Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Winter Flounder Technical Committee

Report on the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder Stock and Recommendations for 2015 Fishing Year

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Revised on October 23, 2014

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The Winter Flounder Techncial Committeee (TC) met via conference call to review recent trends in survey indices for the Southern New England /Mid-Atlantic (SNE-MA) and the recent operational assessment for Gulf of Maine (GOM) stocks. The TC discussed specifications for the 2015 fishing season relative to updated information for both stocks. The TC compiled data from fisheries-independent surveys (bottom trawl surveys) conducted by state and federal agencies to produce indices of abundance and biomass for SNE/MA winter flounder. Paul Nitschke (Northeast Fisheries Science Center) provided an overview of the operational stock assessment update for Gulf of Maine winter flounder completed in August 2014. This assessment is updated through 2013.

Review of Biomass and Abundance Indices for SNE/MA Winter Flounder

The Southern New England Mid-Atlantic stock was last assessed at SARC 52 in June 2011. The terminal year of the assessment was 2010. The TC examined a variety of survey indices covery a broad geographic area. Nearly all the survey indices are near time-series lows (Figures 1-4). The TC concludes that the SNE-MA winter flounder biomass remains near time-series low. Young of year indices generally remain low, although a few indices have improved in recent years. Rebuilding is likely to be slow (if at all) especially if recruitment remains poor. Advisory panel's observations of larger fish, but fewer small fish is consistent with low recruitment indices.

Total catch has been less than the commercial annual catch limit in recent years. Based on comments from Advisory Panel members, the reason for lower catches is due to fewer fish and less interest in this species in recent years. The New England Fisheries Management Council had selected a constant catch approach.

The TC did not have latest catch information and did not have time to examine changes in length distribution or age structure. This is more appropriately done when updating the assessment (tentatively scheduled for Fall 2015).

Trends in eight young-of-the-year (YOY) survey indices for Southern New England Mid-Atlantic winter flounder are shown in Figure 5. Note that the surveys cover different time frames (Table 1). Four of the surveys, CT Seine, RI Coastal Pond, RI Narragansett Bay, NY

Peconic Bay) are at or near the 25th quantile in recent period 2012-13). The MA Seine survey shows a modest increase from record low abundance during 3 year period (2008-10) and has varied between the time series 25th quantile and median for the past four years (2011-14). The NY seine surveys in Jamaica Bay, Littleneck Bay and Manhasset Bay of Long Island show divergent trends, with Manhasset and Littleneck increasing to near or above median recruitment and Jamaica Bay remaining at or near record lows for the last 4 years of the series (2010-13).

2015 Fishing Year Recommendations

- **Gulf of Maine:** The Northeast Fisheries Science Center completed an operational stock assessment for the GOM stock in August 2014. At the time of the TC's meeting via conference call, the NEFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee had not set the ABCs for the GOM stock, but the TC expects a 50% reduction in the ABC and comparable reduction in the state-water sub-component. The NEFMC's SSC committee recommends setting OFL=688 and ABC=510 mt based on their meeting on October 20, 2014.
- **Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic:** The specification for this stock remain unchanged. The the TC recommends maintaining status quo management measures for this stock because trawl surveys indicate that no rebuilding. Based on personal communication with NOAA Fisheries staff, the ABC will be maintained at 1,676 mt.

Figure 1. Trends in biomass indices for four bottom trawl surveys. Note that y-axis scales vary among panels and time series length varies among indices. Solid red line is time series median. Dashed red lines are the 75th and 25th quantiles.

