DRAFT SUMMARY: RED SNAPPER RECREATIONAL CATCH ACCOUNTING METHODS WORKSHOP III

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission/Gulf Fisheries Information Network & National Marine Fisheries Service/Marine Recreational Information Program

Royal Sonesta, New Orleans, Louisiana
December 10-11, 2014

Wednesday December 10, 2014

The third Red Snapper Catch Accounting Workshop began with introductions, as there were several participants who had not attended the previous workshops. Following introductions, the chair of the workshop, Luiz Barbieri, gave a brief review of outcomes and goals from previous workshops and the terms of reference for the group. The key difference of this workshop from the previous two is that all state groups were able to meet with expert statistical consultants one-on-one to review and discuss their survey methods. This was an important step in ensuring that the survey designs being developed and implemented are of the highest integrity and provide coordinated and comparable survey results.

All states provided brief overviews, including results from those methods that were tested in 2014, and plans for implementing their survey designs in 2015. Overall, the basic principles of each state survey were similar and aim for greater flexibility. Discussions during the presentations were brief, as the majority of this took place in the one-on-one sessions. However, the group was able to make suggestions and receive clarification on the survey design methods.

Florida

- Beginning in April 2015, offshore reef fishing permits will be required – this will be an additional check box to fill out when buying a saltwater fishing license.
- In regard to flexible scheduling, it will be important to determine if and how samplers could target days based on weather conditions. Additionally, it was suggested that assignments could be cancelled during bad weather conditions. Small craft advisories may be useful for this, but not reliable as some anglers will still go out.
- Suggestions were offered for estimating effort data, along with planed methods, such as trailer counts at sites.

Mississippi

- Beginning in 2015, there will be a mandatory reporting program of offshore vessel landings of red snapper. Anglers are required to possess the no-cost permit to land red snapper in Mississippi.

Louisiana

- One of the changes Louisiana is making based on the 2014 results is to separate the charter boat fishery into both in- and off-shore strata.
- Much of the discussion focused on the collection of discards. The current survey method does not collect discard data, but a project proposal to do so was submitted to MRIP. Additionally, it was noted and discussed that the two methods need to be integrated for estimating total catch.
- Both MRIP and Louisiana could be making design changes in 2015 which will need to be accounted for during the benchmarking
- At a minimum, benchmarking will need to occur for one year, but if necessary and a joint decision is made, it should continue.
- Because the survey will be implemented January 1, any feedback from this workshop should be incorporated as soon as possible.

Texas

- In the 2014 pilot study, there was poor response rate with the self-reporting option. More outreach is needed and will be conducted for 2015.
- The group is continuing to improve the iSnapper tool

Harte Institute

- An overview of iSnapper was presented by participants from the Harte Institute. Suggestions for improving iSnapper included: 1) need to determine the time spent fishing, not just the time away from the dock, 2) overlaying a grid on the map feature to indicate that the purpose is to provide a general area of fishing, not a specific spot, 3) collect depth data, 4) collect size data, and 5) potentially integrating the log in and other features with social media.
- Additional discussion focused on the feasibility of using the reporting tool while at sea – due to roaming and battery issues. However, it was noted that reporting once back at the dock is more likely to occur.

Alabama

- In 2015, modifications to the design will include adding multi-day trip questions for charter boats, field samplers will not be required to count all fish while interviewing, increased enforcement validation, and using video data to estimate effort.
- It was suggested that the on-the-water validation questions include asking if the boat is returning to a private or public access site.
- Validation bias may be occurring due to anglers submitting their reports after having been contacted. Also, anglers may not realize that they still need to report their trips if they are contacted.

After state presentations, the expert statistical consultants Lynne Stokes and Jean Opsomer presented their initial thoughts on all survey designs. Stokes gave an overview presentation of the general structure of all of the state surveys and identified all of the common issues and assumptions and presenting a capture (reporting) – recapture (access point) model for describing the general survey

structure. Opsomer pointed out that all of the surveys fall under two approaches: 1) self-reporting or permitting where the data is supplied to the agency, but this requires an added step of validation/correction and 2) the 'classic' survey approach through intercepts. For self-reporting, the state programs will need to record time when the report occurred as some will occur after the trip. Several of the states mentioned that flexibility in opportunistically sampling is desired. The consultants determined this was possible, but a specific set of conditions should be developed to control for when this would occur. The possibility of collecting demographic information for the purpose of determining who reports prior to landing or after and if there is correlation was also suggested.

Overview of Process for Certifying Survey Methods and Implementation

Rob Andrews provided a general overview of the current process that NOAA Fisheries/MRIP uses to assess and determine if a specific survey method is statistically valid and acceptable for potential implementation. The general process is as follows:

1. Detailed survey documentation is provided to NOAA Fisheries
2. The survey design is peer reviewed by external expert statisticians
3. The peer reviews and survey design is then reviewed by the MRIP Operations Team (consisting of representatives from NOAA Fisheries, Fishery Management Councils, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, and state agencies.
4. If accepted by the Operations Team, they will make a recommendation to certify/approve the design for implementation to the MRIP Executive Steering Committee.
5. If the Executive Steering Committee adopts the recommendation, they will then submit the survey design to the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator for final approval to be implemented.

Along with the certification process, Andrews discussed the MRIP Implementation Strategy that outlines a proposed process for how NOAA Fisheries and the Regions will prioritize funding for implementing new survey designs. Regional Implementation Teams (the FINs or equivalents) will provide regional implementation plans to NOAA Fisheries that prioritize their needs for survey implementation.

