

**MEETING NOTES
MRIP EXECUTIVE STEERING
COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 12, 2008**



Overview: The meeting was held by conference call from 1:00 to 3:00 EST. Members participating were: Dr. John Boreman (Chair); Vince O'Shea; Larry Simpson; Randy Fisher; Bob Fletcher; Dr. Nancy Thompson; Miguel Rolon; Josh DeMello (for Kitty Simonds); Jay Ginter (for Doug Mecum); Gordon Colvin (Executive Secretary). Also in attendance were: Preston Pate, Forbes Darby and Rob Andrews.

Attachments: Agenda; List of Pending Decisions for Agenda Item II(B); MRIP Communications and Outreach Update.

I. MRIP Status Reports:

A. Operations Team: Mr. Pate reported on Operations Team progress. He and Mr. Andrews have been most active in communications with the Work Groups. Regular conference calls are held with the Work Group chairs to receive updates on project status. The Design and Standards Work Group has completed its stage 1 project: an inventory of current surveys. This comprehensive inventory of all marine recreational fishery surveys' design and methods provides the Work Group with the information it will need for its next stage: development of survey and data quality standards. The For Hire Work Group held a workshop on December 4th at which its consultants presented the preliminary results of their review of for-hire surveys and survey methods. Based on the feedback from the Work Group members, the consultants will prepare a final report which will be the basis of the Work Group's development of recommendations for for-hire survey methodology.

The Operations Team held a conference call on October 28 at which project funding proposals and priorities for FY 2009 funds were developed. Many of the approved projects will be next phases of current projects and pilot projects to implement results and recommended methods developed by the current projects. The Work Group Chairs have been given the approved projects list and are tasked with developing project plans. We will not be able to begin much of this new work until a budget is enacted; however, lessons learned from last year's continuing resolution process will be applied to enable us to hit the ground running to the maximum extent possible.

Mr. Pate acknowledged support from the many organizations that have provided staff to serve as Operations Team and Work Group members. He recognized the work of Mr. Andrews in supporting the work of the Operations Team.

ACTION: Dr. Boreman requested Mr. Pate to provide a copy of the list of FY 2009 projects as recommended for approval by the Operations Team to the Executive Steering Committee members.

ACTION: ESC members will review the list of FY 2009 projects and communicate any recommendations or concerns they have to the members of the Committee and the Operations Team Chair.

Mr. O'Shea noted that the feedback he has received indicates that the technical and policy work of MRIP being done by the Operations Team and the Registry Team is getting high marks.

Dr. Thompson discussed the strong criticism of the MRFSS estimates that was voiced at this week's meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and noted that regional staff and Fishery Science Center staff are often placed in the position of defending the estimates at such meetings. She urged that MRIP begin to implement changes that will improve the quality of the estimates and the stakeholders' confidence in them as soon as possible.

B. Registry Team: Mr. Colvin reported on the work of the Registry Team. The proposed rule to implement the program was published in the federal register on June 12th and the comment period expired on August 21. The Team met by conference call on September 15 to review the comments and to discuss responses and revisions. A final rule package was submitted and cleared by DOC at the end of October. NMFS expects OMB will clear the rule in the near future.

However, the rule will not be adopted by January 1, as had been indicated in the proposed rule. To that end, a statement was released to the media this week and will be included in a MRIP Newscast to be distributed on Monday, December 15, as follows: "A rule to register the nation's saltwater anglers to improve the management of fish is not yet finalized. Once it is, the final rule and information regarding the registration process and requirements will immediately be updated on NOAA's Fisheries Service website <http://www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov>. Until a final rule is adopted, anglers and spearfishers who fish recreationally in federal ocean waters, and for anadromous species, will not be required to register with NOAA Fisheries. For more information, please contact Monica Allen at 301-713-2370."

The staff of the Science Information Division is working closely with the staff of the Fisheries Statistics Division and the National Permit System (NPS) in the Office of the Chief Information Officer to complete work to establish the internet portal and process by which the national registration system will operate. We plan to operate the

portal via the NPS, but will have a backup plan by which a registration can be handled via the Office of Science and Technology's system in Silver Spring.

C. Communication and Education Team: Mr. Darby distributed a written status report (attached) and a recent article that appeared in The Fisherman magazine. The article provides examples of three challenges we face: it bashes MRFSS; it uses certain of our data incorrectly; it expresses hope that MRIP will bring about major improvements. The article helps to show that we are having success in raising public awareness of MRIP and that media and influential writers can help disseminate that message. It also illustrates the need to provide more information about how to access and use our data. Also, the MRFSS-bashing helps to illustrate that building confidence in the MRIP-derived estimates will depend on building stakeholder confidence, and that how we act and respond to stakeholders' concerns and frustration is perhaps as important as the numbers themselves.

