ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

MEETING OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

Friday, October 6, 1995

Alexandria, Virginia

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MR. COLVIN: We have one principal agenda item this morning and we will turn to that shortly. Before we do, we will call the roll and I will call for any additional agenda items.

Mr. Executive Director, please call the roll.
(The roll was called.)

MR. DUNNIGAN: Mr. Chairman, you have 13 members present and you have a quorum.

MR. COLVIN: Are there additions to the agenda?
(No response)

Seeing none, we will proceed. It is the Chair's intention that we try to move expeditiously during this discussion so we can all get on the road earlier than we planned today. The Chair will turn it over to the staff for presentation of the port sampling program.

MR. DUNNIGAN: I think what we are here to talk about this morning is the current status of the northeast biological sampling program and what some of the problems in that program currently may be and what role the states and/or the Commission might play in resolving them.

I propose that the best way for us to go about this is to let Jack Travelstead lead off. The issue has come to the Policy Board on referral from the Statistics Committee, where the issue came up in Providence in July. After that I think that Dr. Serchuk is ready to give us a briefing from the

standpoint of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center about the program and the importance of it for stick assessments and what some of the problems may be.

Dr. Kline will then make a presentation about a series of meetings that were held with your staffs and what some of the results of those were. With that as background, then, I think we will try to spend some time talking at the director level within the states about what some of the opportunities are that we see for us to assist in working on this issue both at the state level and at the Commission level. So that is the plan here for this morning. With that, I will turn it over to Jack Travelstead.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: Thank you, Jack. Over the last several months, I guess, since last spring, the Statistics Committee has been working on the statistics MOU to implement a unified system up and down the Atlantic coast. I think you are all quite familiar with that and we will be signing that MOU at the Annual Meeting.

But throughout that series of meetings there have been a number of sidebar issues that have come up before the Committee that tend to deal with the more current issues, the more day to day what we call short-term issues, and we have attempted to discuss those with the different groups at the National Marine Fisheries Service, the northeast region, or whoever tended to deal with those.

A couple of months ago, I think it was New York's representative who brought up the situation where because of retirements or layoffs or just plain loss of personnel biological sampling that NMFS normally does would not occur in several of the states for lack of personnel.

Obviously, this is a major concern for the Committee. There were two meetings that were set up in August in an effort to discuss with NMFS how the problem might be resolved, might individual states share personnel with NMFS to provide for the sampling that needs to be done. There was a lot of discussion about the types of sampling that needed to be done, how it has to be conducted in order to continue the correct time series of data, how many people were needed, was there any money available from NMFS to pay state people, were states able to hire people or not -- I know some states have feezes on like Virginia.

There was quite a bit of discussion of that at the two August meetings. At the last Statistics meeting there were still a lot of unanswered questions as to whether or not there was money available from NMFS to assist the states. I believe it was Phil Coates who recommended that the entire discussion be elevated to the Policy Board with the NMFS personnel to see if the matter could be resolved. We really, quite frankly, did not feel that we were able to resolve at the level of the Statistics Committee, and so it has been elevated here today. That is essentially where we are.

MR. DUNNIGAN: We wanted to get to this matter as soon as possible, which is why we have dovetailed this meeting with the meetings that were held yesterday.

Questions?

(No response)

I guess, then, I would ask Fred Serchuk if you want to proceed here and sort of -- I know we have had meetings at the regional level with staffs, but I think it would be helpful for the directors to get some background from the Center as to what the nature of the issue is.

DR. SERCHUK: Thank you very much. Perhaps I might start off with an overview on how we view the collection of statistics and biological sampling. To start off with, I think it is apropos in a sense to recount what Mark Twain mentioned regarding publication of his obituary. He said, you know, "Rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated."

I think we can apply the same sort of phraseology to the collection of biological samples. The program is not dead. It is a fundamental mission of the National Marine Fisheries Service. It is a core activity within the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. It is essential from our point of view to maintain the program, to provide the underpinnings of the scientific data, essential for understanding the productivity of the system, the impacts of fishing, and data essential for the provision of advice and development of management programs.

I hope there is not any disagreement among members of this Policy Board on that. In fact, in that sense, we feel very much the way that Jack espoused in an article in <u>Fisheries</u> a few years ago when he pointed out that the collection of statistics is a common challenge to us all, particularly in times of reduced resources, both personnel and fiscal resources.

Nonetheless, unless it is addressed as a long-term process, without overcoming short-term difficulties, we will not make any progress on it. The Center is committed to continue the program of collection of biological samples. It is true that we have great challenges presented to us in terms of downsizing of our agency. Quite frankly, we do not even know where our agency might be next month in terms of where we have been.

We, like other scientific and resource agencies -- our funding is uncertain right now. Nonetheless, we are created to being creative, we are committed to rethinking how we maintain our programs under changing circumstances. As you all know, in May of this past year the statistics investigation was transferred from the Center to the northeast region, in large part reflecting the increasing responsibilities placed on the statistics program that related directly to management.

The mandated programs for collection of statistics, these have just been emanating from the management programs in place. In that sense, we were confronted with the difficulty of

having our traditional port agents who had done the biological sampling in the Center not having as much time as in the past, less time, due to completion of duties related to mandatory programs emanating from management.

In the face of no action anywhere else, we will still do biological sampling. We are committed to do that. We feel that in the short term that is not the optimum approach. The optimum approach is that we are doing biological sampling, as I mentioned, for two reasons: to better understand the dynamics of the system, the impacts of the fishery, and to support management.

There are other interests, I think, that are shared by other agencies, including the states and including ASMFC, that I think represent common ground. To the extent that we are all challenged by changing circumstances there are probably economies of scale that we ought to be thinking about.

Quite frankly, because we feel that the collection of biological samples is so important, without any additional resources or without any commitment for participation or collaboration, we will reprioritize to ensure that we do collect the biologic samples. But of course when you reprioritize in a zero sum game, something comes off the other end. Our overall efficiency, of course, will suffer as we will be trying to do it all -- we are treading water. But still it is a core program.

I see there is a proprietary interest on behalf of

virtually all the states -- I would say all the states -- and the ASMFC to cooperate, as Jack mentioned, in a shared vision of where the data collection system should be. It is important, I think, that we understand what is being collected, why it is being collected, so that these needs of all the agencies and management can be elucidated early on.

The statistics and the assessments from the biological samples will be utilized not only -- I mean the assessment science is just a conduit for presenting information. The implications of the assessments on management should impact or will impact everybody here.

Presently we collect samples on over 30 different species. In virtually all cases, species for which samples are being collected are species which are currently covered by management programs, either federal management programs, interjurisdictional management programs, or are species in which management plans are contemplated.

The intensity with which the sampling is conducted depends on a number of factors. One factor is, of course, we want to ensure that we obtain sufficient numbers of samples to adequately characterize the composition and age structure of the catches, both by harvesting sector and by stock unit.

Second, we want to ensure in our sampling that to the extent the management program requires a certain level of sophistication in terms of the approach taken in management --

it is a very data-intensive management approach quota system where you really need a significant amount of information. That also affects how we collect our samples, the intensity with which we collect our samples.

It is also important to realize that the collection of samples in terms of background for assessment is not something you do on a one-time bases. Time series need to be established. This is why, again, I reiteriate sort of a long-term vision here, a long-term planning process is essential. You just cannot turn around an assessment of a species if you know that there is going to be a brush fire next year on species X. We can begin collecting samples, we can start the process of analysis, but it really requires a longer term commitment than that.

Our priorities are also -- this is something that perhaps you may know about, but I think it is so important that I will stress it -- the priorities in terms of the Center's response to management needs are funneled through the steering committee of the SARC and SAW process. Twice a year the regional SAW process, stock assessment review process, peer review process, in which assessments are developed at subcommittees, are vetted through a stock assessment review committee, are then presented at public venues. That whole process is set by the steering committee. Priorities are established at the steering committee, what stocks and what

assessments are done twice a year.

The members of that steering committee are the executive directors of the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, the executive director of the ASMFC, the regional director, and the Center director. Our sampling priorities, our approach to data collection is really reflective of what the needs are as espoused or as agreed to by this committee.

In response to changing needs, this process has now embraced species which were formerly not traditionally embraced within the process. For example, at the stock review process that was done this past spring we evaluated tautog, a species I know is of great interest here but was not one that normally would have been considered as part of the process. I think that is where we should be heading, that is part of embracing a partnership, part of embracing collaboration.

