



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | G. Warren Elliott, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 27, 2020
To: Scientific and Statistical Committee
From: Brandon Muffley, Staff
Subject: MRIP Question and Answer Session

Background:

In 2019, the Mid-Atlantic Council SSC reviewed the results of the 2018 benchmark stock assessment for summer flounder and the 2019 operational assessments for bluefish, scup, and black sea bass. These were the first Mid-Atlantic stock assessments to include the newly revised and calibrated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) recreational catch and harvest estimates. During the review of these assessments, the SSC noted the new MRIP catch timeseries introduces increased scientific uncertainty when considering acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations, particularly for those stocks with a large recreational component and therefore, assessments with a higher reliance on MRIP data. In addition, specifically related to bluefish, the SSC noted that further evaluation of the differences in the historical correction of the MRIP estimates compared to other Mid-Atlantic species was warranted.

In August 2019, the South Atlantic Council SSC held a three-day workshop with MRIP technical staff to “better understand and evaluate stock assessments that incorporate the new [MRIP] estimates.”¹ Feedback from the South Atlantic SSC and staff was the workshop was extremely informative and helpful in increasing the SSC’s understanding of the fishing effort survey (FES) design, the back calibration of catch estimates, and the implications of those changes in stock assessments. Given this feedback and the questions and concerns and issues raised by the SSC during their September 2019 meeting, Council staff thought a smaller-scale MRIP focused discussion with the SSC, NEFSC assessment staff, and the MRIP technical staff could be beneficial. This agenda item will focus on Mid-Atlantic specific fisheries and issues in order to provide the SSC, NEFSC and Council with an increased understanding of the recent MRIP changes and calibrated catch estimates. Anticipated benefits and outcomes from this discussion would be greater ability to characterize the scientific uncertainty associated with MRIP data, increased considerations and analyses to evaluate the implications of MRIP uncertainty and

¹ The workshop summary and background materials have been included as Supplemental Materials for the March SSC MRIP Q&A agenda item and can be found at: <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2020/march-10-11>

variability within stock assessments, and an opportunity to provide input on other Council actions that are utilizing the MRIP information.

March SSC Discussion:

A small workgroup of SSC members, NEFSC assessment staff, and Council staff was formed to identify potential topics to be discussed at the March SSC meeting. The workgroup identified a number of topics and areas of interest ranging from broader issues on survey design to focused species specific questions. The workgroup eventually settled on a few topics which were then shared with MRIP technical staff for feedback and feasibility. Below are the general topics and areas to be covered in March under this agenda item:

- Overview of recent MRIP design changes, FES implementation, catch calibration methods, and a summary of the South Atlantic SSC workshop.
- Deconstruction/construction of the MRIP process including the steps, assumptions, and decisions points made to develop catch estimates.
- Using bluefish as an example, construct a timeseries of catch estimates using the different calibrations/adjustments that have been implemented recently to understand the impacts/affects these have had over time. Compare the bluefish catch timeseries to other Mid-Atlantic fisheries and highlight how/why the bluefish catch timeseries is different.

Future:

As mentioned above, the workgroup initially identified a wide variety of topics and questions of interest. Given the number and range of potential topics and the overall importance of recreational catch estimates for many Mid-Atlantic stocks, the workgroup expressed interest in future/ongoing SSC meetings with MRIP related agenda topics to cover and discuss. The MRIP technical staff indicated they would be interested and willing to participate in future SSC meetings if desired.

The full SSC should discuss the potential benefits of dedicating time on future SSC meeting agendas to accommodate additional MRIP discussions. If there is interest in allocating agenda time for MRIP topics, the formation of a “longer-term” workgroup to identify topics and the timing for future meeting agendas will likely be needed.