

Assessment Terms of Reference for SAW/SARC-53 (Nov. 29 – Dec. 2, 2011)

(file vers.: 5/20/11-b)

A. Cod (Gulf of Maine Stock)

1. Estimate catch from all sources including landings and discards. Characterize the uncertainty in these sources of data. Evaluate available information on discard mortality and, if appropriate, update mortality rates applied to discard components of the catch.
2. Present the survey data being used in the assessment (e.g., indices of abundance, recruitment, state surveys, age-length data, etc.). Investigate the utility of commercial or recreational LPUE as a measure of relative abundance. Characterize the uncertainty and any bias in these sources of data.
3. Estimate annual fishing mortality, recruitment and stock biomass (both total and spawning stock) for the time series, and estimate their uncertainty. Include a historical retrospective analysis to allow a comparison with previous assessment results. Review the performance of historical projections with respect to stock size, catch recruitment and fishing mortality.
4. Perform a sensitivity analysis which examines the impact of allocation of catch to stock areas on model performance (TOR-3).
5. If time permits, consider the small-scale distribution of cod (e.g., spawning sites, resource distribution, fishing effort) in the Gulf of Maine and advise on its management implications.
6. State the existing stock status definitions for “overfished” and “overfishing”. Then update or redefine biological reference points (BRPs; point estimates or proxies for B_{MSY} , $B_{THRESHOLD}$, F_{MSY} , and MSY) and provide estimates of their uncertainty. If analytic model-based estimates are unavailable, consider recommending alternative measurable proxies for BRPs. Comment on the appropriateness of existing BRPs and the “new” (i.e., updated, redefined, or alternative) BRPs.
7. Evaluate stock status with respect to the existing model (from the most recent accepted peer reviewed assessment) and with respect to a new model developed for this peer review. In both cases, evaluate whether the stock is rebuilt.
 - a. When working with the existing model, update it with new data and evaluate stock status (overfished and overfishing) with respect to the existing BRP estimates.
 - b. Then use the newly proposed model and evaluate stock status with respect to “new” BRPs (from Cod TOR-6).
8. Develop and apply analytical approaches to conduct single and multi-year stock projections to compute the pdf (probability density function) of the OFL (overfishing level) and candidate ABCs (Acceptable Biological Catch; see Appendix to the SAW TORs).
 - a. Provide numerical annual projections (3-5 years). Each projection should estimate and report annual probabilities of exceeding threshold BRPs for F , and probabilities of falling below threshold BRPs for biomass. Use a sensitivity analysis approach in which a range of assumptions about the most important uncertainties in the assessment are considered (e.g., terminal year abundance, variability in recruitment).
 - b. Comment on which projections seem most realistic. Consider the major uncertainties in the assessment as well as sensitivity of the projections to various assumptions.
 - c. Describe this stock’s vulnerability (see “Appendix to the SAW TORs”) to becoming overfished, and how this could affect the choice of ABC.
9. Review, evaluate and report on the status of the SARC and Working Group research recommendations listed in recent SARC reviewed assessments and review panel reports. Identify new research recommendations.

B. Black sea bass

1. Estimate catch from all sources including landings and discards. Characterize the uncertainty in these sources of data. Evaluate available information on discard mortality and, if appropriate, update mortality rates applied to discard components of the catch. Describe the spatial and temporal distribution of fishing effort.
2. Present the survey data being used in the assessment (e.g., indices of abundance, recruitment, state surveys, age-length data, etc.). Investigate the utility of commercial or recreational LPUE as a measure of relative abundance. Characterize the uncertainty and any bias in these sources of data.
3. Consider known aspects of seasonal migration and availability of black sea bass, and investigate ways to incorporate these into the stock assessment. Based on the known aspects, evaluate whether more than one management unit should be used for black sea bass from Cape Hatteras north and, if so, propose unit delineations that could be considered by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and for use in future stock assessments.
4. Investigate estimates of natural mortality rate, M , and if possible incorporate the results into TOR-5. Consider including sex- and age-specific rate estimates, if they can be supported by the data.
5. Estimate annual fishing mortality, recruitment and appropriate measures of stock biomass (both total and spawning stock) for the time series (integrating results from TOR-4), and estimate their uncertainty. Include a historical retrospective analysis to allow a comparison with most recent assessment results.
6. State the existing stock status definitions for “overfished” and “overfishing”. Then update or redefine biological reference points (BRPs; point estimates or proxies for B_{MSY} , $B_{THRESHOLD}$, F_{MSY} , and MSY) and provide estimates of their uncertainty. If analytic model-based estimates are unavailable, consider recommending alternative measurable proxies for BRPs. Comment on the appropriateness of existing BRPs and the “new” (i.e., updated, redefined, or alternative) BRPs.
7. Evaluate stock status with respect to the existing model (from the most recent accepted peer reviewed assessment) and with respect to a new model developed for this peer review.
 - a. When working with the existing model, update it with new data and evaluate stock status (overfished and overfishing) with respect to the existing BRP estimates.
 - b. Then use the newly proposed model and evaluate stock status with respect to “new” BRPs (from black sea bass TOR 6).
8. Develop and apply analytical approaches to conduct single and multi-year stock projections to compute the pdf (probability density function) of the OFL (overfishing level) and candidate ABCs (Acceptable Biological Catch; see Appendix to the SAW TORs).
 - a. Provide numerical annual projections (3-5 years). Each projection should estimate and report annual probabilities of exceeding threshold BRPs for F , and probabilities of falling below threshold BRPs for biomass. Use a sensitivity analysis approach in which a range of assumptions about the most important uncertainties in the assessment are considered (e.g., terminal year abundance, variability in recruitment, and definition of BRPs for black sea bass).
 - b. Comment on which projections seem most realistic. Consider major uncertainties in the assessment as well as the sensitivity of the projections to various assumptions.
 - c. Describe this stock’s vulnerability (see “Appendix to the SAW TORs”) to becoming overfished, and how this could affect the choice of ABC.
9. Review, evaluate and report on the status of the SARC and Working Group research recommendations listed in recent SARC reviewed assessments and review panel reports. Identify new research recommendations.

