts for the ecological role of menhaden. This new addendum should be implemented by the end of 2010.
- It is time for the Board to make difficult policy decisions.

Four members in attendance support Option 2. Several additional comments were made by these members:

- No more harvest restrictions should be implemented until there is science to support it.
- Results of millions of dollars of research haven't identified a smoking gun.
- The purpose of the cap is to prevent expansion of the fishery while science is conducted. There is no science to date to justify a change in management.
- It is important to conduct research in other areas along the coast (e.g., Maine) where increases in bait harvest are being seen.

AP Leadership Changes

This AP meeting was Bill Windley's last as Chair. Jule Wheatly took over the Chairmanship after the completion of the meeting.

Ron Lukens and Bill Windley were both nominated as Vice Chair. In a secret ballot vote, Bill Windley received a majority of the votes and was elected as Vice Chair.