We are receptive and responsive to the needs as they are made clear to us. The steering committee sets the terms of reference for the entire process. Now, where does that leave us in terms of our sampling? In terms of our sampling, again, because of downsizing and because of the transfer of responsibilities, it becomes much more difficult. It was mentioned a few minutes ago that some states have a freeze on hiring. So do we.

Nonetheless, we are committed to get on with the job. We hope that this can be done collaboratively. There are

economies of scale, certainly, that could be brought to bear here so that we can be assured that the data collection system is proceeding to meet all the needs, or at least most of the needs that can reasonably be expected.

The technical details of where we are in terms of our staffing, I think, have been touched upon in the memorandum that Lisa has prepared and presented to you in terms of the two technical discussions that occurred in August, so I do not want to dwell on that. Many issues in terms of how sampling should be approached and tradeoffs in sampling are covered there. I think from a policy point of view it would be inappropriate to dwell on those aspects.

From my perspective, I think the most important thing is are we going to -- is a feeling that there is room for collaboration in approaching biological sampling. Again, Jack noted in his editorial about how it would be counterproductive to argue about who is in charge rather than focusing on where do we want to go, what are our common interests and how do we get there rather than trying to say this is the traditional responsibility of NMFS, we do not have any money, so you proceed along those lines. We will, we will do the best we can, but we are challenged in the same way every other resource agency is challenged.

It simply means that given these trying circumstances, from a policy point of view, I think we need to discuss can we

do the job better in collaboration, in partnership, than we can by relying on a traditional model that perhaps may not be appropriate any longer, given the changing times.

I think I would like to end there. I would be glad to answer any questions as the discussion proceeds, but as I see it, I think that is sort of the challenge before the Policy Board today.

MR. COLVIN: Thanks, Fred. Are there any questions?

MR. DUNNIGAN: I think I have the number, but it might be best to get some more -- at least the questions I have would be better after we get some more of the presentation out.

MR. COLVIN: If there are no questions for Fred, I think we should move on to Lisa.

[NOTE: Dr. Kline was not directly at a microphone and was also beneath the AC fan, hence the recording was substandard.]

DR. KLINE: What I have been asked to present is an overview of some of the information that was given out at two meetings that we held in August through the Northeast Fisheries Science Center personnel, the regional personnel, as well as the individual states from Maine through (inaudible).

All this information is included in the packets that were sent out. A lot of it, as Fred said, is technical and I am not going to dwell on a lot of the details. You can look over the information in the packets at your leisure.

(Transparency)

We held two regional meetings in August. The first meeting was held August 16 for the states from Maine to New York. New Hampshire and Connecticut were unable to attend those meetings. We did get a written response from Connecticut addressing a lot of the questions that were asked at the meeting.

The second meeting was August 30 for states from New Jersey to North Carolina and Maryland was the only state that was unable to attend that meeting.

(Transparency)

The major focus of both of these meetings was to facilitate the exchange of information on both the federal sampling program's biological information as well as the individual state programs. We also tried to facilitate information on some of the sampling needs and priorities of the federal and the state fisheries and to determine whether or not there were any complementary activities between the states and the feds.

We initiated some discussions on what types of cooperative arrangements we could look into to try to mesh the priorities of the states and the federal agencies and build a cooperative program for the collection of biological information.

(Transparency)

In your packets there is an overview of this program.

Again, I will not go into any great detail. The protocol for the collection of biological information is to collect 100 (inaudible) and 25 scales or otoliths per 200 tons of landings.

This protocol is stratified by (inaudible) category, by gear and stock area.

Also included in your packets is a listing for sampling for 1995 and 1996 by port and species, and that will give you an indication of the priorities that the Northeast Fisheries Science Center has for the individual ports.

(Transparency)

The basic requirements that the Center has to continue biological sampling are six to nine full-time FTEs, with one full-time person in six ports listed here, and then three roving samplers to continue collection in the areas in-between.

(Transparency)

I am not going to go into any great detail about the individual state programs. This provides a basic overview of the fishery-dependent biological sampling programs by state. Only two states, Virginia and North Carolina, have dedicated directed programs for sampling biological information. Both of these states do provide that information to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

We have no information for Maryland and New Hampshire. There are limited programs in Maine, Connecticut, and Delaware.

Maine samples the lobster and northern shrimp fisheries.

Connecticut samples the American shad gill net fishery, and

Delaware samples the inshore gill net fishery.

There are also sea sampling programs in Massachusetts and Connecticut and in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

(Transparency)

There were some general issues that were raised during these meetings. The first one was whether or not the at-sea observer programs of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center as well as individual states could be used to supplement some of the fishery-dependent information.

There was some uncertainty about whether or not this was possible. The indication from the Center was that it might be possible as long as the samples on board are culled by market categories. This may provide a long-term solution or supplement to the information but probably would not be capable of being put into effect in the short term.

This may be something that NMFS and the states may want to look into for the long term.

The second question concerned the National Marine
Fisheries Service prioritization mechanism for prioritizing for
the specific species. Frank did address this (inaudible). It
might be something that needs to be looked at down the road to
try to link specific state species-specific priorities with the
priorities coming out of the SARC process.

Last was more of a statement that no matter what cooperative program or what sample program is set up, there would always be a continued need for training and supervision of the samplers as well as coordination of the separate programs that we put in place.

(Transparency)

Following each of these meetings there were several follow-up issues that were given back to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, to the individual states, and also to the regional office. Again, the responses from the Fisheries Science Center are included in your packets. I am just going to go through these relatively quickly.

First was that the Center respond to any statespecific questions on the species priority list. At the time
that we received the response there were no specific questions.
We have since received some questions from Massachusetts, and I
am sure that some were answered by Fred and the ones that were
not will probably be responded to later.

The second question was whether or not the sampling of hardparts would be conducted on an every-other-year basis as opposed to on an annual basis. The response from the Center was that it was essential that the hardparts be collected on an annual basis as well as on a quarterly basis to support stock assessments. This was essentially to provide a long time series of information and to sample the full range of year classes in

the stocks that are sampled.

The third question was whether the Center was capable of processing hardparts that were collected by the individual states. The answer to that was that they probably could as long as the Center was currently processing samples for those species and it is going to take some coordination with the fishery biological investigation section in the Center.

The fourth question came up in both meetings, the question of whether or not NMFS would have any funding that would be available to go to the individual states or to the Commission to assist them in biological sampling. This issue is currently under review by the National Marine Fisheries Service and will be contingent on the FY 1996 budget, so we do not have a definite answer on the funding situation.

The last four issues are more technical issues, whether or not the states can transmit raw data back to the National Marine Fisheries Service. The answer to that is yes, as long as the states follow NMFS data processing procedures and formats. The second was a request for NMFS to provide data format standards and protocols by species. That information is included in your packets. (Inaudible) request to obtain schedule for the at-sea observer program and that should be coming in about a week or two weeks.

(Transparency)

The issues that were given to the states as follow up,

first of all, were to give the Northeast Fisheries Science

Center any questions that they had on the NMFS species priority

list. Again, the only response we had on that was

Massachusetts. The second was whether to provide the National

Marine Fisheries Service with any state-specific biological

sampling needs and priorities. We did receive responses from

four states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, and Virginia.

On this question, most of the state-specific priorities seemed to mesh somewhat with priorities of the National Marine Fisheries Service. This is probably due to the SARC process. The state priorities are based on state needs, Commission needs, as well as Council needs, since they do sit on the Council as well.

Again, this may be something that we may need to look into the future to try to find a better process to mesh statespecific needs with federal priorities.

The third and fourth follow ups were linked. It was a question of whether or not the states would provide assistance to the National Marine Fisheries Service if funding were available and what the cost of that assistance would be. Four states responded and the response was that, yes, they probably could assist NMFS; however, they would need funding to do it. The four states did provide estimates of the funding that they would need and, again, that information is included in your packets.

The last question was whether or not the states could provide assistance between the period of October 1, 1995 through April 1, 1996, which appeared to be a critical period, and this was contingent on NMFS providing little or no funding to the states for that assistance.

The four responses we received were basically that the states could not provide any assistance to NMFS without any funding, and I think we got similar indication from the states during those meetings.

(Transparency)

The last follow up was follow up to the Northeast Regional Office and that was to provide an estimation of the sampling levels that port agent system could provide between the period of October 1, 1995 and April 1, 1996 as kind of a stop gap measure until a long-term solution could be put in place, and also to provide a summary of logistics that would be required to link the biological sampling to the port agent system.

We have not received any response from the regional office. As Fred stated, the biological sampling is probably not going to be able to be linked back up to the port agent system and, therefore, we need to come up with a better solution, or another solution, I guess.

