

U.S./Canada Transboundary Resources Steering Committee Meeting
Hilton Boston Downtown Financial District
Boston, MA
September 13, 2012

U.S. Participants

John Bullard, NMFS, Steering Committee Co-chair
Jennifer Anderson, NMFS, Integration Committee Co-chair
Rip Cunningham, NEFMC Chairman, TMGC Co-chair
Travis Ford, NMFS, Integration Committee
Dave Gouveia, NMFS, SAR Co-chair
Sarah Heil, NMFS, TMGC
Paul Howard, NEFMC, Executive Director
Allison Murphy, NMFS, Integration Committee
Loretta O'Brien, NEFSC, TRAC Co-chair

Canadian Participants

Faith Scattolon, DFO, Steering Committee Co-chair
Andrea Carew, DFO, SAR Co-chair
Mark Craig, DFO, Integration Committee Co-chair
Claude d'Entremont, GOMAC Co-chair
Roger Stirling, GOMAC Co-chair
Michael O'Connor, TMGC Co-chair
Verna Docherty, DFO, TMGC
Lou Van Eeckhaute, DFO, TRAC & TMGC

Opening Remarks

Mr. John Bullard began the meeting by welcoming everyone to Boston and thanked Ms. Faith Scattolon for meeting with him to review the agenda.

Mr. Bullard provided an overview of his background and noted the difficulties and sacrifices associated with rebuilding fisheries. He acknowledged the difficult times that Canada and the U.S. have been through as they work to rebuild a number of fish stocks and commended the industry's resolve.

Ms. Faith Scattolon welcomed Mr. Bullard as Co-Chair of the Canada/U.S. Transboundary Resources Steering Committee. She acknowledged Mr. Bullard's comments regarding the challenges associated with rebuilding fisheries and recognized the cooperative efforts by both Canada and the U.S. on cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder and other marine species to be of mutual benefit.

Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) Report

Eastern Georges Bank Cod

Ms. Lou Van Eeckhaute and Ms. Loretta O'Brien presented the report on behalf of the TRAC for Eastern Georges Bank cod, Eastern Georges Bank haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (attached).

Mr. Paul Howard noted that both cod models appeared to provide similar results for recruitment and biomass, but questioned why they diverged on the results for fishing mortality. Ms. O'Brien indicated that the two models differ by the natural mortality assigned to older ages. The Split 0.5 M model has a larger proportion of the total mortality attributed to natural losses so fishing mortality will necessarily be lower.

Mr. Howard then asked how long it had been since the smoother, used to determine resource distribution, had been evaluated. Ms. Van Eeckhaute responded that the smoother had not been reevaluated; it is a negotiated part of the Understanding. Mr. Michael O'Connor further explained that the smoother is part of the formula that was included in the agreement and it is used to improve the resource distribution calculation from the survey results, which can be highly variable and not reflective of true distribution changes. While it favored Canada this year, it will likely favor the U.S. in the next year or two. He further noted that the smoother was included to provide a buffer to the changes in resource distribution.

Mr. O'Connor asked if it was known why there is so much uncertainty about the 2010 year class. Ms. Van Eeckhaute indicated that estimates from the survey are very poor because current surveys are not effective at catching age one fish; she further noted that even at age two the uncertainty is high. However, it reduces for older fish because the survey better captures the fish and there are more observations of the strength of a year class with each survey and after the age of four or five years, the estimates stabilize.

Eastern Georges Bank Haddock

Mr. Howard inquired about the average recruitment for haddock versus cod over time. Ms. Van Eeckhaute indicated that from the 1930s to 1950s, when recruitment was less variable, it was approximately 40 million for haddock.

Mr. Howard noted that for haddock, it appears that the stock has been below Fref for five years. Further, the 2003 year class is far greater than average size, the 2010 year class was reasonable and yet the TAC this year has decreased by 35 percent. Given the positive news about this stock, he asked why the TAC was going down. Mr. O'Connor responded that neither country is catching their quota but biomass is declining. This is in line with a projection made several years ago that biomass would trend down until the 2010 year class recruits into the fishery.

Ms. Scattolon questioned as to whether a similar recruitment pattern could be observed between haddock and cod. Ms. O'Brien responded that before 1990, recruitment was high for both species, but after 1990, the co-occurrence of similar recruitment events was not as strong, due in part to the truncated age structure of cod relative to the expanding age structure of haddock.

Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

Mr. Howard questioned why the stock had a high mortality and exceeded F_{msy} , yet biomass increased. Ms. O'Brien indicated that although the stock is being fished above F_{ref} , fishing mortality rate has been declining, allowing a moderate increase in biomass. However, she stated that the current level of fishing effort could not be maintained. It was further questioned as to whether the estimate for F_{ref} was incorrect. Ms. Verna Docherty added that catches can exceed F_{ref} and still result in biomass growth because the biomass growth expected is based on the age three fish recruiting to the spawning stock biomass whereas F and F_{ref} are based on age four and older fish.

Mr. Howard asked if the TAC was set above 500 mt, would it result in exceeding F_{ref} in all sensitivity analyses. Ms. O'Brien responded that anything over 500 mt would be above F_{ref} for all except one of the sensitivity runs and that there would be a high probability of overfishing.

2013 Terms of Reference (TOR)

Ms. O'Brien indicated that the draft 2013 TORs are standard except that the TRAC has added preliminary scoping for a new yellowtail flounder model. Although there is no new information to provide insight into the retrospective pattern in the yellowtail assessment, the TRAC hopes that this preliminary exploration of alternative models will determine if a new benchmark would be feasible. It was also noted that at a 2013 International Council for the Exploration of the Sea symposium in Boston, yellowtail flounder will be a candidate stock, along with several other stocks, to be evaluated in a suite of models to address retrospective bias.

The Steering Committee had no comment on the draft TORs and it was agreed that each country will review the TORs through their own internal processes and approve them by the Steering Committee Co-chairs secretorially in December.

Cod Benchmark Assessment

Ms. O'Brien explained that the cod benchmark assessment is scheduled for Spring 2013 and would have two objectives: (1) to review the assessment framework for the Eastern Georges Bank cod management unit with the agreed benchmark model formulation to be used at the June 2013 TRAC meeting; and (2) to discuss criteria for timing of and allowable changes to TRAC benchmark model assessments. More specific objectives for the meeting can be found in the TOR document (attached).

Ms. O'Brien noted that the U.S. is conducting a cod benchmark assessment for both the Georges Bank and Gulf of Maine cod stocks. While estimating discards back through 1978, it was realized that the U.S. does not have Canadian discards reaching back that far and it is hoped that the data can be obtained. Ms. O'Brien went on to indicate that the U.S. is hoping to have one model that better addresses natural mortality and the retrospective pattern. It is the intention of the U.S. to have this model available during the Eastern Georges Bank Benchmark Model meeting in early 2013.

Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC)

Guidance

The TMGC presentation was provided by Mr. Michael O'Connor and Mr. Rip Cunningham (attached). The TMGC's guidance on TACs is as follows: (1) Eastern Georges Bank cod 600 mt (96 mt U.S./504 mt Canada); (2) Eastern Georges Bank haddock 10,400 mt (3,952 mt U.S./6,448 mt Canada); and (3) Georges Bank yellowtail flounder 500 mt (215 mt U.S./285 mt Canada).

Quota Trading

The TMGC discussed the possibility of establishing a long-term quota trading mechanism. It was agreed that quota trading needs to be mutually beneficial to both parties, it would be nation to nation, there would not be any negative impacts on stock status, and it would not affect the sharing arrangement. While both U.S. and Canadian TMGC members acknowledged that it may be difficult to negotiate a mechanism that both parties are comfortable with, it was agreed that the potential benefits are great enough to warrant trying.

Multi-year Assessments

Both the U.S. and Canada already conduct multi-year assessments for other domestically managed stocks. By applying a similar approach to transboundary stocks, the TMGC hopes it will be possible to reduce the frequency of assessments. It was agreed that haddock would be a good pilot since the stock is doing well. The TMGC also indicated that they would like to review the performance of the three transboundary stock assessment models over the last 10 years to determine the accuracy of the assessments and how reliably they were able to perform projections.

Alternative Management Strategies

The TMGC discussed exploring alternative management strategies. Mr. O'Connor noted that we are increasingly relying on models that need to be tinkered with and we need more benchmarks to make the models predictable. While we do not want to interfere with the modeling process, we should be looking at alternative ways of managing fisheries in the event that we do not have

confidence in the model projections. The TMGC indicated it would like to develop a think piece along those lines (plan B) just in case models do not improve.

TMGC Intercessional Meeting

The TMGC proposed an intersessional meeting over the winter to further discuss quota trading, multi-year stock assessments, and alternatives to management. Ms. Scattolon and Mr. Bullard agreed.

