Background

A singular insight gained from the **2010 Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit** (Summit) was the importance the saltwater angling community places on socioeconomic information. Indeed, two of the top 10 Potential Future Actions identified at the Summit were

a) Improve social and economic data (# 2), and

***Summit participants identified four broad visions of a successful future:***

1. Improved open communication, cooperation, and trusting interaction.

2. Improved robust, timely, and accurate data and science on fisheries, habitat and water quality.

3. Fishery management decisions based on a more complete understanding of the social and economic contributions of both the recreational and commercial saltwater fishing communities.

4. Ensure broad access to the greatest possible range of recreational fishing opportunities.

b) Improve economic data timeliness so that they can be included in assessment of management actions (#6)

Each of these Actions was identified as the **TOP** priority potential future action for two of the four broad visions of a successful future. That is, improving social and economic data was identified as the top priority action for improving data and science (Vision 2). Likewise, improving the timeliness of economic information for management emerged as the top priority action for ensuring that fishery management decisions were based on a more complete understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of the fisheries and fishing communities (Vision 3).

Accordingly, the 2010 Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Action Agenda also reflected the urgency to improve economic and social data as well as to improve the timeliness of providing socioeconomic information in the fishery management process.

2014 Economics Workshop

In addition to improving the socioeconomic data and its timeliness, it has also been the Agency’s goal to improve its outreach and communication with the recreational saltwater fishing community. The **2014 NMFS Recreational Fisheries Constituents’ Economics Workshop** (Workshop) provided the Agency an opportunity to directly engage withconstituents and get direct feedback on recent data collection and research activities, hear their perspective on how socioeconomic information is used in the Fishery Management Council process, and get their suggestions for both how the Agency can improve *WHAT* it is doing as well as *HOW* we are doing it.

To ensure that the feedback received at the Workshop reflected a 360⁰ perspective on the Program, Workshop participants came from all NMFS regions and a broad cross-section of saltwater fishing perspectives and backgrounds. The Workshop was organized to provide constituents with a broad understanding of the Agency’s Economics & Human Dimensions Program’s recreational saltwater fishing portfolio. Over the two-day workshop NMFS economists and social scientists from the Science Centers and Headquarters presented on recent data collections, models, and decision support tools. In addition, constituents as well as Agency partners were also invited to present. Ample time was given to discussion for each presentation and with a diverse set of participants, all aspects of the information chain (data, model, decision support tool, management advice) associated with each presentation was in play.

The constituents at the workshop demonstrated a deep understanding of the fishery management process and also proved to be savvy users of economic and social information. They asked questions and were even-handed in giving both criticism and credit for a job well done. In the next section, we provide a brief summary of the discussions that occurred at the Workshop, highlighting the themes that emerged from this event. The final section is forward looking and focuses on next steps.

Overview of NMFS Activities

Doug Lipton, the NMFS Chief Economist, provided an overview of the Agency’s recreational fisheries economics program, including the progress to date on the 2010 Summit Goals and the 2011 National Action Plan. In particular, Lipton pointed to the expansion of the for-hire data collection holdings from only one survey in 2005-2009 to conducting these surveys in 6 out of 7 regions since 2010 as evidence of NMFS’ programmatic approach to its recreational fisheries economics program. In a similar vein, he noted NMFS’ recent development of two decision support tools, discussed below, as evidence of a maturing research portfolio that was progressing beyond single model applications to the development of relevant tools for management.

***NOAA Fisheries Progress***

* NOAA Fisheries responded to angler feedback received at the 2010 Recreational Fishing Summit with a number of strategic activities:
* Since 2010, for-hire surveys have been conducted in 6 out of 7 regions and the national angler expenditure survey was conducted in 2011, as planned
* Improved economic data ‒ current regional survey efforts are all informed by past surveys in their regions, improving the utility of the recent surveys
* Progress on recreational fisheries economic models and two decision support tools: BLAST, a bioeconomic modeling tool being piloted in the Northeast, and the Social Indicators Toolbox

It is essential to conduct for-hire cost and earnings surveys: the software NMFS uses to assess economic impacts does not accurately reflect this important sector (NMFS must “customize” this sector from survey data).

Outreach is essential for developing surveys and ensuring constituent buy-in. Staff also noted that including attitude and perception questions on surveys was important to stakeholders and can improve survey response rates.

NMFS is doing a better job at getting economic information to Councils.

It is not possible to cover the full suite of presentations and discussions in this summary. Instead herein we capture selected highlights that are illustrative of the issues raised at the Workshop.[[1]](#footnote-1) For example, considerable feedback was given on the results from the National Saltwater Angler Attitudes & Preference Survey. While Workshop participants felt that overall the national results from the survey validated what was known about angler preferences (anglers care about fishing with family and friends, the importance of future generations being able to enjoy saltwater angling, and conservation), they pressed for additional information in the regional reports. They also felt outreach could have been better. NMFS fully intends to utilize the feedback received at the Workshop to inform the regional report as well as to guide future survey outreach efforts.

The two presentations on West Coast for-hire cost earnings surveys and, in particular, the economic impact study were well received by Workshop participants, who found it very encouraging that NMFS was collecting this type of information. Workshop participants were particularly quite struck by the findings from the Oregon and Washington survey that demonstrated that for-hire operations outlook was highly correlated with the timing of their entry into the fishery (more recent entries able to adapt to fishery circumstances by purchasing smaller boats, which are proving more cost-effective than the larger boats used by the more veteran operations). In addition, both studies received high marks for outreach.

