

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
WEAKFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel Old Town
Alexandria, Virginia
August 19, 2008**

Board Approved October 21, 2008

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

David Pierce, MA, proxy for P. Diodati, (AA)
Mark Gibson, RI (AA)
Everett Petronio, RI (GA)
Sen. Susan Sosnowski, RI (LA)
Dave Simpson, CT (AA)
Sen. George Gunther, CT (LA)
Jim Gilmore, NY (AA)
Pat Augustine, NY (GA), Chair
Brian Culhane, NY, proxy for Sen. Johnson (LA)
Tom McCoy, NJ, proxy for D. Chanda (AA)
Erling Berg, NJ (GA)
Gilbert Ewing, NJ, proxy for Asm. D. Fisher (LA)
Roy Miller, DE, proxy for P. Emory (AA)
Bernard Pankowski, DE, proxy for Sen. Venables (LA)
Harley Speir, MD, proxy for T. O'Connell (AA)
Bill Goldsborough, MD (GA)

Russell Dize, MD, proxy for Sen. Colburn (LA)
Steve Bowman, VA (AA)
Catherine Davenport, VA (GA)
Del. Lynwood Lewis, VA (LA)
Dr. Louis Daniel, NC (AA)
William Cole, NC (GA)
Jimmy Johnson, NC, proxy for Rep. Wainwright (LA)
John Frampton, SC (AA)
Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Robert Boyles, SC (LA)
John Duren, GA (GA)
Bill Sharp, FL, proxy for G. McCrae (AA)
William Orndorf, FL (GA)
Steve Meyers, NOAA Fisheries

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

Ex-Officio Members

Jeff Brust, NJ DFW, Stock Assessment Subcommittee Chair

Staff

Vince O'Shea
Nichola Meserve

Chris Vonderweidt

Guests

Rob O'Reilly, VMRC
Bruno Vasta, Solomons, MD
Frank Pohanka, Reedsville, VA
Neil Lessard, VCBS

Danny Crabbe, Virginia Charter Boat Assn.
Rye Rogers, Virginia Charter Boat Assn
William Lowery, Virginia Coastal Charter Assn.
Arnold Leo, Div. of Comm. Fisheries, E. Hampton, NY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CALL TO ORDER.....	1
APPROVAL OF AGENDA	1
APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS	1
PUBLIC COMMENT	1
2008 BIOLOGICAL SAMPLING PLANS.....	1
WEAKFISH STOCK ASSESSMENT UPDATE.....	5
OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN	8

INDEX OF MOTIONS

1. **Motion to approve agenda by Consent** (Page 1).
2. **Motion to approve proceedings of February 5, 2008 by Consent** (Page 1).
3. **Move to accept the 2008 biological sampling plans** (Page 2). Motion by Mr. Miller; second by Mr. Culhane. Motion carries by consent (Page 4).
4. **Motion to adjourn by Consent** (Page 8).

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIRMAN PATRICK AUGUSTINE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Weakfish Management Board. It looks like we have a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIRMAN PATRICK AUGUSTINE If you will please look at your agenda, are there any corrections, additions, subtractions? Seeing none, **the agenda stands as presented.**

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIRMAN PATRICK AUGUSTINE Have you reviewed the proceedings of the February 5th meeting? Having done so, are there any additions, corrections or changes? Is there any opposition to accepting those proceedings? Seeing none, the **proceedings are accepted.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

At this time we are opening for the public. Is there anyone from the public that would like to make a statement or comment relative to this meeting? Seeing none, we will move forward.

2008 BIOLOGICAL SAMPLING PLANS

We're going to review the 2008 biological sampling plans. They were submitted by each required jurisdiction. They appeared in your CD. The plan review team reviewed and evaluated each plan, and at this point in time the staff will present an overview of the 2008 biological sampling plans as presented to you in your CD. Nichola.

MS. NICHOLA MESERVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Addendum I to Amendment 4 requires the annual sampling for length and ages. It requires six lengths per metric ton of commercial landings as well as three ages per metric ton of total landings with a maximum of 1,000 ages and also that states continue the 2005 MRFSS level of sampling.

The PRT annually provides projected requirements to the states in February based on the previous year's preliminary landings. The states then submit sampling plans by April 1st. The PRT reviews those sampling plans, and the board today should consider them for approval. The PRT previously sent out all the plans as well as its evaluation because the Board wasn't going to have an opportunity to consider them for approval until this late date in the year.