Ms. Verna Docherty and Ms. Sarah Heil indicated that they would handle logistics for the meeting. The Steering Committee agreed that an agenda for the intercessional would be drafted and agreed upon by both countries by October 26, 2012, and for the U.S. only, the draft agenda would be submitted for review and comment by the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council at their November 1 and 2, 2012, meeting. Finally, it was agreed that the meeting would take place the week of February 25, 2013, in Portland, ME.

2013 TOR (Agenda)

The draft 2013 TOR were reviewed and there were no comments. The Steering Committee co-chairs will finalize the TORs secretariially in December.

U.S. Update on Yellowtail Flounder

Ms. Heil provided an update of U.S. management and discussions regarding Georges Bank yellowtail flounder. She indicated that yellowtail flounder quota had been transferred from the groundfish fishery to the scallop fleet. Further, under the next groundfish action slated for implementation by May 1, 2013, options are being explored to reduce the minimum fish size for many groundfish stocks, including haddock and yellowtail flounder, and no longer allocate yellowtail flounder to sector vessels.

With regard to the timing of the New England Council's Science and Statistical Committee (SSC), the U.S. feels that this year was better because the SSC met prior to the TMGC meeting to review the TRAC's advice and provided a range of acceptable catches. TMGC representatives expressed their optimism regarding the Council's acceptance of TMGCs guidance. Additionally, Canadian TMGC members expressed their commitment to recommended combined catch of 500 mt for yellowtail flounder for the 2013 fishing season.

Gulf of Maine Commercial Fisheries and Fisk Stock Paper

The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment is developing a *Gulf of Maine Report* which aims to provide information on priority concerns for the region that can be used for environmental management, decision-making and education. The editor of the Report approached the Transboundary Steering Committee, in July 2012, requesting suggested authors for one of the modules for the report, entitled *Commercial Fisheries and Fish Stock Status*.

Potential authors were brought forward to the editor of the report. Additionally, the editor requested that the TRAC provide a review function when the draft module was completed. It was decided that the review function was beyond the purview of the TRAC. Mark Craig and Jennifer Anderson were tasked with reporting back to the editor with a suggested reviewer from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Mr. Bullard indicated he would reach out to his counterpart at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and inquire as to whether someone from the Center could be made available to assist with a review of the Report. Ms. Scattolon also stated that she would name an individual to assist with the review. However, subsequent to the Steering Committee meeting, the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment revised the content of the Report and it was determined that a reviewer is no longer necessary.

Species at Risk (SAR) Working Group

Mr. David Gouveia and Ms. Andrea Carew presented the report of the SAR Working Group (attached). Mr. Gouveia noted that although the Working Group has been unable to meet this year, he and Ms. Carew are in touch regularly and have shared information regarding right whale entanglements and ship strike mitigation. Further, staff from DFO attended the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team meeting and in the coming months, the Working Group plans to discuss short and long-term plans of action.

Ms. Carew provided an update on the Canadian list of species and the development of Canada's North Atlantic Right Whale Action Plan. Ms. Carew highlighted shortnose sturgeon (listed as special concern), cusk to be reassessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and Maritimes Region, DFO, as the lead for the southern designatable unit for Atlantic cod.

Mr. Bullard inquired regarding the bluefin tuna/cod listings and the population estimate for right whales. Regarding bluefin tuna, Ms. Carew stated that it was assessed in May 2011 and determined to be endangered; consultations would be starting in the coming weeks and would remain open until December. A listing recommendation is expected in 2013.

With respect to cod, the previous decision not to list was largely related to socio-economics impacts on the industry. Cod has since been reassessed by COSEWIC and the listing process has recommenced.

For right whales, data suggests that the population is on the upswing due to recovery efforts in both countries, including revised shipping lanes.

Mr. Gouveia provided an update on U.S. species. He noted that right whales were undergoing a 5-year review and that it may be possible to down list or delist humpback whales. He also noted that the allowable level of harbor porpoise takes had been exceeded, triggering a two month

closure in the Gulf of Maine. In addition, he explained that Atlantic sturgeon has five distinct population segments and that four out of the five are listed as threatened.

Closing Remarks/Future Steering Committee Meeting Dates

Ms. Scattolon and Mr. Bullard thanked the meeting participants for their hard work and agreed that the Steering Committee will hold its spring video call on April 19, 2013, and next face-to-face meeting on September 12, 2013, in Halifax, NS.