Mr. Darby reviewed the status report and the planned Next Steps to outline strategies and actions planned for implementation with FY 2009 funds. One recommended action he emphasized was the conduct of regional workshops for stakeholders modeled on the successful southeast Grouper Forums.

Dr. Thompson stated that the estimates will continue to draw stakeholder criticism if they continue to show high effort estimates during periods when the industry believes business has declined. Regional staff and the stock assessors in the Centers are called on to defend the estimates and need help with this communication challenge, especially in the northeast and southeast.

Mr. Fletcher noted that estimates of recreational catch were much more believable and therefore more accepted by the anglers following the implementation of the CA Rec. Fisheries Survey (CRFS), which is part of the west coast RecFIN.

Mr. O'Shea stated that the feedback he's had on outreach indicates that more effort is needed to sufficiently raise the awareness of stakeholders. He recommended that the ESC give more attention and support to the Communication and Education Team's efforts in light of this need. He also recommended that the communication strategy place some of its emphasis on direct outreach to the state managers, possibly including having the workshops focus on the state agencies. The states could then be looked to for assistance in further outreach to stakeholders. He noted that, if the states are not sufficiently knowledgeable and supportive of our plans for MRIP, we can't expect constituencies to be.

Mr. Pate agreed and stated that the Councils should also be included in such an effort.

Mr. Simpson stated that, while there are needs for survey improvement and expansion in the southeast, the RecFIN and MRIP programs are well supported by the state directors.

II. Implementing MRIP: moving from the development phase to the operational phase

A. The first topic under this agenda item was a discussion of whether to announce that the current surveys have been replaced by MRIP as of January 2009. Some survey changes (e.g. dual-frame telephone surveys in the Gulf and North Carolina) have been implemented and others are likely to begin in 2009, at least in a pilot stage. Improved estimation procedures are also to be implemented in 2009.

Mr. O'Shea stated that he is concerned that changing the name before significant changes are made to the substance of the surveys will not engender stakeholder credibility.

Dr. Thompson expressed a similar concern, but would be willing to take the risk if we could identify sufficient specific changes in our surveys to justify the action.

Mr. Fletcher emphasized that we must be prepared to communicate specifically and clearly what the changes are, and they need to be understood and visible to the stakeholders (we need to "paint the barn").

Mr. Fisher noted that, on the west coast, a big difference between the MRFSS and RecFIN approaches was putting many more "boots on the ground" so that anglers could observe a much higher level of field sampling effort.

Mr. Pate stated that it will take time for us to complete initial and follow up projects, new method pilots and dual frame and side-by-side calibration studies to enable us to implement significantly and observably different surveys in some regions.

ACTION: At the conclusion of the discussion, the ESC members supported holding off on a formal announcement of the conversion of current named surveys to MRIP until the ESC is satisfied that we can clearly identify and articulate changes in survey and estimation procedures that are significant and observable to the stakeholders. This should be done as early as possible next year. In the meantime, the ESC members recommended that we characterize the status of MRIP in 2009 as "underway and being run side-by-side with MRFSS and other current surveys to smooth the transition process."

B. Decision-making. Mr. Colvin reviewed the list of decisions attached to the agenda. The list identifies three categories of decisions MRIP will need to address as it is implemented: fundamental design and scope of MRIP and its regional components and associated standards for coverage and survey design/data quality; budget and resource use; survey operation and management. These examples are provided to illustrate future decisions we will need to make in order to facilitate a discussion of the ESC's role in decision-making and its process. Mr. Colvin described the general model that has been followed to date in which the Teams develop documents or recommended actions and the ESC Chair distributes these to the members for their individual review and feedback to the Team Chairs. Given the nature of the many decisions we will face from this point

forward, the Team felt it would be helpful for the ESC members to discuss how they wish to be engaged in NMFS' decision-making for MRIP.

Dr. Thompson stated that it would be appropriate to take some time to consider the information presented today, along with the project information the committee will be receiving, and continue to offer advice on this subject after the meeting.

Mr. O'Shea believes the original purpose of the ESC was to serve as a sounding board for NMFS and to serve as a support structure for the MRIP decisions the agency would make. He believes this purpose is still valid. He is comfortable with the Office of Science and Technology making and executing technical decisions, but felt that the ESC members should review issues that include goals, progress reports, timelines, critical policy issues and resource questions, and decisions that involve controversy and tradeoffs (i.e. "management by exception").

Dr. Thompson generally agreed with that approach. She felt that decisions that will likely have consequences for the regions and centers are the ones the ESC members should be consulted on.

Mr. Ginter noted that the ESC members can be ambassadors for the MRIP within their respective regions and help to develop and maintain support for the program.

Mr. Simpson stated that when hard decisions are needed on budget, funding or resource priorities, the chair should seek support from the ESC members.

