Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ISFMP Policy Board

October 24, 2024
10:15 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome/Call to Order *(J. Cimino)* 10:15 a.m.

2. Board Consent 10:15 a.m.
   - Approval of Agenda
   - Approval of Proceedings from August 2024

3. Public Comment 10:20 a.m.

4. Executive Committee Report *(J. Cimino)* 10:30 a.m.

5. Update on the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Work Regarding Industry-based Trawl Surveys (*D. Salerno*) 10:40 a.m.

6. Committee Reports 10:55 a.m.
   - Law Enforcement (*K. Blanchard*)
   - Habitat (*S. Kaalstad*)
   - Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership (*S. Kaalstad*)

7. Review Non-Compliance Findings, If Necessary **Action** 11:05 a.m.

8. Other Business 11:10 a.m.

9. Lunch Break 11:15 a.m.

This portion of the meeting will be Joint with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

10. Consider Approval of Recreational Measures Setting Process Addenda/Framework for Public Comment *(C. Tuohy, T. Bauer, J. Beaty)* **Action** 12:00 p.m.

11. Adjourn 2:00 p.m.

The meeting will be held at The Westin Annapolis (100 Westgate Circle, Annapolis, MD; 888.627.8994) and via webinar; click here for details

MEETING OVERVIEW

ISFMP Policy Board
Thursday October 24, 2024
10:15 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Chair: Joe Cimino (NJ) Assumed Chairmanship: 10/23	Vice Chair: Dan McKiernan (MA)	Previous Board Meetings: August 6, 2024
Voting Members: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, DC, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS (19 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from August 6, 2024

3. Public Comment – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

4. Executive Committee Report (10:30-10:40 a.m.) Action
Background • The Executive Committee will meet on October 23, 2024
Presentations • J. Cimino will provide an update of the Executive Committee's discussions
Board action for consideration at this meeting • None

5. Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Progress Report for Industry- Base Survey Pilot Program (10:40-10:55 a.m.)
Background • The Commission, along with the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, requested information on an industry-based survey that would be complementary to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Spring and Autumn bottom trawl survey • At the Winter Meeting, the NEFSC presented white paper responding to the request of the Councils and Commission

- The three management bodies requested NTAP and the NTAP Industry Based Survey (IBS) Working Group to develop an outline detailing a proposal to conduct an IBS Pilot Program

Presentations

- D. Salerno will provide an update on NTAP's progress (**Meeting Materials**)

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- None

6. Committee Updates (10:55-11:05 a.m.) Action

Background

- The ACFHP Steering Committee will meet on October 21 and 22, 2024
- The Habitat Committee will meet on October 23 and 24, 2024
- The Law Enforcement Committee will meet on October 22 and 23, 2024

Presentations

- S. Kaalstad will present on activities of the Habitat Committee and ACFHP Steering Committee
- K. Blanchard will present on activities of the Law Enforcement Committee

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- None

7. Review Non-Compliance Findings, if Necessary Action

8. Other Business

9. Lunch Break

The remainder of the meeting will be a joint meeting with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

10. Consider Approval of Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda for Public Comment (12:00-2:00 p.m.) Action

Background

- In June 2022, the ISFMP Policy Board and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) approved the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda. Upon approving the Harvest Control Rule, the bodies agreed to continue development of several options for setting recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) for implementation by 2026. The Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda considers the long-term process for setting recreational measures.
- From early 2023 through September 2024, the Plan Development Team and Fishery Management Action Team, under the guidance of the Policy Board, Council, and Commissioner and Council Member Work Group, developed several options for setting recreational measures in a draft document to be to be considered for approval for public comment (**Briefing Materials**).

Presentations • Overview of Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda for public comment by C. Tuohy, T. Bauer, and J. Beaty
Board and Council Actions for Consideration • Approve Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda for Public Comment

11. Adjourn

DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

ISFMP POLICY BOARD

The Westin Crystal City
Arlington, Virginia
Hybrid Meeting

August 6, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX OF MOTIONS

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Pat Keliher, ME (AA)
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)
Cheri Patterson, NH (AA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)
Dan McKiernan, MA (AA)
Sarah Ferrara (MA), proxy for Rep. Peake (LA)
Ray Kane, MA (GA)
Jason McNamee, RI (AA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)
Justin Davis, CT (AA)
Bill Hyatt, CT (GA)
Marty Gary, NY (AA)
Jim Gilmore, NY, proxy for Sen. Thiele (LA)
Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)
Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)
Kris Kuhn, PA, proxy for Tim Schaeffer (AA)
Loren Lustig, PA (GA)
John Clark, DE, proxy for David Saveikis (AA)
Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Lynn Fegley, MD (AA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for De. Stein (LA)
Jamie Green, VA (AA)
James Minor, VA (GA)
Chris Batsavage, NC (AA)
Chad Thomas, VA, proxy for Rep. Wray (LA)
Mel Bell, SC (AA)
Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Rick Jacobson (US FWS)
Mike Ruccio (NMFS)
Ron Owens (PRFC)

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Staff

Bob Beal
Toni Kerns
Tina Berger
Madeline Musante
Caitlin Starks
Jeff Kipp
Tracy Bauer
James Boyle
Katie Drew
Jainita Patel
Chelsea Tuohy

The Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, via hybrid meeting, in-person, and webinar; Thursday, August 8, 2024, and was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Chair Joe Cimino.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR JOE CIMINO: Good morning, everyone, going to Call to Order the Policy Board. We've got a few things to run through, and then we're going to do our very best to get you all out of here, and fingers crossed everyone gets home safely.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR CIMINO: This is another interesting one for us. We'll go through Approval of the Agenda.

Are there any items that need to be added to the agenda for us today? Not seeing any, good deal.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR CIMINO: The Proceedings from the May, 2024 meeting, any additions or edits to the proceedings? Emerson. All right, Emerson, if it is something on the minutes from the last meeting, we'll get that straightened out. Sorry that we're having some issues here. We're going to move on.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR CIMINO: Is there any Public Comment to come before the Policy Board today? Okay, we do have one, I believe, so Adam Subhas if you want to go ahead, you are good to go.

MR. ADAM SUBHAS: Thank you so much for letting us provide a comment on our research project. My name is Adam Subhas; I am the lead principal investigator of the LOC-NESS Project, which stands for Lacking Ocean Carbon in the Northeast Shelf and Slope. LOC-NESS is part of a comprehensive research strategy to address the challenges associated with increasing carbon dioxide emissions.

Broadscale decarbonization of the global economy is the number one solution to keeping future warming to a minimum. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that transitioning away from fossil fuels will not be enough. There is broad scientific consensus from the National Academies, U.S. federal agencies and international bodies that we should evaluate the oceans potential to help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Responding to this recognized need for a scientific assessment of marine carbon dioxide removal methods, and the scientific consensus that in-water field experiments are both the logical continuation of existing laboratory research, and a necessary step to completing this assessment. The LOC-NESS Project was established to evaluate one promising carbon dioxide removal pathway, known as ocean alkalinity enhancement, or OAE. OAE involves enhancing the ocean's natural ability to absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide, by temporarily raising the pH of the sea surface.

The goal of LOC-NESS is not to profit by removing CO2 from the atmosphere, but to carefully evaluate the safety and effectiveness of OAE through a multi-year, multi-disciplinary project. Pending permission from the EPA, the LOC-NESS team plans to conduct a small, constrained and highly monitored field trial in federal waters off of Cape Cod. Federal Consistency Review has determined the project to be consistent with Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management enforceable policies.

This initial field trial is currently planned for September of 2024, this year. The experiment involves an engineered dispersal of sodium hydroxide solution over approximately0.1 square mile patch, which will raise the surface water pH by a few tenths of a unit. Protected Species observers will accompany a multiplatform, multiday monitoring campaign for both CO2 uptake and impacts to the marine ecosystem and environment.

Based on peer reviewed international research and our own team's assessment, we anticipate negligible impacts to the marine ecosystem. A subsequent trial is planned for the summer of 2025 in the Wilkinson Basin Area of the Gulf of Maine. The public comment period for our EPA permit has closed, but there several opportunities for further engagement with our science and our team, and we invite continued input.

We will hold our third dockside session in the conference space above Superior Trawl in Narraganset, Rhode Island, 55 State Street, on August 14, 2024, so that is next Wednesday, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. We are hosting a virtual public event about the project on August 21, and for additional information about upcoming events, Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement, our project, and our team, please visit our website, locness.whoi.edu. Thanks again, so much, for letting us provide this comment.

CHAIR CIMINO: Thank you, Adam, much appreciated.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

CHAIR CIMINO: With that we're going to move on to the Executive Committee Report. It was a somewhat quiet, fortunately, ExCom meeting. We continued to discuss/address, House Bill, which I'm going to let Bob cover for me. Really the only other item we had at ExCom was just going through the next couple of annual meetings. In October we will be in Annapolis, and then following that we will be in Delaware, so keeping it tight in the Mid-Atlantic. With that I will turn it over to Bob. Okay, sorry, we have a few hands up. Malcolm, you had your hand up?

DR. MALCOLM RHODES: I did, I just had a question on that LOC-NESS Project and how they are going to assess how well this works. I mean we're doing a lot of that on land here in South Carolina, with carbon flux towers, looking at carbon sequestration over different plant habitat, hard wood, pine plantation, mixed pine areas, and trying to quantitate how that is done. Are they going to be able to set up like a carbon flux tower in the Gulf of Maine to assess how effective this alkalinization is?

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, I don't now if Adam has a quick response, I'm happy to let him reply to that, and if it is more in depth then maybe you two can connect offline here. But Adam, do you have a response for Dr. Rhodes?

MR. SUBHAS: Yes. I'm still here, thanks so much for the question. Yes, happy to engage. My e-mail address too is ASUBHAS@whoi.edu, I also shared the comment as a PDF with all this information and contact information with the Board, so if that could get passed around to that would be great.

But yes, short answer is yes, we have a number of ways to evaluate the CO2 update. We are not doing the carbon flux towers, technically that is actually really challenging to do on the ocean, and our experiment might be too small to see that with those flux towers. But we're looking into that technology and a whole other range of technologies too, to look at the CO2 updates.

CHAIR CIMINO: Great, thank you, Adam, and Malcolm we'll make sure that you have that contact information, well we'll make sure that everyone on Policy will have that contact information. Thank you again, Adam. We did have another hand up, so I'm going to go to Mike Ruccio.

DISCUSS H.R. 8705, THE FISHERIES DATA MODERNIZATION AND ACCURACY ACT OF 2024

MR. MIKE RUCCIO: Good morning, everybody, again my regrets that I wasn't able to get there in person, but hope you all have good success getting back to wherever you're headed to today. I just wanted to make a brief comment about discussion at the Executive Committee. As you know, federal partners are not part of the Executive Committee, so we weren't at the table for that.

But some concerns about the information and the structure of the discussion on H.R. 8705, that is the

Fisheries Data and Modernization and Accuracy Act. I mean everyone is entitled to their opinion, and certainly they can express concerns and opinions about what is or what isn't happening with the federal government.

But it is our opinion that a lot of the information on the IRA, the Inflation Reduction Act and MRIP were at odds with a lot of the information that we had shared with state directors on Monday, so just kind of wanted to point that out. Then rather than kind of get into it point by point.

I think the Agency may send a letter to the Commission, to just help clarify some of the points that were substantive in that discussion. Just wanted to kind of alert the Policy Board that a letter may be coming from us to kind of outline where we're at with IRA and what efforts, reinforcing a lot of those things that were provided to the state directors on Monday. Thanks, that's all I wanted to say.

CHAIR CIMINO: Well, I appreciate that, Mike. I am going to have Bob cover this now. They were making note to me that this is a separate agenda item as well, but we'll cover this all at once instead. I think really, where we left it at ExCom was that Congressman Graves' Office was looking for comments from NOAA.

We saw that as an important next step, so I do hope that you guys have the chance to have some of the same dialogue that we have had. I was really appreciative of the Office for showing up here and allowing us to have a discussion on some of the concerns that we have as well. With that I'll turn it over to Bob.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Great, thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, as folks have talked about. The Executive Committee had a pretty lengthy conversation about H.R. 8705, which is the Fisheries Data Modernization and Accuracy Act of 2024. Really what it does is look at ways of updating and improving and evolving the MRIP Program that NOAA administers right now. As Joe mentioned, a representative from Congressman Graves' Office came over, Anderson Tran.

Anderson has been working on this for a long time and Alexander and I met with him, I don't know, three or four times about this and talked to him about east coast perspectives on the bill in general. There is not a consensus really among our 15 states on where you go. But there is agreement that recreational data collection on the whole can be improved along the east coast.

However, there is some concerns with the way this bill is currently drafted relative to potential improvements along the east coast. The states talked about those quite a bit in the session that we had yesterday, as well as the conference call we had, I don't now three weeks or so ago. A couple of the main points of concern.

One of them is compatibility of data. As everyone knows here, you know the MRIP program used to be called MRFSS, it's been running since the eighties, so it's got about 40 years' time series of data on recreational fishing along the east coast, and then recreational catch and harvest in landings and other things.

If we were to make significant changes to data collection along the Atlantic Coast there is concerns that the new program may not be compatible with the historic time series of data. Then the other concern relative to compatibility is comparison between neighboring states and states along the coast.

You have states, under this bill there is a potential for states to essentially replace MRIP data collection with the state-specific data collection program. There is concern that if, you know the way Massachusetts is doing it is very different from the way New York is doing it, which is different from the way Maryland is doing it.

You know the compatibility of those different data collection programs is a big concern, both in the management of fisheries and being able to analyze

the data, and understand what differing regulations, what impact they would have, as well as stock assessment work. You know obviously for stock assessments you have to roll together all the recreational information for the range of that species and put back recreational catch into the assessment.

If there are pieces of that data collected within the range of that species that differ, and there is uncertainty about compatibility and how to lump all that together and develop one characterization of recreational catch throughout the range. You know that may actually increase uncertainty in our stock assessments, and obviously that is not something we're striving for.

Uncertainty often means decreased access to fisheries, and that is not what the Commission is hoping for either. Compatibility with the time series and with neighboring states is one of the big concerns. The other issue that came up is that east coast management differs a whole lot from the Gulf Coast. In the Gulf Coast they have a number of in-season closures and changes that happen, and on the east coast we don't do in-season closures. Obviously, in-season closures require very robust, timely data to do that well. For better or for worse we don't do that on the east coast.

For a lot of fisheries, especially the ones we manage at the Mid-Atlantic Council and some others, we essentially set the regulations for a year, let them run out, and see how that year goes, and then adjust in subsequent years if necessary. That is different than the way some fisheries happen in the Gulf Coast.

The phrase apples to oranges came up quite a bit between the way the Gulf and the Atlantic use recreational data. One of the other issues that was talked about quite a bit is the bill establishes, essentially a standing committee through the National Academy of Sciences that will provide advice on species that meet the threshold level of percent standard error. That standing committee would provide two pieces of information potentially, one is how can we improve the percent standard error, and should any management changes be made, given the uncertainty of the fisheries data. One of the big concerns was the threshold to engage that standing committee was a PSE of 30 percent.

If you're looking at the data, it's 30 percent PSE by wave is the way it is written right now, I believe. That is not defined is it by wave by state, by wave by the entire coast, you know one area that we could clarify? Currently if it is 30 percent standard error as a trigger, 300 out of the 304 species, or something like that would trip that trigger at some point.in a year.

That obviously, a standing committee can't wrestle with 300 species and try to provide advice on improving the data collection and/or management of those species. That is an area that we talked about quite a bit on yesterday morning, for the folks that weren't here. Those are the highlights. You know as Joe said, we're going to keep working on this with Representative Grave's Office.

They are apparently waiting on some feedback from NOAA Fisheries on issues like percent standard error and potential cost in implementing this program. It's going to be a continuing dialogue. We are not sending a letter over to Grave's Office or anything like that, we're going to continue to sort of staff-to-staff conversations.

If there is any additional feedback that folks have around the table, on the good parts of this or parts they would like to see changed, we're wide open to that. You know I am happy to answer any questions, but it is going to be an ongoing dialogue. You know recreational data is a big deal for a lot of the species here at the Commission.

If you look at striped bass, red drum, and others, that are solely managed by ASMFC, you know the vast majority of that catch that feed into our management stock assessment is recreational catch. Being able to accurately characterize that is a key piece of sort of it is the underpinnings of how

we manage and assess those populations. Joe, happy to answer any questions on the bill, but it's not finalized and there is a lot of room for conversation I think, still to happen.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, absolutely. I'll look around the table. I see Roy, go ahead.

MR. ROY W. MILLER: If Mike Ruccio, I presume he is still listening in. I was wondering if our federal partners would share with us on the sub boardroom on the legislative committee, any comments that they might have put in writing in regard to this particular bill. I think it would help us in our continuing dialogue with our legislative representatives, so if they could share those viewpoints with us, we would be very appreciative.

