

Summary Notes from the Red Crab Plan Development Team Meeting September 8, 2009

The meeting was held at SMAST in New Bedford, MA.

PDT members present were Richard Allen, Chairman; Barbara Rountree, NEFSC; Moira Kelly, NERO SFD; Antonie Chute, NEFSC; and Richard Wahle, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences (by speakerphone). PDT member Joseph DeAlteris was not present.

Members of the public included Frank Wetmore, Chairman of the Red Crab Advisory Panel; Jon Williams, New England Red Crab Harvesters' Association; and Jeff Kaelin, New England Red Crab Harvesters' Association.

Item 1 on the agenda called for a review of updated data compiled by Barbara Rountree. Barbara agreed that the best way to use her data would be to inject it where appropriate in the discussion.

Chairman Allen distributed a graph of expected crab size distribution at a range of fishing mortality rates using a model that incorporated growth data from *Geryon maritae* and an assumed natural mortality rate of 0.10. The model was tuned with a recruitment number that would produce approximately 4.4 million pounds of yield, comparable to the average yield in the early 2000s. Figure 1 compares the model results to the size distribution that was calculated from the 2003-5 survey. The 90+mm males and the fishable males categories from the survey fall between the model results from $F=0.05$ and $F=0.10$. The males over 114mm are less abundant in the survey than would be predicted by the model for recent fishing mortality rates.

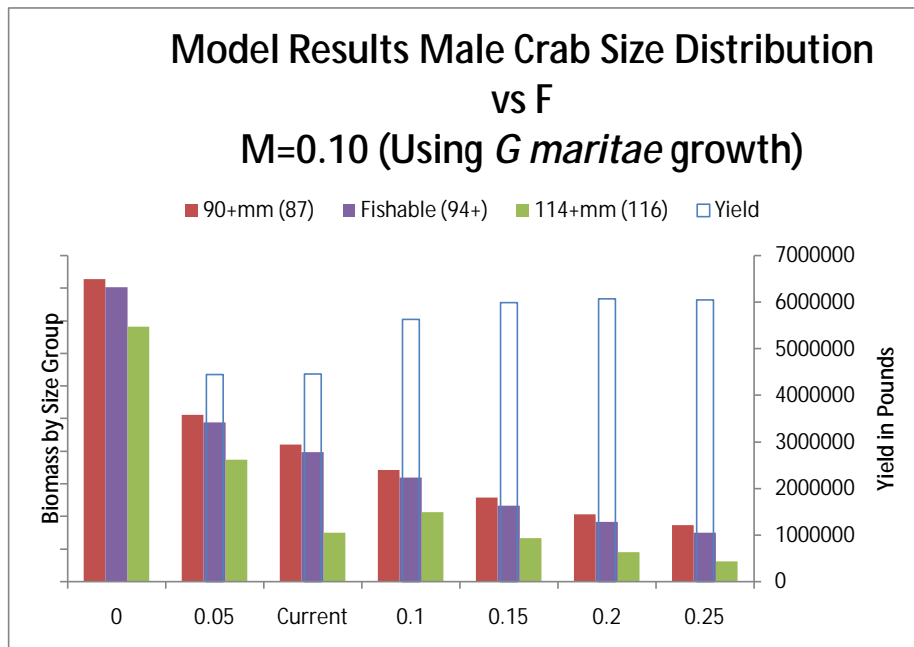


Figure 1- Modeled size distribution vs fishing mortality rate using *G maritae* growth parameters and M=0.10. "Current" refers to size distribution from 2003-5 survey.

Agenda item 3. responded to the suggestion from SSC Chairman Cadrin that the PDT get input from the red crab industry regarding the initial recommendations of the SSC of a 1775mt MSY/OFL and a 30% buffer to produce an ABC of 1243mt.

Jon Williams expressed his frustration with the information that had been presented to the SSC at their August 11, 2009 meeting. Jon stated that he had listened to the audio file from the SSC meeting and had found one inaccuracy after another. Jon indicated that he had pulled 19 sound bites out of the presentation that were either misleading or false. Jon was particularly upset with the failure of the management system to consult with industry concerning the meaning of the data.

Jon explained that the fleet does not begin the fishing season with high discard rates resulting from their search for large males. Rather, the fleet has a planned harvesting strategy based on past experience. Each boat starts in a pre-determined location and leap-frogs its trap trawls to stay on fresh bottom.

Jon provided explanations for ups and downs in the landings stream that have resulted from market constraints and business failures by vessel owners. Jon noted that the local red crab industry had requested emergency action to restrict the uncontrolled expansion of the fishery that was underway in 2000 and 2001. Jon also pointed out the research that had been initiated and supported by the industry for the purpose of advancing the state of knowledge of the fishery.

Jon noted that the recent approval of an experimental fishery for females was presented to the SSC in a negative light, with no mention of the research that was incorporated into the EFP. Jon noted that the industry had proposed the EFP in conjunction with Rick Wahle to answer many of the questions that have surrounded red crab science. The industry proposed that research prior to the time when red crab was taken up by the Data Poor Species Working Group, which subsequently highlighted the need for additional research.

Jon also noted that the presentation had highlighted discards as the primary uncertainty in the fishery and had misrepresented the results of a discard study that was conducted by researcher Shelley Tallack with industry support. Tallack reported a discard mortality rate of 5% but the SSC was told that the discard mortality rate was 15% and probably higher.

Toni Chute re-iterated her belief that the discard mortality rate could be higher than that reported in the discard study. Chairman Allen pointed out that the DPSWG had noted the lack of any apparent affect on the female population as a result of discard mortality.

Jon noted that Toni's presentation to the SSC had included the comment "if you can believe that" when discussing the increase in biomass of fishable males between the 1974 survey and the 2003-5 survey. Jon offered the opinion that a reduction in large males could release predation on the smaller males and result in an increase in the biomass of the smaller males. Toni agreed that an increase in the biomass of smaller males was feasible.

Jon offered information to counter the information that was presented to the SSC concerning a purported shift in the area fished by the red crab fleet in recent years. The slide that showed the landings by area was apparently constructed from incomplete data. According to Jon, there has been no shift in the areas fished. The red crab fleet did not re-locate to Virginia. There is no processing plant in Virginia as the SSC was told. Two red crab boats landed crab in Virginia in recent years as the result of high fuel costs. The crabs were then trucked to Canada as they have been. Most recently, a new red crab plant has gone into operation in New Bedford and the fleet continues to fish over the entire range of the resource.

Jon noted that the Data Poor Working Group repeatedly expressed frustration at not having the industry available to answer questions about the fishery and the data. Jon pointed out that the industry had not been invited to participate or even informed that the Data Poor Working Group was working on red crab. He concluded his remarks by expressing his hope that the industry would be consulted in the future and that industry and management could work together toward the continuing sustainability of the red crab fishery.

Rick Wahle told the group that he had read the report of the Data Poor Species Working Group carefully and noted that the report was lacking published and unpublished references that would have been helpful in analyzing the fishery. In particular Rick pointed to information on fecundity that would help to address the uncertainty surrounding the impact of the reduction in the biomass of large males.

Rick outlined his concern with the decision of the DPWG to discount the possibility of Ricker stock dynamics for red crab, citing numerous studies that point to Ricker dynamics for multiple crab species.

Rick will provide a written document to the PDT prior to the SSC meeting on September 16.