The PRT reviews the performance of the states with the requirements during the annual FMP review. Based on the 2007 projected preliminary landings, the 2008 projected requirements are provided in this table for both the lengths and the ages. The numbers are also on the CD. Overall the totals are 2,311 lengths and 1,828 ages. You'll note that Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Connecticut and Massachusetts are de minimis and are not required to sample.

Just for comparison, I am showing the length requirements in this slide for the last several years. The 2006 requirements and the 2006 sampling are shown in the first two rows. The orange denotes the two states that did not sample the level required by the plan. The '07 preliminary requirements are also shown, and it also notes that the 2007 sampling will be reported in the 2008 compliance reports, which will be due September 1st; and then the '08 projected requirements are on the bottom row again.

Similarly, the age requirements are shown here for the last three years. The states in orange again are those that in 2006 did not fulfill their requirement. The 2007 and 2008 projected requirements are shown again.

The handout on the CD includes a table that summarizes the sampling plans. All the states stated that they will sample for lengths and ages and then provided the sampling procedure which is basically how they're going to stratify their landings. It is recommended that is done by the gear type, the market grade, the season, and the fishery. The table also includes the sampling time and location. The sampling time generally has to do with when the fish are available.

The PRT's comments on the reports are that each state intends to make a good faith effort to collect their required samples and each has given an adequate description of the methodology for doing so. The PRT finds reports that include the tables with the landings by gear, market grade and season to be particularly useful for their review.

The PRT recommends that states include an evaluation of how well the previous year's samples actually represented the year's harvest by strata. This is a recommendation that was also given last year, and two states did do this, Virginia and North Carolina, so those could be used as an example for next year's reports. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Are there any questions? We'd like to entertain a motion to accept the report as given. Mr. Miller.

MR. ROY MILLER: I move to accept the biological sampling plans as presented.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Mr. Miller. Second, Mr. Culhane. Mr. O'Shea.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN V. O'SHEA: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I was wondering the states that did not meet the requirements last year, whether they would have a projection of whether they're going to be able to meet the requirements this year and whether there is anything that the Board or even the Commission or other states could do to help get those samples?

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Mr. O'Shea. Nichola, would you call off those states, please.

MS. MESERVE: Because the 2007 compliance reports have not been submitted, I just know the 2006 requirements versus the samples that were done for the lengths; New York and Rhode Island were short. For the age requirements, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island fell short.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: New York, New Jersey or Rhode Island; would any of you like to comment? Malcolm.

DR. MALCOLM RHODES: Well, I thought at the last meeting Dr. Laney had talked about using the winter cruise data to help the states as well as the NEAMAP Survey, to take those fish to try and fill in. Has anything more come of that?

MS. MESERVE: The technical committee has not met and reviewed whether or not those samples would be adequate for this process.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: New York; Brian, do you know?

MR. BRIAN CULHANE: Don't look at me, Pat.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: I had to ask. New Jersey, Mr. McCloy.

MR. THOMAS W. McCLOY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are working to get the samples that are required. My gut instinct tells me we'll probably be in the same boat as last year and falling short. All

I can tell you is we'll work to get as many as we can. If the board isn't satisfied with that, they have action they can take.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, and if Nichola can do anymore to help you, please let her know. Mr. Miller.

MR. MILLER: It may be that we can help New Jersey out to a certain extent. I presume you're just talking about reading scales or doing otoliths and not the collection of samples; am I right, Tom.

MR. McCLOY: No, that is incorrect. It is the collection of the samples that is part of it.

MR. MILLER: Well, we can only help so far as Delaware Bay is concerned. We couldn't help with your Atlantic coastline.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Okay, thank you for offering, anyway. Any further comments; any further questions? Are you ready to vote? Mark Gibson.

MR. MARK GIBSON: In Rhode Island we sample fish as they become available. In the commercial fishery it is not a matter of not being able to afford them or manpower or anything like that. We're trying harder this year. We have expanded the window of time and the available gear types, and I believe a letter was sent in to the Commission documenting that. Whether we will meet those numbers, I don't know. It depends on when the commercial fishermen catch them, whether we find out about it and can get there.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you for that update. Robert, please.

MR. ROBERT H. BOYLES, JR.: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For those states, to help me understand, is it a fishery-dependent sampling; is it a fishery-independent sampling problem; is it personnel; is it staffing?

MR. McCLOY: All of the above.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: That was clean. Mark, we already know your situation. New York, we have a similar problem, collection not available. Any further comments or discussion? Dr. Pierce.