CHAIR CIMIINO: Well, Roy, that is interesting, since Mike Ruccio has his hand up again, maybe he was thinking the same thing. If it's all right, Pat, I'll go to Mike, and then to you, Pat.

MR. RUCCIO: Yes, thanks for the question on that. I'll have to check, honestly. The process that we engage with Congress on is called Technical Drafting Assistance, and it's kind of a separation between the Legislative and the Executive Branches, and there is no value judgment in the comments that we provide, it's all technical.

Like, it's going to cost this much to do how you've got this written, or as this is written, here is how we would interpret that and implement those measures. It may not be very sexy or very telling, even if we can share those, but I'm not entirely certain that I can, and I actually don't have them before me. It's something I'll have to check with our Office of Government Affairs and Legislative engagement on that.

But did want to mention that formally we are engaged on the legislation through this technical drafting assistance process, and have sent our first round of comments on that. We have also been engaged in formal conversations, much as Bob is describing, with Mr. Law and others on the Commission staff that have talked to the Representative's staff.

We've had those same kinds of informal conversations, and will continue to engage in that as legislation continues to develop. I'll take that as a get back and if it is something that we can share then we'll reach out through Toni and Bob and have that dispersed, and it's not, I'll also close the loop, and let people know that that is not something that we are able to provide.

CHAIR CIMINO: Okay, Mike, you have the microphone, if that was only in response to Roy and you had your hand up previously, why don't you go ahead.

MR. RUCCIO: I had my hand up previously just to say that we have received that request and provided technical drafting assistance, at least the first round, and then wanted to highlight that we've also had some informal conversations, just to highlight that it's not happening in a vacuum. We have been part of the process.

CHAIR CIMINO: I'm going to go to Pat and then Dan.

MR. PATRICK C. KELIHER: Having been involved in discussions, both on the Legislative Committee and then yesterday's Executive Committee meeting, this is a pretty complicated issue. I really appreciated Jason McNamee's comments about the complexities of data collection and the consistencies of the issues that were addressed then. I don't know the best approach forward for us, but getting some additional information and writing from NOAA, I think would be helpful, and I appreciate Mike's comments. But if we're going to come together as a body, with the complexity of issues and differences around this table. I think we're going to need really a focus group to think about this, not the Legislative Committee.

Because frankly, the Legislative Committee is not thinking about this the way Jason and other people

with really strong yourself, Mr. Chairman, with a really strong technical background. If we're going to have ASMFC come up with a consistent position on this, I think it's going to take a lot of work.

I mean we sent in a lot of comments through my Deputy Commissioner for the first round of conversations, and sent that into Alexander. It's complex. It's complex. It is just food for thought, but I don't know how we're going to get to a consistent position on a 20-page piece of legislation that has this type of complexity.

CHAIR CIMINO: Thanks, Pat, and before I go to Dan, I'll just say that yes, I think a lot of our staff has spent time on this already. It is a complex issue. You know there are things that in our conversation, with intent it sounded like we're on the same page. But the wording in that legislation still looks scary at times. It doesn't cover the things that we all are most concerned about.

There is that element of it, and quite frankly, I'll say this to Bob, if we need to get to that point of coordination, I think we should be meeting with Gulf states as well, because they have a different problem, as Bob mentioned. They have things that they are trying to get to that may not exist here, and they've been in the process of having state-specific surveys. There is definitely a learning element to it, and I will go to Dan, but Erica, if you want to, I would actually very much appreciate help from our southern partners.

MR. DANIEL McKIERNAN: Jason made a lot of great points yesterday, talking about precision and accuracy. Folks in the past have made reference to the simple altering the sequence of two questions, had like a 30 percent change in the outcome of output. The thing that struck me, thinking about yesterday and watching the cobia discussion.

Can you imagine challenge of the cobia discussion if one or more states had boutique data collection systems that were either biased or just perceived to be biased? I think it would really tear apart the ability of the state partners to negotiate some of these quota management outcomes.

CHAIR CIMINO: Erika, did you want to comment?

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: Not yet.

CHAIR CIMINO: Okay, sorry, I jumped the gun there, I thought I saw you. I'm going to go to Dave Sikorski then.

MR. DAVID SIKORSKI: This is good conversation, I had to step out of ExCom halfway through, so I missed some of the final conversation yesterday. I'm glad Dan just mentioned cobia, because that is what is on my mind. Frankly, I think the system we have in place, I think of it slightly differently. I think yesterday was a good highlight of the system that we have in pace doesn't work for cobia, and our management is not syncing properly, our stock assessment is pretty weak. I think of cobia as an opportunity. I've said this to my delegation and others in the region for a long time that I think cobia is low hanging fruit to figure out how do we properly assess, properly allocate and properly provide access for a species that is expanding its range?

You know we've had some challenges, but experience with other stuff in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, but we've always relied on MRIP. I get that change is difficult, and I totally recognize the expertise that so many of you have in the room that I don't, when it comes to statistics and such, but I think it is necessary that we have the type of conversation that I know Joe and Pat were just talking about, to try and find a solution.

I end it with an open-ended question, which is, does this legislation present an opportunity for the east coast to potentially tackle a problem child, or a challenge like cobia. Frankly, I think it is worth it. I think we recognize the value of that fishery to many of our state partners yesterday. That value is going to change, that value is going to expand.

Speaking as a Maryland angler, as somebody deeply involved in fisheries management, also representing recreational anglers, through an organization that you all know is on top of this topic and is probably involved with Congressman Graves and others in the Gulf for very, very, very good reason.

I'm going to give a little brief history. I had drafted legislation in the state of Maryland to create a recreational data task force, to try and identify ways that combined with outreach and education efforts and engagement efforts, with people that are not engaged in our state. How do we take this opportunity to capture better data and advance the management of our fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay?

We have lots of great priorities that are very difficult and very expensive, but I'm proud of that work, because it was planting a flat to say, we the stakeholders, we the community want to work on this. Well, there is a million very good and very valid reasons that we cannot advance that great work that highlighted some stuff already done in the Gulf, which is allow better angler access and better communication with states managing their resource for their anglers.

We're trying to advance that work in the Chesapeake, but there is something in the way every single time. I have great frustration in that, yet I understand all the reasons why. I believe Maryland is moving forward to lead the charge on pilot programs and efforts to better understand it. Is it ever going to replace MRIP, heck no.

When you stop thinking it through that lens, we need to just obviously push back at that opportunity, which I think we are, or that part of the conversation. But we also need to kind of look on the bright side and say, what are we actually going to do. That is what the stakeholders want. Back to cobia, last point. I didn't say it yesterday, but what Virginia is being challenged with right now is spillover from North Carolina anglers, Maryland anglers, Delaware anglers all recognizes that there is a great fishery that is being talked about, and that is a challenge we have too. The only way to solve that is to better engage with our anglers, better understand what they are catching, and I'll just leave it with this, low hanging fruit, and I hope this legislation could be an opportunity to solve this thing before many of us around the table are done with this arena.

CHAIR CIMINO: Any other hands? Not seeing any, as mentioned by Bob when we started out here, this discussion will continue. As Pat pointed out, maybe we need to be a little more focused and engaged. We'll see where this all goes. I appreciate everyone's comments. Erika, all right, go ahead.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: I held back just a little bit to see if there was going to be a specific question or not. I'll respond to your comment about the Gulf states. The Gulf States Commission has written a letter of support for this bill. All of the Gulf states individually have written letters of support, so they are behind it.

But I think if you're interested to learn more about their experience with state data collection programs, calibrating those programs, going through MRIP certification, we would be happy to provide a presentation to ASMFC if there is interest. I know many folks have seen this presentation before, especially if you were at the South Atlantic Council. But happy to if there is interest.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, I think it's something to think about. My understanding is that these programs are evolving as well. Former presentations may be evolving as you guys look to make adjustments and probably get a little bit closer together, so that as the Congressmen's folks have said.

You know they realize the importance of having continuity in all of this, so thank you.

UPDATE ON AMERICAN EEL CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF ENDANGERED SPECIES ACTIVITY

CHAIR CIMINO: We're going to go to our next agenda item if we don't have any other hands, and that is on the American Eel Trade Issue. There was a letter that went out, and Toni is going to give us an update on that.

MS. TONI KERNS: In mid-May, Fish and Wildlife Service reached out to the Association of Fish and Wildlife agencies on the potential listing of American eel in CITES Appendix III. Fish and Wildlife Agencies then reached out to myself and Caitlin on gathering information on our thoughts on this, and since this was between Commission meetings, but they needed comments prior to mid-June, we went ahead and sort of talked to different states about the issue, and then wrote a joint letter back to Fish and Wildlife Service, which got sent out on June 21.

In that letter we referenced some of the changes that we had made recently in eel management, and then pulled together a list of concerns that the Commission has on the potential listing of CITES Appendix III. If you're not aware, when you have something that is listed as an Appendix III, it means there has to be legal documentation that that or certified documentation of some sort. I'm not 100 percent clear what that documentation needs to be and that I'll get into.

The exports then have to have a permit to leave the country, and that permit has to be issued by Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of our comments were that we had concerns that there isn't a certified legal acquisition process in all of the states that have eel trade, and to put that system together would be costly and potentially burdensome. In some of the states the eel fishery, in particular the yellow eel fishery, not the elver fishery, has monthly reporting, so timeliness of getting that documentation, and then those permits might be problematic. We also aren't clear on what it means to have a legal acquisition finding.

Like what documentation would be necessary, so it is difficult for us to comment more specifically on what that is, unless Fish and Wildlife Service comes back to us and tells us what that actual documentation would be, so we had a request to have that information worked out prior to any sort of finding to move into an Appendix III.

We also noted that eel is a live specimen oftentimes in trade, especially in the elver fishery. Once those elvers are packed, then they cannot be in their packaging and in transit more than 36 hours at the most, otherwise that product is going to perish. The current permitting system in other species that are listed in Appendix III do not move that quickly.

We had great concerns that the elver fishery would be negatively impacted if we move into the CITES III Appendix, because of the permitting process that is currently in existence. We requested that Fish and Wildlife come back to us and have a conversation about how we can change that permitting system to make sure that this product is not going to be damaged.

The eel fishery, in 2023 the elver fishery was worth over 20 million dollars, it's a very economically important fishery, in particular to the state of Maine, and to lose that fishery would be extremely problematic. We really do want Fish and Wildlife to have this conversation with us.

The last part is that we want to understand how American eel could come out of an Appendix III listing. There is legal authority to remove from that, but the criteria are extremely prohibitive. To come out you can't have more than five shipments per year, and there has to be fewer than 100 individuals.

We cannot imagine a time when we would ever meet that criterion for American eel, because of the nature of the elver fishery. There are thousands of elvers in one pound. That was a huge concern for us. This letter went. The state of Maine also sent a

letter, and I'll let Pat describe anything that he wants to, then the letter that they sent.

We have not heard back from Fish and Wildlife Service. I was hoping that by the time this meeting came around that we would have some more information to share with the Board on the next steps in the process, and how they would be engaging with us, but we have not heard anything from them, nor has Maine or the Association of Fish and Wildlife Service.

Unfortunately, I don't know where Fish and Wildlife Service is in this process, what the steps will be to move forward, if they are going to have a public comment period, if they will engage with us any further in the consideration. That's it. I don't know if Pat has anything he wants to add.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, thanks, Toni, Pat, if you would like to add to that.

MR. KELIHER: I don't really have a whole lot more to add, other than it is really disappointing that they have received three letters on this and are not kind of getting back to us on kind of the process side of this. We tried to explain in our letter that we have a really strong chain of custody, all the way up to sealing packages with Marine Patrol present.

Marine Patrol actually seals all exports being shipped out of the state of Maine before they go to an airport, where U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can then inspect, to ensure that that package has not been tampered with, right. There is strong, stronger chain of custody than any other fishery. It is disappointing I haven't heard back, so hopefully we can kind of keep the heat on and see where this is going to go. Thank you.

CHAIR CIMINO: Rick, go ahead.

MR. RICK JACOBSON: Yes, I am with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I just want to be clear, neither of those letters came to me. Joking aside, I do have some familiarity with this issue. I am not part of the office that deals with CITES listings or with permitting. I was however, with the, while with the state of Connecticut.

I did serve through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies on their CITES Technical Committee, and as Chair of the International Relations Committee worked closely with the Internationals Affairs Program with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This has been on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services radar for at least the last seven years, I believe, when the discussion first came up about the potential of listing other anguillids

It's not that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is unaware of the issue, they have been aware of the issue for quite some time. Since Toni brought this to my attention, I have reached out to my colleagues within the International Affairs Program, and I do anticipate we'll be hearing back from them in the near future. That's all.

CHAIR CIMINO: Thanks, Rick, appreciate that. Any other comments or questions on this issue? Okay, we're going to go to Anne St. John.

MS. ANNE ST. JOHN: Appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly on this. My name is Anne St. John, and I am with the Division of Management Authority in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are in fact the lead office on CITES for the U.S. Government. Just want to appreciate the information that was provided in the summary of the issue and just to kind of let you know a little bit more, I guess about an Appendix III listing, and then also sort of where we are in this process. Just to be clear, at this point we are in an information gathering process.

We have not made any Agency determination on whether to move forward with an Appendix III listing. We are undertaking consultations as was described. You know we reached out to the Commission through Aqua, and so we have received several responses from you all and from the state of Maine, and so are evaluating those. We are also undertaking a consultation with U.S. Tribes that are engaged in conservation and management of

American eel, and then also with other range countries. We'll be moving forward with that soon. Taking in to consideration the information we received through those consultations, and any additional information that we gather on our own. If we were to decide to move forward with an Appendix III listing, the process would be for us to publish a Proposed Rule in the Federal Register that would solicit public comments on whether or not the United States should move forward with an Appendix III listing.

Then if after evaluating the comments and additional information we decide that it would be appropriate for the U.S. to list the species, then we would publish a final rule, and also notify the CITES Secretary of the listing. We are still very much in the sort of beginning stages of this process, and appreciate any information, and I'm happy to provide my contact information and my leadership contact information, if folks want to be in contact and have additional information.

Then I guess just very quickly, a couple of matters with regard to an Appendix III listing. An Appendix III listing, as Toni described, it is sometimes legality. It is not about making determinations about the biological sustainability of the take and trade in the species, but about ensuring that specimens in the international trade were legally acquired, and that they are traceable through a system of CITES permits and certificates.

What that looks like, what that would look like, if we were to go that direction, you know it is a conversation that we can still have. We have various sort of iterations of what kind of what CITES listings of native species look like. We realize, for example, on U.S. Native species like American ginseng, American Alligator, and Fur bearer species, we rely very heavily on information provided by state Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

That helps us to make programmatic findings, so that we're not having to make determinations to such a degree on an application-by-application basis. There are, you know there is not one single model for what that coordination between the Federal and State and Tribal levels would look like, and that we can still discuss that.

Then the other issue, or the other thing I would want to mention is that for an Appendix III listing, those can be annotated such that they exclude certain products from CITES coverage. The listing would not necessarily cover all American eel specimens in trade. The intention would be to ensure that we're capturing within the permitting system, within the finings system, that we're capturing those specimens that are traded that are the first point of trade.

Then also, specimens that dominate the trade from the wild resource, so we wouldn't be necessarily wanting to sort of impose a burden, an administrative burden on specimens that are further down the processing line. Just to clarify that a listing could be annotated such that it, you know, it only covers whole specimens, or it covers parts and products, right.

Whatever would make sense from a conservation perspective. But yes, just wanted to provide a little bit of additional information, and as I said, we're moving forward with this conversation, with this consultation and we'll definitely be back in touch. But we're really in the early stages and happy to take any questions here, or follow up by e-mail. Thank you.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, thank you for that, Anne. We do have a question from Toni, and then I'll look around the room.

MS. KERNS: Anne, so we had several questions in our letter, and then concerns that we would need to be addressed before we can provide any additional comments, if this were to go to a public comment Federal Register Notice. I'm wondering if the Agency will be getting back to us, the state of

Maine and the Association prior to any Federal Register Notice.

Because we won't be able to comment on how this process would work, unless we understand what an LAF is, what the permits are, how you can acquire the permits. The system that is in place right now, we as a Commission have grave concerns about, and without knowing how that would be addressed, we wouldn't be able to provide meaningful comments back to you all, so conversation prior to that would be needed.

MS. ST. JOHN: You bet, yes, we would absolutely plan on doing that, and appreciate your willingness to have those conversations. But yes, there is nothing to be gained by us sort of moving forward in a vacuum. We would absolutely want to have those conversations and appreciate the information that you can provide. You know the intention is right, to support the conservation of the species. We would want to make sure that all of our ducks were in a row, and that we were moving forward in a thoughtful and appropriate manner, so appreciate that.

CHAIR CIMINO: Any other, at least one, Jim.