There is a lot more information -- technical details -- that is in your packets. This is just a basic overview of

what occurred at those two meetings. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

MR. DUNNIGAN: Would you put back up the slide that says NMFS basic requirements.

(Transparency)

We may continue to return to that issue. Thank you. What generated this slide?

DR. KLINE: Information that was given by Daryl Christianson from a review that the Center did on what they would need to continue biological sampling. Daryl may want to respond to that.

MR. CHRISTIANSON: Basically this is what we had intended to do internally had there not been a hiring freeze. This was the Center plan on how we would handle biological sampling. None of the field positions were approved or hired and they are unlikely to be. That was what we estimated it would take to do the job.

MR. DUNNIGAN: With the reference to full-time FTEs, was it your thought that you would actually hire full-time individuals or would that be perhaps 19 half-time people?

MR. CHRISTIANSON: It would be a variety. We would prefer to have full-time FTEs. We are looking at other options and will continue to look at other options.

MR. DUNNIGAN: I guess what I was operating under was the sense that prior to May the biological sampling was picked

up by port agents as sort of an add-on activity, and that it was not something that either required or necessarily could be done very effectively by someone whose job was to do just port sampling.

But I guess the sense I am getting is that your planning might have put you in that position, of having people whose full-time job was to collect port samples.

DR. SERCHUK: There are a couple of aspects. I think Daryl is correct. This is sort of an optimal approach to maintain and perhaps ensure that not only our sampling protocol was not only put out, of course, but we would actually garner the samples that we felt were needed.

There are a couple of issues here that I think are important and I think these issues should be discussed. One of the benefits of having the traditional role model of the statistical port agents collecting the samples is they knew the fisheries, and they were in the ports and they had insight into when landings were coming in.

When you remove that expertise and bring additional people in, you are starting from a different starting point. You may even be able to put somebody down there full time; you do not have the entré. What we would hope in any system is that we would work with the expertise that is available, whether it is state expertise available or whether it is still our statistical people in the ports doing mandated collection of

statistics. We do need an entré there.

I think we need to expand it and think about doing things differently, but trying to work with the existing linkages that we have.

The other thing, because the landings patterns can be very erratic, it is not as if you can sit back and say, well, on Thursday I am going to send someone to New Bedford or on Friday I am going to send someone to Rockland. It just does not work that way. You could be there and there would be no samples, no boats landings, or the boats landings are not the samples you need.

So in one sense the idea of bringing the FTEs on was to have that surveillance around it. If the samples came in, you were there and accessible to the samples. That is the model that is embodied within that. I think the roving sampler was sort of an accommodation, to be able to have the flexibility to switch your sampling geographically.

As Daryl said, this approach, from our point of view, is not very useful, because we are not getting any of those positions.

MR. DUNNIGAN: Your position within what you can do right now in the Service is constrained by a hiring freeze, and that is not always the same thing as being in funding problems. I wonder if you are in a position to sort of clarify right now what is the relative status of your issues, FTEs and hiring

freezes, as opposed to having funds available?

DR. SERCHUK: I think it is a good question. We are proceeding in terms of our internal discussions, recognizing that the hiring freeze and the downsizing of the federal funding are not going to go away -- in fact, it has just begun. Anyone who thinks we have reached the nadir here -- we realize we are going to be a lot smaller in terms of FTEs than we are in terms of FTEs, full-time permanents.

We basically pushing that aside and recognizing that is a reality. There are ways to accomplish the job without encumbering FTEs. Obviously, there are cooperative approaches, there are contracts, and then there are other types of programs that could be implemented in terms of funding, in terms of internships, so on and so forth. There are lots of different ways I think that this can be approached, if we recognize that we are not going to be able to approach it from the way we have historically done it. We are not going to be able to have full-time FTEs doing this program.

There are many options, I think, available to us. We discussed a whole spectrum of them. The money, I think, only comes into it in that there are some cost-effective ways to do it and there are less cost-effective ways to do it. You go to one approach and ask, for example, the states to be partners and then ask, well, in order to do it, you need to pay for the equivalent of a full-time state person to do it. That is a

different cost expense and actually different logistics than if you basically mediated that through contractual services with an independent contractor or through an internship or through a state program or a voluntary program.

I hope you do not get confused, I urge you not to get confused with a lump sum contract type of approach in the short term and what we can do with X amount of dollars relative to where we want to go, what we need, and how we might go about that and meet all our needs in the most cost-effective manner. We all have these problems.

I hope I answered your question.

MR. PIERCE: Fred, could you fill us in as to how you are filling the hole now? Who within the Center is in the field collecting these samples? Clearly, if, for example, you have the age and growth people out there collecting the biological samples, it is less time for them to do age and growth work, it means we have fewer keys that are critical for assessments, and we all know that as a group of states we are highly dependent upon those assessments.

Is it the age and growth unit that is picking up the slack and will they most likely be the individuals or the unit that would continue to pick up the slack until the states get involved perhaps in a bigger way?

DR. SERCHUK: Those people have been involved. We have had contractual services, for example, with Ward College.

We have also had internships from Mass Maritime. We are trying to utilize all the resources without trying to take away people whoa re having an ongoing critical activity and moving them off. We are trying to be very flexible and very plastic about it.

If we take our age and growth people off and take our assessment people off to go out in the field, we are collecting essential information but something will give. We are still getting cooperation from the statistics, that has not stopped. To the extent that they can accommodate our needs, given that they have met all their priorities, they are willing -- and there is some accommodation there -- to continue biological sampling as an interim measure, as a stoppap, because their job is going to get worse in terms of prioritization of mandated activities. We cannot count on that in the long term.

MR. PIERCE: The statement regarding the need for the biological samples, the otoliths, the length frequencies, the scales, the Center has said that we must continue to have these hardparts each quarter of the year. Is that correct? I ask the question because one of the questions we raised as a state, and I think other states may have the same question, to what extent do you really need to get these samples every quarter, every year? Can you go every other year?

Assessments that have been done to date that we have relied on, have we had the availability of all of those by year keys or have we acquired it, for example, for one year and used

that a key for a few other years because information for those years has not been available?

I would like to know how flexible the assessments are with regard to these keys, because if you do not have to collect all of these samples on a year-to-year basis, then certainly it frees up a lot of time to focus on the length frequencies that are, of course, important in characterizing the abundance of fish by age groups and that are critical for the assessments.

DR. SERCHUK: I would like to recast your question and ask the question in a slightly different formulation. It is unimportant in a very narrow sense to talk about what we need for the assessment. The assessment is a tool. We do not do assessment just for assessment's sake. The assessment is a link to a good management program and the questions that are being asked in the management program often require, okay, what happened this year? What happened last year? To the extent that the management program depends on annual changes and to the extent that they want that precision within the assessments in the process of managing annual changes in quotas -- to the extent that you do not use annual data, active data for the year, the evaluation of the resource will not be as precise, not as accurate.

This is a great concern expressed by the Councils and other places to parameterize the uncertainty in the assessments. I think we have gone some way in trying to show what the

uncertainties are, to parameterize the uncertainties in the forecasts, that is, our evaluation of the probable future conditions.

We know that changes occur each and every year in these resources. These are dynamic resources. To the extent that you sample every other year or use combined age-length keys over a few years, what you are essentially doing is bringing a substance into that process that will make the bounds of uncertainty much wider than they currently are. That is simply clear, because the assumption is, well, if I collect the age composition in 1995, I do not need to collect it in 1996, I can apply the 1995 age keys.

That assumes the growth rates are the same, that assumes all of the underlying parameters are the same, and they change. I think we need to know that going in, or remind ourselves going in, where that applies.

Second, in terms of the adequacy of the sampling, the adequacy of this approach, we have made great strides in the SARC process to present in each one of the assessment reports a detailed listing of the number of samples that were collected by quarter, zone, and so forth, down to the details, so they can be examined, they can be scrutinized from a technical point of view, so people have an understanding of where the samples are coming from, what times of year, where the gaps are, and so forth.

To the extent that that is adequate is then a decision that has to be made by the technical people involved. We know there are shortcomings and we are trying to address them. I think you have to put it in the context of what are the management needs? I think there are certain basic requirements that need to be captured. We need to capture when the fishery is occurring, the whole spectrum, is it desirable to capture all the gear components? We certainly do not want to have a management program that looks at it and says you have not characterized my gear component.

You all know the problems with that. I am not telling you anything that you do not live day to day with. So to the extent that you anticipate that that is going to be a concern, then they have to be incorporated into the assessment.