DR. DAVID PIERCE: I might have missed it, but was there any information provided regarding the extent to which each individual state was able to sample by the different stratification that we have

set? For example, we've got fishery, commercial/recreational; we've got type of gear, market grade, time of year. Those are the categories that are supposed to be used for stratification.

We see numbers on the screen, but I don't think we were in a position to really judge whether, for example, all of the fish were sampled for one stratification and the other three were not covered. Is that information available so we can get a better feel for whether the stratification actually is occurring, because without the stratification a state can do what it's supposed to do in terms of numbers of fish, but may miss the bulls eye, may miss the entire target.

MS. MESERVE: Your comment is the basis of the PRT's third recommendation that states include a table to document how well the previous year's samples actually compared by fishery, gear, market grade as to how the fishery has actually performed. Two states did do that in their report. All the reports are on the CD. Those are the only two right now that has documented that.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Does that answer your question, Dr. Pierce?

DR. PIERCE: Yes, we really don't know at this point in time, but I would suggest that we should remind ourselves that these are the stratifications that need to be tended to, all the while recognizing that fish may not be landed; and if you don't have fish that are landed, either commercially or recreationally, there is no way you can sample them. Thank you; I'm all set.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Mr. Gilmore, we passed over New York because you weren't here, but we were wondering what kind of sampling problems we're having relative to weakfish in New York. Mr. Gilmore, do you have any information for us on that?

MR. JAMES GILMORE: We've had a lot of practical limitations this year because of – I think we've had a record in the number of vessel breakdowns. We've actually done hardly anything because of all the logistical problems we've had. The fiscal problems we're having on top of that, it's things like broken trailers aren't getting replaced. I hope we're going to be able to do better, but that's the reality of the situation right now.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you very much. I was also under the impression that we were looking for the new survey that's being conducted to possibly

ask those folks to supply some otolith samples for up and down the coast. Mr. Miller.

MR. MILLER: Mr. Chairman, if I may be so presumptuous, I'll just take a brief minute to state the obvious. In the case of weakfish we have a fishery stock that we feel has declined drastically over its prior abundance. I think everyone up and down the coast is concerned about the relative scarcity of the weakfish stock, and recreational fisheries and commercial fisheries have collapsed while this species has been under our management umbrella, unfortunately.

Unfortunately, some of our member jurisdictions are unable, for a variety of reasons we've heard today, to meet their sampling quota. What I'm wondering is can we have further discussion on possible mechanisms on how we can supply the data to at least bolster our assessment of this particular species, which by all accounts is in serious decline. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you for that. Comments from any of the board members as to suggestions we might have? Dr. Daniel.

DR. LOUIS B. DANIEL, III: Well, we've been involved with this for a long time. We've made the effort, as has South Carolina, to help folks out and process otoliths and the like, and that offer still stands at least for North Carolina. But, we had those grants with South Carolina where we had an opportunity to buy fish for states and nobody took us up on it. To some degree, there doesn't seem to be that significant of a willingness to do this, and that's worrisome to me.

Because Virginia and North Carolina have such sampling programs during the winter, we probably do catch a lot of the migratory fish. One of the real concerns back in the day on the technical committee was the fact that we were using Virginia pound net lengths for Rhode Island trap fish, which were totally different. Getting that information is critical for the assessment.

I've love to know a reason why we couldn't use the SEAMAP Winter Tagging Cruise types of data. When those fish come back to North Carolina, we'd be happy to process those to get folks up above their required sampling level. It is going to be tough for us to get their lengths for them, but certainly the ages, we're willing to do whatever we have to do in order to get this up. I mean, we're not going to find somebody out of compliance for not doing this, but if

we all backed off of our sampling programs, we'd be in a world of hurt. I think it is a critical thing that we need to solve today for how we're going to get these samples for the next assessment.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Dr. Daniel. Any further comments?

MR. ROB O'REILLY: I share Dave Pierce's concerns in that it doesn't seem to be terrible to fall short of the 2006 targets, but what would be a problem is if there is just some bulk buying going on to get samples with a disregard for the stratification. I'm hoping that the technical committee certainly lets all their representatives know about the sampling and keeps reminding them of how the samples should be taken. That would help out a lot.