MR. JAMES J. GILMORE: I'm a little rusty on the issue, but I mean part of the concerns we had with when Maine was going to keep harvesting, I think they corrected, because as I recall, there were limited airports, whatever, that you could essentially get eels, when the whole traffic thing was going.

The system that Maine put in resolved all those issues. It's like it's been fixed, and it's kind of like well, we're going to look for a solution to a problem we've already fixed. I think part of the comment should be into that. We went through this years ago, what Pat did, and the system he put into place.

Kennedy Airport was one of the places they could get eels out of, they can't do that anymore, because of the system that was put in. It really is, first off not a lot of states involved, it's Maine, and essentially that system took care of any, at least for the elver fishery, or elver trafficking. I think that should be probably highlighted that we took care of this problem, and we really don't need more work.

CHAIR CIMINO: Any other questions or comments on this item? John Clark.

MR. JOHN CLARK: I'm sorry if it came up before, but what was the impetus to look into listing this under Appendix III? Weren't American eel put on Appendix II years ago?

MS. ST. JOHN: I'm happy to respond to the last couple of questions, if that would be helpful.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, thank you, Anne.

MS. ST. JOHN: The species currently is not in fact included in the CITES Appendices, so it is not regulated under this International Structure that is CITES. I agree with the previous comment that this has been raised to us as the U.S. trade on CITES. It has been raised to us a number of times the concern with regard to the legality, the biological sustainability of the trade.

The other sort of issue that has come up relatively recently is that the European Union has really tightened up controls on harvesting and trade of European eel, and included that species in the CITES Appendices. With the sort of tightening of the rules around trade in European eel, there is a real concern, and I think that there is increasing evidence of poaching and smuggling in American eel.

The point of the exercise that we're undertaking now is to determine if a CITES Appendix III listing would be useful, would be supportive of the conservation efforts for the species. It would not be intended to be sort of an impediment, but rather to support the conservation. That is just a little bit more information on how we've landed where we are. But like I said, we're still very much in an information gathering phase at this point.

CHAIR CIMINO: Lynn.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: Curiosity question, I think for Anne. If this were to be listed as Appendix III, then I'm assuming that would apply to all countries dealing in the trade of animals, so Caribbean countries would also need to comply, because it's an international treaty. Is that correct?

MS. ST. JOHN: That is correct. The way what we call sort of a "standard" Appendix III listing works is that the country that listed the species in the appendices in Appendix III. For that country there would be the requirement would be the issuance of a CITES Appendix III export permit. That permit would be predicated solely on a legal acquisition finding.

That would be the document required to export from the U.S. For all other countries, for all other range countries, for all other exports of this species they would have to issue a CITES Certificate of Origin. It's a CITES document that confirms that the specimens in trade were acquired in that country.

It's not a determination of biological sustainability or legality, but simply a confirmation that those specimens being exported were acquired in that country. The other thing that would be required is that all of the trade would be captured within what is called the CITES Annual Trade Report.

Every country that is a party to CITES has to submit an annual report of trade from the prior calendar year, so they have to submit those reports every year. In them they report on imports, exports, and re-exports of CITES listed species. It would also give us sort of more visibility into the trade out of other range countries for the species.

MS. KERNS: Amne, but for that, don't those countries also have to have to decide to have an Appendix III listing? If they don't do that, then do you still get that information?

MS. ST. JOHN: Under this scenario of a standard Appendix III listing, the other countries would not in fact have to agree with it. It is a unilateral decision of the listing country. You'll notice some listings in Appendix III are limited to national populations or particular regions. For a species that is as wide ranging and has such a shared range as American eel.

We don't think that limiting the scope of the geographic coverage of an Appendix III listing would make sense from a conservation perspective. It would sort of limit your visibility on data from other countries. The point would be to understand, you know get a better understanding of the trade, and as I said, make sure that the trade is legal and traceable.

CHAIR CIMINO: Go ahead, Eric.

MR. ERIC REID: With your permission, this has nothing to do with CITES, but since we're having a discussion about Fish and Wildlife and International Trade, I would like to ask a question, which I know I won't get an answer for today, but it's in support of your stakeholders, my stakeholders, stakeholders in the audience and stakeholders from some of the people around this table. Are you okay with that? Okay.

In support of our Mid-Atlantic partners, we have been trying to understand the regulations on having to pay duty for the export of squid. If at this point there is an exemption in the rules for seafood products that includes crustaceans and mollusks, which squid is a mollusk. But squid are not exempt, because they have been deemed to be not seafood, not mollusks, and not even any kind of seafood product, which I don't understand that.

I want somebody from Fish and Wildlife to answer that question for real at a Mid-Atlantic Council meeting, which happens to be next week. Because it just doesn't seem to me that that is anywhere possible that squid is not a seafood product. I think you're familiar with that, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate your indulging my request, but it's been an uphill battle, but the notion that squid is not a seafood

product is, I'm a little confused on that. That is my question, thank you very much, I appreciate it.

CHAIR CIMINO: Anne, I don't know if you have a response to that. As Eric mentioned, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has sent letters on this. An important issue for us, and certainly something that we're looking to engage on, and have a response to. It certainly doesn't need to happen today.

MS. ST. JOHN: Yes, appreciate that. I will certainly reiterate the comment and the question to our leadership, but I think that that is a separate office within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I think that that is the Office of Law Enforcement. I will reiterate the question and the desire for additional conversation about that to our leadership, and pass it along to the appropriate office. Thanks.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, great, I appreciate that. Thank you. Any other questions or comments on this potential CITES listing? Not seeing any, we will move on.

PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING

CHAIR CIMINO: As noted, we wrapped in the discussion on House Bill 8705 in with the Executive Committee Report, so we'll be moving on to Presentation of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Electronic Monitoring and Reporting and we have Willy Goldsmith online, so whenever you're ready, Will.

MR. WILLY GOLDSMITH: Good morning, everybody, I'm sorry I can't be there in person today. My name is Willy Goldsmith, I'm here on behalf of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. I'm here to share some information on the electronic monitoring and reporting grant program. This funding opportunity is currently live, and just wanted to share some information about the request proposals, and hopefully provide some helpful background for any folks or members of your networks who might be interested in getting involved.

Just to reiterate, this request for proposals is currently live, it's available on this web page. I will be providing some more information here in the coming slides. Whether this is the first time you've heard about this program or whether you've been around for a while and are very familiar with it, certainly encourage you all to learn a bit more about it, and to reach out to me if you have any questions. Some brief background on this list. It was created by a Congressional charter back in 1984.

It is an independent nonprofit, but it does work very closely with NOAA Fisheries, and really works a lot in public and private partnerships, working really to leverage public funds with private sector investments, so partnering with corporations and with private foundations as well. As a nonprofit, NFWF does not conduct or fund any advocacy, lobbying or litigation activities. Rather, the main focus of NFWF is on voluntary conservation action, rather than compliance with regulatory or legislative action.

Getting into the subject today, so for the past decade or so electronic technology broadly in U.S. marine fisheries has been a key focus of NMFW, with about 33 million dollars awarded through these programs to 112 projects. Certainly, the Atlantic Coast has been a major focal area for this program, with about 8 million dollars awarded to 33 projects. As you can see below here, NFWF partners closely with NOAA Fisheries, and here are some examples of some foundations who provide key investments over the years as well.

When it comes to the priorities for the electronic monitoring and reporting program, there are kind of two major buckets into which projects typically fall. The first is really in supporting the use of electronic technologies and data collections for thinking through opportunities to improve and scale electronic monitoring. What is going on, on the water thinking through challenge of the fishery

dependent data collection, and how electronic technologies can help improve those opportunities.

By the same token, looking at electronic reporting and opportunities to pilot new applications for electronic reporting and data collection, as well as to scale concepts that have already been proven in a pilot context. Through both of these efforts, a real key focus is on engaging closely with fishing communities throughout the data collection process, and ensuring that they are an integral part of this whole process.

That is sort of one side of what this program typically funds. The other is more on the data management side, and thinking through how can we best adapt and modernizes the data management process, to ensure that we are processing this data efficiently, that we're doing it in a cost-effective way, and that we're really making any data that are collected available to scientists and managers in a timely and accessible way. Those are kind of the two major areas that this funding opportunity is for. I just want to provide a couple brief examples of the types of work that the NFWF Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Program has funded in the past. Again, these are just illustrative and by no means any indication of the only types of work NFWF funds.

But just to give you a flavor of the kind of work that has gone on in the past. If you are interested, we can provide some final reports for these projects that have wrapped up. Some of them do represent a series of several grants as well. On the electronic monitoring side, one example has been up in New England, where the Gulf of Maine Research Institute has worked to pilot and implement electronic monitoring for the large mobile gear groundfish vessels in New England.

Some of the goals here include enhancing quota utilization, also providing a means for fishermen accountability. That is one example. On the other end of the spectrum of commercial vessels, Gettysburg College has worked the pilot on EM aboard some small vessels, including a pound net vessel in North Carolina, demonstrating opportunities where cameras onboard might be a means of collecting fishery dependent data when an at-sea in-person observer might not be feasible in those cases.

Some examples of continued opportunities to think through electronic monitoring and its application include thinking through costs, so what are cost efficient ways to monitor fisheries electronically, just in terms of expenses of equipment and also thinking through the time and effort of fishermen who are of course integrally involved in the implementation and the successes of some of these programs.

A second aspect that has been a key priority is thinking through new tools to further reduce cost, such as artificial intelligence. Okay, so moving ahead here. We talked about EM, this is the other category of kind of on the water, fishermen implementation, and that would be electronic reporting. Again, here are just some regional examples of work that has been funded in the past.

Cornell Cooperative Extension has been working with both for-hire and commercial fleets in New York, to transition to the electronic trip reporting. Meanwhile, down in Maryland, the Oyster Recovery Partnership has looked into integrating commercial shellfish harvest into existing systems for other commercial fisheries in the state.

Then down in Virginia, and relevant to the conversation earlier, there has been a big focus on thinking through recreational data collection and the piloting of a new recreational and citizen science reporting application called RecFish, to both provide value to fishermen, for anglers in Virginia and beyond.

Will also provide information for us. Some of the key next steps here include kind of lowering the barriers to participation from fishermen. Thinking through how to make these Aps and other

technologies accessible to fishermen, trying to create efficiencies, and bringing multiple reporting platforms or requirements under one umbrella, and then again relevant to the questions about our recreational data collection, how there might be opportunities to better engage the recreational community in reporting their catch and effort and other key fishery dependent activities.

Then again, once these data are collected either electronic monitoring or that reporting, thinking through ways to process that data QA/QC, and making that data available, so that it gets to be applied for science and management purposes is another real key priority here. Here are a couple of examples, Teem Fish monitoring up in New England has been looking into using AI to automate from the groundfish discard data collected through EM, identifying species, measuring fish, issuing counts, those sorts of data.

Meanwhile, CFRF in Rhode Island has looked into a buoyless gear location marking allocation for mobile and fixed gear fisheries related to the North Atlantic Right Whale conservation. Again, the key next steps here really involve rolling the ball forward towards increasing efficiency and accessibility, so that folks who really need to use these data are able to do so, kind of as quicky as possible once they are collected, and ensured that that data has been verified for quality and accuracy.

That is hopefully some helpful background for you all on the types of projects that NFWF Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Grant Program has funded in the past. Again, the RFP was released back in mid-July, and the application window is currently live. The deadline for applications is October 2, at 11:59 p.m. eastern time, and about 5 million dollars in funding are available to support electronic technologies and fisheries around the nation.

For more information there is a landing page on NFWFs website, bit.ly/EMRRFP2024, and I believe in the meeting materials for this meeting, in addition to our PDF of this presentation there is a quick one-pager that just has a quick overview of eligibility kind of restated some of the program priorities and providing some key resources for you all to access.

In terms of what makes a good proposal, and again this information is highlighted in much greater detail elsewhere, but just want to give some key points here. First off, partnerships are really important. To ensure this work isn't happening in a vacuum, demonstrating that fishermen are engaged and invested, and now they are trying to pilot new technologies or to implement new technologies of scale.

That is a really key element here., as well as demonstrating to the folks who will ultimately be using or regulating or applying any information that are collected is also key, so that might be NOAA Fisheries, that might be a regional council, other groups that could be involved there. The other piece of course is thinking through the strong technical elements, and ensuring that the technical expertise and the folks who are involved in the proposal are kind of available and capable of implementing the work that is proposed.

Certainly, having a team with the requisite experience and familiarity, both with the technology and with the fishery is key here. Then lastly, it is important that grantees really be prepared from a financial standpoint, to receive federal funds. There are several steps that need to be taken there, and we have much more information on this and some additional background materials. But just a note that this is something to consider. If you have concerns about this, it might be beneficial to consider partnering with an organization that is well versed in the federal off funds arena. Coming to the end here.

Just to give a big of background on my role in this process. This is something that I had the fortune of participating in last year as well. I'm serving as a field liaison for NFWF EMR Program this year for the RFP, and my goals are really, first off, to spread

awareness of the opportunity to make sure that any entities, including those who may not have participated in the past are aware of this funding opportunity.
To help identify perspective applicants, and with those folks' kind of help think through potential ideas for projects and partners that align well with the goals of this fund draft, this funding opportunity. Then lastly, really to help serve as a resource when developing the application material. There are several parts that go into a proposal, and just want to make sure that everybody is putting their best foot forward here.

My contact information is on the right-hand side of this slide, and certainly hope to hear from some of you, and I hope that you can also circulate this information to the folks in your network, and again, the deadline for applications is in a little bit less than two months from now. I think that is about all I have for you all.

Again, just want to thank you for taking the time this morning. If you do have any additional questions, or would like some more information, feel free to contact Gray Reading, he is the Program Manager for the Fisheries Independent Fisheries Innovation Fund at NFWF. Of course you can reach out to me as well, and then once again the bit-lead to the RFP is on this slide. With that, if there is any time for questions, I am happy to take them, otherwise, I hope to hear from some of you after the meeting. Thanks.

CHAIR CIMINO: Well, thank you, that was a great presentation, encouraging to see the diversity of projects that have been funded in the past. I think, as you mentioned, application information is in the meeting materials, contact information is as well. It may be better as we move forward.

If folks do have questions or comments on applying here, that they do reach out to contact yourself and to Gray. Appreciate that.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

CHAIR CIMINO: With that we'll move on to our next item, which is our Committee Reports. We're going to go into two, we have Simen up here and he'll start us off with the Habitat Committee, or ACFHP.

ATLANTIC COAST FISHERIES HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

MR. SIMEN KAALSTAD: Thanks everyone for your time. I do have a few updates here on the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership and the Habitat Committee Reports. I'll start with the Partnership. The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, we met in Virginia Beach at the Chesapeake Bay Foundations Brock Environmental Center, where we discussed project updates, plans for our next science and data projects, as well as outreach initiatives. I guess the biggest item would be that we had elected a new Chair and that is Justin Coakley from the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, and the new Vice-Chair is Chris Moore from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. We also were privileged to have some guest speakers from the Lynnhaven River NOW Organization. Michelle Bachman from the New England Fisheries Management Council, who presented on becoming a new ACFHP partner, as well as Sofia Hoffman from the Virginia Coast Reserve Long Term Ecological Restoration Network, and Alex McOwen from NOAA and part of the NFHP staff who updated us on the NFHP activities as well as the ACE Act Reauthorization.

I won't bore you with the details on the ACE Act Reauthorization, but in short it benefits the partnerships in that there will be additional support and funding for habitat projects as well as FHP operations. It encourages greater collaboration among various stakeholders. Basically, new seats were added to the Board, as well as promotes conservation and recreational and commercial fisheries and sustainable fishery management practices, and it provides data and tools to support effective habitat management and decision making.

A few updates on recently completed projects that were supported by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership. There was the Dana Dam removal along the Norwalk River in Connecticut, that opened up 6.5 miles of high-quality habitat to migratory fish, and reconnected about 1.1 acres of floodplain.

Another project that recently wrapped up was the Cape Fear River Wetland Restoration at the USS North Carolina Battleship. They restored about 800 linear feet of hardened berth with a living shoreline, and created 2 acres of tidal wetlands in what was an existing parking area previously. Another dam removal as well in Massachusetts, the Armstrong Dam, which opened up 36 miles of river and reconnects about 180 acres of river herring spawning habitat.

It's tricky, because we sort of operate in 3 fiscal years. Right now, FY24, those projects were recently approved by the U.S. Fisheries Service, so we will receive about $300,000.00 in funding again, and we'll be supporting two additional restoration projects, one in Maryland that restores about 39 acres of wetland habitat, and that is led by the DelMarVa Research Conservation and Development Council.

