

MRIP Listening Session

Summary Report

Location: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Date: July 7, 2008

Purpose: To gather input from Caribbean Fisheries Management Council members and staff and partners from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to assure that the MRIP design we are developing is appropriately tailored to the specific fishery management and stock assessment needs of the region. Further, such an assessment will enable us to begin to identify and prioritize regional needs for MRIP projects for the next round of project funding, with FY 2008 funds.

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Agencies/Groups Represented: Caribbean Fishery Management Council, Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.

Attachments: Agenda, list of attendees

Major Points and Comments:

1. The MRFSS survey is conducted in Puerto Rico but not in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). It is the primary survey for all fishing modes in Puerto Rico. At present, intercept surveys are conducted by the NMFS contractor (Macro) and by PRDNER staff. The CHTS telephone survey is conducted by Macro; the Council and PRDNER staff are not aware of language-based difficulties with the telephone survey.
2. In January, 2009, PRDNER plans to conduct 100% of intercept sampling with their own staff. Data (and funding) will be moved through the GSMFC's RecFIN(SE) program. It is expected that data availability will be substantially improved following this change. PRDNER staff also sample all marine fishing tournaments in the Commonwealth.
3. The lack of data in the USVI will make resource allocation between recreational and commercial fishers very difficult.
4. Results of the two MRIP research projects should improve surveys for the for hire and HMS fisheries.

5. Puerto Rico has developed a recreational fishing license-issuance system and implementation regulation that could be quickly implemented if authorized by the leadership of the Commonwealth government.
6. There are approximately 65,000 DNER-registered vessels over 13 ft in Puerto Rico. The Commonwealth shares their vessel license database with the Coast Guard. Vessels are not registered by the USVI. It is not known if the Territory shares the vessel database with the Coast Guard.
7. There seems to be good public reaction and support from charter captains for the two MRIP research projects (for-hire electronic reporting and improved HMS surveys).
8. PR has a nine-nautical mile area of jurisdiction. VI has three. Council-managed fisheries (queen conch, lobster, reef fish) are harvested in both federal and territorial waters, and a large component of the harvest is in the territorial sea. Conch and lobster are often taken along with fish in mixed-trip fisheries. MRFSS does not sample/interview people for conch, whelk, lobsters, crabs, or other invertebrates.
9. Both in the USVI and PR, there is a problem with large scale harvest of immature conch and undersized and egg-bearing lobster. This includes festivals in which large areas of inshore waters may be subject to depletion of conch with long term negative impact on stock rebuilding potential.
10. The Council is considering allocating ACL's by sectors. Several sector options are being considered, including: geographic-based allocations between Puerto Rico and USVI fisheries; geographic-based allocation within Puerto Rico (e.g. east-west) and the USVI (St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix separately); commercial-recreational; angling-spearfishing within a recreational sector; Lack of recreational data will make it very difficult to allocate ACLs by sector and jurisdiction and to enforce AMs.
11. Lack of data is a problem for SEDAR process and management in general. SEDAR 14 included a data needs assessment.
12. The current survey results do not reliably differentiate catches between EEZ and territorial waters, because anglers are not always aware of their position relative to the EEZ boundary.
13. The Council is experiencing a lag time receiving MRFSS info from NMFS. This may be a result of the need to convert catch in numbers to catch in weight in the Southeast Fishery Science Center before the data is provided to the Council.
14. Questions about anomalies in MRFSS data need to be answered more quickly. Local constituents, the Council and Puerto Rico DNER

staff need to be involved in the annual constituent data review workshop.

15. There needs to be more dedicated funding to insure more consistent data collection.

16. Standard telephone survey techniques will not work in the VI. There was a 2002 report that indicated a 14% response rate to telephone interviews.

17. There is not always a clear line of distinction between recreational and commercial fishermen. Some recreational fishermen sell catch although they are not licensed and do not report as commercial fishing. Also, subsistence and tradition are significant motivators for non-commercial fisheries in both Puerto Rico and USVI.

18. Council and PRDNER staff needs better access to the more detailed data for local analysis to meet local needs. Using the RecFIN(SE) as a data manager for the Puerto Rico data is expected to help address this need.

Future data and research needs:

1. Future surveys should include collecting catch and effort statistics for lobster and queen conch and other invertebrates such as blue crab and Caribbean Top shell (“whelk”).

2. A survey is needed to get non-commercial catch and effort data for the USVI.

3. More information is needed about harvest for the personal use in the marine aquarium fishery, in which an estimated 6000-8000 people participate.

4. Landings and biological data of snappers and groupers need to be provided by species instead of reported for the complex (i.e. “groupers unspecified”). Also, it’s important to recognize that this fishery is expanding to progressively deeper waters, resulting in harvest of different species as it progresses. Training in fish identification for intercept surveyors, charter boat operators and anglers will be necessary to address this problem.

5. Future surveys need to provide better spatial coverage and more precise estimates. Coverage and estimates for the south side of Puerto Rico are not very good (although recent hires of additional PRDNER samplers should help with this area).

6. There is essentially no social and economic data for these fisheries since the 1980's. The Council needs updated socio-economic information for recreational fisheries of the region, and Puerto Rico needs to be included in next national survey. There is a pending census of the subsistence fishery that will help to address that sector.
7. Need information on the extent of targeting spawning aggregations of snappers and groupers. This could help with survey design.
8. Need better information on the extent and impacts of night fishing, particularly for yellowtail snapper.
9. Additional biological data collection needs include getting weights on at least the targeted 50% of catch.

Outreach Needs

1. In Puerto Rico, outreach materials must be bilingual. In general, English-speaking anglers are charter boat customers. Essentially all other anglers are Spanish-speaking.
2. A Constituent Data Review session for Puerto Rico, either in the region or as part of the annual program in the D.C. area, should be undertaken.

Regional Project Proposals

1. A demonstration project to collect data on queen conch, lobster (for the Council), blue crab and whelk (for the Commonwealth).
2. A project to assess the significance of spawning aggregations (snapper and grouper) on recreational catch and effort sample design. This could include both an initial characterization of the magnitude of recreational effort on the (already well known and documented) aggregation areas, possibly using satellite imagery and an assessment of the significance of such effort distribution on sample design.
3. A demonstration project on catch of ornamental species for personal aquarium use.
4. Development of outreach and educational information and tools. For example, there are over 180 species of fish harvested in the region, and providing fish identification training and materials is an important need for fishermen as well as interviewers and charter captains.

5. Conduct an assessment of the 7 years of MRFSS data for Puerto Rico to completely characterize the fisheries and trends as well as to evaluate data collected by not previously analyzed or available through the MRFSS webpage.