

Draft Terms of Reference
Data Poor Stocks Working Group
(written: 10-11-07, updated: 5-9-08)

Background

Data poor stocks are problematic for managers because traditional measures of status (biomass and fishing mortality) are not available. A variety of *ad hoc* metrics have been developed to address these issues but a synoptic evaluation of the problem has not been conducted in the Northeast. The term “data poor” will be used to categorize assessments limited by either data or lack of contrast in time series. Fisheries stock assessments require the integration of multiple sources of data including commercial and recreational landings, discards from multiple fleets, fishery independent survey indices, and measures of fishing effort. For some species, one or more of these data sources may not be available or have such low precision that it is not possible to use them in a conventional application within an assessment.

Objectives

1. Constitute and convene a Working Group comprising NEFSC assessment scientists, and staff from NERO, NEFMC, MAFMC, and ASMFC to:
 - a. Recommend biological reference points (BRPs) and measurable BRP and maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxies for the following data poor stocks: Black sea bass; Deep-sea red crab; Scup; Skates; Atlantic wolffish.
 - b. Provide advice about scientific uncertainty and risk for Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) to consider when they develop fishing level recommendations for these stocks.
 - c. Consider developing BRPs for species groups for situations where the catch or landings can not be identified to species. Work on this objective will depend on, and needs to be consistent with, final guidance on implementing the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, whenever that guidance becomes available.
 - d. Comment on what can be done to improve the information, proxies or assessments for each species.
2. For weakfish, provide guidance/suggest methodologies for scientists to use in future assessments.

Participants

The Working Group (WG) will consist of representatives from the staffs of the NEFMC (2), MAFMC (2), ASMFC (2), NERO (3), and NEFSC (5).

Products

The WG product will be a document providing: (a) proposed BRPs and measurable BRP and MSY proxies for the five Northeast stocks/species groups listed in 1(a) above; (b) advice for SSCs to consider when they develop fishing level recommendations for these stocks; (c) advice on what to do about species with identification problems; (d) comments on what is needed to improve the proxies and/or assessments for each species and (e) suggested methodologies for conducting future weakfish stock assessments. Although it is expected that significant uncertainties will be associated with the proposed BRPs, MSYs, and their proxies, the intention is that the recommended values will represent the best available science.

During (or after) the WG's activities, a peer review of some type will be undertaken to ensure that the WG's recommendations and technical approaches are sound.