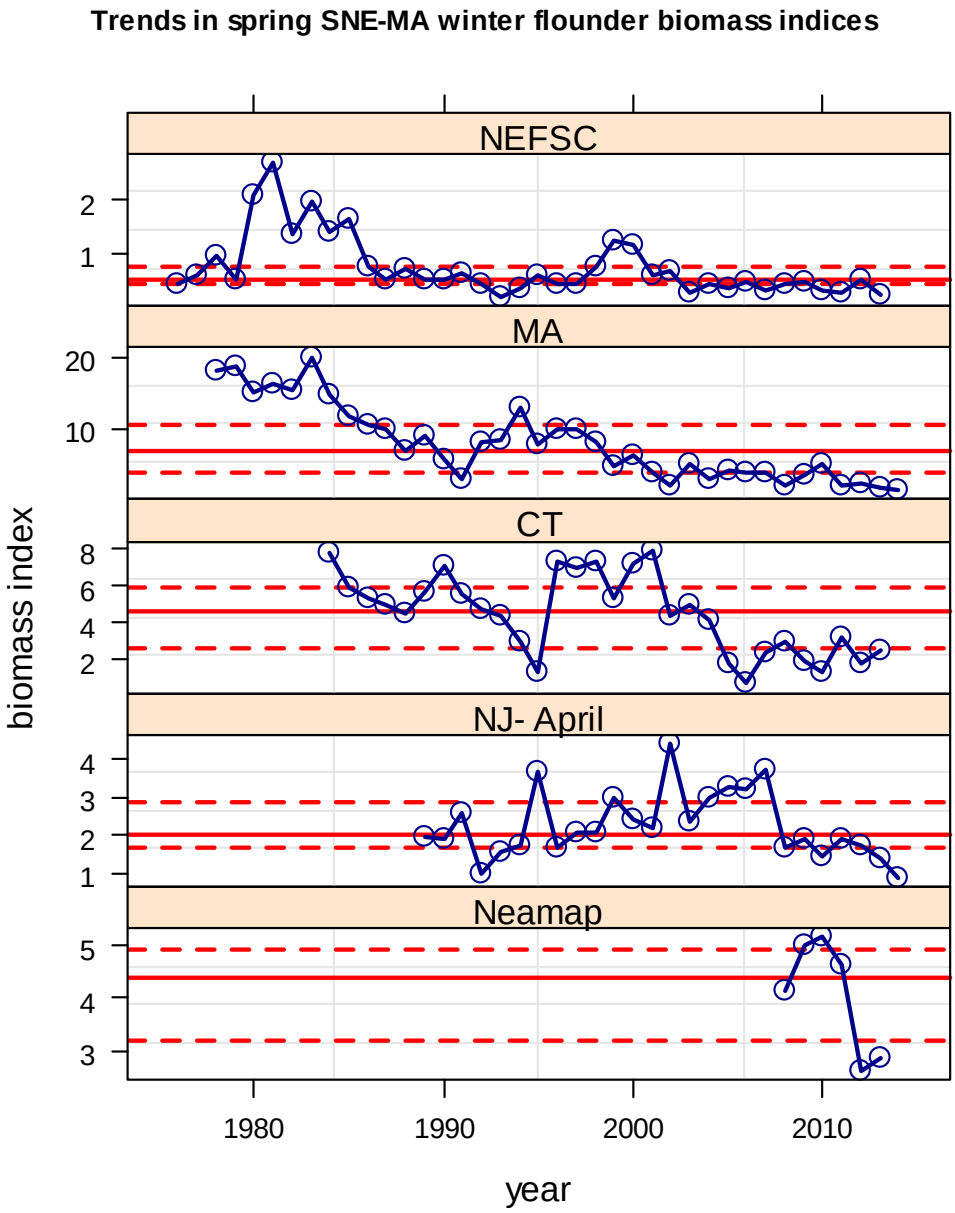

Figure 2. Trends in abundance indices for five bottom trawl spring surveys. Note that y-axis scales vary among panels. Solid red line is time series median. Dashed red lines are the 75th and 25th quantiles.

