



**Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee
Webinar Meeting
May 28, 2020
Partial Meeting Summary (Recreational Reform Initiative Only)**

Monitoring Committee Attendees: Julia Beaty (MAFMC staff), Peter Clarke (NJ DEP), Dustin Colson Leaning (ASMFC staff), Karson Coutré (MAFMC staff), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC staff), Steve Doctor (MD DNR), Emily Keiley (GARFO), Alexa Kretsch (VMRC), John Maniscalco (NY DEC), Lee Paramore (NC DMF), Caitlin Starks (ASFMC staff), Rachel Sysak (NY DEC), Mark Terceiro (NEFSC), Corinne Truesdale (RI DEM), Sam Truesdell (MA DMF), Greg Wojcik (CT DEP), Rich Wong (DNREC), Tony Wood (NEFSC)

Additional Attendees: Annie, Steve Cannizzo (NY RFFA), Mike Celestino (NJ DEP, Bluefish MC), Nicole Lengyel Costa (RI DEM, Bluefish MC), Maureen Davidson (NY DEC, Council/Board member), Greg DiDomenico (Lund's Fisheries), Tony DiLernia (Council member), Cynthia Ferrio (GARFO, Bluefish MC), James Fletcher (United National Fishermen's Association), Jeff Kaelin (Lund's Fisheries), Joseph Munyandorero (FL FWC, Bluefish MC), Adam Nowalsky (Council/Board member), Eric Reid (Council member), SRW, Mike Waine (ASA), Kate Wilke (Council member), Amy Zimney (SC DNR, Bluefish MC)

Meeting Summary

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee met via webinar on Thursday May 28, 2020 to discuss several topics. The Bluefish Monitoring Committee was invited to participate in the discussion of the Recreational Reform Initiative as this initiative also addresses bluefish.

Briefing materials considered by the Monitoring Committee are available at:
<https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2020/sfsbsb-mc-may28>.

Note: This document summarizes only the Monitoring Committee's discussion of the Recreational Reform Initiative. A more complete summary addressing all topics discussed by the Monitoring Committee will be compiled at a later date.

Recreational Reform Initiative

Council staff summarized a draft outline of the Recreational Reform Initiative developed by the Recreational Reform Steering Committee. The Monitoring Committee was generally supportive of continued development of all approaches in the Steering Committee outline. Comments on each objective in the outline are summarized below.

Objective 1: Better incorporate uncertainty in the MRIP data into the management process

Objective 1 in the Steering Committee outline contains three specific suggestions for better considering uncertainty in the MRIP data. The first suggestion is to adopt a standardized process for identifying and smoothing outlier MRIP estimates to be applied to both high and low outliers. The Monitoring Committee agreed that it would be very beneficial to adopt such a process.

The group agreed that outliers could be identified using the Modified Thompson Tau approach used in the past for some black sea bass outliers, or other methods. One Monitoring Committee member said there are multiple potentially appropriate methods for identifying outliers and consideration should be given to which methods are most appropriate for different circumstances. For example, a multi-faceted approach could be considered. Another Monitoring Committee member said consideration should be given to the appropriate level at which the estimates are examined for outliers, for example, at the state/wave/mode/year level or the coastwide annual level.

MRIP estimates are used in many parts of the management process, including in the stock assessment, development of annual catch and landings limits, comparison of catch to the annual catch limit (ACL) to determine if accountability measures are triggered, and development of recreational management measures. To date, smoothed outliers have only been used in a few instances to develop recreational management measures for black sea bass. They have not been used for other purposes for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. For example, the smoothed black sea bass estimates for 2016 and 2017 were not used in the 2019 operational stock assessment due to concerns about the appropriateness of smoothing only two high estimates in recent years without examining the entire time series for both high and low outliers. Several Monitoring Committee members noted that this creates a potentially problematic disconnect with other parts of the management process. The group agreed that adoption of a standardized method for identifying and smoothing both high and low outliers would increase the likelihood of being able to use smoothed estimates in all parts of the management process. The group agreed that it would be very important to identify and smooth both high and low outliers and to have a standardized process.

