



NEWSCAST

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The Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is the way NOAA Fisheries is counting and reporting marine recreational catch and effort. It is a customer-driven initiative that not only produces better estimates, but does so through a process grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability and engagement.

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Gulf Coast Red Snapper Recreational Catch Accounting Workshop: *Outcomes and Next Steps*

Overview

"Pulse" or "rare event" fisheries, such as Gulf of Mexico red snapper, represent a unique challenge for both fisheries scientists and managers. The very short fishing season makes it difficult to produce precise estimates of catch using existing sampling methods. In addition, under current methods, estimates cannot generally be produced until after the season is finished. This, in turn, impedes managers' ability to make in-season adjustments based on whether that catch is exceeding or falling behind target limits. Therefore, if red snapper catch exceeds quotas during one season, fishing must be curtailed in the next. The net effect is recreational fishermen - and the businesses and coastal communities that rely on recreational red snapper fishing to support their lives and livelihoods - face uncertainty from season to season as to how much, or even whether, they can fish.

Red Snapper Catch Accounting Workshop

In November 2013, the Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, partnered with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to convene a group of stakeholders representing federal, regional, and state fisheries scientists and managers, along with independent experts, to discuss and develop plans to improve red snapper estimates. This workshop, and subsequent progress, is a major step in addressing perceived shortcomings of current data and management decisions, and in bringing together federal and Gulf state partners to determine the best data collection design(s) that work for all involved states. Since the initial workshop, five pilot projects have been identified and are already underway, making this a substantial effort and commitment by MRIP and its Gulf partners.

The workshop centered around two goals:

1. To identify two or more potential survey designs for further evaluation and trial in the Gulf of Mexico and
2. To outline next steps needed to develop pilot studies, which can provide supplemental information for the Gulf red snapper fishery.

The workshop opened by outlining the ongoing federal and regional management needs and challenges of the red snapper fishery, and how implementing a regional management structure would potentially affect ongoing data needs. The group considered the differences between the

current management method (uniform regulations across the entire Gulf) versus regional management (different regulations based on region within the Gulf). With the proposed regional management structure there would still be a Gulf-wide recreational quota, but each state would be allocated a certain proportion or sub-allocation of red snapper for the season, and would be able to set individual season start and end dates, daily limits, and other management measures.

Outcomes

The group determined that the current sampling strategy of MRIP, which is a multi-species monitoring program, may not be suitable for fisheries, such as red snapper, that are executed during short periods of time. However, a switch to regional management would present its own challenges in being able to meet the precision and timeliness data needs of each state, while maintaining a design that provides comparable state estimates for integration into a single, accurate, Gulf-wide estimate for stock assessment and federal management purposes.

Following the opening discussion on regional management, representatives from various state organizations presented current efforts to enhance data collection in their states. For example, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries presented results from a quota monitoring survey piloted during the 2013 red snapper season, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission presented their survey design and results for targeting offshore red snapper fishing on the Florida Atlantic coast.

For the remainder of the workshop, key discussion areas included:

- Whether targeted red snapper sampling should be integrated into the general MRIP survey, or if a survey specifically targeted at Gulf red snapper alone, or in combination with other Gulf reef fisheries, should be considered;
- The need to better characterize and sample anglers that are fishing offshore or from private access sites, as offshore catch is generally difficult to sample due to the variability of offshore access sites within each state and the varying definitions used among surveys;
- Key goals for improving timeliness of reporting estimates to increase the efficacy of in-season management ;
- Ensuring that methods to enhance the timeliness of effort estimates are also considered;
- How to coordinate all the work being done at state and federal levels to enhance red snapper estimates; and
- How to maintain a consistent time series of red snapper removals and other key data points.

You can view a summary of the workshop [here](#) and a description of potential assessment methods from the independent experts who participated [here](#).

Understanding that not all fisheries and regions are the same, a key component of MRIP is to address how we can produce estimates more quickly, for smaller geographic areas, and tailored to the needs of specific

fisheries. This workshop and subsequent pilot studies and efforts are a direct result of how MRIP and its partners are doing just that.

Next Steps

Considering workshop findings and recommendations regarding survey designs that may provide catch estimates better aligned to managers' needs, the Gulf partners have developed a number of survey designs to be pilot tested beginning in 2014. Currently, three pilot studies relating to red snapper have been approved for 2014 MRIP funding. In Alabama, two surveys will be designed to test a census of private angler and for-hire red snapper catch using electronic logbook reporting. The third proposed project will be testing the use of the iSnapper smartphone application to gather data from a panel of private recreational anglers in Texas.

In addition to these three pilot studies, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to further expand fisheries monitoring programs in the state, which will include expanding data collection efforts for red snapper. Also, the state of Louisiana is implementing a revised survey design in 2014 that places more emphasis on offshore catch.

A follow-up workshop will be held March 27-28, 2014 to review and refine survey designs, discuss input from statistical consultants, establish a process and timetable for evaluation of the results of the 2014 projects, and determine how to integrate data from the pilot projects into management decision-making.

In the Next Newscast:

In the third and final installment of our Effort Survey series:
What's the best way to reach anglers in the digital age?

Ask MRIP

Do you have questions about MRIP or our surveys? Ask us and we'll answer your question in an upcoming newsletter. If you've got a question about MRIP that you'd like answered, please e-mail Leah Sharpe at Leah.Sharpe@noaa.gov.