



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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American Eel Technical Committee Meeting

January 13th, 2026
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Technical Committee Attendance: Kim Bonvechio (Chair, FL), Alexis Park (MD), Brad Chase (MA), Caitlin Craig (NY), Casey Clark (ME), Chris Adriance (DC), Chris Wright (NOAA), Eddie Perri (FWS), Jen Pyle (NJ), Jim Page (GA), Jordan Zimmerman (DE), Kevin Mongoloski (USGS), Matt Lee (NH), Mike Porta (PA), Pat McGee RI, Shakira Goffe (VA), Sheila Eyler (FWS), Todd Mathes (NC), Wendy Morrison (NOAA)

Commissioners in Attendance: Erika Burgess (FL)

Staff: Caitlin Starks (FMP Coordinator), Samara Nehemiah (stock assessment scientist)

Public: Jason Dotson, Jeff Renchen

The Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar to continue addressing a Board task. The Board directed the TC to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and report back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

Discussion of Florida YOY Survey

After reviewing information on the Florida YOY survey available from the 2023 stock assessment, the TC asked questions about the survey to better understand the site suitability, issues, and limitations, as well as other sampling efforts in the state that capture American eel.

FL noted that they have made extensive efforts to improve the YOY survey by trying other gears, searching for alternative sites, but there are not any other viable options. They also commented that sampling and collecting age data in other areas across the state is showing a healthy age composition for yellow eels, which does not align with the trends in the YOY survey showing very low numbers of recruits for a number of years. While the persistent low catches in the YOY survey are suggestive of recruitment failure, other monitoring efforts do not agree with that, which raises concerns about the ability of the YOY survey to accurately capture trends in recruitment. FL expressed that they believe the long-term statewide electrofishing efforts combined with age data would provide a better understanding of eel recruitment than the YOY survey.

The TC discussed that the FL electrofishing data were reviewed for the stock assessment, but not used for analysis due to sampling issues, but it was not clear what those issues were. To evaluate whether these data could be used as suggested by FL, the TC agreed that it would be helpful to

ask for input from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS). FL noted that they have a standardized protocol for the sampling, and additional years of data that may improve the usefulness of the dataset, along with age data.

One TC member pointed out the criteria for determining whether fishery independent data can be used in the stock assessment, which include that surveys should operate with gear that is capable of catching American eel, and only surveys that operate during a time and place where American eels are available for capture should be considered. The criteria also note that examining the precision or proportion of zero catches of American eels in a survey can be tools for evaluating this. Thus, the TC recommended that the YOY survey be analyzed for the proportion of zero catches to compare it to this criterion.

Ultimately, the TC expressed concern with discontinuing the YOY survey without gaining any other information. The TC agreed the following next steps should be completed before a decision is made as to whether the YOY survey should be discontinued:

- Gather input from the SAS on the Florida surveys, including
 - Utility of the FL YOY survey in terms of variability and power, and in comparison to other surveys
 - Impacts of not having the FL YOY survey data for future assessments
 - FL electrofishing and age data and why they were not used in the recent assessment
 - Whether electrofishing data and age data can be used in the future to assess recruitment; what could be done to improve the survey for eel assessment use
- Analyze the YOY time series to calculate the proportion of zero catches of American eels

It was noted that the YOY sampling will occur this season, conducted by the University of North Florida (UNF). UNF has agreed to follow the state's monitoring protocol for consistency, but the amount of effort may be reduced. It was also noted that a stock assessment update is scheduled for 2027, and as part of that process the SAS could do a deeper investigation of all YOY datasets and develop recommendations for how they could be considered in the next benchmark stock assessment.

While YOY surveys are evaluated in the stock assessment and used to understand local trends in recruitment, they are not currently used for the development of fishery regulations in the Commission's management program.

Elect Vice Chair

The TC elected Jen Pyle as Vice Chair with no opposition.

Next Steps

S. Nehemiah will work with the SAS to complete a data request to Florida for their full YOY and electrofishing datasets for eel. C. Starks will schedule a meeting with the SAS to review the FL data and comment on possible methods for evaluating recruitment or abundance at other life stages.