Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • www.asmfc.org

Winter Flounder Advisory Panel
Call Summary

Webinar
January 12, 2023

Advisory Panel Members in Attendance: Bud Brown (Chair, ME), David Goethel (NH), Charles Witek (NY), Allen Butler (MA)

ASMFC Staff: Tracey Bauer

Others in Attendance: Jared Lamy, Tony Wood, Paul Nunnenkamp, Tara Dolan, Paul Nitschke, Kurt Blanchard, Jay Hermsen

The Winter Flounder Advisory Panel (AP) met via conference call to review the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) stock assessments, provide recommendations for 2024-2025 specifications for state waters, and to comment on any other current fishery management issues of concern to them.

General Comments
General concern was expressed by the AP about the low abundance in both the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic areas. One AP member was also concerned that the current low rates of reproduction cannot overcome the higher rate of natural mortality.

Specifications Recommendations
One advisor recommended a moratorium for the SNE/MA winter flounder stock, as he thought there was little interest by recreational fishermen in this area for a fishery, and an open season in the GOM because he believed more people actively participate in that fishery. Another advisor cautioned that, given the state of the stock, they prefer to convert those discards to landings. This advisor recommended to continue to have a small recreational creel limit and a small commercial trip limit, as they would rather see some landings than dead discards. This advisor also supported allowing some landings because this will ensure scientific data are still be able to be collected on the catch, and that a complete moratorium would mean no data would be able to be collected. A third advisor initially recommended no allowable catch in both SNE/MA and GOM regions, but later agreed with this second advisor that some landings should be allowed to minimize dead discards.

An advisor commented that the Winter Flounder Management Board should not have expanded the winter flounder fishing season in the SNE/MA region in 2014, and that it should instead be limited again.

Two AP members expressed support for all states to adopt a commercial and recreational spawning season closure to allow winter flounder the chance to spawn with no fishing pressure, and recommended that the Board strive for consistency in spawning closure seasons between states. An AP member noted that currently, there is disparity between states with spawning closures in both the

commercial and recreational fisheries; some states do not have closures at all, and for those that do, the timing of the spawning closure can differ between states.

Research Recommendations

The advisory panel also provided comments on research recommendations for consideration at the next research track stock assessment. Two advisors expressed their concern that the current stock boundaries do not reflect what may actually be many more distinct, smaller stocks that we should be managing by; they believed more research into winter flounder genetics was crucial to understanding this issue. An AP member expressed his frustration that the stock assessments do not include many years of high catch and abundance of winter flounder because the start years currently used are at the latest in the 1980's; however, it was explained that the data for these earlier periods, especially for the recreational fishery, are sparse or does not exist.

One advisor expressed concern that discards from observer data are being misrecorded and recommended that discards and discard mortality in state waters should to be investigated further. Winter flounder discards in state waters are currently calculated from only federal observer data and so these data are more uncertain than the federal discard numbers. This advisor recommended that states should not rely on the federal observer program to calculate these discards, but instead should invest in their own systems to calculate discards and discard mortality.