

Final Meeting Summary
MRIP Executive Steering Committee Conference Call
November 21, 2011

John Boreman convened the meeting at 3:00 pm EST. Executive Steering Committee (ESC) members attending/represented were: John Boreman, Chair; Doug Mecum; Ned Cyr; Steve Turner for Bonnie Ponwith; Josh DeMello and Paul Dalzell for Kitty Simonds; Gordon Colvin; Russell Porter for Randy Fisher; Larry Simpson. Also observing were: Pres Pate (Chair, Operations Team); Lauren Dolinger Few (Chair, Information Management Team); Forbes Darby (Chair, Communication and Education Team); Rob Andrews (Operations Team).

1. FY 12 Budget and Contingency Planning for possible future budget reductions (these two items from the meeting agenda were merged into a single presentation and discussion item)

Gordon Colvin reviewed the updated MRIP Spending History spreadsheet that had been distributed ahead of the meeting and which is appended to this summary. The following points were covered:

- The FY 11 column was reviewed. In general, FY 11 funds were obligated as per the spend plan. A final as-executed update will be provided in two to three weeks.
- The final FY 11 executed budget figures may slightly affect the amounts needed in some of the FY 12 spend plan lines, but significant changes in the final FY 11 executed budget figures are not expected.
- In FY 11, the President's budget request was for \$9.0M. The final appropriation for MRIP was nearly \$10.0 M and was received late in the fiscal year. To be certain all of the FY 11 funds were obligated, the FY 11 spend plan allocated about \$1.0M to pre-fund 2012 base survey costs for APAIS, CHTS, and LPS. When the FY 12 budget is final, its spend plan would transfer that \$1.0M back to MRIP.
- The FY 12 Appropriation Bill was just passed, and final details are being sorted out. The President's budget request for MRIP was \$12.0M. The increase was identified for: producing preliminary catch estimates using one-month waves in two NMFS regions (\$2.0M); beginning to implement electronic trip reporting in for-hire fisheries in one (eventually, two) NMFS regions (\$1.0M). The amount appropriated to MRIP is \$11.0 M. With the \$1.0 M to be transferred from the pre-funded base surveys, the total expected is \$12.0M.
- NMFS must also execute an unallocated cut of \$24M over the entire agency budget. This is not expected to target either MRIP or the base survey budgets, but it is possible that an across-the-board proportionate reduction could be part of the agency's plan. If so, the FY 12 available funds could be reduced somewhat (around 3%).
- Based on a \$12.0M budget, a preliminary FY 12 spend plan was outlined, and input from ESC members sought. In general, proposed funding for staff, contractor, and expert consultant support, travel and the work of the Registry, Information Management, Operations, and Communication and Education Teams is proposed at about the same level as FY 11. Funding for Operations Team (OT) Projects was proposed at \$2.0M as a placeholder, pending the outcome of the upcoming annual meeting of the OT and solicitation of FY 12 project proposals. Final decision-making on this amount must await the OT's project funding recommendations after

solicitation and evaluation of project proposals, probably by late January. Funding for ST 1-sponsored projects was proposed at slightly below the FY 11 level, but there may be additional project proposals developed for this line. These expenditures would total approximately \$7.3M, leaving \$4.7M as yet unassigned in the spend plan.

- MRIP's operating and budget execution strategy has been to develop new survey and estimation methods that address the NRC recommendations for fundamental design improvements as a top priority. Once such improved methods have been developed and implemented, the strategy is to then increase sampling to improve precision of estimates, survey coverage, and timeliness of delivery of preliminary estimates, reflecting regional partner/customer needs and priorities. MRIP is now beginning to implement survey improvements it has developed. Therefore, it is timely to begin to allocate funds to the increased cost of implementing new methods and for increasing sampling to meet customer needs. To that end, the MRIP Spending History spreadsheet has added two new categories and lines as follows: Data Collection Costs for Implementing New Methods (AP AIS; Effort Surveys) and Expand Data Collection to Address Timeliness/Resolution/Coverage Requirements (One Month Waves; For-Hire Electronic Reporting; Expanded Coverage; Improved Precision; RecFIN Enhancements).

