

Report of the Monkfish Assessment Oversight Panel Meeting

The Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) met on March 18, 2016 to discuss the monkfish update assessment. The meeting was conducted by conference call with a webinar. In addition to the AOP, lead scientist, and working group chair, four people participated in the call (see Participants List below). The meeting lasted one hour. Discussions followed the monkfish assessment analysis and peer review plan available on the SAW webpage (<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/saw/monkfish2016/index.html>).

One purpose of the AOP meeting was to confirm the recommendation made by the NEFSC and the concurrence of the NEFMC's Scientific and Statistical Committee to not update the monkfish assessment using the same modeling approach as used in the last assessment. This recommendation was based on new scientific evidence that the vertebral ageing method for monkfish is not valid. There is not an accepted method to age monkfish and estimate a growth curve at this time. Since the previous monkfish assessment uses the SCALE model and this model relies on a growth curve to relate observed length distributions to estimated ages, the lack of a growth curve prevents its use. The AOP agrees with the recommendation to not update the previous modeling approach (SCALE) for monkfish during the update assessment. This decision is recognized as a departure from standard procedure but is based on the recognition that the inability to estimate monkfish growth makes any analysis using SCALE unusable for providing catch advice. The AOP agrees that running the SCALE model just for the sake of process, when there is no chance the results would be acceptable for management purposes, is not a good use of time.

The AOP discussed the work to be done for the monkfish update, labelled "Plan B" in the plan document. The approach will be a data update with simple analyses to support the SSC in setting the ABC for monkfish. Standard data will be updated including landings and discards, fishery independent surveys, examination of length-weight relationships, spatial distribution of the stock, and performance of the fishery relative to previously set quotas. The AOP recommends that NEFMC SSC members participate in the working group and subsequent integrated peer review to ensure that the analyses conducted by the working group contribute to the SSC catch advice deliberations. The desire is for the working group to provide the information needed by the SSC without spending time on analyses that are found to be not useful by the SSC. The AOP recommends that stock status not be evaluated during this data update for monkfish because of the lack of biological reference points to allow status determination. The next monkfish benchmark will provide biological reference points that can be used to determine stock status. It is expected that the OFL for monkfish will be unknown after this data update. The next benchmark should also consider defining a "Plan B" in case the recommended assessment approach fails in subsequent updates.

The next steps in the monkfish update will start with a public outreach meeting on April 19. Details about this meeting will be provided on the SAW webpage. The monkfish working group is scheduled to meet in Woods Hole May 24-27, but may not require the entire four days. The working group meeting will be available by web conference with

details provided on the SAW webpage. The report of the working group will be reviewed during a one day integrated peer review in late June (exact time to be determined). This meeting will also be available by web conference with details provided on the SAW webpage. The AOP suggests the scheduling of meeting for update assessments be considered from a broader perspective to ensure that the appropriate balance between transparency and efficiency are met.

AOP Recommendations

- **The AOP agrees with the recommendation to not update the previous modeling approach (SCALE) for monkfish during the update assessment.**
- **The AOP recommends that NEFMC SSC members participate in the working group and subsequent integrated peer review to ensure that the analyses conducted by the working group contribute to the SSC catch advice deliberations.**
- **The AOP recommends that stock status not be evaluated during this data update for monkfish because of the lack of biological reference points to allow status determination.**

Participants List

John Boreman (AOP, MAFMC SSC chair)

Jake Kritzer (AOP, NEFMC SSC chair)

Chris Legault (AOP chair)

Anne Richards (lead scientist)

Mark Terceiro (working group chair)

Fiona Hogan (NEFMC)

Jean-Jacques Maguire (NEFMC SSC)

Jason Didden (MAFMC)

Sheena Steiner (NEFSC)