Then if one state happens to miss by 20 percent, to know that those samples were taken according to the strata, that would be great. The second comment is that there are other models available. I'm going to ask Jeff later on a little bit about some of the forward-projecting models, but some of these statistical catch-at-age models probably do lend themselves to using or mixing in some of the independent samples; whereas, the traditional ADAPT and everything that has gone before it has always broken out the weakfish fishery in terms of north and the south, early and late, being the two halves of the year and gear basis for the commercial. That has always been the way it is done, but maybe there is more flexibility now with different modeling that if it isn't taking place right now for this assessment, I'm sure will take place.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Rob. Any other comments from the board members? Nichola, could we do something with NEAMAP and with the SEAMAP? We'll ask Jeff Brust to make a comment on that.

MR. JEFF BRUST: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to let the board know that the information from the surveys is already being used in the assessment. The ages, the lengths, the weights, they are used in the assessment. One problem, though, that I see, taking data from a survey and applying it to a certain state's commercial fishery will need to be reviewed by the technical committee.

Right now we're substituting that – as Dr. Daniel mentioned, we're substituting data from a fishery in one state with a given gear for a fishery in another state with a different gear. The fish caught in those two separate fisheries are not necessarily the same. I'd be a little worried about taking data from a survey

that may not be any more representative of any given fishery and applying it to a fishery.

The technical committee would have to review the data that is coming out of the surveys before we would be able to apply those data to a given fishery. Basically, it sounds like what the board is asking is that we just take one set of data and substitute it for a different set of data to stick it in a hole that we have, and we can't do that without reviewing the data first. The survey data is certainly being used right now, but if we want to apply it to any given state's commercial fishery we will need to review that data pretty intensely.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thanks for that input. Dr. Daniel.

DR. DANIEL: I think you're absolutely right, but the issue I was thinking of was at least with New York and New Jersey falling below the line; that since they do have a commercial trawl fishery, there may be a reasonable assumption that could be made that those two were right. I agree with you that you can't use trawl data for pound net landings and those types of things.

I just think that there is data out there that we can tap into. We're not talking huge numbers, but it is nice to have that regional information. I mean, we're right now – I don't know where we are, Mark, from where we were in the early days with the numbers of otoliths that we're collecting now, but it looks there are fewer than there used to be, but at least we've got a good rolling time series.

I agree with Rob that the statistical catch-at-age models and AD model builder stuff that they're using now tends to eliminate some of the retrospective bias, and it allows us to look at it more holistic, and I think that's a good approach to consider. I guess we'll talk about that later.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Jeff, do you want correspond or are we okay?

MR. BRUST: No, I'm fine.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Okay, any further comments or discussion; any new points to be made? Let's get back to the motion and approve the 2008 biological sample plans. Motion by Mr. Miller; seconded by Mr. Culhane. Do I see any objection to the motion? **Seeing no objection, the motion carries.**

WEAKFISH STOCK ASSESSMENT UPDATE

We will move on to the weakfish stock assessment update. The background on it, if you refer to your meeting overview, the weakfish data workshop was held July 14 through 17 to compile, organize and critically evaluate the available fishery-dependent and fishery-independent and life history information for use in the 2008-2009 weakfish stock. At this time we'd like to have Jeff Brust, chairman of the stock assessment subcommittee, provide an overview of that data workshop and what our next steps are going to be for the stock assessment.

MR. BRUST: All right, as Pat just mentioned, this is just going to be a quick update on the data workshop that we had about a month ago, I guess. There were four main goals at the workshop. The first one is really what the data workshop is for. We wanted to critically evaluate all the available data, go through each of the datasets and decide whether it is compatible with the assessment that we're considering, keep the data that we think are useful, table the data that we don't think will fit into the assessment framework.

We also discussed some of the candidate models. We identified some outstanding tasks for the committee to evaluate. Then we wanted to re-evaluate the timeline. There was some concern about the amount of time between when the assessment is going to be completed and when the peer review is going to happen. We just wanted to re-evaluate the timeline; as well as also with the outstanding tasks, whether we could get things done in the previously approved timeline.

It was pretty well attended workshop. We had ten technical committee members; we had two advisory panel members and three folks from Virginia Tech. You may remember that Virginia Tech has a grant out to do an alternative assessment on weakfish, so they came and they presented some of their work. They were also involved with our discussions on the appropriateness of the different datasets.

Some of the data types that we looked at; obviously commercial and recreational landings, recreational discards. At this time we did not do commercial discards. You'll see that on another slide. Commercial discards had been done for the first time in the last assessment. The person who did that is no longer in the United States, and we've been struggling to update his methodology. We're a bit behind on that but we're getting closer.