The second project to be supported for FY24 is another dam removal in New Jersey, the E.R. Collins Dam, and that is led by the Nature Conservancy, and that opens about 3 miles of river access, but is part of a bigger sort of effort, where several other dams will be removed, and I'll tell you a little bit about them. We just received approval for the FY24 projects and we also recommended the next round.

It takes about a year until the funds make it to where they need to go, so for FY25 we recommended 3 more projects to the NFHP Board, which have been approved, but they've not yet made it to the Fisheries Service, and we have not secured that funding quite yet. But it seems to be looking good. We'll be supporting 2 additional dam removals by the Nature Conservancy, and that is the Cedar Grove Dam and the No Name Dam, so those are part of that E.R. Collins Dam effort as well, so there will be 4 dams removed in total on the Pequest River in New Jersey.

Those removals will add about 57 miles of additional riverine habitat access, and the last project that we recommended for FY25 is not a dam removal, that is for oyster reef restoration in Florida. That is an effort led by the town of Marine Land, sort of in partnership with the University of Florida, and that will build about a 500-foot living shoreline, as well as doing some tidal vegetation restoration along that part of the river.

HABITAT COMMITTEE

SIMEN KAALSTAD: Moving on to the Habitat Committee Report.

Mainly we've been discussing the Habitat Management Series next issue, and I'll get into that. Recently we had a virtual summer meeting. Well, the Committee approved the final draft of the Acoustic Impacts Habitat Management Series Document, and began developing plans for the next one, which we have come to a consensus that we'll focus it on shell recycling programs along the Atlantic Coast.

In addition to the Habitat Management Series, we talked about the Habitat Hotline Atlantic, which is a bit of a question on format and content. We discussed what is the most useful content to you all, what kind of format and what should be the next steps. Obviously, the anticipated release date would be in December, sort of the last chance to release the 2024 Issue.

The Habitat Management Series Acoustic Impacts Document that we are seeking approval for, the longer title is Anthropogenic Noise Impacts on Atlantic Fish in Fisheries Implications for Managers and Long-Term Productivity, which is a mouthful. But that report folks is on the effects of anthropogenic noise on fish managed by the Commission.

It covers the potential impacts of human generated noise. What is not covered is marine mammal sound production and those affects, since they fall outside of the Commission's management scope. But sensitivity to noise varies by species, and fish perceive sound through pressure and particle motion.

Some of these effects are physiological, damage to the ear and lateral line tissues, hearing loss, and can be potentially lethal, for example pile driving or under subsurface explosions. Behavioral effects such as freezing, increased swimming speed and disrupted feeding or spawning or schooling and other critical life functions.

Just some examples of specific species that are affected, that is covered obviously more in depth in this document. Atlantic cod for example, they freeze in place or they'll increase their swimming speeds, and Elasmobranchs, they are startled by sudden noises, but they may habituate over time.

Then crabs and other marine invertebrate settlement can be delayed by turbine noises. What is not on the slide here is the effects on zooplankton. Air gun blasts can obviously increase zooplankton mortality, which will have indirect effects on fish species that feed on these zooplankton. It goes a little further into, you know cumulative effects such as the chronic noise that leads to stress, reduced condition, and decreased fitness.

There can be potential population level impacts if spawning behavior is disrupted. It goes a little into the effects on fisheries catch rates, which are decreased in areas exposed to seismic air gun blasts and some fish populations may be redistributed, due to exposure to different noises, and these responses again vary amongst species. Mitigation Strategies is sort of what the whole ideas of the document, covers vessel noise reduction, such as alternative propeller design or soundproofed hulls, better, I guess improved marine spatial planning, protecting critical spawning and aggregation sites from loud noises, and monitoring compliance with tracking technologies.

On the seismic survey side, higher sensitivity hydrophone, so that you can pick up those no non-impulsive low frequency marine vibriosis. Sort of lastly here, discusses the construction noise mitigation, for example, like "quiet" foundation technologies for offshore wind turbines at various sound dampening measures, bubble curtains, isolation casings or soft-start and ramp-up strategies to deter mobile species.

The last bit of the document covers research priorities, which focuses, you know we need further study on the impacts of particle motion, evaluating these new novel seismic survey technologies and development of best practices and noise thresholds, and overall research on the effectiveness of various noise mitigation measures. That is what the newest issue of the Habitat Management Series covers, and with that I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIR CIMINO: Questions for Simen? Loren.

MR. LOREN W. LUSTIG: Thank you for that fascinating report. I really appreciate learning more about the habitat management initiatives. Early in your report you used the phrase outreach initiatives, which caught my attention right away. Sometimes that's a euphemism for educational components that are inherent to the work.

Could you describe any parts of the habitat work that use or employ educational components as a function of what is being done? For example, I'm working with high schools in Pennsylvania to try to encourage graduating seniors to get involved in hands-on projects. That would be an example, where perhaps there would be opportunities for internships among young people on these projects. Thank you.

MR. KAALSTAD: Yes, thank you for your question. There are, and that for example is a great example of an outreach initiative that ACFHP would love to sort of be a part of or get involved with. Most of

the outreach that ACFHP does directly is sort of actually indirectly through our projects. Each project has an outreach component that is in the criteria for the restoration projects that we support.

A lot of them just kind of naming some examples, they won't have, from my experience, I am less than two years in. But they won't have as direct educational components as, for example, reaching out and directly engaging high school classes, but they do have seminars or they will sort of show the benefits of this restoration project at local community events.

For example, with oyster there is always, you know oyster cookouts and things like that where the local community can get involved, and a lot of the proceeds go to further restoration of the watersheds. In that case they will invite smaller educational groups. A lot of informational signage at some of these boardwalks that are placed along rivers where dams are removed, and that is just kind of a few examples I can think of. Anything under the sun, I guess is sort of possible, and I'm always looking for other efforts to sort of expand our outreach, so what you mentioned would be a great example of something that we would love to get involved with.

MR. LUSTIG: Thank you, and Mr. Chairman, if I could have a follow up question, please. There are many nature centers operated by counties, for example, or by jurisdictions of various types in the coastal areas. I think if I wanted to really enhance the educational component of a local project, I would start there, with a real good connection with the nature center administration, and see how you could work together for sort of a win-win kind of effort.

MR. KAALSTAD: Are there any other questions, but to your point also, in general the outreach discussions that we've had have been how-to, sort of engage with underserved communities and tribal organizations, without being a nuisance, I suppose. A lot of our partners already work with organizations that work with underserved communities or tribal organizations, and so we're sort of trying to leverage that relationship, without being another person who is just flooding their inbox with hey, join up.

CHAIR CIMINO: We'll look around the table for any other, John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Thank you for the presentation, Simon. Just curious on the noise. For offshore wind there has been a lot of focus, those groups opposing it about the seismic activity used to look for good sites, and you mentioned there was mitigation going on to reduce the sound used when they survey these sites. I'm just curious if any of that is being used right now to mitigate the amount of sound coming out of those seismic cannons there to read bottom.

MR. KAALSTAD: That is a very valid question, and I'll be honest. I was not involved with the writing of this document as much as I was in getting everyone to sort of put the finishing touches on it. I read through it a fair amount of times. I believe there are a few people looking into sort of how to mitigate the seismic disturbances. Whether or not it is implemented as sort of standardized practice, I couldn't tell you, but I would hope so. At least that is the direction it seems to be moving in.

CHAIR CIMINO: Yes, John, and I can send you some information of some recent stuff that has been put out there, you know the research that has gone on, on the East Coast here, but also some of the stuff that has been put out by the wind energy companies themselves that has recently made some headlines on their activities. Any other questions for Simen? This is an action item, we would like to have the Policy Board's approval of this report, so I'll look to Cheri, since I don't see any other questions.

MS. CHERI PATTERSON: I would like to **move to approve the Habitat Management Series: Anthropogenic Noise Impacts on Atlantic Fish and**

Fisheries: Implications for Managers and Long-Term Productivity.

CHAIR CIMINO: Great, thank you, second to that John Clark. Any discussion on this**? Seeing none; any objection to this approval? Seeing none; great, thank you, and again, Simen, thank you and motion carries by consent.** I want to thank everyone for the work that went into this report, much appreciated.

ASSESSMENT SCIENCE COMMITTEE

CHAIR CIMINO: Our next committee report is going to come out of the ASC, and I'll go to Janita for that.

MS. JAINITA PATEL: I just have a brief update to the stock assessment schedule that I would like to present to you all. This is the updated schedule; I know it is very hard to read on the slide. But I believe you should have a version that is easier to see in the supplemental materials for this meeting. A couple things to note here. You will notice we've added the 2027 and 2028 assessments to the schedule.

We've also added for this year and for next year the quarters in which you will be receiving updates for the benchmark assessments or the update assessments, so you know what to expect at each meeting. I will just go over briefly the newly added assessments, and some things that have changed since the last time you saw this.

For the benchmark assessments, cobia will have a benchmark assessment in 2025. Coastal shark will also have a benchmark assessment in 2026, and the species included for that are tiger, spinner, bull and Finetooth. In 2027 black drum will have a benchmark assessment, scup will have updates in 2025 and 2027, with a benchmark in '28.

Striped bass has been added for '27, and sturgeon for '28. For assessments that have been moved, the Atlantic croaker assessment will now take place next year, and you'll be hearing about the full benchmark report during the next summer meeting, and spot will take place a year after that, so you'll be hearing about that in the annual meeting of '26.

Then for the long-term schedule for the updates, in '27 you will her bout eel, black sea bass, bluefish, horseshoe crab, scup, and then summer and winter flounder, and for '28 there is herring, horseshoe crab, Jonah crab and potentially menhaden. That's all. Any questions?

CHAIR CIMINO: Any questions or comments on the updated schedule? Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: Just one question, because I may have misheard. On the chart that I'm looking at here to the cobia benchmark in 2026, you said 2025, right?

MS. PATEL: Yes, good question. The projected timeline for that assessment is that it is supposed to be completed sometime at the end of 2025, but just to give the Committee a bit more time before they present the benchmark report, it will be presented in the first quarter of '26, even though the assessment will actually take place in '25.

CHAIR CIMINO: Other questions or comment on this?

MS. KERNS: I think it's not in here, and I think it affects the quarter. Just to note that lobster did shift from the August meeting in '25 to the annual meeting in '25.

CHAIR CIMINO: Jeff Kaelin.

MR. KAELIN: Thanks for the update. I'm looking at menhaden. I thought that the BAM model, we were going to have a benchmark on the BAM model after the ERP benchmark, but all I see is an update all the way through 2028. What is going on there? I thought there was going to be a benchmark following the ERP benchmark, no? I guess I'm wrong. It's been a long time. Just a question.

CHAIR CIMINO: We're phoning a friend. Katie is coming up. Go ahead, Katie.

DR. KATIE DREW: The intent was we're only doing an update for this cycle, as we know in 2025, and then it will get a full benchmark the next time we do the ERP and the benchmark together, which will be in 2031.

MS. PATEL: Thanks, Katie.

CHAIR CIMINO: If there are no other questions or comments, we would like to have at least Board consent on this. I'll ask this, is there any concerns or objections to this updated schedule, and we will obviously continue these updates as I appreciate Jainita put in there so we would know what to expect when we are getting updates at each of these meetings.

Not seeing any, so with that I am going to consider that approval by consent. Much appreciated there. We have no noncompliance findings, which was the next item on our agenda, and with that no need for the Business Session.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIR CIMINO: I will look to Other Business and open it up to, if there are any other public comments that were not made earlier in the meeting, I will open that up now. Okay, Emerson, we see your hand up.

MR. HASBROUCK: Just getting back to the previous proceedings. Just a very minor item, and that is for the attendance of Board members. Amy Karinoski is listed there as proxy for Senator Gopal. She was actually proxy for Assemblyman Thiele. Just to set that straight. Thank you.

CHAIR CIMINO: Okay, thank you. We have one other hand and that is James Fletcher. Jim, do you have a comment?

MR. JAMES FLETCHER: Yes, I have a comment. I have listened patiently most of the week and I have not heard anybody bring up the nano plastics or microplastics, and where this comes in is every one of these species that spawns and the egg comes near the surface, the egg as it hatches and feeds is exposed to the nano and microplastics.
I know it is not ASMFCs job, but in all of these Congressional things the fisheries as a whole, Council, National Marine, ASMFC needs to point out that these microplastics are a major, major problem, and support ground application of waste water or lake or pond application of waste water, to allow the plastics to float to the shore and go into that situation, rather than coming in.

But is it possible ASMFC and the way that it is formed, could help bring this situation, because you discussed the eels this morning. Those elvers are exposed to nano plastics, and if it blocks their digestive system they die. Every fish we have it is the same thing. The situation with the plankton and stuff that is being studied, I can't find where they're saying we did X number of surveys and found X number of microplastics. It's just the United National Fishermen is off on another tangent. But the microplastics and the plastics are our major problem, and going back to another one of your species, the sturgeon. They feed on the bottom in the rivers, and the amount of plastic on the bottom in the river is blocking the intestines of these fish.

Is it possible ASMFC can maybe make a major issue of the microplastics, nano plastics and just all plastics that are going into the water and support land. The way to do it, solution to the problem is land application of all waste water. Where that is not feasible, drop the waste waters in the lakes and let evaporation go on. I thank you for your time and I hope somebody is listening. James Fletcher, United National Fishermen's Association.

CHAIR CIMINO: Thank you, Jim, I think you know this is an issue that a lot of states are dealing with somewhere within the state government. I know for New Jersey, as a representative of EDP that the

forever chemicals and some of the stuff that you've talked about are important issues for us.

I'll work with staff and see if there is a nexus where we can kind of gather some of the information on how states are tackling this. It wouldn't hurt to put that forward in the fish world, even if it is another group within the states that are taking a look at this and doing their best to tackle it. I appreciate that. Do we have any other hands? Okay, don't see any other hands.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR CIMINO: With that, I don't think there is any other business before us. I hope that everyone gets home safely. We have a lot of weather out there, and it looks like in just about every direction. Travel safe everyone, and we will see you at the annual meeting. Take care, thank you.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at10:08 a.m. on Thursday, August 8, 2024.)

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel

Meeting Summary

Thursday, July 11th, 2024
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
New Bedford Port Authority, New Bedford, MA

I. Summary

The meeting was held in person with a virtual option. Attendance was high both in person and virtually. The meeting included updates on NEFSC and NEAMAP spring surveys, discussions around the Bigelow Contingency Plan and offshore wind survey mitigation, a presentation from one group using a constraining rope (similar to a restrictor rope, which was the object of NTAP research), presentations from three groups using industry vessels for long-term groundfish monitoring surveys, and presentations about offshore wind inter-array and export cables.

- All spring surveys were successful though gear interference and weather affected the Gulf of Maine NH/ME survey.
- NEFSC continues to work with OMAO to ensure the Pisces is ready to trawl, primarily as a replacement while the Bigelow undergoes mid-life repair, but also as a potential "fill-in" when the Bigelow is unavailable.
- There is significant interest in developing an industry-based trawl survey and a working group meeting is needed to plan a pilot study for FY25. Whether or not "Bigelow contingency" and "offshore wind survey mitigation" objectives can both be addressed is still unclear.
- The IMR in Norway uses a constraining rope which was shown to reduce the variability of door spread on their survey. Other surveys under the ICES umbrella have not used constraining ropes due to operational safety challenges associated with deploying them.
- Survey practitioners of trawl surveys being done in other regions - west coast, Alaska, and coastal Northeast - provided overviews of their survey methodologies and challenges. Discussions with these experts covered topics such as tow length, use of auto trawls, fixed and random station selections, differences in vessels, how to integrate new technology, and biological sampling.
- The cable presentations illustrated how cables are buried and discussed the likelihood of cables becoming exposed, impacts of electromagnetic fields, and charting.

A planned discussion regarding how survey data influences stock assessment and quota outcomes was postponed to enable longer discussion around a regional industry based trawl survey.

In the last hour of the meeting some NTAP members attended a tour of the South Terminal in New Bedford, where Vineyard Wind is staging offshore wind turbine construction materials.

There will be plans to hold an NTAP Working Group meeting to continue progress on developing an Industry-Based Survey (IBS) pilot study. The next full panel meeting will likely be held in fall/winter 2024 or early in 2025.