Mr. Colvin asked if the ESC should give more advice to NMFS on budget needs for MRIP. Dr. Boreman stated that it should, within the boundaries allowed by federal budget development process and timing. The ESC needs more information in order to render effective budgeting advice.

ACTION: Mr. Colvin will work with Dr. Van Voorhees to develop a MRIP budget briefing and long term strategic document for the ESC.

ACTION: ESC members will continue to review the decision-making document along with the FY 2009 project list and offer any further suggestions and comments they have to the Chair. Generally, the ESC will be consulted on the kinds of decisions described in the members' comments above.

III. Review and affirm or modify ESC functions: Beyond the discussion that took place under the preceding agenda item, the ESC members did not indicate the need to revise operating procedures or information distribution. The issue of membership was discussed. Mr. Fletcher noted that his term on MAFAC will end following the MAFAC May, 2009, meeting. At that time, the Chair of MAFAC's Recreational Fisheries Working Group will need to be contacted to determine a replacement from that committee.

Mr. O'Shea stated that it is not necessary to add state directors to the ESC; the Commissions' Executive Directors are the appropriate members to coordinate the states' input. However, he felt that the importance of the states' physical involvement in MRIP going forward, including operations and outreach, could not be overstated.

ATTACHMENT

AGENDA MRIP EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE DECEMBER 12, 2008

I. MRIP Status Reports

- A. Operations Team: P. Pate
- B. Registry Team: G. Colvin
- C. Communication and Education Team: F. Darby

II. Implementing MRIP: moving from the development phase to the operational phase

- A. Status. What will we be doing and saying in January, 2009?
- B. Decision-making. See attached list of the kinds of decisions MRIP will be making as it is implemented. Discuss MRIP decision-making process, including role of ESC.
- C. Communication/education/outreach (V. O'Shea)
- D. Future role of the states in MRIP (V. O'Shea)

III. Review and affirm or modify Executive Steering Committee functions. Relevant questions include:

- A. What are members' recommendations to assure the continued effectiveness of the ESC?
- B. Do the ESC members desire changes in the committee's process or operations?
- C. Do the ESC members want to receive more or less detailed information, status reports, briefings, etc.?
- D. ESC membership.

IV. Other Topics?

ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA—DECISION TOPICS

For Agenda item II (B): Implementing MRIP: moving from the development phase to the operational phase. Decision-making. Discuss MRIP decision-making process, including role of ESC. For purposes of discussing decision-making processes, the

following is a list of three generic decision topics with examples of specific issues within each.

I. Overarching decision: How and when will the transition from the MRFSS and other current surveys to MRIP take place and what components will the MRIP consist of?

1. When and how does MRIP formalize the definition and identification of each regional survey that will collectively constitute MRIP?
2. Determine the roles of partners, including FINs and states, in funding and in actual conduct of survey work. Is there a need for consistency among regions or only within regions?
3. Determine the strategy for filling in the major gaps in the current surveys, including how we (NMFS/ST/MRIP) handle decisions regarding any non-NMFS administered program. For example, how do we encourage Pacific RecFIN (or RecFIN states) to implement recommended changes, and what happens if they don't? Principal decisions include:
 - a) Texas in GOM region
 - b) USVI in Caribbean region
 - c) Role of NMFS in Alaska region
 - d) Missing modes in any region (e.g. shore mode in WA/OR) or missing areas of coverage (e.g. bays, estuaries in WA, OR)
 - e) Future identified improvements to survey design, data management and/or estimation procedures
4. What should NMFS commit to in terms of its funding to produce estimates for (in each region/all regions?):
 - a) Basic coverage (area, modes, species, months etc.)
 - b) Timeliness of estimate generation (length of waves, time to produce preliminary and final estimates, etc.)
 - c) Spatial resolution of sub-regional estimates (state-level; sub-state, other)
 - d) Supplemental surveys for social and economic data, HMS and other infrequently encountered species, others
 - e) Sample sizes to achieve specified targets for resolution/PSE of catch/harvest estimates
 - f) Others?

II. Budget and resource use decisions.

1. Decisions on adding staff and/or contract support. Who decides if we need to add communications/customer service staff, more statisticians, or social scientists?

2. Budget decisions. Who decides on what future budget resources to seek via PPBES, and with what justification/metrics to support, as well as how to distribute available appropriations over competing demands? What is the role of the ESC in this?

III. Principal survey management decisions that may include:

1. What will be the MRIP “standard” for-hire survey methodology?
2. What method(s) will be used to generate effort estimates?
3. Adoption of national standards and best practices for survey design, survey management, QA/QC and estimation procedures.
4. Implementation of NRC recommendations for establishing a National Statistics Program, possibly including an independent research group.
5. Many others....