

FishTank - Groundfish Dialogue

Consensus Statement for Consideration by the New England Fisheries Management Council

The FishTank – Groundfish Dialogue is a group of fishermen, environmentalists, managers, and other marine stakeholders who are concerned about the current state of groundfish management in New England. The objective is to have discussions among various communities and interest groups with various management ideas. It is a forum for vetting ideas, refining options and educating each other about the intended and unintended consequences of management alternatives. A series of meetings have been held at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland, Maine to discuss various management options. The format for each meeting included one example or case study of the management framework being discussed followed by a dialogue about the pros and cons among the group.

In November of 2006, a diverse group of fishermen were invited to attend a two-day workshop to continue the dialogue and broaden the input among stakeholders in the region. The group included fishermen from New Bedford, Scituate, Gloucester and Cape Cod, Massachusetts; Portsmouth, NH; Portland, Boothbay, and Port Clyde, Maine. These fishermen ranged from commercial gillnetters to large and small trawlers to hook and line to recreational. There were also representatives from fishermen's organizations in Maine and Massachusetts and an environmental organization. There were nine current and former New England Fisheries Management Council members who attended – each with varying perspectives on groundfish management (past and present).

Following is a consensus statement from this diverse group. It should be noted that "consensus" was defined as not opposed to the concept proposed and believing the idea has enough merit to be endorsed as an alternative in the amendment process.

Consensus Statement:

We accept some type of point system (e.g. output control, removing input controls, lands all fish managed under the plan, real-time reporting and accepted allocation formula not on a species-by-species basis) as a concept to allocate access to catch and may embed within that some type of sector and/or area-based approach with a biological backstop.

There were several issues raised about how this type of system would work. Though we did not resolve these issues, we suggest below a series issues and potential solutions.

Issue:

If individuals are given a limited number of points at the beginning of the year, how do you ensure that all the points aren't used to fish for species of concern resulting in over harvest of these species? The intention of the point system is that the points for stocks of concern would be high enough that there would be a disincentive to fish on these stocks and it would be mathematically impossible to over harvest. However, some folks may still chose to target

cod (for example) and ‘wipe that out the first week’ leaving no cod available for others to catch later in the year.

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Set an annual hard TAC based on OY for species of concern
(Individual species TACs in multispecies complex was noted as a difficult task)
- 2) Set limits to vessels of stocks of concern

Issue:

If a hard TAC is set, then there is concern for a derby fishery. If a soft TAC is set, then how do you guarantee there will not be excessive fishing mortality? Hard or soft TAC? How do you ensure you don’t exceed F for stocks of concern? What happens when the hard TAC is set wrong?

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Set hard TACs per stock area
- 2) Penalize individuals the following year for overages (i.e. forfeit points) for going over TAC
- 3) Limit the percentage of points allowed to be used during the first part of the year to 80% and hold back 20% of points for later use if the stocks are still under the TAC
- 4) Establish mandatory sectors, allocate point to each sector and use them as a monitor
- 5) Establish a multi-species TAC, instead of individual species TACs and manage to this
- 6) Hold an annual ascending value auction to distribute all the points at the beginning of the year with a hard TAC.

Issue:

The key element of the point system is the idea that each fisherman has an individual allocation of points and each stock is assigned a point value. However, how do you ensure individual accountability and establish a system of real-time reporting so the landings can be accurately tracked?

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Require retaining of all species.
[Note: Safety at sea is a concern if you require landing of all catch: A solution is to allow offloading at sea (call a buddy over to take on fish you can not safely land) or call-in a dump when necessary (VMS a tool here)]
- 2) Assign weigh masters to specific ports.
- 3) Require daily landings report and 30% observers (such as in the scallop fishery)

Issue:

Rules currently exist under Amendment 13 for setting up sectors (i.e., a group of fishermen that pool their DAS). In addition, there are active discussions about area-based management

(i.e. setting a geographical boundary with finer-scale management measures). We discuss below how these management frameworks might overlap with a point system of allocation.

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Establish an inshore and an offshore division (either as a sector or a geographically defined area). The inshore of Maine could be further divided by downeast, midcoast, southern sections.
- 2) Allow sensitive habitat areas to establish further gear restrictions within those areas, while allowing any vessel with that gear to fish in those areas.
- 3) Use VMS as a monitoring tool and require vessels to declare intent to fish in an area, fish there only on the local area/sector rules, and, possibly, assign points based upon history of fishing in that area and or allow for point values for species to differ by area.