II. Participants

A. NTAP Members:

Name	Affiliation	In attendance
Kathryn Ford	NEFSC	Yes
Phil Politis	NEFSC	Yes
Anna Mercer	NEFSC	Yes
Jessica Blaylock	NEFSC	Yes
Dan Salerno	NEFMC Member Co- Chair	Yes
Wes Townsend	MAFMC Member Co-Chair	No
Terry Alexander	MAFMC Stakeholder	Yes
Dan Farnham	MAFMC Member	Yes
Jim Gartland	MAFMC Scientist	Yes
Vito Giacalone	NEFMC Stakeholder	Yes
David Goethel	NEFMC Stakeholder	Yes
Jameson Gregg	MAFMC Scientist	Yes
Emerson Hasbrouck	MAFMC Stakeholder	Yes
Michael Hiller	MAFMC Stakeholder	No
Pingguo He	NEFMC Scientist	Yes
Sam Novello	NEFMC Stakeholder	No
Chris Parkins	ASMFC Representative	Yes
Mike Pol	NEFMC Scientist	Yes
Bobby Ruhle	ASMFC Representative	Yes
Peter Whelan	NEFMC Member	Yes

B. Other Participants:

Name	Affiliation
Alexander Dunn	NEFSC
Andy Jones	NEFSC
Catherine Foley	NEFSC
Janita Patel	ASMFC
Corin Flora	NE DEQ
Chelsea Lomante	Harvard University
Steve Wilcox	MA DMF
Jerry Leeman	NEFSA
Shale Rosen	IMR
Lyle Britt	AFSC
John Harms	NWFSC
Melanie Griffith	MA DMF
Jack Wilson	MA DMF
John Quinn	NEFMC Stakeholder
Hannah Hart	MAFMC
Brandon Muffley	MAFMC
Dom St. Amand	unknown
Ethan Taulbee	Maine DMR
Gareth Lawson	unknown
Kelly Whitmore	MA DMF
Madison Hall	NEFSC
Rebecca Peters	Maine DMR
Ron Larsen	unknown
Sarah Hudak	Sea Risk Solutions
Sefatia Romeo Theken	MA Fish and Game
Stephen Drew	unknown
Drew Minkiewicz	Black Point Law
Ursula Howson	BOEM
Cristiana Banks	Vineyard Wind
Garreth Roberts	Vineyard Wind
Joe Buetchel	Vineyard Wind

II. Notes by Agenda Topic *(action items in red)*

Welcome, Introductions, Logistics (D. Salerno)

- Round Table Introductions
- Accept meeting summary from last meeting

Meeting notes adopted

Center Updates (K. Ford, A. Mercer, K.Burchard, A. Dunn)

- Update on action items from last meeting

    - Better address the impact of the Rockhopper Catch Efficiency Study in assessments - in process, on agenda for today's meeting
    - Action for industry-based survey: We need to think about at least 1-2 working group meetings to discuss metrics important to have consistency across vessels before April - done, WG meeting held on Feb 29
    - Solicit a presentation from about restrictor ropes - done, on agenda for today's meeting
    - For Bigelow contingency, there is at least one large industry vessel with an auto trawl, get more information - done, vessel is interested.
    - Unsure if sampling can occur with trawling inside of wind farms (turbine spacing, cables, electric stations, heat generation) - scheduled cable discussion for today's meeting
- Update on correspondence since last meeting
    - Emails from Capt. Novello (wing spread concerns)
    - Weekly survey updates Mar-Jul for BTS, BLLS, scallops, sharks
    - Monthly email updates
    - Scallop vessel solicitation; other pertinent announcements
    - NTAP full panel meeting Feb 8
    - NTAP working group meeting Feb 29
    - NEFMC June meeting Jun 26
- Survey updates
    - Spring 2024
        - This marked the 60th year of the NEFSC Bottom Trawl Survey
        - Completed 367 representative trawls of 377 planned
        - 111 bongo samples of 116 planned
        - Some weather impacts during legs 1 and 2
        - Less issues with fixed gear
        - Spring and MA fixed gear closure
    - Fall 2024
        - On track to begin as scheduled
        - 60 days, 3 legs
        - September 6 - November 13
        - 377 stations planned
    - Pisces Update
        - Internal working group with OMAO and NMFS NEFSC staff meets monthly
        - Identifying the tasks that need to be completed
        - Two phases
            - Trawling capability as short-term fill-in for Bigelow (similar to 2017 situation)
            - Wet lab overhaul for multi-season fill-in for when Bigelow is in refit Shakedown cruise this Nov on Pisces after the fall survey on Bigelow
    - Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey (BLLS)
        - Completed 100% of planned stations (45) in spring 2024
        - Unusually high catches of halibut and haddock

        - High catches of red hake, thorny skate, and barndoor skate
        - Numerous basking shark sightings
        - Lower catches of white hake compared to recent years
        - Staff turnover required diversifying team members
        - Recent data use
            - BLLS data used in the recent thorny skate, red hake, barndoor skate, and Atlantic cod stock assessments
            - BLLS barndoor skate catch and length data provided to DFO for spatiotemporal distribution modeling
            - BLLS soak duration data provided to UMass Boston for research on thorny skate hotspots.
            - Live fish collected for Woods Hole Aquarium
    - ME/NH inshore Trawl Survey
        - Fall 2023
            - 78 tows completed out of 120 planned
            - Reason for missed tows: fixed gear and bad weather
        - Spring 2024
            - 100 tows completed out of 120 planned
            - More black seabass caught on this survey than ever before
            - Reason for missed tows: fixed gear
    - MA DMF Spring 2024 Trawl Survey
        - 100% station completion (103 of 103)
        - Completed over 18 days with one day lost due to weather
        - Abnormally large tow of Northern Sea Robins south of Nantucket
        - Used two nets for entire survey (cod end liner of first net was damaged in sea robin tow)
        - Fall 2024 planned as normal
    - Mid-Atlantic/Southern New England NEAMAP Nearshore Trawl Survey
        - Spring 2024
            - May 4 - 27th
            - 150/150 stations completed
            - 24 calendar days, 22 working days, 2 weather days in NJ
            - Top species by weight: Winter Skate, Little Skate, Clearnose Skate & Scup
            - Top species by count: Butterfish, Longfin Squid, Scup
            - Notable: 18 Alternate Stations Used-
                - 7 retowed due to mud at primary station (North NJ & NY Long Island)
                - 7 moved due to untowable bottom (known hangs/rocks (Block & Rhode Island Sounds)
                - 2 retowed due to hangs during tow (NY Harbor & Narragansett Bay RI)
                - 1 moved due to pipeline obstruction (central NJ)

        - 1 moved due to close proximity to Chesapeake Bay Light Tower (VA)
        - NEAMAP MA/SNE has NOT encountered any survey disruption from Offshore Wind
    - Fall 2024 Expectations
        - Trip departure should be within a few days of September 20th, weather pending. No major changes or additions
    - Upcoming NEAMAP/SEAMAP In-Person Vessel and Gear Workshop
        - Objective: build off of the online workshop in January 2024 to see hands-on methods of calibrating gear and vessels across trawl and longline surveys and learn from one another and industry experts on how to make coastal surveys more time- and cost-efficient
        - 3-day in-person workshop
        - November 12-14, 2024 held at VIMS (Gloucester Point, VA)
        - Presentations, mini-workshops, vessel and gear demonstrations, and discussions led by commercial professionals, industry vendors and NEAMAP/SEAMAP survey leads
        - Federal partners from the Councils and Science Centers are welcome to join
        - If interested, please contact Jainita Patel - jpatel@asmfc.org

- Offshore Wind Survey Mitigation Update
    - NOAA Fisheries NEFSC Survey Mitigation Plans for all FID surveys + "new methods" surveys (e.g., hook & line) - 19 plans
    - Initiated Pilot Survey Mitigation efforts (hook & line, acoustics on ASV)
    - Peer Reviewed the Survey Mitigation Plans
        - Joint SSC Panel Review of Draft Survey Mitigation Plans- May 22-24th
        - ASRG Panel Review of Protected Species Plans- May 29-30th
    - Drafting the Northeast Survey Mitigation Program (expected Fall public comment period) - includes Final Survey Mitigation Plans and cost estimate
    - SSC Review Recommendations
        - Traditional calibration experiments or model-based calibration approaches may be useful.
        - Several surveys will require re-stratification.
        - Panel agreed that Generalized Random Tessellation Stratified (GRTS) is worth exploring in many of the surveys, although model-based approaches to re-stratification are also possible.
        - Attempting to project increases in uncertainty in indices onto catch advice through management strategy evaluation models.
        - Impact mitigation should be successful, if NEFSC has enough resources to implement the plan.
        - NEFSC has done well in developing an initial mitigation plan that addresses the expected impacts of offshore wind and identifies key uncertainties in future operations and data streams.

        - Lessons to be learned from other trawl surveys that navigate obstacles and/or operate inshore (e.g., NEMAP, USGS Lake Erie Trawl Survey).
- Communications update
    - Communicating NTAP research
        - Stock assessment schedule
        - NOAA Fisheries event calendar
        - Research track stock assessment webpages
    - How NTAP research is used in assessments
        - Dashboard: Tool for tracking use of Rockhopper Catch Efficiency Study result in assessments
            - 2023 used in: red hake, summer flounder, north windowpane flounder
        - web feature story on use of Rockhopper Catch Efficiency Study results in stock assessments

Discussion and Questions:

A few questions focused on the Bottom Longline Survey, confirming that it overlaps in time with the NEFSC bottom trawl survey. One NTAP member expressed interest in seeing the overlaps of the survey spatial footprints and better understanding the influence of the BLLS in areas where the bottom trawl survey doesn't sample. General concern about the weighting of different surveys in the WHAM model. The BLLS uses an algorithm to classify bottom roughness. Also, a camera system is used to collect data on this as well. For indices we work up both rough/smooth and together. Decision of what to use occurs in each assessment (up to lead).

Create a map or a list of resources so the public can access that info.

Send out solicitation for hook and line vessels and for study fleet program

After the NESFC and NEAMAP updates a lengthy discussion focused on the Bigelow contingency plan and an industry-based survey ensued. The conversation was extended and replaced the planned discussion on communications around how the rockhopper catch efficiency work is used in assessments. Some key elements of the discussion included:

- Pisces - this is the sister ship to Bigelow and will be relied on for filling in for lost sea days on Bigelow and importantly for the mid-life repairs. NTAP discussed that it will have some of the same constraints as Bigelow related to staffing and funding and discussed the value of staff training and consistency. It hasn't been specifically determined how the lead fisherman and other deck staff will be shared or cross-trained, but NEFSC expects there will be overlap in the crews.
- Multiple survey objectives - the "industry-based survey" was originally rooted in the conversation around a Bigelow contingency option. The Councils are very supportive of a bank-wide survey as a separate time series that can include areas that exclude Bigelow/Pisces (such as wind energy areas).
- Offshore wind survey mitigation is a need that has influenced the conversation but has not been clearly addressed and the relationship between a "contingency" or "complementary" survey to the existing NEFSC survey on the Bigelow and an "offshore wind mitigation" survey remains unclear. If a new survey needs to operate inside of wind farms, that could greatly influence operational and design decisions. NEFSC described a situation where an offshore wind mitigation survey is designed

as a trawl survey on a smaller vessel capable of surveying within wind energy areas. This survey could be designed in a way that it could grow over time and expand into more areas if either the Bigelow is not available (or has reduced availability) and/or wind energy areas expand. There remains some uncertainty regarding the ability to trawl within wind energy areas and the specific constraints (e.g., daytime only), but NTAP members currently involved in monitoring surveys that are trawling inside of wind areas are certain trawling will be possible since they are successful trawling. Many questions remain to resolve, including if a new survey is standardized to the Bigelow and if it is considered a federal survey.

- Survey design elements - there remains concern about the operational design details for the survey, with differences in opinion across the group with regards to the best way forward to ensure that industry vessels are capable of doing the work.
    - Autotrawl - several industry members have in the past and at this meeting iterated that an autotrawl is an obstacle for using industry vessels since very few vessels already have them. Several members have suggested that auto trawls are unnecessary since good captains know how to achieve consistent net geometry with manual adjustments. One vessel in the fleet that is most similar to Bigelow does have autotrawl and uses it sometimes but not always. The working group has not determined whether or not an autotrawl will be recommended for a new survey and NTAP is learning more from the Alaska Fisheries Science Center about the scientific and operational value of auto trawls. The initiation of a pilot survey does not require a decision about an auto trawl.
- We need a working group meeting to develop a plan that includes cost so we can find the funding.

There were several questions about Offshore Wind Survey Mitigation. Questions addressed the developers' engagement with writing and funding survey mitigation plans and data management.

- Writing plans: Developers are now on the hook within their terms and conditions to mitigate survey impacts. NEFSC is in communication with BOEM and developers to determine how to do this on a regional scale. Developers have not developed survey mitigation plans yet. Monitoring plans (for impact monitoring) have been developed, those are separate. Some monitoring groups have been contacted by developers to discuss this, and are considering if shared control areas (for monitoring studies) should be developed.
- Funding: an NTAP member expressed concerns about funding and if there would be enough; NEFSC indicated that some funds have come from Congress and the developers are also responsible.
- Data management: NTAP has consistently identified that data management and public availability of data is necessary. NEFSC discussed a project whereby RSA data is being managed for improved access in the assessment pipeline. All of the survey mitigation plans that NEFSC wrote addressed data management. One NTAP member described work being done with ROSA that confirms that there is still uncertainty about how data management will work; different issues like security and compatibility still need to be addressed. Data access can be addressed in contracting and funding proposals and this is becoming common. One NTAP member gave an example where he is currently doing a survey where he specified at the outset that he was going to have control over the data (not the wind farm developer).

Stock management process infographic discussion(A. Dunn)
Did not cover. Previous discussion ran over.

Restrictor Rope- Guest Speaker (Shale Pettit Rosen, shale.rosen@hi.no)
"Constraining rope to standardize trawl geometry" - Restrictor Rope Use by IMR presentation-
Description of the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) in Norway (speaker's institution).

> Employs approximately 1000 staff, across five offices. IMR does Monitoring and advisory work (not management and enforcement). Budget of ~ 170 million a year. Direct and indirect funding on aquaculture and wild harvest. Produce catch advice on 80 stocks. 7 research vessels are operated, 4 large oceangoing vessels, one Bigelow size vessel. 2023 cruise data, ~1500 trawl hauls annually. Charter commercial vessels. Pelagic trawlers. Used for pelagic surveys. Gear design work also will charter demersal trawlers. Barents Sea is the most productive for groundfish. Cooperation with Russia. Resulting from migration by groundfish. Avoids impacts on juveniles.

Constraining ropes, originated at IMR. Needed consistency in gear performance between 50 and 600 meters. Just correcting for wingspread was not enough - just measuring geometry was unsatisfactory because overall bottom contact could change, lifting force on doors could change. Cloud formation, ground vibration, etc. Sweep angle is something of concern. Flat fish can be overrun by the trawl.

Vessel Schematic: Sweep angle impacting flatfish catches without constraining rope (restricting rope). 10m long rope. Not done at doors because it can be shorter and worry about impact of vibrating rope in front of the net. IMR uses two different sweep lengths - one length for shallow depths and one length for deep depths. Rope is 100-600 meters above the trawl doors - so the rope is 35-290 meters off of the seabed - reduces variability in door spread and sweep angle. Precise position varies by vessel; set aside 2 days before survey to test all trawls to achieve specific door spread; they have established 10-meter constraining rope works - related to the block distance on the largest vessel - the block distance is just under 10 meters, but they use the same length on all vessels since it works well enough. But each shakedown period they confirm the distance of the constraining rope along the trawl rope - they have a sense of the approximate location based on depth, but they double check it each shakedown period.

All vessels have identical trawl doors; dialed in so they have enough spread power in shallow water and the constraining rope keeps it from overspreading. Using a constraining rope at the doors would lock in the door spread, but by constraining further up, the rope isn't in the way of the trawl and has no behavioral effects.

Note they are using bigger gear and sampling deeper depths.

ICES member countries don't want to implement the restrictor rope mostly due to operational challenges (affects safety of crews, some vessels don't have a good setup to attach and remove the constraining rope - need access to a spot behind the block).

Showed videos of how the constraining rope is attached. One side is stationary with a choker and the other side rides up and down using a ring with a roller (it lets the warp move freely forward and backwards on one side). Has empirical data about performance and less spread variance with the constraining rope (5 meter standard deviation instead of 13 m with overall door spread of 100-130 m).

Discussion and Questions:

Several questions focused on specifics of operation. Other questions related to behavioral effects. IMR looked at behavioral effects when first implementing this; Dr. Rosen didn't recall anything major was identified. Keeping warp consistent and distance off the seafloor consistent will be best.

Industry-based trawl survey discussion

Contingency Plan Working Group update (Kathryn Ford, NEFSC)

NEFSC provided a brief update regarding the Bigelow Contingency Plan. Provided background purpose, the options covered by the document, and summary of discussions and decisions from Feb 8 NTAP meeting and Feb 29 NTAP working group meeting. Decision matrix approach was used to compare options. Plan is not quite done yet - no single option, need to pursue multiple contingency options. Councils have had updates in April and NEFMC in June.

NWFSC Presentation (John Harms, NWFSC)

West Coast Groundfish Trawl Survey and Southern California Shelf Rockfish hook and line survey. Amy Keller is the lead and would have liked to attend but was not available.