One Monitoring Committee member noted that even if smoothed estimates are used in management, no change would be made to the official MRIP estimates. The group agreed that it could be beneficial to have MRIP staff provide feedback on the process to identify and smooth outliers to help increase buy-in for using smoothed estimates in multiple parts of the management process. The intent would not be to have MRIP staff approve the smoothed estimates, but rather to provide feedback on the appropriateness of any methods developed.

The second specific suggestion under objective 1 is to use an “envelope of uncertainty” approach to determine if changes to recreational management measures are needed. Under this approach, a certain range above and below the projected harvest estimate (e.g., based on percent standard error) would be defined for comparison against the upcoming year’s recreational harvest limit (RHL). If the RHL falls within the pre-defined range above and below the projected harvest estimate, then no changes would be made to management measures. The Monitoring Committee agreed that this is worth pursuing and that further discussion is needed on defining the appropriate envelope. One Monitoring Committee member noted that the group has struggled to define similar metrics in the past and asked if the Council and Board would determine how to define the envelope or if it would be a Monitoring Committee decision. One Monitoring

Committee member said that, given their technical expertise, it may be more appropriate for the Monitoring Committee to recommend the appropriate envelope, rather than the Council and Board.

The third specific suggestion under objective 1 is to consider the appropriateness of using preliminary current year MRIP data in the management process. The Monitoring Committee agreed that this may warrant further consideration. One member noted that MRIP has changed the timing of when they incorporate for-hire data into their estimates. In the past, preliminary estimates were sometimes released without the incorporation of for-hire vessel trip report (VTR) data. VTR data were incorporated into the final estimates. Under the current process, VTRs are incorporated into the preliminary estimates, so the differences between the preliminary and final estimates may not be as great as they were in the past. He recommended an evaluation of the scale of the change from preliminary to final estimates under the current MRIP estimation methodology. He also noted that final data may be appropriate for longer-term decisions including development of management measures that are intended to be in place for multiple years. However, he cautioned that if only final data are used for annual adjustments to measures, there will be a greater disconnect between the data used and current operating conditions than if preliminary current year data were also considered. A few Monitoring Committee members agreed that there are certain situations in which it is beneficial to use preliminary current year data, including making annual adjustments to measures and considering how variation in harvest might be influenced by factors such as year class strength.

One Steering Committee member said the Steering Committee's intent for all three suggestions under objective 1 was not to ask the Monitoring Committee to second-guess and revise the MRIP estimates, but rather to think about the impact outliers can have on recreational management. For example, outlier estimates can lead to significant changes in management measures from year to year which may not be reflective of a true conservation need.

Objective 2: Develop guidelines for maintaining status quo measures

The second objective in the Steering Committee outline is to develop a process for considering both recreational harvest data (all considerations under objective 1 could apply) and multiple stock status metrics (biomass, fishing mortality, recruitment) when deciding if measures should remain unchanged. The Monitoring Committee was generally supportive of this approach.

One Monitoring Committee member said it would be helpful to give greater consideration to how expected catch (i.e., landings and dead discards) compares to the ACL, rather than focusing on the RHL as the primary management target when setting management measures for the following year. She questioned whether the Fishery Management Plan would need to be modified to provide more flexibility in this regard.

Another Monitoring Committee member said the group tends to be most comfortable with estimates of expected landings and dead discards when they are based on assessment data. He thought it could be helpful to give stock status metrics from the assessments greater consideration in the process of determining how to change management measures. For example, he feels more confident in the need for more restrictive measures in response to a stock assessment rather than in response to recreational harvest estimates alone, which can be quite variable.

Objective 3: Develop process for setting multi-year recreational management measures

The third objective in the Steering Committee outline is to develop a process for setting recreational management measures for two years at a time with a commitment to making no changes in the interim year. This would include not reacting to new data that would otherwise allow for liberalizations or require restrictions. The Monitoring Committee was very supportive of this approach.

