

MRIP Highly Migratory Species Work Group Conference Call Summary and Update

Call Date: August 31, 2007

Call Participants: Ron Salz, Joe Desfosse, Guillermo Diaz, Craig Brown, Stephen Stohs, Craig Heberer – (NOAA Fisheries), Ron Coddington (Southeast Swordfish Club, HMS Advisory Panel), Dave McGowan (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.), Dave Donaldson (GSMFC)

Work Group Membership

Prior to the call Ron S. sent out a spreadsheet with current membership and potential additions from agencies and fishing industry representatives. Ron Coddington officially joined the work group. Craig Heberer asked to sit in on the call to learn about the process before he decided what his role should be. Craig and Stephen will discuss other potential work group additions from the Pacific coast, including a fishing industry representative. Ron said he would ask Greg Skomal if he had interest in joining. Ron also said he would follow-up with potential candidates from the Caribbean. After the conference call Ron contacted Grisel Rodriguez (Puerto Rico DNER). She works on tournament and other recreational data collection programs and seems like a good fit to represent Puerto Rico. Grisel accepted the offer to join the work group and said she would send names of other people in the Caribbean who we may want to include on the work group or on specific project plans. Ron S. also sent an email to William Tobias (USVI DPNR) asking if he was interested in joining.

Discussion of Project Plans

Ron briefed the work group on the Operations Team conference call review of project plans. The work group discussed each of the four project plans:

1. Explore options and feasibility of designing a program for non-tournament sampling in the Caribbean

The Operations Team had no comments on this project plan. The work group members generally agreed that this was important and that we needed to recruit agency and industry representatives from the Caribbean. Ron S. has started contacting folks from the Caribbean and will seek some from that region to take the lead on this project. The For-Hire work group is working on a project plan to conduct a pilot logbook reporting program in Puerto Rico (with possible expansion to USVI). The HMS work group project plan scope may need to be reduced to only private boats if the charter fleet is covered by this logbook pilot. Ron S. will work closely with For-Hire work group chair Bev Sauls to avoid overlap or redundancy. The HMS work group will have the opportunity to review the For-Hire group's draft project plan for this pilot.

2. Evaluate LPS tournament data

The Operations Team had no comments on this project plan. Ron S. is developing the draft project plan for work group review.

3. LPS sampling charter boat mode in the Gulf of Mexico

The Operations Team (OT) suggested that a characterization study of the fishery should precede full-blown expansion of the LPS into the Gulf of Mexico. Prior to the call Ron S. put together spreadsheets showing MRFSS estimates and PSE's for large pelagic species in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. In general the precision on harvest estimates for many HMS species in these regions is less than adequate. Ron S. said that in addition to characterizing the fishery at some point we need management input regarding species prioritization and acceptable levels of precision. Some species are so rare that even a specialized survey (e.g., LPS) will not yield precise estimates. If the need for precise/accurate estimates exists for these species some kind of census approach may be needed (e.g., catch cards, landings tags, logbooks). For other species the MRFSS (or revised MRFSS) will provide adequate precision on harvest estimates and a specialized approach may be redundant. There was general agreement among the work group that more information is needed before we implement a catch and effort survey for HMS in the Gulf.

The work group agreed with the OT recommendation that we add questions to the existing For-Hire Telephone Survey in an effort to characterize this fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. We may want to include the South Atlantic (NC, SC, GA, E. FL) in this characterization study since these states are not covered by the LPS. Dave D. volunteered to be a project team member for this project. Ron S. (by default) will be the project lead and develop a project plan for work group review. Ron S. has discussed this project with For-Hire work group chair Bev Sauls and offered her work group to add a member to the project team. Bev said she will consider this but at a minimum would like the For-Hire work group to review the draft project plan.

4. HMS angling permit holder telephone survey in Florida

The OT had concerns about designing specialized surveys for particular species that could result in redundancy and heavy respondent burden. They suggested that initial studies focus on gaps (management needs) in existing data collection programs. Dave M. and Ron C. both felt strongly that the existing programs are missing or don't adequately estimate HMS activity in Florida particularly for swordfish and sharks. Ron S. asked if the work group thought we needed to conduct an effort survey or if a one-time characterization survey was sufficient. Dave M. said that the telephone survey for effort would provide a relatively inexpensive way to both characterize the fishery and produce accurate effort estimates with minimal recall bias. The work group approved of this approach. There was also general agreement that this pilot should be expanded to cover the Gulf and S. Atlantic. Geographic expansion into all

states, except North Carolina, would not greatly increase the scope/cost of this project. As project lead Dave M. will look into this possibility and try to contact folks in these other states. Independent of the MRIP process the GSMFC has a RFQ advertised to characterize the HMS private boat fishery in the Gulf through a mail survey. Dave D. said they are still deciding if they will fund this project or work through the MRIP process to collect this information. Either way it will be important for the HMS work group to work closely with GSMFC as we move forward.

Other Business

Ron S. reminded everyone that project plans are due to the OT by October 15. Ron S. said he would like to have the draft plans done by the end of September. The next HMS work group call will be in early October to review the draft plans.