

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Coastal Sharks Advisory Panel

June 30, 2009

Conference Call Summary

Meeting Participants: Chris Vonderweidt (ASMFC), Lewis Gillingham (VA, Chair), Rusty Hudson (FL), Frank Blount (RI).

The Coastal Sharks Advisory Panel (AP) convened via phone conference to review Draft Addendum I for public comment and provide recommendations to the Board. The AP agreed on each Issue as follows.

Issue 1. Smooth Dogfish Finning and Identification

The AP supports Option B but would suggest increasing the fin to carcass ratio from 5% of total dressed carcass weight to 15% of total dressed carcass weight. The commercial smooth dogfish fishery is extremely high-volume, labor intensive, and requires a very fresh product. Requiring commercial fishermen to keep the fins attached will increase the time from catch to refrigeration and result in a poor quality product. Smooth dogfish meat spoils quickly and the market demands that it be very fresh. Increasing the initial processing time (gutting and bleeding the shark without removing the fins completely) and requiring fishermen to handle hundreds of smooth dogfish a second time (to completely cut the fins off) will result in a poor quality product. Requiring the fins to remain attached is simply incompatible with the nature of the commercial smooth dogfish fishery.

As noted above, the 5% fin to total dressed weight ratio was developed for *all* sharks and is inappropriately small for smooth dogfish. The percentage should be increased to somewhere between 10 – 15%. An analysis of log book or trip reports can be used to determine the most appropriate fin to total dressed weight ratio for smooth dogfish.

The AP discussed the perception that allowing commercial fishermen to remove smooth dogfish fins at sea will open enforcement loopholes, but they strongly disagree with such claims. Smooth dogfish are easy to distinguish from other species because they have rough (sandpaper like) and transparent skin and the fin placement is different than that of the sandbar shark. Sandbar sharks have smooth opaque skin. There are also prohibitively large penalties for federal dealers who buy and sell sandbar sharks. The financial incentive for dealers to sell sandbar sharks (or parts) as smooth dogfish is not large enough for them to risk large fines and/or loss of their federal dealer permits.

Issue 2 & 3 Smooth Dogfish Recreational Possession Limits

The AP supports Option B for Issue 2 and 3, which removes all smooth dogfish recreational possession limits. They agree that in the absence of an assessment, recreational possession limits are inappropriate, especially when there are no commercial possession limits and 90% of the

harvest is from the commercial fishery. Recreational harvest has been relatively steady over the last decade without possession limits so as long as the catch does not increase dramatically, possession limits are unnecessary. They also agree that a smooth dogfish assessment is vital to properly managing the species and should be completed as soon as possible.

The AP would also like the Board to consider allowing recreational fishermen to cut-up smooth dogfish and use the pieces as bait. Historically, recreational fishermen used smooth dogfish for this purpose, but restrictions in the FMP do not allow fishermen to continue the practice.

Issue 4. Bycatch Reduction Measures

The AP supports Option B which removes the 2-hour net-check requirement for large mesh gillnets. Net checks are impossible to enforce and 2 hours is insufficient for fisherman to even set and check their nets. There are a lot of mixed fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic and this requirement will force them to discard their incidentally caught coastal sharks and these dead discards will not be counted against the quota.