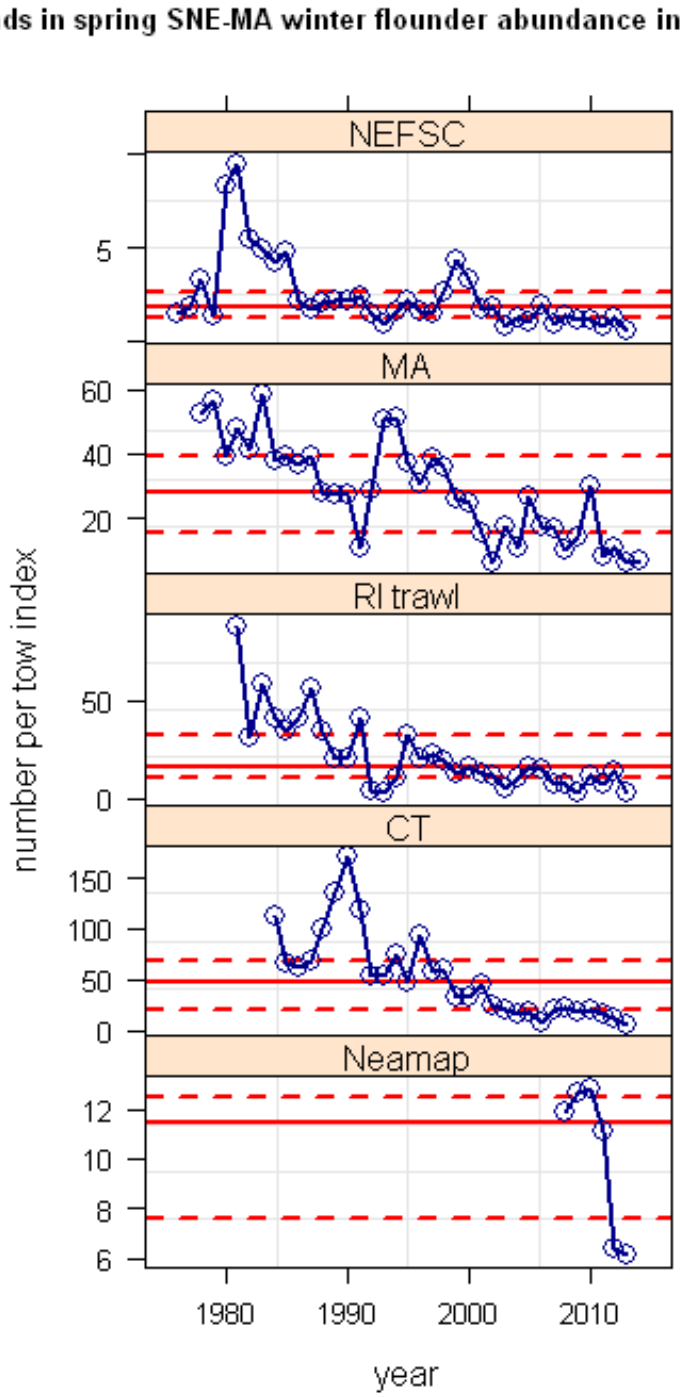

Figure 3. Trends in biomass indices for five bottom trawl fall surveys. Note that y-axis scales vary among panels. Solid red line is time series median. Dashed red lines are the 75th and 25th quantiles.

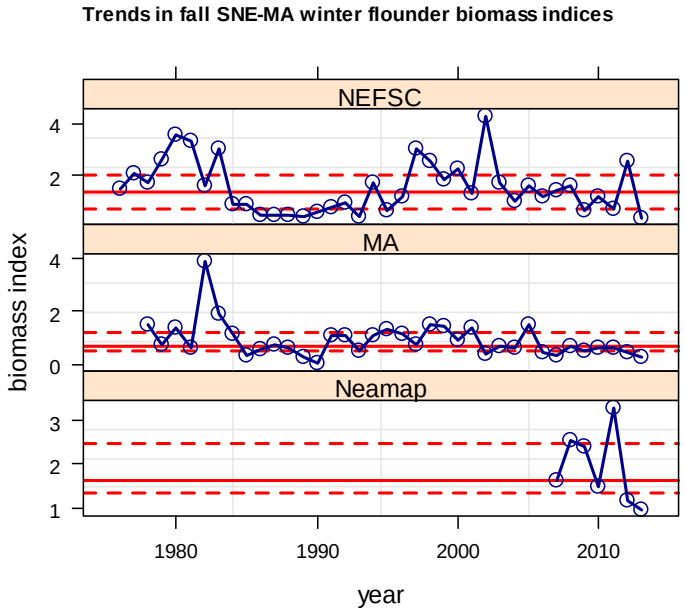

Figure 4. Trends in abundance indices for five bottom trawl fall surveys. Note that y-axis scales vary among panels. Solid red line is time series median. Dashed red lines are the 75th and 25th quantiles.

