

**Canada/U.S. Transboundary Steering Committee Meeting
September 22, 2011
Summary Minutes**

Item 1 - Opening Remarks from Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Patricia Kurkul - National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) – U.S. Co-chair

- A national report on the status of U.S. fisheries ranked the port of New Bedford as the most profitable in the nation, primarily due to the lucrative scallop fishery. Protected resources will likely continue to grow in importance.
- A status review for bluefin tuna found that listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was not warranted.
- A high number of harbor porpoise takes may result in some areas being closed to commercial fishing.
- Several petitions were received to list species under the ESA: (1) alewife and blueback herring; (2) scalloped hammerhead shark; (3) thorny skate; and (4) thorny, barndoor, winter, and smooth skates.
- Work to reduce entanglements on large whales is ongoing, particularly with vertical lines. Public scoping meetings were completed and the U.S. will be developing measures for implementation in 2013.
- Ms. Kurkul announced that she would be retiring at the end of the year.

Faith Scattolon – Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) – Canadian Co-chair

- DFO's new Minister of Fisheries, the Honourable Keith Ashfield, retains his portfolio as Minister of the Atlantic Gateway. He previously served as Minister of State and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and Minister of National Revenue.
- Mr. David Millar is now Regional Director of Ecosystem Management Branch and Ms. Rhea King is the Regional Director of Policy & Economics Branch in the Maritimes Region.
- The Recovery Potential Assessment report for a potential COSEWIC listing of bluefin tuna as "Endangered" is scheduled to be published on the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat's website on September 23, 2011. Next will be a socio-economic analysis, public consultation and aboriginal consultation. A listing decision is not likely before 2013.
- COSEWIC has been very active in reviewing several species over the past year and DFO is in the final days of looking at several shark species.
- The department is also working closely with the U.S. on the exportation of farmed sturgeon eggs to the United States.
- Ms. Scattolon noted that the meeting marked the last official meeting of the Canada/U.S. Transboundary Steering Committee with Ms. Kurkul as U.S. Co-chair.

Item 2 - Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee (TRAC) Report

Cod, Haddock, and Yellowtail Flounder

Status reports for cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder can be found on the TRAC link under related groups.

Allocation Shares

- Allocation shares for cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder: (1) Eastern Georges Bank cod U.S. 24 percent/Canada 76 percent; (2) Eastern Georges Bank haddock U.S. 43 percent/Canada 57 percent; and (3) Georges Bank yellowtail flounder U.S. 49 percent/Canada 51 percent.
- Regarding retrospective pattern for cod, TRAC provides a range, rather than an exact amount of catch. TMGC and Steering Committee often recommend catches mid-range; therefore, there is a 50-50 chance of success or failure. TRAC usually advised catch be set lower due to the retrospective bias as well as poor stock productivity and the range provided for cod by TRAC does not take the retrospective pattern into consideration. In past years TMGC addressed lower catch levels indicated by the retrospective bias by advising catches corresponding to the 25% risk level. TRAC intends to present risk analyses which take the retrospective bias into account in the future.

Multi-year Assessments

- A multi-year assessment working paper developed by TRAC was not presented to TMGC, so it will be included for discussion at TMGC's January intercessional meeting. After review by TMGC, the paper will be brought to the Steering Committee for discussion.
- The U.S. has recently been looking at projections to determine if there is any indication whether a stable catch approach works better. Predictions greater than four years were found unreliable but the two-three year range predictions work well. The U.S. does not have experience with stable catches but an advantage of using projections is that they are based on an overfishing definition, which ensures that a stock is not fished too ambitiously. This is not the case with stable catch, whereby it may be easier to overfish or underfish a stock.
- Benchmark assessments for yellowtail flounder and eastern Georges Bank cod were conducted in 2005 and 2009, respectively. A U.S. benchmark assessment for Georges Bank cod is scheduled for December 2012 and Canada will be invited to participate. A benchmark assessment for a stock would only be warranted if additional information on a stock came to light or if the assessment model was not producing satisfactory results. In the interim years between benchmarks, assessments have been conducted annually using the benchmark model. If TMGC moved to a two or three year cycle, annual interim assessments would be unnecessary, but catch and/or survey monitoring would continue to be reported. The annual quota sharing exercise and setting of the TACs would continue, but the stock assessments would be multi-year.

Mackerel Working Group

- The Mackerel Working Group was a recommendation of the TRAC benchmark assessment for mackerel. The main objectives of the working group are to prioritize research recommendations, determine how industry would be able to contribute in completing these recommendations, and monitor progress. The U.S. has appointed three scientists (Kiersten Curti, Gary Shepherd, and Dave Richardson) and three industry representatives (Geir Monsen, Greg DiDomenico, and Jeff Kaelin) to the Working Group. The U.S. has scheduled a conference call with the group in October and Canada is planning to initiate their group this fall.

TRAC 2012 Terms of Reference (TOR)

Two new TORs were added to the TRAC in 2012 and TRAC is now documenting the history of how and why new TORs were agreed upon. The first new TOR was to provide sensitivity analyses to account for retrospective bias on stock biomass and fishing mortality estimates for cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder. The second was to document the source of the fishing reference level for cod and haddock and determine the suitability of F_{ref} in light of changes in the fishery, biological characteristics, and current assessment methods. TRAC would meet every year, although it may use video conferencing in years when a full assessment is not undertaken. Final approval will take place between the U.S. and Canadian co-chairs via email, following respective domestic consultations. Once finalized, the TORs may need to be revised if TMGC recommends adoption of a multi-year assessment process during its intercessional meeting scheduled for January 2012.