MR. FOTE: I am learning a lot about samples. I want to try to get clear in my mind the requirements for the person. You want somebody who is really familiar with the fisheries, in that area, somebody who knows all the protocol -- somebody could be on standby --

DR. SERCHUK: The collection of biologic samples is a technical function. I mean, it does not really require a brain surgeon, in my mind, to collect biological samples.

MR. FOTE: But as you pointed out, you were using port agents, because they were familiar with the fisheries.

DR. SERCHUK: They were familiar with the fisheries,

and the fact is if you are going to collect samples, particularly in those cases where collection of samples is a voluntary exercise -- I mean, you are really questioning the harvesting sector, "May I sample your catch," if it is not mandated.

I do think you want to bring this within the context of there is a system out there. We do not have biological samples that are disconnected from statistics, that are disconnected from the assessment process. From a purely operational point of view we just need bodies to collect samples in the appropriate fashion.

The details of when samples need to be collected, in which stock areas, and which gear types, that can be specified in advance and has been specified in advance in coordination with the scientists from the Center and from the states involved with the process in relationship to management needs. For actual collection, that just requires a person.

MR. FOTE: But I am saying, from a management point of view, what I am looking to do is hire a person who can basically go out, is familiar with the fishery, can be on a standby basis when that fishery is active -- does not have to be full time, just be involved when you need to go down to the docks, collect those samples, and that is going to be cost effective.

What I am trying to do is weigh how that would best be served, not worrying about funding, because that is between you

and the states, how to do it, but how could I best do that process being the most cost effective?

When I look at contractor work, I see that is not cost effective a lot of times. Also, I see some of the expertise about that fishery missing. Just running in my mind, I look at a state biologist who is responsible for a certain type of fishery, maybe three or four fisheries, and he is handling, say, surf clams, or he is handling whatever. He might be the person. The problem is, where do you get the funding to make that part of his job or if he needs an extra person in that fishery, or do you send enough money down to a state to cover seven biologists who will do that sampling and make up that part of the salary?

What I am looking at, just from management point, is that one of the most cost-effective ways of doing it? Would that give you the type of person necessary to handle the problem?

DR. SERCHUK: I guess yes. Those are all important considerations.

MR. FOTE: That is what I am trying to understand, if this would fill that need. I do not know about the funding. That is a whole different ball game.

DR. SERCHUK: I think you have raise a whole array of issues that cannot be answered right now. Essentially what I think we need is a person to make contact and collect samples. There are other things that would enhance that process,

certainly would contribute to better communication between the scientific aspects and the harvesting sector, and we can build up from that. But essentially we need someone at a particular place at a particular point in time to be able to collect the samples.

MR. FOTE: I am looking at a state biologist who works in that state, knows the docks in the state, knows the fishermen in the state, would be able to get, hopefully, comfortably down to the dock and could be on a standby basis, doing his other jobs at the time, but have an allocation of time to accomplish that.

PARTICIPANT: You have got to talk to a few state biologists.

(Laughter)

MR. COLVIN: This discussion helped me to frame it. I think Fred just really kind of put it very succinctly and clearly. We have a process that we participate in, the states and the Commission, that identifies needs, including biological sampling needs, through the ISFMP, through our participation in the SARC Steering Committee. These have been identified, they will continue to be identified and refined over time, and over time they will be more closely adapted to our needs as they evolve.

The bottom line is that to collect those data there need to be people doing sampling and NMFS is not going to be

able to hire those people, period. So the question is, is that where we are? Is it appropriate to focus our discussion on that issue only at this point?

MR. DUNNIGAN: Yes, I think it is. And the "we," of course, is all of this individually as states and us working together collectively as a Commission. Where do we have strengths that we can bring that will make this work to everybody's benefit? That is what we have to hash out, I think, at a policy level right now.

I have a question, and it is a question of significance in priorities. As a Commission we have a series of priorities that are established through our fishery management plans, much the same as your assessment process tries to respond both to our needs as well as to the Councils. So all of the states are concerned about bluefish, or striped bass, or weakfish, or whatever, because the Commission has those things under management and that lays mandatory requirements on states.

In addition, outside of the Commission people around the table have a lot of concerns about things that are not managed by ASMFC but dearly affect their states. Groundfish in New England, for example, is not an ASMFC issue but it has major impact on states.

The way that we look at priorities differs sometimes, depending upon which of those two areas we are coming from. And I guess there are even some things where as states we have very

little interest because the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Councils talk almost complete control of those and there is not a lot of state impact. I might offer highly migratory species as one of those, but then I would show you how little I know or care about highly migratory species.

I guess what I am wondering is, is the process for priorities, setting what these 30 species are, there are probably some things that we as a Commission are very concerned about that do not blip on the radar screen right now -- I just leaned over to Gordon and I said, "Who collects biological samples on striped bass and how important is that?" That is probably our premier issue.

If we were to want to move forward as an institution and separately as states on some kind of a cooperative program, what do you think the opportunities are to really engage in some mutual planning, recognizing that we have a lot of interests that overlap but we each have some interests outside the areas of overlap, and if we are going to have really a joint program we have got to be able to cover both of those universes?

DR. SERCHUK: I hope it could be accomplished, Jack.

I also have five bosses. I have one Council. In one sense we have the Commission here. We have agency demands, and so forth.

I would like to have a reconciliation if we really had a policy about it. That is one of the reasons I think (inaudible) has actually been very good for us.

When you have different needs, often competing needs, you need a policy, you need to have good collaboration. If we do not have it, I do not see how we can succeed, Jack. If there are issues that you feel are not being recognized, I think we have to bring that to the fore. We have to move forward in a collaborative fashion.

MR. COLVIN: I guess I would look to the Board for some guidance here at this point as to our perceptions about the appropriateness -- well, any significant concerns we have about the issue that Jack raised. Do we have reservations about the data that are part of the port sampling program at present as we have seen in design that rise to such a level that we are not comfortable yet as states buying into a very, very full partnership and, if not, then how do we feel about working toward solving that problem that just flashed off the screen in terms of the need for nine FTEs' worth of effort to get working on this?

MR. FOTE: I looked through this to see what fish were being sampled and in what different ports. What I notice is that in some ports it was extremely important, because they were sampling, and some they were not even looking at. Like in Maine they did not look at bluefish at all, yet other states were looking at bluefish. Tautog and blackfish the same thing. It seems like blackfish, which is a regional fish, and we look at its size and age sampling right now, wouldn't that be done in

all the states? The same thing for bluefish, certain species of it. That is not being picked up, if I am looking at this thing right.

I guess what has been done previously is the Council or the region decides what is the priority, so it might be bluefish here and it is not up there, but maybe we need to know in the whole range. Looking at this, that is what my concern would be. I am a neophyte looking at these data, but that is what I saw was obvious. There were certain ports and certain states where there were no data being collected on a species but that species was important to that state.

DR. SERCHUK: Let me give a two-minute background on how the process works in terms of allocations of samples in the states, because that is not the way we do it.

MR. FOTE: That is what I want to know.

DR. SERCHUK: Essentially what is done is we would look at the landings patterns of the year just prior. We look at the landings patterns in terms of the distribution of landings by port, distribution of market categories within ports in relationship to the stock. If we were talking about a Gulf of Maine cod stock, for example, we would look at where the landings came in. The principal Maine ports are Boston, New Bedford, and so forth.

Then we would allocate the total samples required based on the considerations I previously spoke about and

ensuring that we maintain an adequate representation characterizing the landings.

Then we see by port which ports account for which fraction of the landings of that stock. That would be our initial allocation. Then we would recognize that in many cases we have to modify that, because certain ports would then have so many things that we would have to sample that we could not do it. Then we might say, well, for the Gulf of Maine stock we are saying that with whiting and herring and so forth all coming into Portland, we are overburdening Portland. We still get landings from Boston on it, so we would modify it.

It is also modified to recognize that some ports have two people, some ports have one person, and given the fact of what their performance was in previous years.

But that is essentially what we have done. We have taken it from a point of view of what the performance of the fishery is, what the likely performance of the fishery is in terms of getting landings in so we can get samples. But if you look at it on a state basis, solely on a state basis, it belies that in some cases we may trade off to measure on landings from a fleet in a different state.

From your point of view, you might say, well, my fishery is not represented. To the extent that some other state fishes in the same area with the same gear we made the decision that we are not going to characterize that fleet, we are going

to characterize your fleet.

MR. FOTE: And that is strictly on the commercial landings and not the recreational landings that those decisions are made?

DR. SERCHUK: Yes, we are talking right now -- the recreational sampling is done in a completely different system.