Mission and objectives: generate a time series of abundance for assessment and management. Trawl for soft bottom, and hook and line for hard bottom. Standard bio data. Ecosystems and oceanographic data. 90 species in the management plan. Not all are assessed.

History of Trawl Surveys: from 1977 shelf and slope. Opportunistically. Footprints ranged. The timing is also not standardized. 1995 stock assessment external review identified gear inconsistencies and performance issues. After review there was a need for an annual synoptic survey. Survey responsibility was shifted from Alaska to the west coast.

- 1995-1998 transitioned from AFSC to NWFSC and the two surveys went to NWFSC
    - 1998 started NWFSC Slope survey. Deeper water.
    - 2003 current west coast groundfish survey starts. Much shallower.
    - Randomized stratified design. Working with industry.
    - Canada to Mexico, stratified random design with west coast trawl fleet
    - 4 boats 65-92 ft; 2 boats for each 3 month period
    - 188 vessel fishing days, ~700 tows per year, daylight only
    - 55-180 meter depth
    - Consistency in the 4 vessels - this helps a lot - he mentioned this is true for their hook and line survey, too
    - Survey staff inspect the nets - Net is an inhouse net design. 4 seams. Manufactured but a single net loft. Nor'Eastern Trawl Systems. 8-10 inch cookies. Net verification is very thorough. Ensures verified nets are used on boats.
    - Simrad ITI and PX sensors

    - Industry's vocal support has gotten these surveys off of the ground
    - Tows 12 - 15 min. Speed is 2.2 knots. Headrope height .0 - 6.8.
    - Trawl bottom contact sensors.
    - CTDs also deployed.
    - In house software used to see what the trawl data looks like at the end of tow.
    - Catch processing done on deck. Subsampling occurs. Technology system in house tools.
- Hook and line survey. Similar but sampling different habitats. High relief habitats. 20 years of data. Doesn't use stratified design. Fixed site design. See presentation for gear specifics. Deployed by rod and reel. 3 anglers, 5 coordinated drifts. Tracked by a biologist with a tablet. Originally, a smaller area then added areas in MPA. No weather days. Very short survey. We end up missing stations. 55 - 75 feet. Vessels have been consistent for >10 years. Similar data to trawl surveys.

Camera sleds were also deployed. Data analysis: indices for trawl vs. hook are different. Trawl is a catch per area. For the hook survey it's a probability of a given hook catching a fish. Length distributions are essential. Collected on both surveys. Otoliths (or others) are taken from all FMP species. Want good LAA curves. Updated. Maturity done by one person. A few people are on diets. Fin clips taken for many species. Some cryptic species of sebastes. Ecosystems data collection. EK 80 used on each vessel for habitat etc. Oceanographic data was also collected (see presentation).

Benefits of industry vessels. Cost, sale of catch (smaller but helps fund). Access to knowledge and expertise. Adaptability. Reliability. Transparency. Research as a shared product. Closely linked captains can serve as emissaries (discuss and explain results).

What we do differently if we did it again - not much. Minor tweaks to the net and foot rope. Expand hook and line survey outside of CA.

NEAMAP presentation (Jameson Gregg, VIMS)
Benefits of Challenges of NEAMAP collaborations (presentation)
MENH, contact Robyn Linner.
MA/SNE, contact Jim Gartland Many benefits.
VIMS SEA SCALLOP. Uses RSA funds. Sally Roman key contact.
VIMS Atlantic Surf Clam & Ocean Quahog.
VIMS Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey.

AFSC Presentation (Lyle Britt, AFSC)
Cooperative Trawl Survey at the NOAA AFSC
Been working at the center since 1995. We use a variety of platforms. Use white boats and chartered vessels. Oscar Dyson gets used mostly for acoustic and ecosystem questions.
See slide 5 in presentation for survey breakdown and for temporal components of each survey. Some changes through time because of climate impacts.
Many different designs. Stratified systematic design. 1950 survey design. More modern include stratified random or modified index-stratified random design.

AFSC surveys cooperative from the beginning.
Focusing on the Bering Sea. See slide 9 in presentation. Systematic designs. Blue King Crab Focus.
Sub areas based on depth can impact station density. Timing begins at the beginning of June. Try to be a little flexible (+/- a week). Each survey uses two vessels. Usually looking for vessels >120 feet in length. Vessels typically have 1,700 hp (1,000 hp requirement). Berthing of at least 6 scientists and 5 crew. The crew must be experienced. Vessels must have an endurance of 30 days at least. GPS. ES 60/80/90. Satellite data upload required. Data sent to Seattle. Must have fished within the last three years. Need two net reels. Must have one stern mounted. Paired hydraulic (see presentation)
Daytime survey operations: 12- 13 hours a day, 30-minute tows. Tow direction towards the next station, 3 knots, no autotrawl currently used but desire for use in the future. See presentation.
Speed up at the end of haul and get it on deck as fast as possible.
Catch processing done on deck.
Survey innovations. In the process of survey improvement. Looking to move from gridded design. To a stratified random design. Working to modernize the net. Working with industry. Will test in flume. Incorporating autotrawl. Also new sampling (e.g., EDA and cameras). More cross platform uses.

Discussion and Questions:

After the presentations discussion ensued about various details of the different surveys.

- Several questions addressed the length of the tow for the NWFSC survey (which is same, 15 minutes, as IMR survey) and how that impacts the catch of larger fish; Mr. Harms and Dr. Rosen addressed the questions and provided this paper: *Effect of tow duration on length composition of trawl catches* (https://doi.org/10.1016/0165-7836(90)90062-Z).
- Changes to gear - these tend to be minor and focus on things like plotters and net mensuration; it is a challenge across the different surveys to figure out how to adapt to technological improvements; even being able to sample more space due to improved seafloor mapping may have an impact
- For contracted vessels, there tends to be a decent amount of stability over the years, but can and do change. AFSC refines contract requirements to try to achieve consistency across vessels and also randomizes location and gear to mitigate differences due to vessels.
- Fixed station vs randomized design: Fixed station design gives a lot of power in determining distribution but less in biomass/population estimate. Lose power when we can't complete grid cells and increase uncertainty. Have to remove the survey area. Stratified, random design mitigates this. If funding was stable we could do all grid cells, but because we can't, the stratified, random design is better.
- Are observers used to staff surveys? AFSC: We do use observers on our longline survey, longline is almost all commercial (~30) species so observers work well there. On BTS we have ~400 species and our only support is our science team.
- How do the various surveys handle IACUC rules and animal welfare protocols? NOAA isn't bound by IACUC but academics are; across the surveys (including the NOAA surveys) there are fish handling protocols and training.
- AFSC indicated they want to use autotrawls, is that for scientific reasons? All the vessels we use have autotrawl. But we can turn it off. We want to use autotrawl and our studies have shown that it makes our catches more consistent (less of an issue in Bering Sea given it's a massive sandy plain).

Combining different survey areas with some habitats where autotrawls would be beneficial for catch consistency.

Offshore wind

Cabling presentations:

Christa Bank (Vineyard Wind - Fisheries Manager)
Garreth Roberts (cable installation expert)
Joe Buetchel (inter array cables)

Inter-array cable presentation (Joe Buetchel)

Vineyard wind specifics: 62 towers and cables between each, 1 nm between each.
Presentation: Graph of installation progress through array. Inter-array cables are 6 inches in diameter. Armoring plus cables. Two weeks to load cable onto a vessel (100 km of cable) on a carousel. Is laid out then buried. Rock placed on top of the cable ends. 1.5-2.5-meter target depth - if you put it too deep it gets too hot; 18 cables placed, 18 buried to full depth (all sand so works perfectly with the fluidized burial sled); +/- 2 m corridor for cable laying - very accurate. Pre-survey is done to make sure no rocks in the way; pre-lay grapnel run to remove whatever is in the way

Export cable presentation (Gareth Roberts)

Submarine Export Cable System Overview see presentation for diagram
Can be laid with one try. Done with two joints. Some differences in installation in near shore vs deeper water (injection vs. plow).
Greater than target burial for >95% of installation. Sand waves make the cable deeper than 4.5 meters. 1.5 meters below stable seabed because it was a permit requirement. Daily report important evidence of progress and quality of installation.
Cable and injector diagram.
Offshore component done with an HD3 plow. Top of the line. Well run and know what you are going to get. This is the back end of the operation. Lots of surveys, etc. go into installing this.
Nearshore Shallow water Cable Protection. See presentation.
What can be laid on the seabed is highly regulated. ECONCRETE mattresses used. Put in with divers. Sculpted to encourage marine growth. Needed to document and get permission. Basically, just where burial was not allowed or possible.

Discussion and Questions:

Short amount of time for questions. A few questions to clarify specifics of depth and extent of rock armoring. Concern about temperature increases and electromagnetic fields. Gareth indicated that EMF concerns are common throughout the world, and he hasn't heard of any consequences. Pushback from an NTAP member - consequence due to migration. Cables are indicated on charts.

ADJOURN: 4:05 p.m. to South Terminal; tour of South Terminal extended to 5:30 p.m.

#9b

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel
Bigelow Contingency Plan Working Group Meeting- Virtual

Thursday, August 22, 2024
1:00 AM - 4:00 PM

-- **NOTES --**

Attendees: Anna Mercer, Dan Salerno, Eric Reid, Jainita Patel, Jameson Gregg, Jason Morson, Jerry Leeman, Jessica Blaylock, Jim Gartland, Kathryn Ford (first 30 min), Robert Ruhle, Sefatia Romeo Theken, Terry Alexander, Gareth Lawson, Alex Dunn, Hannah Hart, Katie Burchard, Andy Jones, Madison Hall, Vito Giacalone, Aubrey Church, Corrin Flora, Emerson Hasbrouck, Kelly Whitmore, Drew Minkiewicz, Alex Dunn, Catherine Foley (late), Pete Chase (late)

Purpose: Discuss next steps for Industry based survey

Synopsis: The meeting discussed goals around a long-term industry based survey and goals and logistics for a short-term pilot industry based trawl survey which would establish at least some operating procedures for the long-term survey. Funding has not been identified for either a short or long term survey but there is a need to plan and move forward to have good estimates to request funds and in case a funding source is identified. There was agreement on objectives for a long-term survey. There was agreement on objectives for a short-term pilot survey that is focused on operational questions. Discussion of a very short operational survey next March for about a week was held and included some definitions around the scope and costs of such a pilot survey. Multiple meeting members expressed interest in expanding beyond a one-vessel survey into a 2-vessel survey. Start-up costs are high and need considerably more discussion. Design work is needed for the long-term survey to ensure compatibility as a Bigelow contingency. There were strong objections from industry members regarding the use of auto trawl technology for any survey work because the improvement in standardization of gear performance for single and multi-vessel surveys is not expected to be worth the cost of the systems. Data acquisition (e.g., FSCS) and equipment elements (e.g., CTD and net mensuration) were discussed at some length as costly and complicated aspects that need more discussion and scoping for the long-term survey. For the short-term pilot (described as Phase 1), auto trawl is not needed, full design is not needed, and the use of vessels that are already conducting surveys in wind energy areas (e.g., Darana R and/or Bulldog) allows reliance on data acquisition systems and equipment already in place, providing cost efficiencies.

Meeting minutes:

<u>1:00 -1:10 PM Welcome</u> (Dan Salerno)

- Changes in NTAP membership
    - Jessica Blaylock new panel member -liaison between NTAP and Population Dynamic Branch
    - Phil Politis has shifted out of Bottom Trawl survey Branch- Peter Chase will be stepping in as acting lead of the BTS until we have a permanent hire in place.
- Name change of IBS to RTS

    - Concern with name change because of the possibility of confusing it with something else at least for the next few months while the budget works itself out.
    - NEFSC will continue to use IBS when communicating out
- Goal of today is to take what's presented in slides to develop a plan we are comfortable moving forward with.
    - Current plan/expectations for full-scale IBS
        - Appropriation Language (Senate Mark):The Committee provides $3,000,000 within Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys, and Assessments to design and implement a pilot industry-based fishery survey. This program will be designed to run in conjunction with and in complement to NOAA's established surveys. The IBS should seek to complement the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow's work and follow NMFS protocols to the extent practicable.
    - Can't depend on these funds yet, plus funds may come in late in the year and there may be limited time to plan/spend

1:10 - 1:40 PM Regional Trawl Survey (RTS) (Anna Mercer)

- Proposed objectives [see notes in Edited Slides]
    1. To improve resource assessments by providing indices of abundance complementary to the BTS
    2. To sample areas that cannot be sampled by the BTS (i.e., wind energy developments, fixed gear), while also ensuring sufficient spatial overlap with the BTS to enable data integration
    3. To provide a data stream that would be available in the future if we lose access to the Bigelow

Discussion/comments:

First bullet should also reference providing biological sampling.

Second bullet should also include areas that were dropped from the BTS when transitioned from Albatross to Bigelow.

The survey should be a contingency to the Bigelow and have overlap. This is also an opportunity to reevaluate how the strata are set up.

Second bullet should ensuring sufficient '**and expanded**' spatial overlap with the BTS to enable data integration. Being able to survey in wind farms depends on a lot of things- one insurance. Current work being done to test trawling feasibility in wind farm area so that may not need to be an explicit goal of the pilot work/we can learn from existing work in wind farms.

If we can't sample in wind farms will we drop objective 2? Instead of specifying shallow water strata, change to unsampled strata.

This survey has to be supplemental to the NEFSC bottom trawl survey. It takes at least 5 years for data set to be used. Need to look at more vessels. 24 operations will be a problem. Has to be some consistency in order to get the data used before approved as a long enough time series on its own.

Add biomass index to objective 1. A survey is meant to get data from a broader landscape and populations. Design is really important.

Need to confirm that this survey can operate in Canadian waters as needed.

Can we develop finer scale sampling than is currently being done on the BIgelow?

Objective 3 is a really long term goal.

- Proposed timeline: contingent on so many things that are currently uncertain but can help us think through next steps. All pilot work is contingent on funding available.
    a. Summer 2024 (today!): Define goals/objectives of full-scale RTS; Draft operational plan for pilot RTS
    b. 'Fall/Winter 2024: Finalize operational plan for pilot RTS
    c. Spring 2025: Implement pilot RTS
    d. Fall 2025: Expand/continue pilot RTS
    e. Spring 2026: Expand/continue pilot RTS
    f. Fall 2026: Expand/continue pilot RTS
    g. Spring 2027: Year 1 of full scale RTS begins

Discussion/comments:

When talking about coming FY in order for things to move would you need a full budget without continuing resolution(CR)? A: Yes as of what we know right now.

Two year pilot phase is a benefit. Timeline needs to be fluid depending on FY budget timelines.

1:40- 1:50 Break

1:50 - 3:50 a.m. Pilot Regional Survey Discussion

- Proposed objectives [see notes in Edited Slides]
    - Inform the development of a full-scale regional trawl survey. Pilot: We test what we think the survey should look like and adapt then.
        - Develop more specific vessel requirements
        - Explore feasibility of operating in and around offshore wind farms
        - Explore operational feasibility of oceanographic and biological sampling components
        - Explore operational feasibility of day/ night sampling
        - Create a draft Standard Operating Procedures document

Discussion/comments:

Be specific that we're testing trawl gear - add trawl gear to ~~explore feasibility~~ sampling gear

Should we add testing restrictor/constraining cable?

Sampling gear will come up under standard operating procedure, so maybe we don't need to be so specific

- Proposed scope of Phase 1 pilot [see notes in Edited Slides]
    - Pilot RTS on F/V Darana R in March 2025 (availability of FV Darana R and VIMS team)
        - Leverage available gear and vessel configuration for survey operations (work stations)
    - 5 days at sea, 2 days staging, 1 day destaging
    - Test survey operations at stations within wind farms and stations outside wind farms

        - number of stations based on distance between stations and time required for each station
    - Rely on VIMS staff, F/V Darana R crew, as well as 1-2 NEFSC staff to coordinate staging/data acquisition/gear/computer needs,
        - Draft SOP for staging, IT set up, operations, destaging
    - Priority uncertainties to address in pilot RTS
        - Data acquisition system (FSCS, TOGA), data transfer - time/staff required, vessel requirements
        - Procedures for sampling inside of wind farms
            - How far should we stay away from turbines?
            - How do we test this?
        - Use of restrictor rope
        - Day/night operations
        - Oceanographic sampling
            - Bongo tow operations
            - SeaBird CTD + Niskin (or rosette) operations
        - Biological data collection procedures
        - Multibeam acoustics for fish biomass measurements
        - Gear details - who/how are nets built and inspected, stored; same for doors and sweep
    - What other questions needs to be answered in a RTS pilot?
        - Different length tows?
        - Different ground gear?
        - Autotrawl?

Discussion/comments:

Where is the funding coming from, does NTAP have funding? A: No funding identified right now. Typical NTAP budget is $50,000 each year or every two years. Only 30,000 in our budget right now.