Appendix to the SAW TORs:

Explanation of “Acceptable Biological Catch” (DOC Natl. Standard Guidelines, Fed. Reg., vol. 74, no. 11, 1/16/2009):

Acceptable biological catch (ABC) is a level of a stock or stock complex’s annual catch that accounts for the scientific uncertainty in the estimate of [overfishing limit] OFL and any other scientific uncertainty...” (p. 3208) [In other words, $OFL \geq ABC$.]

ABC for overfished stocks. For overfished stocks and stock complexes, a rebuilding ABC must be set to reflect the annual catch that is consistent with the schedule of fishing mortality rates in the rebuilding plan. (p. 3209)

NMFS expects that in most cases ABC will be reduced from OFL to reduce the probability that overfishing might occur in a year. (p. 3180)

ABC refers to a level of “catch” that is “acceptable” given the “biological” characteristics of the stock or stock complex. As such, [optimal yield] OY does not equate with ABC. The specification of OY is required to consider a variety of factors, including social and economic factors, and the protection of marine ecosystems, which are not part of the ABC concept. (p. 3189)

Explanation of “Vulnerability” (DOC Natl. Standard Guidelines, Fed. Reg., vol. 74, no. 11, 1/16/2009):

“Vulnerability. A stock’s vulnerability is a combination of its productivity, which depends upon its life history characteristics, and its susceptibility to the fishery. Productivity refers to the capacity of the stock to produce MSY and to recover if the population is depleted, and susceptibility is the potential for the stock to be impacted by the fishery, which includes direct captures, as well as indirect impacts to the fishery (e.g., loss of habitat quality).” (p. 3205)

Rules of Engagement among members of a SAW Assessment Working Group:

Anyone participating in SAW assessment working group meetings that will be running or presenting results from an assessment model is expected to supply the source code, a compiled executable, an input file with the proposed configuration, and a detailed model description in advance of the model meeting. Source code for NOAA Toolbox programs is available on request. These measures allow transparency and a fair evaluation of differences that emerge between models.

Appendix to the SAW TORs (cont.):

ABC Control Rule Methods Proposed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council:

A multi-level approach will be used for setting an ABC for each Mid-Atlantic stock, based on the overall level of scientific uncertainty associated with its assessment. The stock assessment will be required to provide estimates of the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) and future biomass, the probability distributions of these estimates, the probability distribution of the overfishing limit (OFL; level of catch that would achieve MFMT given the current or future biomass), and a description of factors considered and methods used to estimate their distributions. The multi-level approach defines four levels of overall assessment uncertainty defined by characteristics of the stock assessment and determination by the SSC that the uncertainty in the probability distribution of OFL adequately represents best available science. The procedure used to determine ABCs is different in each level of the methods framework. The SSC will determine to which level the assessment for a particular stock belongs when setting single or multi-year ABC specifications and a description of the justification for assignment to a level will be provided with the ABC recommendation. The ABC recommendations should be more precautionary as an assessment moves from level 1 to level 4. Recommendations for ABC may be made for up to 3 years for all of the managed resources except spiny dogfish which may be specified for up to 5 years. The rationale for assigning an assessment to a level will be reviewed each time an ABC determination is made.