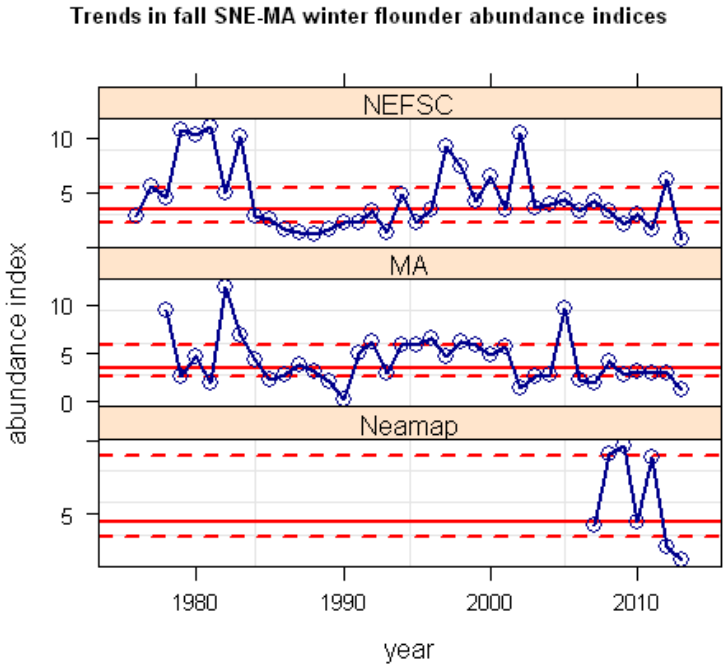

Figure 5. Trends in eight young of the year survey indices for Southern New England- Mid-Atlantic winter flounder. Y axis is logarithmic and varies among panels. Solid red line is time series median, dashed lines are 25th and 75th quantiles (interquartile range). Black line is a fit from a gam. Gray shaded area represents approximately 95% confidence interval on fitted value. Note that year of last data varies among surveys (see Table 1).

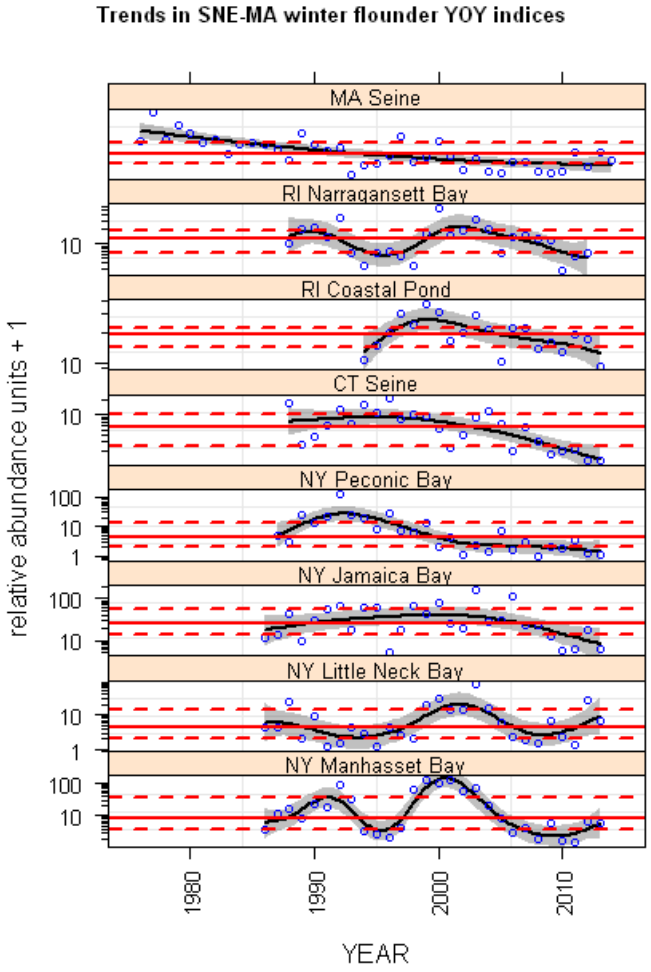

Table 1. Starting and most recent year for eight YOY indices for SNE-MA winter flounder.

Survey	Starting year	most recent year
Ma seine	1976	2014
RI coastal pond	1994	2013
RI Narragansett Bay	1988	2012
CT Seine	1988	2013
NY Peconic Bay	1987	2013
NY Jamaica Bay	1986	2013
NY Little neck	1986	2013
NY Manhasseet	1986	2013