Action item: follow-up with funding options. For planning, we will move forward with the assumption that funding will be found.

Complete faith in Darana R and team. Was there $ 250,000 for this first phase? Very impressed to see these numbers (it has taken a long time). Preference is to build a survey with two vessels doing 12 hour shifts. Other vessels and other partners could pilot phase 2. Eventually we will need to talk to someone besides the senate and will need real numbers.

Cornell Cooperative Extension can contribute. Has two nets- bridles, net mensuration equipment, one set of doors he can contribute with no additional cost. BUlldog can be ready to go.

Broad support around using 2 vessels.

If planning on 8 days in March budget likely not coming in time from Congress. Good to try and work with two boats; maybe do two phases - would like to get something done in Spring 2025 and smaller scale (one vessel) is more cost effective. Other benefits of a phase 1 single vessel pilot discussed.

What will we be seeking to learn in the phase 1 pilot? What protocol would we see different from what NEAMAP does? A: gear performance to get optimal configuration in deeper strata. We use different data collection software. We don't do any bongo work and had a hard time using sea bird. What nicks and tucks do we need to do to get this to work on deeper water and in and

around wind farms. Maybe use a restrictor? Iron out gear performance metrics and operations metrics. We have to have capability across all platforms.

Consider data collection (FSCS?) for fish and oceanography data collection -very wise to integrate best we can- allow this survey to meet the long term objective 3.

- Data system- installation, operation, maintenance
- Gear performance testing across intended depth range of IBS/RTS
- Gear operations - restrictor
- Oceanographic data collection operations - bongo, BTD, Niskin
- Operations within/around wind farms
- Day/night sampling
- Sampling efficiency- how many stations can be done per day?
    - Depends on sampling elements included survey design, distance between stations.
    - This will enable future phases to pilot to strategic allocate resources/effort and enable analytical work on survey design (station density, allocation)

Sampling efficiency may be hard - no one fully functional wind farm to test in. Hard to put a number on it.

Need to establish sampling design in terms of which approach (e.g., stratified random sampling, GRTS) and number of samples - doesn't have to be determined before pilot - some of this analytical work is already be done at NEFSC.

Some discussion of the details around design considerations, how to determine number of stations, time and distance and oceanographic sampling - maybe use a CTD on the trawl net?

- Proposed budget of Phase 1 pilot [see notes in Edited Slides]
    - Vessel:
        - 8 days (5 at sea, 3 staging/destaging) - $15,000 per day x 8 = $120,000
        - Fuel - $5 per gallons x 400 gallons per day x 5 days = $10,000
    - Gear:
        - 2 nets & doors - VIMS/vessel
        - Workstations, measuring boards, scales - VIMS/vessel
        - Data collection system (FSCS)- NEFSC (need to confirm availability)
        - Expendable gear and sampling supplies - purchased by VIMS - $50,000
        - Bongo & CTD - NEFSC (need to confirm availability)
    - Field Work Staffing:
        - VIMS- ? ($50,000 as placeholder)
        - NEFSC - IT, Oceanography, Operational Support - leverage existing staff
    - Post-cruise
        - Dedicated support for documentation, data analysis - is this needed?
    - Total - At least $230,000
- Staffing of Pilot Regional Trawl survey
    - Chief Scientist(s) - ?
    - IT Support (FSCS) - NEFSC
    - Oceanography Lead- ?
    - Field Team - VIMS staff? NTAP members?

- Proposed scope for Phase 2 pilot [see notes in Edited Slides]
    - Pilot RTS on additional FV(s) in fall 2025

        - If more than 1 vessel, requires double the gear, equipment, supplies, staffing…
    - Days at sea scaleable to funding available
        - Depends on funding
    - Expand spatial scope of pilot RTS
        - Gulf of Maine? Mid-Atlantic?
        - Offshore?
        - Test survey operations at stations within wind farms and stations outside wind farms
    - Survey gear - purchase new gear?
    - Sampling equipment and supplies - purchase new equipment and supplies?
    - Staffing?
    - Develop further list of uncertainties/questions to address in Phase 2 (based upon results of Phase 1)

Discussion/comments:

Discussion of people to support this effort - question about how to support use of FSCS (may not be possible at this time). Dan Salerno can help; staff limitations from VIMS and NEFSC identified.

Are we still the Bigelow contingency working group? Or is this all going into a this pilot. (Not answered directly, there is a lot of overlap.)

Can we remove autotrawl from the list of gear? It's preferred for standardization but not readily available in the fleet. A: not need for pilot.

Autotrawl cost estimate is $250,000 and takes 2 days to calibrate before surveying; industry members consistently identify that the cons outweigh the pros for autotrawls, not worth discussing; differences between east and west coast surveys mean east coast doesn't need it.

- Proposed budget for Phase 2 pilot [see notes in Edited Slides]
    - Vessel (assuming 1 vessel)
        - 18 days (15 at sea, 3 staging/destaging) - $15,000 per day x 18 = $270,000
    - Fuel - $5 per gallons x 400 gallons per day x 15 days = $30,000
    - Gear:
        - 2 nets & doors - $100,000
        - Workstations, measuring boards, scales - $250,000
        - EK80 - $300,000
        - Net mensuration system - $350,000
        - Data collection software (FSCS)- NEFSC
        - Oceanographic sampling equipment (bongo nets, CTD, Niskin) - $200,000
        - Biological sampling supplies - $100,000
        - Expendable gear and sampling supplies - purchased by VIMS - $50,000
    - Field Work Staffing:
        - Research Team (or NEFSC) - $150,000
        - NEFSC - IT, Oceanography, Operational Support - leverage existing staff?
    - Post-cruise

        - Dedicated support for documentation, data management, analysis - $200,000
    - Total - At least $2,000,000
- Potential expectations for a full-scale survey
    - Design:
        - The IBS would be designed with the intent of the survey being capable of growing to encompass the full survey range (area and depths) currently sampled by the NEFSC on the BTS
        - Strata will be colocated with BTS strata to enable intercomparisons
        - The design of the IBS will be developed to maximize value to stock assessments
        - Ideally calibrated to BTS with a side-by-side comparison to build calibration factors for key species
    - Operations:
        - At full-scale, the IBS is expected to require multiple vessels
        - It is possible that the IBS will be a daytime-only survey due to logistical and safety constraints of working on smaller vessels and working within wind energy areas, but pilot survey should explore the operational feasibility of including nighttime sampling and statistical analyses should define the consequences of losing nighttime sampling
        - Standard operating procedures should be developed to maximize the stability of gear geometry, bottom contact, and haul-back speed across multiple vessels and should consider the impact of sampling on larger vessels on the shelf edge

Discussion/comments:

Need to break down costs and who is required to provide what. Estimate costs from the vessel side. Identify what the Science Center can provide.

Full-scale costs are high, and existing surveys are using gear they have (no extras). When start adding in all the different sensors would be lucky to get it to come out to as low as $350,000. Strong net mensuration system is crucial and worthwhile.

Discussion of SIMRAD PX as potential net mensuration system. Could use existing onboard package and just purchase sensors needed. Cheaper than needing to purchase whole package.

Costs need some more detailed consideration - what is available on vessels already, how many vessels need to be outfitted - can any gear be shared between vessels?

Discussion included variables relative to a larger scale survey and interface between this work and what Bigelow will be sampling - discussion around what is a phase 1, phase 1.5, and phase 2 survey. Phase 2 might be two vessels but staggered, maybe doing 24 hour sampling attempt. Maybe one boat at a time to make sure we can do it at a larger scale. Get Bulldog to sampling level of Darana R.

Must consider long term value - what is spatial overlap with Bigelow. How we design this will have a major bearing on how the resulting data are used in the assessments.

Pilot should focus on if it is going to work, can we do it. Pilot biological sampling data can still be used regardless of overlap.

Discussion focused on costs - need to consider lots of equipment: biological sampling supplies, workstations, measuring boards, scales, bags, tweezers etc. Sampling stations and setting up

the FSCS data acquisition are very expensive. Start up costs will not be cheap but for pilot some boats (e.g., Darana R, Bulldog) can provide a lot of this. Some details around overhead costs discussed.

- Future survey enterprise?
    - Start with offshore wind survey mitigation driver to build a regional trawl survey that over time could expand and cover more area; it is expected the design will require sampling stations in and out of wind areas
    - If trawling can't happen at all in wind areas, we'll still have operational lessons learned to sample outside of wind areas as contingency for white ships
- Big outstanding questions

Item	Need to resolve to start a pilot?	Issue(s)
Size of vessel	No	Maximize size that can operate in a wind area
Auto trawl	No	Strong scientific support; no industry support b/c introduces costs to available vessels
Day/night	No	Hard for smaller boats to do 24 hour sampling; complexities and bias introduced with 12-hour options
Communication	Yes	How to solicit vessels; socialize the work; peer review/Council comms?
Specific pilot study goals	Yes	What are the specific operational questions; are there associated questions - side by side with Bigelow, different length tows, fishing in wind farms
Specific biological sampling	No	On smaller vessels with smaller vessel and science crews, how do we be maximally efficient
Specific stations; coordination with BTS	No	Ideally we would have the "final" stations, but using pilot stations is feasible
Funding	Yes	Need a budget and a funding source

3:50- 4:00 a.m.Bigelow Contingency Plan Working Group (Anna Mercer and Dan Salerno)

- Status of the plan review
    - Plan document has been drafted and details the 4 options
        - Pisces, calibrated NEFSC vessel, calibrated industry vessel, separate survey ("IBS")
        - White paper around IBS was completed
    - Plan still needs to be finished for release to NTAP Full Panel for review and comment
        - Originally anticipated end of June, now shooting for end of September
    - Many priorities already being implemented
        - Pisces shakedown cruise this November
        - Development of a survey that meets the goals of the IBS
- Rename working group to fit Industry-Based Survey pilot project or develop new working group
- Develop new terms of reference for working group
- Next steps

Discussion/comments:

No conclusion on transition from Bigelow Contingency Working Group to something else. (Action: Anna and Dan will discuss with Kathryn.) Agreement that at least one more meeting needed to discuss budget elements for short term Phase 1 pilot. Aim for October. Action: Hannah will send out scheduling poll.

3:51 Adjourn

NTAP Bigelow Contingencies Working Group

Aug 22, 2024

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions (1-1:10)
   a. Changes in NTAP membership - BTS, PDB
2. Regional Trawl Survey (1:10-1:40)
   a. Proposed Objectives
   b. Proposed Timeline
3. Break (1:40-1:50)
4. Pilot regional trawl survey (1:50-3:50)
5. Bigelow Contingencies Working Group (3:50-4:00)
   a. Status of the plan review
   b. Rename working group/develop a new TOR?

Regional Trawl Survey (RTS)

- Proposed objectives of RTS
- Current plan/expectations for full-scale RTS
- Appropriation Language (Senate Mark):
  - The Committee provides $3,000,000 within Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys, and Assessments to design and implement a pilot industry-based fishery survey. This program will be designed to run in conjunction with and in complement to NOAA's established surveys. The IBS should seek to complement the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow's work and follow NMFS protocols to the extent practicable.

BTS = existing NEFSC multispecies Bottom Trawl Survey being conducted on the Bigelow

RTS = refers to a 2nd survey currently being designed

Proposed Objectives of Regional Trawl Survey

1) To improve resource assessments by providing indices of abundance complementary to the BTS

2) To sample areas that cannot be sampled by the BTS (i.e., wind energy developments, fixed gear), while also ensuring sufficient spatial overlap of the BTS to enable data integration

Test/verify assumption: Can we survey with bottom trawl in wind farms?
How/what are constraints-standard operating procedures?

3) To provide a data stream that would be available in the future if we lose access to the Bigelow

NEFSC would continue to operate the BTS with the same operating procedures currently used to ensure consistent coverage for stocks that span the whole survey extent, to enable nighttime sampling capacity, to maximize biological sampling capabilities, and to provide a robust platform for oceanographic and acoustic sampling capacity.

Potential Timeline DRAFT

Summer 2024 (today!): Define goalsobjectives of full-scale RTS; Draft operational plan for pilot RTS

Fall/Winter 2024: Finalize operational plan for pilot RTS

Spring 2025: Implement pilot RTS

- *Contingent on funding availability*

Fall 2025: Expand/continue pilot RTS

Spring 2026: Expand/continue pilot RTS

Fall 2026: Expand/continue pilot RTS

Spring 2027: Year 1 of full scale RTS begins

Proposed Objectives - PILOT Regional Trawl Survey

- Inform the development of a full-scale regional trawl survey.
  - Develop more specific vessel requirements
  - Explore feasibility of operating in and around offshore wind farms
  - Explore operational feasibility of oceanographic and biological sampling components
  - Explore operational feasibility of day/ night sampling
  - Create a draft Standard Operating Procedures document

Proposed Scope of Pilot Regional Trawl Survey - Phase 1

- Pilot RTS on F/V Darana R in March 2025
  - Leverage available gear and vessel configuration for survey operations (work stations)
- 5 days at sea, 2 days staging, 1 day destaging
- Test survey operations at stations within wind farms and stations outside wind farms
  - number of stations based on distance between stations and time required for each station
- Rely on VIMS staff, F/V Darana R crew, as well as 1-2 NEFSC staff to coordinate staging/data acquisition/gear/computer needs,
  - Draft SOP for staging, IT set up, operations, destagning,
- Priority uncertainties to address in pilo RTS
  - Data acquisition system (FSCS, TOGA), data transfer - time/staff required, vessel requirements
  - Procedures for sampling inside of wind farms
    - How far should we stay away from turbines?
  - Use of restrictor rope
  - Day/night operations
  - Oceanographic sampling
    - Bongo tow operations
    - SeaBird CTD + Niskin (or rosette) operations
  - Biological data collection procedures
  - Multibeam acoustics for fish biomass measurements
  - Gear details - who/how are nets built and inspected, stored; same for doors and sweep

How do we test these?

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Proposed Scope of Pilot Regional Trawl Survey

What other questions needs to be answered in a RTS pilot?

- Different length tows?
- Different ground gear?
- Autotrawl?

Draft Budget for Pilot Regional Trawl Survey - Phase 1

- Vessel:
  - 8 days (5 at sea, 3 staging/destaging) - $15,000 per day x 8 = **$120,000**
  - Fuel - $5 per gallons x 400 gallons per day x 5 days = **$10,000**
- Gear:
  - 2 nets & doors - VIMS/vessel
  - Workstations, measuring boards, scales - VIMS/vessel
  - Data collection system (FSCS)- NEFSC (need to confirm availability)
  - Expendable gear and sampling supplies - purchased by VIMS - **$50,000**
  - Bongo & CTD - NEFSC (need to confirm availability)
- Field Work Staffing:
  - VIMS- **? ($50,000 as placeholder)**
  - NEFSC - IT, Oceanography, Operational Support - leverage existing staff
- Post-cruise
  - Dedicated support for documentation, data analysis - **is this needed?**
- **Total - At least $230,000**

Staffing of Pilot Regional Trawl survey

Chief Scientist(s) - ?

IT Support (FSCS) - NEFSC

Oceanography Lead- ?

Field Team - VIMS staff? NTAP members?

Proposed Scope of Pilot Regional Trawl Survey - Phase 2

- Pilot RTS on additional FV(s)in fall 2025
  - If more than 1 vessel, requires double the gear, equipment, supplies, staffing…
- Days at sea scaleable to funding available
  - Depends on funding
- Expand spatial scope of pilot RTS
  - Gulf of Maine? Mid-Atlantic?
  - Offshore?
  - Test survey operations at stations within wind farms and stations outside wind farms
- Survey gear - purchase new gear?
- Sampling equipment and supplies - purchase new equipment and supplies?
- Staffing?
- Develop further list of uncertainties/questions to address in Phase 2 (based upon results of Phase 1)

Draft Budget for Pilot Regional Trawl Survey - Phase 2

- Vessel (assuming 1 vessel)
  - 18 days (15 at sea, 3 staging/destaging) - $15,000 per day x 18 = **$270,000**
  - Fuel - $5 per gallons x 400 gallons per day x 15 days = **$30,000**
- Gear:
  - 2 nets & doors - **$100,000**
  - Workstations, measuring boards, scales - **$250,000**
  - EK80 - **$300,000**
  - Net mensuration system - **$350,000**
  - Data collection software (FSCS)- NEFSC
  - Oceanographic sampling equipment (bongo nets, CTD, Niskin) - **$200,000**
  - Biological sampling supplies - **$100,000**
  - Expendable gear and sampling supplies - purchased by VIMS - **$50,000**
- Field Work Staffing:
  - Research Team (or NEFSC) - **$150,000**
  - NEFSC - IT, Oceanography, Operational Support - leverage existing staff?
- Post-cruise
  - Dedicated support for documentation, data management, analysis - **$200,000**
- **Total - At least $2,000,000**

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Update on Bigelow Contingencies Plan

- Plan document has been drafted and details the 4 options
  - Pisces, calibrated NEFSC vessel, calibrated industry vessel, separate survey ("IBS")
  - White paper around IBS was completed
- Plan still needs to be finished for release to NTAP Full Panel for review and comment
  - Originally anticipated end of June, now shooting for end of September
- Many priorities already being implemented
  - Pisces shakedown cruise this November
  - Development of a survey that meets the goals of the IBS

To Who It May Concern:

Overfishing in the Gulf of Maine is occurring because rules and regulations are not being enforced. Specifically, there are three regulations that I will address in this letter that are not being enforced: mesh size, horsepower limit, and gear being used in the GOM/GB Inshore Roller Gear Restricted Area

Mesh Size
The body of a groundfish net is regulated to be no smaller than 6" mesh. The ground fish net is shaped like a funnel. The funnel tapers into a "lengthener' or 'extension'. The 'lengthener' is a long tube 20'-100' long and about 6' wide. It is also regulated to be no smaller than 6"mesh. See Photo #1.