MS. ALDEN: None of my concerns are going to help our financial problems with this, but the fact that you are making biological sampling keyed up with the landings statistics, we have got a problem with coverage, which is no surprise to you, in eastern Maine. There are a number of fisheries which basically are ending up ignored not only in the statistical collection and, therefore, in the biological sampling, and also in the trawl survey side of things because of the bottom up there.

When I look at ocean quahogs, for example, we have a very contentious issue about ocean quahogs between the Councils. There is no statistical sampling, there is no biological sampling of the ocean quahogs that are being caught in eastern Maine. One of the problems, they were left out of the planning process by the Mid-Atlantic Council because they were forgotten. They were forgotten because they are in eastern Maine and is a very small fishery, but it is part of the resource that has been included in that management regime.

That is a graphic example of some of the problems as I

am looking at state resources right now -- we are going through a major downsizing. One of the things we are trying to do in the process of downsizing is to beef up our ability to do some monitoring and also possibly to beef up our statistical collection, because we feel as if there are no data coming out of those ports to make it possible for us to get included in the rest of the biological system.

I am not criticizing the effort that NMFS has done by saying this, but I am saying there are some gaps that are pretty important. Cod has been put out of the 1996 sampling process for the eastern Maine station. I am not convinced that Portland is going to capture all of what is going on in down east cod stock. So there are issues such as that that I think in any cooperative program are going to have to be on the table. It does not help the financial situation at all.

DR. SERCHUK: I agree 100 percent with what you said. It is a classic case of a state having proprietary interest in a resource. It brings revenues, it brings employment, and so forth. In the whole sphere of the challenge to us in terms of sampling quahogs, it is a very small thing in relationship to the whole context. It is very important to you. And something else would be very important to your state and your state and your state.

That is a reason that I think we need to enter into a common approach here, an integrated approach, because even if we

cannot get together in a combined system, we ought to get into a system that is an integrated system, so that if you start collecting ocean quahog samples within the state of Maine, for example, we can link that with the data processing system that we have for quahogs in general. I mean, I really think this is important.

MS. ALDEN: It is a problem, though, for a state to be told there is a federal management process, a Council process, going on and if you want to be included you have to collect your own statistics.

DR. SERCHUK: I did not say that.

MS. ALDEN: No, I know.

MR. PIERCE: Fred is right, we all have proprietary interests in these species, these management plans. In Massachusetts we certainly feel that all of us collectively have created a tremendous demand for biological information, a demand that up to this point in time we have expected the National Marine Fisheries Service to meet.

That certainly is unrealistic and I think it certainly is unfair, since we have created many problems for all concerned by way of the fact that we have chosen management strategies that are data-hungry, that cry out for many biological samples. It is going to get worse, not better.

Groundfish, for example, where the groundfish plan is developing it looks as if we are going to return to total

allowable catches, quota management in one form or another. That is going to be very data-hungry. We have fluke, continued management of fluke, very data-hungry. Scup management we are all involved in as a group of states at the ASMFC level and of course at the Mid-Atlantic Council level. That is going to be data-hungry if eventually the decision is made to go with quotas.

The same thing with sea bass. It is going to get worse as time goes on. Bluefish as well, perhaps. So it is definitely necessary, I feel, and Phil feels the same way, for us as a group of states to help out as best we can and, indeed, there needs to be a way for us to determine how to work better with the National Marine Fisheries Service, how to increase our cooperation, how to come up with a creative approach to gathering this information.

In Massachusetts we do not have any biological sampling program per se. We have put our priority on the seasampling aspects of data gathering and we have, up to this point in time, said we will let NMFS continue to do the good job that they do with biological sampling and we will supplement that with sea sampling, with the intent to get estimates of discards that seriously hamper the assessments.

So one thing we would like to explore as a state with the assessment scientists in particular is how can we best use the sea-sampling information to supplement and perhaps, in some cases, take the place of the biological sampling, since in sea sampling you do know where the fish were caught, you do not have to worry about an agent in the field using his or her knowledge of the fishery to figure out where the catch actually came from, especially if the catch occurred over the course of a long trip in five different statistical areas. It is a real difficult job for the sampler at the port.

We are, in house, Phil, myself, and other staff people within the agency that could influence how the different programs will go in the agency, trying to come up with some ideas that will involve a shifting of priorities within house, using our existing monies, and that will involve some additional monies, hopefully, coming from the National Marine Fisheries Service, to meet some of the demands that we have created through our involvement with the management process, whether it be groundfish or whether it be fluke or sea bass or scup.

We feel it is extremely important for us as a state to get more involved, for example, in the collection of biological information for scup and for sea bass, since if we use landings in other states to characterize what is coming out of our state waters we put ourselves and everybody else at a disadvantage since we have different management regulations.

Massachusetts landings are going to differ greatly in terms of size compositions from landings in Rhode Island or other states of fish taken from Mass waters, because we have a

9-inch minimum size on scup, and many scup that are caught in our waters and landed elsewhere are landed as small fish because the minimum size there is smaller.

So if the assessment scientists take the information acquired of landings in other states of scup taken from Mass waters and that information is used to expand the data base to characterize the entire fishery we are going to end up with a lot more smaller fish being caught from the resource than actually have been caught from the resource because of different management regulations.

There is no final decision yet made, of course, within our agency as to the extent to which we can make some changes in house, because it is going to take a little time for us to work out all the details, and we have to find out as well what funds will be provided by the Service but, as Fred said a little while ago, we are not going to know right away how many funds will be available for the different states to use, because the budget is not yet known, NMFS' fate is not yet known.

I suspect, therefore, that we are going to have a problem unless NMFS has been able to pick up the ball already from shifting priorities and using other people, we may have a problem in the last quarter of 1995 and we certainly will have a problem with the beginning of 1996.

I do not know when all of us as a group of states will be able to make those fateful decisions to determine how, in the

long term, we are going to deal with this biological sampling problem. I would like to think that we could resolve it for at least the middle of 1996 in terms of our knowing what to do, how to work better with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Optimistically, I would think maybe we could get it all worked out by the middle of 1996. It is hard to say. All I can say on behalf of Phil is we are going to make our best attempt to help out as best we can, but at this meeting today we cannot really provide the group with anything that will give an idea as to how we are finally going to fall out on this.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: I have a list of questions on the short-term status of things and I guess on the long term as well. Fred, can you tell us right now where the holes are in the system and what ports? Is this something that is all up and down the coast or have you all filled all the holes, at least on a short-term basis?

DR. SERCHUK: We do know where the holes are. Some of that information is in your packets. We have gone forward in looking at not only what the sample requests are but how well the sampling requests have actually been filled. It is clear, in information also included in the packets, we still -- we are doing this on an ad hoc basis, and that is very unsatisfactory. We will do our best on an ad hoc basis to ensure we can get as far along as possible.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: I guess I want to know is the system

about to collapse any minute and there will be no port sampling in the very short term or at such a minimal level as to be worthless?

DR. SERCHUK: We have our finger in the dike. We are trying to build a better edifice so that the water does not overwhelm us. We would like to basically say that we are not alone. Quite simply, we are up against some forces that are quite beyond our control. I do not want to sound like a broken record here in terms of fiscal and future status, but it is quite clear we do not know and, quite frankly, I do not even know whether there is going to be any money available from NMFS.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: Are there particular states where it is more of a problem?

DR. SERCHUK: Yes. Do you want to make a comment on that, Daryl?

MR. CHRISTIANSON: We can limp along, I think, for a few more months. (Inaudible) we cover Maryland, but as you go north it gets worse. Basically, we have very little capability in New Jersey at the present time. We coopt people who work for different divisions and send them over and I have traveled to Cape May. This is not an effective and efficient way to cover New Jersey, but for right now that would be our only option.

Basically, Maryland and Virginia are about the only places where we can struggle along for a while. Maine has gone the other way. We lost two people. We had two people located

in Portland who essentially did most of the biological sampling in southern Maine, New Hampshire, even went up and helped out at Rockland a bit. Those people were government employees and they are both gone. Even though they worked well into the summer, they are gone now, so we have a real disaster situation in Maine.

The only thing we can do right now is we can send people on travel from Woods Hole to Maine. In Boston we have a contract with Gordon College for a work-study situation there and we have one person (inaudible). At New Bedford we are going to have to start sending people over from Woods Hole lab, again. I may go myself. In Rhode Island I think we can struggle on a little while, but out contingency plan would be to have people from the Narragansett Lab. People from other divisions within the Center are simply coopted to go help out on an interim basis until we can come up with a better plan.

We have not done any specific samplings in Connecticut and we have not really addressed how we would do it. Long Island is a total disaster right now. We have two people out there (inaudible). If I had to cover that, again, I probably would have to send people on travel either from Woods Hole or from Sandy Hook.