We went through all the biological samples. We reviewed the fisheries-independent and the fishery-dependent abundance indices. Some of the key decisions obviously – we had three days for this meeting and obviously we did more than make these four decisions, but here are some of the bigger ones.

Reviewing the surveys, we decided that the NMFS Survey Index is not really a good indicator of abundance based on some of the inter-annual variability and some other issues that we had. We did add a new survey to the mix. It is a gill net survey done in North Carolina. I believe it has been going for seven years. It is an aged survey, so this is very beneficial. We were very happy to get new data that we haven't seen before.

Some of the other things we did, we reduced the recreational discard mortality rates. We have used 20 percent in the past. There was discussion on reducing it to 10 percent, and we reviewed some available data. We've made the consensus agreement to move forward with a lower rate. We're evaluating two different methods, but it is going to be probably around 10 percent discard mortality in the recreational fishery.

During the last assessment some information came out that in Florida there was an overlap between weakfish and sand seatrout. They overlap in range and they actually hybridize. There has been some work down there to sort of separate the multiple groups, and so the Florida recreational data and actually the commercial data also has been subset to remove the sand seatrout and hybrids from the landings.

Those are just some of the major things that we did and decided on at this workshop. Some ongoing investigations that we're continuing with; you may remember that one of the decisions of the last assessment is that we believe natural mortality has been changing over time. We're investigating a couple of methods to evaluate this, looking at both life history parameters, changes in life history parameters over time; and also there is a new ADAPT implementation that allows you to estimate natural mortality by year.

We're looking at a couple of different ways to look at this hypothesis of changing mortality. The folks from Virginia Tech presented some of their work on standardizing all of the survey indices based on spatial, temporal and environmental variables. They presented that and it looked – they only had a subset of the data, but what they did we thought looked

promising, and so we have asked them to continue that with the remainder of the surveys.

At the assessment workshop they will present that work, and we may make a decision at that time to at least incorporate their standardized data as a candidate run in our models. Also, as I mentioned before, we are working to update and revise the commercial discard estimates. The next step is obviously to complete the outstanding data tasks. We have been working on that since the workshop.

The next major step obviously is the assessment workshop. It was originally scheduled for September, but because of the size of the outstanding work that we had to do, we were requesting to delay it until October. This will also push back the completion of the assessment until early next year. I think it will push back the completion of the report.

Also thrown into this mix is the data-poor workshop. Weakfish has been identified as a species with poor data so has been added to the data-poor workshop agenda sometime in November. We don't know what influence their decisions will have on the current assessments. We are moving forward assuming that it is not going to have much influence, but they might decide in November that we need to start over, which hopefully isn't the case. There is that unknown right there.

Then the assessment will be done early next year, and then the peer review won't be until June of 2009. That was one of the reasons we wanted to delay the assessment workshop. We've just got some big outstanding issues. We didn't want to be rushed, and we also didn't want to have too much time between the completion of the assessment and when we have to present it. That was sort of our justification for requesting a delay in the timeline.

Overall it was a successful data workshop. We got a lot of work done. We made some key decisions that should improve our ability to evaluate this stock. We're investigating some new data and some new methods, and the work is progressing mostly on schedule despite the one-month bump in the assessment workshop and given the unknown of the data-poor workshop and their outcome. That was the end of my presentation. I wanted to put this up, the revised timeline. I don't know if that's big enough for folks to see.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Any questions for Jeff on his presentation? Yes, Rob.

MR. O'REILLY: Jeff, you certainly grabbed my attention. The release mortality of 10 percent is something that has been around the technical committee for probably ten years. There never seemed to be much of a basis to lower it from 20 percent; albeit the 20 percent was done by consensus as well, reduced from the original 35 percent, which had been based on a spotted seatrout study out of Texas, but that goes back to about 1990.

The 10 percent, however, it would have been preferable to have some basis for doing that. There are some very limited studies. Malkoff and Hines in New York had a study which showed very low release mortality, but it was a very reduced area. The Fish and Wildlife Service had one in Virginia which showed low release mortality. There was never the promised study for weakfish to have a warm water, at depth, hook-and-release study in the Mid-Atlantic to really get a handle on what might be the overall hook-and-release mortality.

So, you know, you really got me on that, but at the same time the other thing that we faced with other assessments is bringing information forward when we've made this type of change, so I would assume that the committee plans to have a run with 20 percent as well as with the 10 percent so the management board can at least see the signals that were present in the last assessment. If the same conditions are used, this is to signal this assessment. Is that the case?