The codend or 'tail bag' is sewn to the end of the 'extension'. For most nets (unless there is a special exemption program), the codend mesh is regulated to be no smaller than 6.5". The 6.5" mesh allows the small fish to escape by going through the mesh and back into the ocean as the net is dragged along the bottom. The cod end has chaffing gear on the bottom of it because it bounces and drags along the bottom of the ocean floor. The chaffing gear is comprised of layers of gnarly thick twine to prevent tears that would allow the fish to escape. The cod end is cinched with a clip while fishing. When the bag is boarded the clip is released and the fish are dumped on deck.

I have noticed non-compliant 'lengtheners' on groundfish nets, flounder nets and redfish nets, with mesh that is as small as 4 and 1/2". A crewman weaves a piece of twine between the lengthener and the codend. This twine pinches off the lengthener so the 6.5"codend becomes a 'decoy'. When the crewman is hauling back, and the bag of fish gets close to the net reel, the crewman jerks the net reel, the twine breaks, and all the fish dump into the codend. Someone on deck, like an observer, would never know that the 'lengthener' is the 'real' codend. There would be no evidence of the twine ever being there. Photo #2 shows a non compliant 'lengthener' with 4.5" mesh.

Fishermen are doing this to retain smaller fish. Photo #3 shows an aerial view of a redfish net being hauled back and the 'lengthener' has been pinched off. The pink fuzzy stuff is redfish caught in the 'lengthener'. You can see the cod end is completely empty.

Fisherman that are cheating with a lengthener add chaffing gear to the bottom of the lengthener. If they didn't add chaffing gear to the lengthener, then as the bag of fish is being dragged and bounced over the bottom, then the bag would tear a hole, and all the fish would escape. There is no reason for a lengthener to have chaffing gear on the bottom of it, unless the 'lengthener' has non-compliant mesh. See photo #4.

In 2013, Framework Adjustment 48 revised the minimum fish sizes for commercial vessels. There were a lot of fish being caught and discarded because they were too small to keep. I think they were too small to keep, because a lot of fishermen were pinching the bag or using 'liners' in order to catch a bigger volume of fish. I think this practice has been going on for a long time. This practice creates smaller and smaller fish. As long as small mesh is being pulled around the ocean, we will never have rebuilt, sustainable fish stocks.

I believe this is a systemic problem in the ground fishery. This isn't one or two isolated vessels.

The Office of Law Enforcement has said that it is 'next to impossible' to enforce the 6" mesh regulation in the lengthener if a vessel has 2 net reels. One net has a legal 6" lengthener and the other net has the non compliant mesh size. When a captain sees the Coast Guard coming towards them on AIS (Automatic Identification System), they haul back before the Coast Guard

gets there. If the Coast Guard doesn't see the net in the water and being hauled back, then they can't prove which net was being used to catch the fish.

Here are some solutions that I have thought of:

1. The Coast Guard could turn their AIS off.

2. Vessels could be allowed only one net and one net reel onboard a vessel, then there is no question which net was in the water.

3. A new regulation could be passed that prohibits 'lengtheners' from having no mesh smaller than 6.5" That way the lengthener and the codend would both be 6.5 inches. There would be no reason to pinch off the bag if the mesh size was the same. A crewman can change a lengthener pretty quickly. The only 6" mesh onboard should be the 6" mesh in the body of the net, and a limited amount of 6" single ply mesh twine to repair the body of the net.

4. The Coast Guard could use drones for an aerial view. When a net is being hauled back, and if the bag is being pinched, they could see which net reel is being used.

5. There should be a regulation stating that there should be "no chaffing gear on any lengthener". The only part of the net that should have chaffing gear is the codend.

6. Law enforcement could do random boardings when boats are landing their fish. They should have them drop the net, past the codend, so they could take measurements at the beginning, middle and at the end of the 'lengthener'. This would tell them who is naughty and who is nice.

Horsepower Baseline Limit
In 1986, National Marine Fisheries Service went from an open access fishery to a limited access fishery. They created a multispecies groundfish permit. Vessel length and horsepower on these permits were recorded and a 'baseline' was established. Our forefathers knew that horsepower was the biggest factor in creating mortality in fish stocks. The baseline is still supposed to be used today to limit length and horsepower that a vessel can have.

Most fishing vessels in the 1980's had 200-300 horse power motors, A 400 hp motor would have been a 'big motor'. I never saw even one 1,000 hp motor on a fishing boat back then.

Right now, I am seeing MANY HIGH horsepower vessels. It has to be recognized that there has been no enforcement of the horsepower baseline law. I have never heard of anyone getting a violation because the horse power of their motor exceeded the limit on their baseline.
When a person does a 'Vessel Replacement' through NMFS, all they have to do is get a certified mechanic or a dealership to say what the horsepower of that motor is. Nobody checks to see if it is true.

Some boat owners re-power their engine with higher horsepower but don't report it to NMFS.

With today's modern electronic motors, horse power can be easily altered. By adding turbo's, charged air units, and high pressure injection pumps, a person can increase horsepower substantially. With electronic motors you can upgrade the computer programs to create high horsepower. If a person has a high horsepower electronic motor, they can change their horsepower in a matter of minutes if they have access to Wi-Fi. Most fishing boats have access to Wi-Fi the entire time they are fishing, through STARLINK.
For example, a vessel that has a baseline maximum of 400 horsepower, can 'up-tune' their motor to 600 hp, with an online computer program, within minutes, and 'de-tune' there motor back to 400 hp in minutes

There is no way to test the horsepower of todays motors. These are non-compliant workarounds to flout the horsepower regulation that was created in 1986 to control future fishing effort.

A low horsepower motor has very little impact on fishing mortality. Low horse power motors cannot access hard, rocky bouldery bottom because the motor doesn't have enough power to get over this type of terrain. This allows for 'escapement' of cod, pollock, redfish and haddock. Conversely, high horsepower motors are the exact opposite. High horsepower motors can easily handle the increased drag of hard rocky bouldery bottom. The non compliant increases of the baseline horsepower regulation allows access to hard bottom, which has increased mortality on cod haddock redfish and pollock. In the past, this horse power baseline regulation did limit access to this type of terrain. The rocky bottom is also where most spawning occurs. If this horsepower regulation could be enforced then it would increase spawning for haddock pollock redfish and cod, and reduce mortality.
One way or another, the fishery needs measures to increase spawning and reduce mortality. This is a regulation that is already in existence, and I think it can be tweaked and continue to be an effective management tool.

The horsepower regulation cannot be enforced because of the new innovations of electronic motors. But the door size on a vessel is dependent on the vessels horsepower. Companies that manufacture the trawl doors use the horse power of a vessels' motor to recommend the size of the door, net and trawl frame.
The size of the door is an easier way to enforce the baseline horsepower regulation. In general, a specific door size is equal to a horse power 'range'.
Most fishermen would like to have the largest size door possible, to open the largest net possible with the horse power that their vessel has.

A low horse power motor, say 200hp, only has enough power to tow a small set of doors, a # 5 Bison, for example. This #5 Bison could open/inflate a 65' net. A net that size could hold a maximum of 7-800 lbs of fish per tow. This requires many haul backs, and it makes for a very slow boat going to fishing grounds and coming back. This is a very low impact fishing operation.
On the other hand, a #14 Bison door could open/inflate a 200' net. A net that size could hold a maximum of 30,000 lbs of fish per tow. This is a very high impact fishing operation. This is only possible with a high horse power motor. This is why it is important to enforce the baseline horsepower regulation.

The horsepower pulls the door and the net. A perpendicular door spreads the net, and keeps the mouth of the net open. If there isn't enough horsepower the door lays down and the mouth of the net collapses. The heavier the door, and the bigger the net, the more horsepower the vessel needs to keep the door perpendicular, and the net open.

Instead of throwing the limited baseline horsepower regulation out the window, a fairly simple solution would be to regulate a door size to match the horsepower baseline. For example, a #5 Bison Door (or an equivalent Thyboron door) would be 200-300 hp; a #6 Bison Door would be 300-400 hp; a #7 Bison Door would be 400-500 hp, etc.

In order to regulate the door instead of the equivalent horsepower, a fisherman's limited access multispecies permit would require the door size to be matched with their baseline horsepower. The dimensions and # of the door would be indicated on their multi species permit. This would be an easy way for enforcement to check for compliance. If a vessel is boarded by law enforcement and they ask for the fishing permit, they could check the size of the door right on deck.

We will have way, way more overfishing and over capacity, if we don't rein in the limit on the horsepower. I think the limit on the horse power is the most important regulation in order to have healthy sustainable fish stocks. Vessels with high horsepower can get over ANY bottom type, creating more mortality.
In the future, if there is still too much overcapacity, then the door size, net and frame could be limited to a smaller size. I think this is a fair and equitable way to manage the fishery.

Creating the special exemption redfish program set in motion the beginnings of a high horsepower fleet. You need high horsepower, large heavy doors, and a massive 20 to 24 inch roller frame to harvest this species. A special access program was created in 2015 to take advantage of the large biomass of redfish.

Redfish and pollock reside on the same rough, rocky, bouldery, terrain. In order to get over this bottom, without tearing the net, a fisherman would need 20 to 24 inch discs on the roller frame. This heavy massive roller frame keeps the net 10 to 12 inches off the bottom. The net has to be a high rise net because both the redfish and the pollock tend to be high off the bottom. The net is about 30 feet from the roller frame to the top of the opening of the net. A regular groundfish net is about 15 feet from the roller frame to the top of the opening of the net. It takes a massive door to make this net 'open' or 'inflate' the net. As the 20 to 24 inch roller frame bounces and encounters large rock piles it creates large amounts of drag. Red fish and pollock are both fast swimmers. The vessel has to maintain a speed of 4 knots in order to catch these 2 species. This requires a massive amount of horsepower to maintain the 4 knot speed of the vessel. This is the formula: weight (massive doors, roller frame, and high rise net) + rocky boulders (creates drag) + maintaining a 4 knot towing speed = massive horsepower.
Now that these vessels have powered up to catch redfish and pollock, they can also catch haddock, hake and cod using a 5.5" codend as long as they are in the 'Redfish Exemption Areas'. The amount of groundfish to redfish being landed monthly is supposed to be 45% groundfish to 55% redfish, but I don't believe this is necessarily the case.
The special exemption redfish program has created a large scale fishery using 5.5" twine to harvest all multispecies, not just redfish, in the Redfish Exemption Areas.
Small mesh means small fish and low recruitment.

GOM/GB Inshore Restricted Roller Gear Area
There is a GOM/GB Inshore Restricted Roller Gear Area for all trawl vessels, the maximum diameter of any part of the trawl roller frame, including discs, rollers or rockhoppers, may not exceed 12".
There is a fairly new type of trawl frame that has been developed, called 'Tractor Trawl Gear', or 'Risers'.
Enforcement has said that they haven't seen this gear type, and they need clarification on whether or not this gear type can be used in the "GOM/GB Inshore Restricted Roller Gear Area".

The New England Fisheries Management Council should determine if this gear type has the same impact as a 12" disc roller frame, so enforcement would have a clear answer whether this gear type is permissible in the GOM/GB Inshore Restricted Roller Gear Area.

This gear type is very similar to the 'Street Sweeping Gear' that was banned a few years back. The tractor trawl gear is designed to get over hard, rocky bottom, that 12" discs can't.

The traditional 12" roller gear allowed in this area has one cable that has a variety of discs, rollers and rockhoppers, not exceeding 12", strung onto it.

The tractor trawl frame, does not have ‘roller’ gear. It doesn’t ‘roll’ across the bottom. It has a ‘trawl frame’, which is more like a mat. The tractor trawl frame is made up of 2 parallel cables attached to each other with ‘dog bones’. So the 2 cables together are about 24” tall as they are dragged along the bottom of the ocean.
The bottom cable is strung with 12” discs and ‘dog bones’ which have a hole in each end. One hole of the dog bone is strung onto one cable, and the other hole of the dog bone is strung onto the second cable. The second cable has smaller discs with the dog bones in between. At the bottom of the net reel you can see orange and black small cookies. This third cable attaches the trawl frame to the net. See photo #5.

A traditional 12” disc roller frame cannot fish ‘on top’ of the hard rocky bottom without ‘hanging up’ and tearing the net.
This tractor trawl frame is designed to go over hard rocky bottom and not hang up. This is a ‘work around’ to be able to access harder bottom in the GOM/GB Inshore Gear Restricted Area.

I think the restricted inshore roller gear regulation was originally implemented to keep vessels OFF the hard bottom in this area, mainly to protect the codfish.
Codfish mostly reside on rocky hard bottom. Pollock and haddock also reside on this bottom type.
If this tractor trawl gear is allowed in this area I think it would have a negative impact on the spawning cod, pollock and haddock.
If we are serious about rebuilding efforts with cod. We can’t have gear that can have a 30,000 pound set in this inshore area. One set would negate all rebuilding efforts.

These are the three biggest problems that are keeping the fish stocks from reaching maturity. Small mesh in the lengtheners, the horse power baseline not being enforced and allowing vessels to fish on hard bottom in the GOM/GB restricted roller gear area. These aren’t easy problems to solve, but I think we need to begin to address them.
I realize this is a lengthy letter. I appreciate that you are taking the time to read it. My wife and I put a lot of effort into gathering all the information.
I think the bottom line is that there is no point in trying to move forward with any fish stock rebuilding plans unless these 3 regulations can be enforced and are being enforced.

Sincerely.
Knoep Nieuwkerk
Fisherman in the Gulf of Maine for 30 years,
Owner/operator of a small trawl vessel and a small gillnet vessel.

Photo #1 Net plan

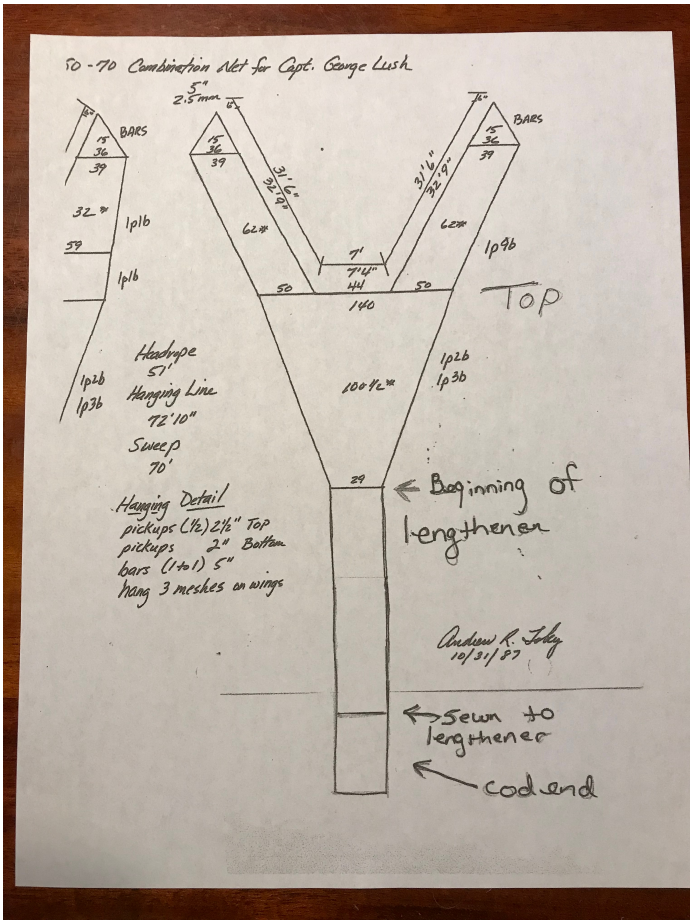

Photo #2 Non compliant mesh in the lengthener

Photo #3 Aerial view of redfish pinched bag

Photo #4 Chaffing gear on bottom of lengthener

Photo #5 Tractor trawl gear