The group's main concern for determining implementation priorities was that there are currently no comprehensive and specific standards/minimum requirements for producing estimates, also focusing on how to integrate estimates from multiple survey methodologies. It was suggested that the regional implementation plans should address how to do this. However, it will be a joint process between the regional partners and NMFS to develop any data requirements.

Transition to New Survey Designs

Dave Van Voorhees presented a general transition plan for moving away from current surveys to improved survey designs. An MRIP Transition Team was put in place to make recommendations and specific transition plans for new survey designs. Currently, the group is working on transition plans for design changes to the Access Point Intercept Survey and the new Fishing Effort Survey. In general, any

transition will have a benchmarking period for potential calibration and revision of estimates, allowing for comparison of the two estimates as 'apples to apples.'

The main concern of the group was how to handle the complexity of having two sets of estimates and how and when to incorporate revised estimates into the stock assessment and management processes. Van Voorhees stated that these issues will be addressed in any transition plan, with recommendations for how to move forward for both federal and state management issues. It was noted that the timing of benchmarking will be an important consideration as it will need to be long enough to confidently develop calibration models, but not too long as to have impacts from changes in current methodology effectiveness over time. It was agreed that in terms of having multiple state-run surveys, compatibility is key and incorporating each set of estimates into a single estimate is feasible; as is currently done with Texas.

State Consultations

The afternoon was reserved for one-on-one state consultations with the two attending statistical consultants.

Thursday December 11, 2014

The first half of the morning was a continuation of state consultations with the consultants.

Once reconvened, the group and consultants provided feedback on the effectiveness of having state-specific consultations. Overall, everyone was very pleased with the process. There had been concern about each state conducting their own survey design and that it will be difficult to integrate estimates for management purposes. However, the statistical consultants determined that the methods are all similar; encompassing two design structures discussed the previous day:

1. Self-reporting or permitting where the data is supplied to the agency, but this requires an added step of validation/correction and
2. The 'classic' survey approach through intercepts.

The states were encouraged to provide survey documentation to the consultants if they had not already done so and that further discussions can be scheduled.

The remainder of the workshop focused on the following topics

- Re-visit state data needs, considering Council actions and expectations
- Discuss issues associated with use of different methods across the Gulf
- Discuss how to integrate data derived from special design surveys with that derived from the general survey so that the data streams can complement one another
- Discuss potential adoption and revision of Gulf FIN Standards

Multiple surveys and estimates

Because this group was convened to discuss the best next steps on developing multiple state and species specific surveys, the *intent* of each survey needs to be defined. For example, if the survey is

intended for providing estimates for in-season monitoring, for enhancing the general MRIP survey or replacing the MRIP survey estimates. Everyone agreed that regardless of intent and method, there needs to be a strong communications plan for outlining why or why not specific estimates are being utilized and when it is appropriate to utilize them. One suggestion was for detailed and specific criteria and rules to be set for when to use an estimate (e.g. MRIP or state), selecting the data that fits the criteria best. This could be incorporated into the revised GulfFIN standards or separate.

All agreed that effectively communicating results of these surveys and the general survey will be key and that efforts should be directed towards state directors, Hill staff, governors, media, *et cetera*. A key message will need to be although there may be more 'attractive' estimates (i.e. lower), this does not necessarily mean that the trend has always been happening. However, expectations will also have to be tempered as there are specific groups that will not listen and will continue to use varying estimates to push their agenda.

Updating the GulfFIN standards

Dave Donaldson noted that GulfFIN was already intending to update their data standards and can incorporate feedback from the workshop when doing so. GulfFIN will be discussing this and moving forward with updates in 2015. However, because GulfFIN standards are for collecting scientific data, management needs will still need to be considered; this will happen with the Councils and Commissions. It was noted that it could be difficult to manage a specific stock based on multiple survey approaches and that future discussions will also have to focus on in-season versus stock assessment needs, not only higher or lower estimates. One specific issue raised was that as survey methods change over time, standards will also have to change.

Integrating data derived from special design surveys with that derived from the general survey

Ideally all information from multiple surveys would be used; however NMFS can take advantage of specialized survey approaches and determine how to integrate data into the general survey. The group discussed the pros and cons of the general survey versus the specialized red snapper state surveys. SERO is very supportive of the efforts of the Gulf States because it is difficult to monitor red snapper with the general survey. However, the concern was that because there will be multiple surveys and pilot studies occurring and SERO will need to manage multiple datasets that expectations need to be managed when determining how each dataset is used. Specifically, the Councils, NMFS, and the states all view this differently – again outlining the need for defining intent of each survey.

It was noted that if both the general survey and specialized surveys are unbiased, then it could be determined how to improve precision for in-season monitoring, arguing that a specialized survey would be better for this and that having two sets of estimates is not necessarily a bad thing, and if both are consistent over time the specialized survey could be used as another variable, enhancing the general survey. At the Council level, once any new survey methodology is vetted and certified for use, there will be a discussion on which is best available data and how to use that for stock assessments.

Because states are at different points in the survey development and certification process, integration will be a stepwise process. All agreed that at this time, the message should be that the methods and associated estimates are at the pilot phase and should not be considered for decision-making until there is a plan for integration and survey methods have been vetted/certified.

Additional Topics

- Further discussion on discards and integrating into standards
- Start setting expectations with the Councils on outcomes from the workshops – utilize the data collection committee meeting for this

Next Steps:

1. Consultants will provide a general summary on the two broad approaches and how to best incorporate suggestions presented to states, also including a summary of integration concern issues
2. Gregg Bray will send an email to all participants outlining the plan moving forward working with the consultants
3. Planning agenda and details for GulfFIN standards discussion and update (GSMFC) – prior to March
    - States, Commission, NMFS staff
4. Meeting summary

Participant	Affiliation
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