The truth of the matter is, we are approaching, in my opinion, a very critical time period, particularly with the loss of the people in Maine. The nice thing about Portland is that

fish are brought into the Portland auction from all over Maine and from New Hampshire, even from northern Massachusetts. The fish were trucked in and we could get (inaudible) allowed us access to fish from a large area and from various stocks (inaudible).

But we will sample one way or the other if we have to put people on travel and tell them, "This is your job so many days a week." It is certainly not cost-effective to do that.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: I do not want to characterize it wrong, but it seems as if, as Fred put it, he has got his finger in the dike, that things are being covered in some areas rather poorly, the system is not about to collapse, data are being collected, so in the immediate short term things are relatively okay, but there is the longer term concern that the program is going to continue to erode.

I am just trying to figure out how this group, how ASMFC, the Statistics Committee, or whatever, can get involved in alleviating the situation. I think until the funding question is answered, it will be difficult for most of the states to commit. I think in the meantime perhaps staff here, working with some of the states where it is more critical, can begin to look at some sort of integrated program that might occur in the future. I do not know what else to recommend.

MR. GROUT: Certainly a cooperative integrated program is, I agree with Jack -- but until we start getting funding it

is not something the states can pick up. We have a staff and we are already overcomitted by four times. The help that you get from the permanent staff, at least, in our state would be very minimum.

Certainly, if you need bodies and funding comes in, we have a hiring freeze, we would not be able to hire someone full time. We found that out with the ACSEMA funding. We figured we could hire someone full time to undertake some of these projects and it just was not possible and it is not going to be possible in the political climate. Certainly the Republican state of New Hampshire started this out a long time ago.

One of the concerns I have is we have a constraint of we can hire people for full time for about six months and then we have to let them go. That would be one possibility if we got 100 percent funding. We could hire someone part time for six months. The other possibility is contracting but, quite frankly, contracting has a lot of administrative time and if the feds could contract I would just as soon have them take that up. If it helps by our having someone on for six months and NMFS could provide full funding without any kind of state matching, certainly there is a possibility that we could help out there if that meets the needs, if a part-time inexperienced person can do the job to meet the needs.

MS. ALDEN: It seems to me, given the sensitivity that Fred mentioned about needing the people who are doing the

collecting, needing to have them know the fishery and be able to be accepted on the docks and so forth, structurally I think there probably are some savings and some efficiencies in doing this cooperatively, and if states -- not every state may have this situation -- but if states have people in the field on a regular basis, it makes sense to me that we can find some efficiencies by doing this cooperatively.

What is clear to me, and I am agreeing with you, is that we cannot talk about that unless there is going to be some additional funding because we are all in that situation. I think it is a very constructive route to go to look at doing this cooperatively and to look at the quality control of the program, if you will, as being jointly managed by states and the federal system.

But we have to talk about funding, and I think it may come out to be a lower cost, but probably not much.

MR. COLVIN: I am sensing a couple of things here, and let me just lay them down and, if Jack wants to respond, he can. I am sensing there is a considerable sentiment among the Board members in support of exploring concepts for an integrated cooperative program, recognizing that the states have a unique situation that would need to be researched and carefully explored in the context of every state's financial circumstances, its ability to pay and ways in which it can use money right now.

States are moving in different directions. What is happening in New York, for example, is very similar to what we all know has happened in Maine; it is just not quite as far advanced, but it will be in six months. I suspect that the two of us not alone.

It is going to take a little bit of time and some staff work to try to pull all those things out and see where some accommodation can be made and, also, I think we need some more information from the Service, because clearly I am also hearing that federal financial support needs to be right up front as part of the discussion from the beginning, and I think we need to know a little more about that than, clearly, we do today.

If I am not mistaken, those are the sentiments I am hearing from the Board members. I am wondering, Jack, if you have some ideas about how we could take those sentiments and move forward.

MR. DUNNIGAN: Yes, I do. There is an initial question that you have to give me some guidance on, and that is how critical an issue is this for the Commission to take a lead and invest in a solution. We have \$950,000 that came to the Commission staff under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Law and I think we have spent it wisely on much better conduct and coverage for meetings, on a much better integrated advisory process, the staff support to the management boards (we have

done some considerable staffing up).

Yet, you know, this is all a question of tradeoffs.

We always say, well, we need more money to do this or that, but

I think we have to ask ourselves sometimes whether doing this is

more important than some of the things that we have under way

today. As Fred said, they are collect biological samples one

way or the other. They may have population dynamics scientists

out doing it, but that is a tradeoff that they have to decide.

One of the questions I guess I have for the Board is, is this issue critical enough that you want the staff to really get involved in it? Do you want the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to sort of take this on as a priority item on your behalf? Given all of the other things that we are trying to do right now in the ways our program has grown over the last year and a half. That, I think, is a serious question.

We could easily do that -- easily -- we could do that. Let me just say easily in terms of functionally we can maneuver a lot easier than most state and federal governments can and I think that we have got the interest and managerial capability within the Commission to carry it off. But it is going to be a question of how high does it blip on the priority scale?

Do we reprogram some of the funds that we have? Do we try to be more efficient in some of our other areas to make money available for this? Or do we say, no, we would be glad to do it, but we cannot touch it unless somebody, either Congress

or the National Marine Fisheries Service or the Fish and Wild Life Service, someone, comes up with brand new dollars?

If you want to give me this direction today, we will begin to proceed, if you say it is important enough. We will begin to proceed to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service in trying to build a cooperative program. That is going to have some impacts on the staff of the Commission and I want to make sure that you have got that level of commitment to it that you want us to do that.

MR. COLVIN: Jack, it is going to be difficult, I think, for the folks here to give you an answer to that question unless we understand a little better what you are asking us. I do not think you are asking us, and maybe I am wrong but we have got to make this clear, I do not think you are asking us whether or not we want to recommend diversion of some of the \$950,000 or whatever it is into the conduct of the sampling program.

I think you are asking us do you want to put staff time, energy, travel resources, et cetera, into putting together a cooperative program somehow? Those are very, very different questions and you are going to get very, very different answers to the two of them. Can we be a little more specific here?

MR. DUNNIGAN: Let us deal with your second question, then, first. That is more of a planning issue and a basic commitment issue. But I do not want to avoid the second one, really. I think it is important.

MR. COLVIN: I guess I am not sure yet. Are you suggesting that we put on the table here whether we use that money to conduct a biological sampling program?

MR. DUNNIGAN: No.

MR. COLVIN: That is what I wanted to make clear. You are not suggesting that. So let us move on to the other side of the question. I am going to turn to Jack Travelstead. I know Jack's committee has not had a chance to frame a specific recommendation on this, but you have talked to many members about it and I am wondering if you can share with us a sense of what the committee's feeling is likely to be.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: I think the committee would be interested in pursuing some sort of -- of course, the staff is going to be doing most of the work -- but looking at developing some sort of integrated approach to the problem. They are very excited about the ones they are doing on the statistics MOU and that major program, and it seems to me that this ties in nicely to all of that. In some ways it is hard to separate the two.

It is hard for me to speak for the committee, obviously, because we really have not gotten this far along in our deliberations. I can only say, based on what I know now, I think there would be quite a bit of interest in pursuing this.

The other question, about spending ACPACMA money, I would not want to stick my neck out on that one. That is a much bigger question.

Before I can say anything more than that, I think I need to hear, and perhaps the rest of us need to hear, what kind of impacts is this going to have on other things that the staff is doing. Is it going to impact development of some of these management plans we are working on? For two years we have been hearing now how important it is to have a bluefish plan done by this time next year. We are working on a shad management plan. We have a statistics MOU and all that goes along with that. And striped bass is going to come back and be an issue here in the next year or so. How does all of that tie together? Any comment, Jack, on the impacts of what we are talking about would have on all of that?

MR. DUNNIGAN: We had a plan for utilizing the funding that was available to us. We have mainly been able to execute that plan fairly faithfully. There are still some shortfalls. We do not have staff right now in a position, although it is assigned, to work assertively on the five species that under the purview of the South Atlantic Board. We do not have staff to deal with a number of critical species in the northern area, like northern shrimp and menhaden. And if we get into lobster fishery management...hired a population dynamicist.

We have come to the conclusion that we would be better off in the overall scheme of things not to develop that capability within the Commission staff but to try to build that capability more strongly within state staff. We have not had to

hire a law enforcement coordinator. We have had that service volunteered to us by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

I do not think that we have ended up spending as much money on meetings and travel as we set aside. We set aside a lot of funds to do that, because it was a very strong priority. So over the 10 months or so that we have had this program under way I think we have pretty much followed our plan and there is some opportunity to make some revisions in that.

