

Term of Reference

1. Does SEDAR 32 currently represent the best available scientific information to establish catch limits or other technical management measures, including bag limits and trip limits, for blueline tilefish within the jurisdictional boundaries¹ (i.e. federal waters from the Virginia/North Carolina border through Block Canyon) of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council?

The consensus is that in the light of recent events, SEDAR 32 does not currently represent best scientific information available (BSIA) to establish catch limits or other technical management measures.

Historically, there has been little research north of Hatteras. The report by Schmidtke et al² is among the first. This study provides new information on growth, age structure and maturity of blueline tilefish. Work is underway to improve on this effort, but the jury is out concerning productivity north of Hatteras. SEDAR 32 includes higher growth rates than seem likely in the Mid-Atlantic and does not include CPUE data from north of Hatteras. If the portion of the population north of Hatteras is insignificant, then the SEDAR 32 assessment might be considered BSIA.

¹ The NEFMC-MAFMC boundary begins at the point of intersection of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York (41°18'16.249" N. lat. and 71°54'28.477" W. long.), and proceeds south 37°22'32.75" East to the point of intersection with the outward boundary of the EEZ as specified in the MSA. The SAFMC-MAFMC boundary begins at the seaward boundary of Virginia and North Carolina (36°33'01.0" N. lat.), and proceeds due east to the point of intersection with the outward boundary of the EEZ as specified in the MSA.

² Schmidtke, Michael, Kathleen Kirch, and Cynthia M. Jones. 2015. The Population Dynamics of Blueline and Golden Tilefish, Snowy and Warsaw Grouper and Wreckfish. Grant F-132-R-2. Report to Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

The 2014 occurrence of high landings in the Mid-Atlantic in 2014 is the other new aspect that needs to be considered. These recent large catches in weight were taken from Area 626, which is entirely in MAFMC's management and where the commercial catch in 2014 was more than half of aggregate catch for all areas and more than an order of magnitude higher than any previous year (per Table C in materials prepared by MAFMC staff for the 25 February 2015 Blueline Tilefish webinar³). Given the significant effort shift or a remarkable change in availability for a non-migratory species as noted in Table C, at the very least the assessment (SEDAR 32) would need to be updated to reflect these recent events.

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³ Accessible though this weblink:
<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/511cdc7fe4b00307a2628ac6/t/54e64c74e4b08d8eee365df4/1424378996969/REV+ComRec+VTR+Catch+by+Area.pdf>