Levels of stock assessments, characteristics, and procedures for determining ABCs are defined as follows:

Level 1: Level 1 represents the highest level to which an assessment can be assigned. Assignment of a stock to this level implies that all important sources of uncertainty are fully and formally captured in the stock assessment model and the probability distribution of the OFL calculated within the assessment provides an adequate description of uncertainty of OFL. Accordingly, the OFL distribution will be estimated directly from the stock assessment. In addition, for a stock assessment to be assigned to Level 1, the SSC must determine that the OFL probability distribution represents best available science. Examples of attributes of the stock assessment that would lead to inclusion in Level 1 are:

- Assessment model structure and any treatment of the data prior to inclusion in the model includes appropriate and necessary details of the biology of the stock, the fisheries that exploit the stock, and the data collection methods;
- Estimation of stock status and reference points integrated in the same framework such that the OFL calculations promulgate all uncertainties (stock status and reference points) throughout estimation and forecasting;
- Assessment estimates relevant quantities including F_{MSY}^1 , OFL, biomass reference points, stock status, and their respective uncertainties; and
- No substantial retrospective patterns in the estimates of fishing mortality (F), biomass (B), and recruitment (R) are present in the stock assessment estimates.

The important part of Level 1 is that the precision estimated using a purely statistical routine will define the OFL probability distribution. Thus, all of the important sources of uncertainty are formally captured in the stock assessment model. When a Level 1 assessment is achieved, the assessment results are likely unbiased and fully consider uncertainty in the precision of estimates. Under Level 1, the ABC will be determined solely on the basis of an acceptable probability of overfishing (P^*), determined by the Council's risk policy (see alternatives in section 5.2.2), and the probability distribution of the OFL.

¹ With justification, F_{MSY} may be replaced with an alternative maximum fishing mortality threshold to define the OFL.

Appendix to the SAW TORs (cont.):

Level 2: Level 2 indicates that an assessment has greater uncertainty than Level 1. Specifically, the estimation of the probability distribution of the OFL directly from the stock assessment model fails to include some important sources of uncertainty, necessitating expert judgment during the preparation of the stock assessment, and the OFL probability distribution is deemed best available science by the SSC. Examples of attributes of the stock assessment that would lead to inclusion in Level 2 are:

- Key features of the biology of the stock, the fisheries that exploit it, or the data collection methods are missing from the stock assessment;
- Assessment estimates relevant quantities, including reference points (which may be proxies) and stock status, together with their respective uncertainties, but the uncertainty is not fully promulgated through the model or some important sources may be lacking;
- Estimates of the precision of biomass, fishing mortality rates, and their respective reference points are provided in the stock assessment; and
- Accuracy of the MFMT and future biomass is estimated in the stock assessment by using *ad hoc* methods.

In this level, ABC will be determined by using the Council's risk policy (see alternatives in section 5.2.2), as with a Level 1 assessment, but with the OFL probability distribution based on the specified distribution in the stock assessment.

Level 3: Attributes of a stock assessment that would lead to inclusion in Level 3 are the same as Level 2, except that

- The assessment does not contain estimates of the probability distribution of the OFL or the probability distribution provided does not, in the opinion of the SSC, adequately reflect uncertainty in the OFL estimate.

Assessments in this level are judged to over- or underestimate the accuracy of the OFL. The SSC will adjust the distribution of the OFL and develop an ABC recommendation by applying the Council's risk policy (see alternatives in section 5.2.2) to the modified OFL probability distribution. The SSC will develop a set of default levels of uncertainty in the OFL probability distribution for this level based on literature review and a planned evaluation of ABC control rules. A control rule of 75 percent of F_{MSY} may be applied as a default if an OFL distribution cannot be developed.

Appendix to the SAW TORs (cont.):

Level 4: Stock assessments in Level 4 are deemed to have reliable estimates of trends in abundance and catch, but absolute abundance, fishing mortality rates, and reference points are suspect or absent. Additionally, there are limited circumstances that may not fit the standard approaches to specification of reference points and management measures set forth in these guidelines (i.e., ABC determination). In these circumstances, the SSC may propose alternative approaches for satisfying the NS1 requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act than those set forth in the NS1 guidelines. In particular, stocks in this level do not have point estimates of the OFL or probability distributions of the OFL that are considered best available science. In most cases, stock assessments that fail peer review or are deemed highly uncertain by the SSC will be assigned to this level. Examples of potential attributes for inclusion in this category are:

- Assessment approach is missing essential features of the biology of the stock, characteristics of data collection, and the fisheries that exploit it;
- Stock status and reference points are estimated, but are not considered reliable;
- Assessment may estimate some relevant quantities including biomass, fishing mortality or relative abundance, but only trends are deemed reliable;
- Large retrospective patterns usually present; and
- Uncertainty may or may not be considered, but estimates of uncertainty are probably substantially underestimated.

In this level, a simple control rule will be used based on biomass and catch history and the Council's risk policy.

The SSC will determine, based on the assessment level to which a stock is classified, the specifics of the control rule to specify ABC that would be expected to attain the probability of overfishing specified in the Council's risk policy. The SSC may deviate from the above control rule methods framework or level criteria and recommend an ABC that differs from the result of the ABC control rule calculation, but must provide justification for doing so.

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