**“*This [economic impact] study is invaluable to the charter industry.” Captain* David Monti**

The Massachusetts angler valuation survey did not receive high marks for outreach and there were also considerable concerns expressed about the timing of the survey. That is, concerns were expressed that the study, which assessed the value anglers place on having access to fishing via the value they placed on possessing an annual fishing license, may have harmed angler compliance with the recently instituted saltwater fishing license. This said, the same Workshop participant that raised this issue also concluded that despite his concerns he was glad NMFS conducted the survey because the Agency needs this type of information. In addition, he believes that survey results demonstrate that investment in recreational fishing infrastructure is a good investment and thus can help guide state budget decisions.

The presentation on the BLAST decision support tool generated considerable discussion. Workshop participants considered BLAST a game-changer in how economic information is used in the fishery management process.

***“I hope the [BLAST} model can be worked on to address shortcomings; it would be a step backward not to use this cutting edge tool.”* Captain Patrick Paquette**

***Thinking broadly about the portfolio of projects NMFS has presented, this (BLAST) is what the program must do.”* Ted McConnell, University of MD**

***”The two major advances of BLAST are 1) it is embedded in the fishery management process and doesn’t leave it up to the Council members to figure out how to use the economic information; 2) it uses a coupled biological–behavioral model [instead of an isolated economic model].”****.*Doug Lipton, NMFS Chief Economist

BLAST PLACEHOLDER

RITA WILL EXPAND HERE

SOCIAL INDICATORS PLACEHOLDER

RITA WILL EXPAND HERE

Key Takeaway Messages

While constituents commented on all aspects of the data collections, models, decision support tools as well as the management process, four key themes emerged repeatedly over the course of the Workshop. These themes call for:

**#1. Increased communication of research goals and priorities for NMFS’ recreational fishing economics program.**  Constituents repeatedly expressed their desire for a well-articulated statement of socioeconomic research priorities that can serve as a roadmap for future research activities. Constituents expressed their interest in helping to develop this plan which be based on management needs and would include a list of both national and regional priorities.

***From outside in, it still strikes me as a piecemeal approach; we need to see the roadmap. And then we need to see how this information is fed into the management process.* Mike Leonard, American Sportfishing Assn.**

**#2. Improved socioeconomic information.**

***What We Heard***

**Our socioeconomic research priorities and goals are not well understood. Constituents would like to be involved in setting this research agenda.**

**Socioeconomic information needs to be**

**Socioeconomic information could be better utilized in fishery management decisions.**

**Constituents want to be more informed and engaged in our socioeconomic work.**

**RITA WILL EXPAND HERE.**

**#3. Improve incorporation of socioeconomic information into the fishery management process.** While NMFS staff cited the increased availability of socioeconomic information in the Council process, the constituents, in contrast, expressed concerns that the use of such information in shaping fisheries management decisions is still limited. Reasons for this may include a lack of understanding of socioeconomic information and its appropriate use, lack of timely data, and the sheer volume of both biological and other data presented to the Councils.

***“Socioeconomics is rarely discussed at Council meetings. It is always off on the side; how do we bring this more center?”* Ken Haddad**

**#4. Improved communication, cooperation and collaboration.** This recurring theme, prominently mentioned at the 2010 Summit, remains an ongoing concern of the marine recreational fishing constituents. Constituents remain deeply vested in improving the communication among anglers, the recreational and commercial industry, fishery managers, and scientists. Constituents expressed an interest in working more closely with NOAA Fisheries on all stages of socioeconomic work including priority setting, survey design, survey implementation, and understanding and sharing results. They also recommended that NMFS staff be given increased opportunities to share their research at regular (annual or bi-annual) meetings.

Next Steps

The four key areas identified by Workshop participants as issues that need to be addressed within the NMFS recreational fisheries economics program are inherently different and, as such, resolution to these issues will also vary.

**1. Develop a clearly articulated plan to improve understanding of NOAA Fisheries socioeconomic priorities and activities***.* It is important to us that stakeholders understand what we are doing, why, and where they can contribute. Moving forward, we will work with the stakeholder community to develop a well-defined research agenda and to clearly communicate in our internal and external communications how our various research projects meet our research objectives.

**2. Increase awareness and appropriate use of socioeconomic information in the fishery management process.** Although evident from workshop discussions that fishery management decisions would benefit from the increased use of socioeconomic information, it was not clear why use of this information was not more widespread. In 2014, NOAA Fisheries will reach out to internal and external stakeholders and establish a working group to examine the scope of the problem and to design a path forward for increased utilization of socioeconomic information.

**3. Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement and information sharing.** Since the 2010 Summit, the NOAA Fisheries socioeconomic program has been seeking out opportunities to engage with our constituents both regionally and nationally, such as the many outreach efforts associated with recent cost and earnings surveys across the country and with the 2011 National Marine Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey. In 2011, several constituents spoke with us about the impact fishery management decisions were having on bait and tackle retail outlets. Without economic data on these important components of the coastal community, they argued, the impact on these businesses was largely unrecognized in the decision-making process. Working closely with the tackle industry, we are developing a study to better understand the economic importance of retail bait and tackle stores. This survey will launch in summer 2014 with the broad awareness and support of the fishing tackle industry. This collaboration is just one of the many ways that NOAA Fisheries and the fishing community can work together to improve our understanding of the socioeconomic aspects of recreational fishing.

1. A more detailed summary of each presentation and the associated discussion is provided in the Appendix. In addition, two facts sheets, one on the Agency’s recreational fisheries economic data holdings and the other on economic models, are also included in the Appendix.. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)