- The MRIP Spending History spreadsheet also includes a new column H showing actual annual costs of the current base MRIP program lines. Annual spend plans do not always include all of these costs because some contracts cover multi-year periods. To facilitate the ESC's review of spending priorities and evaluation of where to accept funding reduction if necessary, the actual annualized cost of current spending lines is now provided in column H.

Discussion: The following points were covered in the ESC discussion of the FY 12 Spend Plan and Contingency Planning item:

- John Boreman indicated that the ESC would meet again after the OT had made its recommendations for FY 12 project funding. At that time, the ESC should plan to offer comments on the entire FY 12 spend plan priorities, strategy, and details. In the meantime, members should send comments on the current draft to Dr. Boreman and Mr. Colvin, especially with their thoughts on priorities for use of the as yet unallocated \$4.7M.

- It was noted that base funding for survey execution is also critical. It was generally agreed that, if there are any significant reductions in base survey funding, use of MRIP funds to maintain essential data collection should be considered. It was noted that the cuts of 15% to 33% in the FIN lines (which include both commercial and recreational fishery catch data collection) that had been in the House and Senate subcommittee marks were not in the final appropriations bill for FY 12. A smaller reduction of about 3% for the FINs was included.

- There was a question whether the unallocated FY 12 amount was \$2.7 or \$4.7 M. It was noted that:

- The total unallocated amount is very approximate pending final OT project funding recommendations;

- There is an obligation to use about \$2.0M of the increase for some combination of monthly sampling intervals and electronic for-hire trip reporting. Specific recommendations on how best to satisfy this requirement will be forthcoming from staff, but ESC members' suggestions would be welcome.

2. 2011/2012 Implementation Plan Update comments

The draft 2011/2012 Implementation Plan update had been distributed to the ESC for comment prior to the meeting. No comments were received prior to the meeting. No comments were offered during the meeting. The update will now be finalized and posted to the MRIP website.

3. Implementation of weighted MRIP estimates for 2004 to 2011, including a planned MRFSS/MRIP calibration workshop

Gordon Colvin outlined the current schedule for implementation of the new estimation method, including release of the revised, weighted estimates for the years 2004 to 2011. ST 1 expects to provide the updated estimates to the NMFS Regions and Fishery Science Centers by Dec. 1. SF and the Regions will then review the revised estimates and prepare plans for necessary follow up actions. The public release of the revised estimates and regional plans for management response is currently planned for the week of January 23. The agency also plans to release revised, weighted estimates based on the new MRIP methodology dating back to 1998 by June 2012.

John Boreman described the proposed scientific workshop to develop advice on transitioning from use of the historic NRFSS-based catch estimates to the MRIP estimates for stock assessment and related management advice. Terms of reference and a list of working papers that should be developed prior to the workshop have been developed and were provided to the ESC. The workshop will be scheduled after consultation with agency leadership and commitments for completion of necessary working papers can be developed.

John Boreman asked ESC members to send comments on the rollout process and workshop. It was mentioned that Council staff will need some time to review revised estimates and response plans before the Councils meet in order to be prepared for the questions they can expect from Council members and the stakeholders. It was noted that the January 23 rollout week was selected in part to allow some time prior to the next scheduled meetings of the four affected Councils.

4. Feedback received from MRIP outreach efforts

Forbes Darby reviewed a summary of planned FY 12 Outreach Strategies and Tactics that had been distributed to the ESC prior to the meeting (attached to this summary). He asked the ESC members to provide feedback on the document at any time.

John Boreman asked ESC members to report on what they may be hearing from stakeholders. Mr. Simpson indicated that there is some speculation and concern over the effects of the pending revised catch estimates. He also stated that stakeholders tend to be critical, particularly regarding the pace of implementation; but that MRIP is doing all that it can and should to address these concerns. John Boreman asked all ESC members to continue to provide information to the ESC and the Communications and Education Team about the feedback they hear from the public about MRIP.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:10 pm EST.