The Monitoring Committee agreed that this approach could lead to compounding overages or underages of catch and harvest limits. However, this could represent just as much of a conservation benefit as a conservation risk.

Multiple Monitoring Committee members said maintaining the same measures for at least two years can allow for better evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures at constraining harvest. The group discussed how harvest can fluctuate widely under constant management measures. Having more years of constant measures would allow for a better understanding of the variations in harvest.

One member clarified that the proposal was for two years and not a longer time period because it is anticipated that updated stock assessment information will be available every two years. This would allow management to react to updated stock assessment information.

One Monitoring Committee member said this approach could pull together many aspects of the other approaches in the Steering Committee outline and it could be a good way to move forward with the goal of stability in management measures. For example, it could allow for use of final MRIP estimates (see objective 1), would allow for consideration of the timing of the management measures recommendation (see objective 5), would allow for changes to be considered in response to updated stock assessment information, and would allow for year-to-year stability in recreational management measures.

Another Monitoring Committee member said this approach would work best if the RHL is the same across the two years.

The group discussed how state conservation equivalency could work under this approach. There was a general consensus that the approach would work best with a strong commitment to no changes at the federal or state level during the two years, including no changes made through conservation equivalency.

One Monitoring Committee member noted that it could be difficult to explain to stakeholders why they may have to forego potential liberalizations in the interim year under this approach. She recommended that this approach be evaluated from a socioeconomic perspective. Another Monitoring Committee member recommended consideration of the benefits of this approach in terms of compliance with and enforcement of the management measures.

Objective 4: Consider improvements to the process used to make changes to state and federal recreational management measures

The fourth objective in the Steering Committee outline relates to improvements to the process used to make changes to state and federal waters recreational management measures. The Steering Committee has not discussed this objective in great detail.

A few Monitoring Committee members said it would be beneficial to have guidelines on how to best use MRIP data at the state/mode/wave levels. The group agreed that additional analysis is

needed to better understand the limitations of the MRIP data for any given species before recommendations can be made for how to best use the MRIP data. For example, one Monitoring Committee member said it may be challenging to develop robust guidelines that could be applied uniformly across all states as MRIP sampling is not consistent across states and states with more frequent intercepts of the species in question may be put at an advantage. Other Monitoring Committee members agreed.

One bluefish Monitoring Committee member said regional measures, especially for shared water bodies, are worth considering and can help address concerns about using MRIP data at too fine of a scale.

Objective 5: Consider making recommendations for federal waters recreational management measures earlier in the year

The Steering Committee has discussed the idea of recommending federal waters recreational management measures in August or October rather than December of each year. The Monitoring Committee supported further consideration of this approach. Many members noted that it has been challenging for states to develop measures and for the Technical Committee to review proposals under the tight deadlines that are needed under the current process. Moving some of the decision making to earlier in the year could allow more time for robust review of proposals. However, the group also noted that earlier decision making would not allow for consideration of preliminary current year data when developing recreational management measures for the following year. This may be acceptable when measures are intended to be in place for multiple years (e.g., see objective 3).

General comments on the Recreational Reform outline

The group noted that the Council and Board may wish to include additional topics in the Recreational Reform Initiative after discussing the ongoing commercial/recreational allocation amendment during their next meeting.

Several Monitoring Committee members supported consideration of an additional approach that would more explicitly tie changes in management measures to the stock assessment, for example by considering changes only when new stock assessment information is available. This may be feasible under the anticipated every other year timeline for stock assessment updates in the future.

One member of the public asked how the Recreational Reform Initiative complies with the recent executive order to produce seafood. One Steering Committee member emphasized that the initiative relates to recreational fishing only and not commercial fishing. Another Steering Committee member said the initiative would help ensure a supply of seafood by maintaining harvest at sustainable levels.