The question is going to be where does this come into the revision? Right now Lisa Kline and her staff are working overtime and they are doing an exceptionally good time. We would have to find some way within the existing resources to supplement what she is doing in order to take this on. And do not expect Lisa to be able to go to all these meetings, because she is already going to too many as it is. We have to have somebody else to do it, and I have got some ideas. I think we can.

But I need to know that it is of a level of priority for the states that you want me to do that. That is all I am asking.

MR. COLVIN: It occurs to me, too, that it is a special area of impact here in terms of resources that the Commission invests in this program are invested in the northeast and our southern members may have some concerns. Two of them have obviously deemed this important enough to be here today on

a northeast discussion and we appreciate that. Dave and Susan, any thoughts that you have along the way or concerns you have about the directions we have been headed in we look forward to hearing.

MR. FOTE: I am looking at the management plans and we sat through a shad meeting yesterday, shad and river herring, and again I looked at this whole factor of sampling. I notice herring is basically sampled at only one part in Maine and shad is not even done. The data were explained to us yesterday and there are a lot of holes in them on shad and river herring, biological data. We definitely need those.

The same thing with bluefish, the same thing with blackfish. We are trying to do aging studies. Now the states are taking care of that and maybe there needs to be a cooperative arrangement where we share this information with the National Marine Fisheries Service to do that. Do I think that the Commission should be involved with a staff person full time handling this cooperation, and I can speak because I do not have to do any funding. I have serious doubts about that.

What I think needs to be done is somebody dedicated to facilitate this cooperative program that is going to go on in the interim period before we get it agreed. Maybe you cannot do that without an extra full-time or half-time person hired just specifically to do that task. Then you have travel pay. Maybe the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission does not have to

pick up all the travel pay for those meetings; maybe there needs to be a cooperative agreement for that.

I would seriously, at this point, because I know what is going on with all the other plans, be worried about that \$950,000 being used for all this, but I know that we need to have somebody at the Commission level to facilitate bringing this all together. That is not a full-time person, that may be part of a job. That is the way I look at it. Maybe I am wrong, but that is the way I figure it in my mind. I do not think we need to really do this at the Commission level. It should be an agreement between the states and National Marine Fisheries Service and maybe you just need to do a little facilitating to get that off the ground and coordinate what data you need that should be included in this program with the plans that you are doing.

MR. STEWART: I just had a question of Fred. This is very biologically specific for reports, trying to get a handle on what the distribution is, the size distribution, age frequency of a species. How do the new logbook systems come into play with your port agent data and do you find that it is augmenting the data analysis any so you have better stock assessment estimates as opposed to this, which is more biologically species specific?

DR. SERCHUK: It is difficult to answer that question across the board. If it is the first year of a mandated program

we know there are going to be problems with filling out the logbooks correctly, but idea was, and I think this is sensible, to put the onus on the people who are actually harvesting the resource, they know where it was taken, they know how much was taken, rather than trying to go one step back. You go to your primary source and I think the management plans recognize that the most reliable data should be obtained from the people who are harvesting and where they are harvesting and how they harvesting.

If I could just make an interjection here -- again, this discussion I know has taken place -- it is an infrastructure problem. We do not get concerned about the bridge to get over to Cape Cod unless the bridge needs repairs. When the bridge needs repairs it has caused tremendous problems. If you do not anticipate that you are going to address your infrastructure problems, which is what I see collecting statistics and biological samples as, as part of the process, we are all fooling ourselves.

If you come back with the answer, well, we cannot do it now, we cannot do it now, the problem on the other end is do not come back and expect that you can get the answers from the process that you are being requested of or you are being besieged by, because it is not there. It simply will not be there. It is just a matter of accountability. If you do not do this action, this action cannot proceed.

If we are all too busy to do it, always too busy to do it -- I am not chastising anybody, because we have the same problems here -- if we cannot go in and say that this plan, this plan, and this plan, they are all predicated on data we do not have or minimal data we have, we come back in and then we want to know why you really cannot differentiate between a fishing mortality of 0.2 and 2.8 because the samples are not there. If you do not have building blocks, if you do not have a foundation, if you do not have an infrastructure, you cannot get where you are going.

MR. STEWART: My question is where would you optimize the best statistics? We all know if you are doing a port assessment you are obligated to bias because of the regulations that --

DR. SERCHUK: No, we are doing it by stock. We are not doing it by reports.

MR. STEWART: All right, but would the logbook systems — if you have a three-pronged effort, port sampling, your own statistical at-sea sampling, and the logbook system, where would you direct the funding to give you the best data and where would the states best benefit to assist in creating one system that has all the emphasis?

It is a question and you are the one who is maybe handling the three of them for NMFS. It seems as though we have three different efforts going on and we --

DR. SERCHUK: Well, they are complementary efforts. It is different from the logbooks, there is no biological sampling that flows from there. David mentioned quite correctly that we do have a sea sampling fishery observer program. We need to look more carefully at that. We actually have our surveys, we collect information on surveys, but the fact is none of us wants to be in a position, quite frankly, to say we did not collect information from the harvesting sector.

Those research surveys, they go where we do not fish, so they are a waste of time. Sea sampling, we showed them what we wanted to show them, but that is not the way we operate. We get information from the harvesting sector representative of that they are catching. The systems are complementary. There is very little redundancy between those systems.

MR. STEWART: Do you find concurrence with the logbooks and your port samples?

DR. SERCHUK: That is a different question.

MR. DRISCOLL: I just wanted to mention the logbooks do not give you all the information you need anyway, because depending on the mesh size the person is fishing and so on, you miss the whole information on what is really there. Catch does not tell you what is really there, so it is really a waste of time.

MR. STEWART: Absolutely, that is the main thing.

Equation with gear type and selectivity and what you are getting

in the biological sample. At-sea data or harvesters sector volunteer data and a good logbook system --

DR. SERCHUK: I would be glad to discuss that with you, but it really is quite a different issue. It may be part of the overall framework here but it is really quite different.

MR. DUNNIGAN: Let me try to bring this around for you. I think the states have got a very strong interest, obviously, in the assessment process as the states and the Commission have become more active in determining fisheries management in the last couple of years and probably more so in the next. That interest has grown.

I think you would all be well served by a sampling program that was not just one that was done by the Northeast Fisheries Fish Science Center to meet its perceived needs of its clients but one that more broadly was able to take into account all of what our needs are and able to use all of what our capabilities are, whatever those might be.

I think that the ultimate answer to the problem that Fred has laid out about how to do biological sampling in this new world is probably going to depend somewhat on federal capabilities and somewhat on individual states that can and somewhat on the Commission on behalf of the broad group and on behalf of those states that are not in a position to help.

What that means is we need to have a cooperative state-federal program that can best make use of federal, state,

and Commission resources as they are appropriately available.

As Fred has said and has Allen Peterson has told me, the job is going to get done. The question is do we want to be a part of making it happen?

The sense I am getting, and i think the Chairman is getting, is that at this point, although you cannot sign any checks or any bottom lines, that you would like to move in that direction. If that is what you want, what we will do as a staff is get back to the Center and start putting some kind of a program or program document together for you to look at in more specificity that will require that we talk to them, that will require that we also come back and talk to you and your staffs about where your capabilities are.

It may be that we will say we need somebody to do X in Portland, Robin, can you do it and what will it cost? We will get it down to that level of guestion.

What you are saying a lot of times is, well, we do not know if we can help, because we do not know if there is any money. The Center's commitment, I think, is one or another to do the job, and whether they contract with us or whether they assign their population dynamicist to do it or whether they contract with the Manmomet Bird Observatory is going to depend on what the most efficient way of getting the job done is.

I think we would all be best served if we are a part of determining that equation. So I would propose that you let

us go ahead and do that for you, sit down and talk to the Center, talk more with your staffs, and then we will come back and present some more detail on this to the Policy Board.

MR. COLVIN: Any comment or reaction to Jack's recommendation?

MR. PIERCE: I think he is right on. I do not think we can rely on the National Marine Fisheries Service to do the whole job, especially since we have created the work load in part. They have constituents that they manage and they have to answer the questions that they ask and we ask ourselves, and the only way we are going to do that is by more active participation by ourselves.