Item 3 - Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC)

Eastern Georges Bank Cod

- For Eastern Georges Bank cod, TMGC recognized that catch levels advised by TRAC were low and it would be a difficult year for the industry. The total allowable catch (TAC) agreed upon by TMGC was 675 mt. This results in a national quota of 162 mt for the U.S. and 513 mt for Canada.
- TMGC would like TRAC to provide further information on retrospective patterns and natural mortality and to help TMGC inform their decision in 2012. To reach the 675 mt TAC, both models were considered equally and the agreed upon TAC was a compromise between the two models which differ by the estimate of natural mortality applied at age. Canada hopes that only one model will be adopted once the 2003 year class provides reliable information on natural mortality.
- TMGC would like more tools to manage risk and uncertainty – i.e. a compromise between the two models is not necessarily an ideal approach, but the best one available at present.
- Both cod and yellowtail flounder are due for benchmark assessments in the U.S. and those results should feed into a joint Canada-U.S. benchmark assessment.
- The U.S. is having a Georges Bank cod benchmark assessment in December 2012.

Eastern Georges Bank Haddock

The haddock TAC agreed upon by TMGC was 16,000 mt, which represented a neutral risk of exceeding F_{ref} and resulted in a national quota of 6,880 mt for the U.S. and 9,120 mt for Canada. The stock was at a record high biomass in 2009 and the risk of stock decline was not significant. The stock size is expected to increase beginning in 2013 as the 2010 year class recruits (currently estimated at 557 million individuals).

Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

- The TAC agreed upon by the TMGC was 900 mt, which represented a low risk of exceeding F_{ref} and is expected to result in a biomass increase. The TAC results in a national quota of 441 mt for the U.S. and 459 mt for Canada.
- After the TMGC meeting, the New England Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) met. The SSC is required to provide the Council advice on annual catch limits for yellowtail flounder. The SSC's advice to the Council was different than that of TMGC's – 1,150 mt for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder. Although a provision was considered that would have allowed the Council to only receive advice from TMGC rather than both the TMGC and SSC, the provision was dropped from the International Fisheries Agreement Clarification Act. Now the Council will have both SSC and TMGC recommendations to consider, and may not agree with the TMGC recommendation. In anticipation of such an outcome, Canada was requested to agree to a TMGC conference call prior to the November Council meeting to discuss potential reconsideration of their recommendation for Georges Bank yellowtail. Canada agreed to discuss

this issue internally and respond to the U.S. regarding whether they felt it was appropriate to hold a TMGC conference call.

- When asked why the SSC recommended the 1,150 mt instead of 900 mt, there was speculation that the SSC was less concerned about the retrospective pattern than TMGC. When the Northeast Region Coordinating Committee meets in October they will discuss SSC involvement in the process, with the intent of avoiding this conflict in the future.

Intercessional Meeting

- TMGC proposed to hold an intercessional meeting in January 2012 with agenda items to include multi-year stock assessments by TRAC, alternative management options (managing risk and uncertainty), and considerations of national quota trades.
- Canadian members of TMGC recommended a special science meeting to develop biological reference points (B_{msy} , F_{msy}) for the Eastern Georges Bank management units for cod and haddock. This approach would assist industry with eco-certification processes, and these reference points could also assist with Canada's precautionary approach for fisheries management.
- U.S. concerns over having two different reference points developed were discussed (U.S. points and U.S./Canada points strictly for the Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock stocks). If a B_{msy} calculation is developed, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center would consult outside experts. The proposal would be to establish shared B_{msy} and F_{msy} for the shared portion of the stock, which would not necessarily impact the U.S. portion of stock. Concerns were raised about different models for the cod stocks calculating allowable take differently which could potentially lead to a situation of overfishing in one area and underfishing in another.
- The timing of a special science meeting to develop reference points would need to consider the 2012 U.S. cod benchmark assessment, available information from the 2003 year class, and an agreed upon F_{ref} , B_{msy} and F_{msy} . TMGC was asked to consider some of the science questions at their upcoming two-day intercessional meeting and establish a meeting date for the science meeting. The Steering Committee agreed to approve the date intercessionally or during the spring 2012 meeting.
- The TMGC 2012 draft agenda will be discussed at the January intercessional meeting and will be approved secretorially by the SC. The SC will approve the TMGC TORs secretorially before December.

National Quota Trades

TMGC agreed that national quota trades and several other issues will be discussed at the TMGC intercessional meeting. U.S. and Canadian TMGC members are drafting a white paper to aid with this discussion.

Item 4 - Species at Risk (SAR) Working Group

Canadian and U.S. SAR Working Group co-chairs will be meeting in November 2012. The following Canadian species were highlighted: Atlantic salmon, Atlantic sturgeon, leatherback turtle, loggerhead turtle, North Atlantic right whale, cusk, white shark, Atlantic cod, and bluefin tuna.

Primary U.S. species at risk concerns were addressed in Ms. Kurkul's opening remarks. Additional information and Species at Risk listings for Canada and the U.S. are available in the SAR Working Group report.

Item 5 - Oceans and Habitat Working Groups

- Both Oceans and Habitat Working Groups were recommending that they be dissolved, as they do not have anything particular to collaborate on in the near future. If any future issues arise other mechanisms, such as the Gulf of Maine Council, will address them. The SC accepted that the Habitat and Oceans Working Groups could be dissolved at this time and reconvene if further collaborative efforts are required in the future.
- The Gulf of Maine Ecosystem Overview Report is to be released and a link to the report will be posted to the web.

Next Meeting Date

There will be a videoconference call on April 5, 2012, and next year's face to face meeting in Boston is scheduled for September 12-13, 2012.