MR. BRUST: I guess to the second point first. Certainly, we haven't spoken about it in detail, but I certainly expect that we will do at least one run using previous configurations of the model with just updated data. But to get to the discard mortality, when we discussed this, your name came up quite a bit about this deep water, warm weather concern. You are right, there aren't that many studies.

We were able to come up with – some of the more historical members came up with some of the discussion that had gone on previously. In addition, there was a new study that was found I believe in North Carolina that encompassed several months within a year, including some warm weather months.

I can't recall off the top of my head whether they were deep water, but reviewing all of the data that was available – yes, water temperatures ranged from about 14 to 27 degrees. I don't see depths. It expanded over 2000 and 2001. I don't have all the details here. The bottom line is we just took the averages from each of these studies – or the ranges

from each of these studies and averaged them and it came out to 10 percent.

Then what we also did is this North Carolina Study encompassed some warm weather months. They actually had estimates by different months, and so we took the higher rate for the warmer months and did an estimate based on, well, I guess a wave-specific mortality rate to include a higher mortality rate for the warmer months. The bottom line, it turned out to be about 10 percent average over the year. So there is some level of justification for moving down to this, but as I mentioned earlier I expect we will do a run or two with previous specifications with just updated data.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Does that help, Rob?

MR. O'REILLY: Yes, the last point is the most important.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Any other questions of Jeff?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN V. O'SHEA: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's not a question as much as a clarification on the bottom line here. I think this is great that the board is getting an update from Jeff. It says "peer review workshop", and that is actually going to go to the SAW/SARC process in the spring, in 2009.

The reason I bring this up is we have had slippage with this species in the past, and the fact that we're committed to the SARC means that is not going to be a negotiable deadline to that process. So, getting an update at this point and the board staying with Jeff and ensure if there are any problems that we're able to respond and support the technical guys, it will be important to make that because the alternative, if we fall out of there, is, number one, a credibility issue with the Northeast Fishery Science Center, because those spots are in high demand. Then the second is the added expense to the commission to do an independent peer review.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you for that update. Dr. Daniel.

DR. DANIEL: I was just going to ask if we saw any positive signs in the data workshop based on any of the indexes or perhaps the age-structure information, what we are seeing. I know in North Carolina our landings dropped off to about 150,000 pounds. All of you that fished on our dock during the annual

meeting, I think we caught the last of them down there.

MR. BRUST: I wish I could give you some good news. Coast-wide landings are down to about 390 metric tons, which I believe is the lowest in the time series. I guess if you're scraping for something good, New Jersey and New York provided samples this year, but the stock itself – without having done the assessment, I don't want to reach too far, but the trends don't look positive.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: That's always a nice note to end on. Any other comments for Jeff? Yes, Rob.

MR. O'REILLY: Jeff, I was very encouraged by your mention of the standardization procedures at Virginia Tech we will be using. I want to see if you, at least, share my enthusiasm of where this could lead. What Virginia Tech plans to do on one level – to talk about at one level is to look at a trawl survey, whether it be Delaware, New Jersey, wherever it may be, and look for auto-correlation as one aspect.

They will look to see if the sites that are sampled or the times of the sampling are introducing some bias essentially into the catch-per-unit effort, the catch per tows and make adjustments, and I just think this sounds pretty straightforward, but it is neat and I'm not sure that anyone else has tried that before.

It may be a big help for other species, because the problem is you have – whether it's a trawl survey, whether it is the MRFSS CPUE for weakfish, whether it is a pound net survey for something else, you have all these different surveys and you're trying to incorporate them to talk about a unit stock. What I think Virginia Tech is going to do shows some promise.

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Rob. Did you want to respond?

MR. BRUST: Well, I certainly agree with Rob. What they're doing is very interesting. They're a lot smarter than I am, and it's very interesting to me. I do believe that if they can show something that could prove useful down the road, some of our historically biggest surveys are the ocean surveys.

The NMFS Survey and the New Jersey Survey are two aged surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, but we struggle every year because of the timing of the migration versus the timing of the survey, and is it a big year class or is it just they were moving out at that time.

So if they could find some signal within that series, I think, yes, it could provide a lot of information for us.

OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN

CHAIRMAN AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Jeff. Is there any further business to come before the Weakfish Board? Seeing none, the meeting is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 1:55 o'clock p.m., August 19, 2008.)