I know what happens now at the staff level within our agency, we talk a lot with the scientists who do the specific species assessments and at the Center and we have already provided them with some information that helps them make the biological data base better, and just through those discussions alone we know that a lot can be provided by Massachusetts and I am sure by every state to really make those assessments a lot better than what they are, so that when we get up as a state and argue for a specific management strategy we know that we have had as much input as we could possibly have and, therefore, we feel more confident as a state buying into a particular management approach because that assessment was put together in part by data that we helped provide.

MR. COLVIN: Do you want a motion?

MR. DUNNING: I can operate on the consensus of the group. I guess from the staff standpoint I am mainly looking to see if you all have any problems.

MR. COLVIN: I think what may happen is that conceivably, depending on how much Jack can complete between now and the Annual Meeting, we may be looking at an action proposal at that time. That is a tall order. There are just not many days in-between.

MR. FOTE: I wonder do we need a motion. Now we have given direction back to the Statistics Committee, which I am a member of. Is that going to be a charge to that committee or we will keep it at the Policy Board level?

MR. COLVIN: I think what will happen is that the staff will work with the Statistics Committee to move forward along the idea of Jack's idea and will be looking for recommendations back to the committee.

MR. DUNNING: I mentioned Annual Meeting, because I knew the Policy Board would be getting together then. If you are going to allow this managed at the Statistics Committee level, we will work with Jack and deal with it there.

MR. FOTE: That is the question I am asking.

MR. W. COLE: If Jack is going to do this, I doubt if there is another federal agency that has got as many people as far flung as the Fish and Wildlife Service. We are called the

7-Eleven of the federal government.

(Laughter)

Jack, one of the things I would certainly like to look at, not that we do not have closure and downsizing problems that will pale some of your problems, perhaps, but given the fact that we have trained professionals scattered all over the place, to look into the possibility that we could help meet some of those demands. All it will take is basically an MOU to do this. I mean, it is possible. I am not sure we could do it in every place, but in those places where we do have people, we would be more happy to entertain the notion of could we cooperate to facilitate the integrated program.

MR. COLVIN: We would love to have your folks help us out in Brooklyn.

(Laughter)

MR. W. COLE: The Long Island office, having worked there, was not very interesting. They kept getting lost on the subway.

MR. GROUT: Lisa, there were only four states that filled out that survey. Was that a survey that you just needed information for this meeting or would it be helpful if the other states --

DR. KLINE: I will follow up on the other states and we will get the same information, because I think that is part of what we need.

MR. CUPKA: I was going to say from our state's perspective I do not have any problems with what Jack has suggested here. We are in a little different situation, I guess, in the south Atlantic and fortunately we are not faced with this problem. Part of the reason why, I think, is because we have managed to utilize resources from a number of different programs. Our cooperative statistics program funds some of what we call our tip sampling, which is basically biological sampling. The reason we are able to do this is because the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has recognized the importance of this and has agreed to support it.

We also utilize resources from other sources such as our (inaudible) program and BIOMAT program. We use some of our (inaudible) program to sample hardparts and things like sea trips. We are fortunate, I guess, in that we have been able to draw from a number of sources to get the job done in the south Atlantic. It really is not going to help you in the northeast.

It seems to me this is such a fundamental need that something has got to be done about it, and we certainly do not have any problem from our state's perspective, at least, in supporting Jack's proposal. Something has to be done and it is just so basic that if it takes doing that as opposed to doing some other things that the Commission does, I certainly think it is important enough to do and we ought to try and do it.

MR. FOSTER: I would just like to offer a little

different perspective and that is from a fisherman's standpoint, somebody on the outside. The problem you are dealing with, collecting data and funding, is a very serious one. Another problem is how those data area handled and how quickly they come out into the public and what they look like when they come back.

The problem the public is having is that it takes two or three or four years for those data to come back, and they come back in the form of F values and spawning stock biomass values that do not mean anything. So in order to get more support for funding you need to get those data back quicker.

Just my suggestion is that it may not be necessary to run a virtual population analysis on every bit of data before it can be used. The best example I can think of right now is weakfish in North Carolina, where the 1995 data, which are primarily January, February, and March, would be available in May or June and could be used as an index for the species to see yearly patterns.

So if we could do something to get those data a lot faster, then instead of having public pressure on the legislators to cut funding you would have a public pressure, a great deal of it, to get funds.

I realize you have no legislative authority to do it, but if the states were required to provide the sampling on a continuing basis in order to receive their allocations under the various plans, they would make sure that they had the samples.

The industry would make sure.

MR. COLVIN: Are there additional items that folks would like to bring up for the Policy Board this morning?

MR. FOTE: After sleeping over the bluefish thing that went on last night and sitting and talking to a lot of people, I realized that we talked about this a long time ago: We really need some good articles going on and put out there on exactly what is happening in the species. We spent a lot of time yesterday debating what the bag limit was and what would go on with the commercial fishery, and a lot of people insinuate the Commission is doing nothing.

In looking at bluefish, some tough decisions, as Gordon pointed out, are going to have to be made. We should be putting that information out to fishermen about really what is going on in the bluefish fishery -- and we need it in other species, the same thing.

I know I am kind of rambling here, but what I am trying to say is on bluefish we are going to have to explain to the fishermen they are going to have to make some tough decisions, whether they want to basically harvest this population down until we collapse and put it into a moratorium or are they going to look at what they want to cut in order to bring this fishery up for a longer period of time, until it rebounds on itself, because we may not be able to do that with fisheries management, bring this population up, but we need to

protect the biomass that is out there.

And we need to do the same thing on other species and we do it proactively instead of reactively, we start fighting some the battles. I think we need to put that out in some kind of writing exactly where we are going. I am not sure we know where it is, but I think we need a clearer picture to go to the public so the public starts working with us on it.

MR. COLVIN: Are there any other thoughts, ideas, or issues that people would like to bring up at this point? I thank everybody for coming here. I know it is extraordinary to come to a Policy Board meeting so close to the Annual Meeting. I think that this was done with a sense of urgency conveyed at the last meeting that took place in my absence (I was on vacation), and I really appreciate your being here.

I think this is a relatively urgent issue, and by virtue of having assembled we have laid the groundwork for some quick action. I think that is going to really pay off.

Is there anything further before we adjourn?

MR. FOTE: Yes, I will open my mouth one more time. We have a scup meeting coming up on the 18th, we have got a summer flounder meeting, the same thing with the Mid-Atlantic Council. This not only adds to our time during Commission meetings but now is putting a lot of our time at the Council meetings.

It is getting to be a time thing and we have really

got to regulate this now, hold it at six weeks, sometimes maybe put the Mid-Atlantic Council and the New England Council into our meetings where we are going to have it during our meeting week, so basically pull all those meetings together.

MR. COLVIN: Your Chairman has spoken rather candidly to both executive directors of the Commission and the Council about concerns regarding scheduling and the delay in the scup meeting. It could have been held some time ago coincident with other meetings. It is my expectation to work very hard with Jim Gilbert to try to do a much better job than we have done in coordinating between the activities and not just scheduling, but much more substantive matters, between the Mid-Atlantic Council and the Commission. This is something we are going to be talking about.

MR. FOTE: Meeting with the whole instead of meeting with the committees and things like this?

MR. COLVIN: Even more than that.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: On the issue of scheduling, some time ago Jack sent out to the states a list of proposed meetings for 1996. What is the status of that? Is that going to be talked about at the Annual Meeting?

MR. DUNNING: I will come to the Policy Board or Executive Committee with a recommendation for the 1996 meetings.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: Did you receive our comments on some of those meetings?

MR. DUNNING: I do not have that file with me. I got a number of comments from a number of people, but we did not hear from as many as I thought we might. We have a problem and Massachusetts has a problem because of preset Commission dates, and we will try to work around those. I know we got comments from Susan as well, and I think David.

The biggest issue -- well, the one Tom raised, which you might just check for about a second, is a question of having that spring meeting in Washington, D.C. the first week of June in connection with National Fishing Week. I think there are a number of good reasons for doing that. There is a lot that goes on this week that will be of interest to you.

We would like to use that as an opportunity to work you folks up on Capitol Hill with your representatives. There will be a lot of that going on that week as well. I think there is some synergy that we can get from having that meeting here at that time. Tom and I have talked about it and nobody has objected to it yet.

MR. COLVIN: Some of the states do things at home that week. I hope we will discuss that issue.

MR. FOTE: To follow up on that, I did have some problems with doing it the same week and Jack and I discussed that maybe -- that is one of the complaints I have, we do things collectively in the states on National Fishing Week and it is very tough to get out of it.

MR. COLVIN: If there is no further business, we stand adjourned. We will see you in Charleston.

(Thereupon, at 10:10 a.m., the meeting was concluded.)