

Data Collection Advisory Panel

Meeting Summary

Tampa, FL

February 13, 2023

9:00 am – 3:30 pm

The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Data Collection Advisory Panel (AP) was convened on February 13, 2023 at 9:00 am EST. The agenda was approved after adding two discussion items to other business: federal private recreational and red grouper management. The September 14, 2021 meeting summary was approved as written.

Election of chair and vice-chair

Captain Troy Frady was elected chair and Captain Dylan Hubbard was elected vice-chair.

Proposed Electronic Reporting in the Commercial Coastal Logbook Program

The Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC) is interested in transitioning to an electronic reporting platform for the commercial coastal logbook program. This transition would allow fishermen with federal commercial Gulf reef fish and/or coastal migratory pelagic permits to report logbooks electronically rather than by completing paper forms. Since the coastal migratory pelagic fishery management plan is cooperatively managed with South Atlantic Fishery Management Council an associated joint amendment is being developed. SEFSC staff provided an overview of reporting modifications and demonstrated the electronic reporting platform. Electronic reporting would allow for selections of "favorites", automated error identification, and quicker transmission than the current paper forms.

The AP asked if logbook reports could be printed or e-mailed after submission. SEFSC staff indicated that the web-based version may have that capability, and noted that a screen shot could be taken as an electronic record. Another AP member inquired whether e-Trips was the only software currently approved as an electronic platform. SEFSC responded that it was, but noted that once technical specifications were generated, more vendors would have the ability to participate in the program. The AP asked about the implementation timeline, and SEFSC indicated that a gradual roll-out would be conducted after implementation of the joint amendment to help program participants transition to electronic reporting. The AP was amenable to the proposed program changes and discussed the merits of in-person public hearings instead of exclusively virtual hearings and a mail out as suggested by staff. Ultimately, the group decided that staff should determine an appropriate outreach plan for the document.

The Data Collection AP approves the transition from paper logbooks to electronic logbooks. In addition, direct Council staff to work with industry groups to determine what outreach and education would be appropriate to the commercial participants.

Motion carried unanimously.

The AP recognized that no major programmatic changes would occur with the transition to electronic reporting. However, the AP also acknowledged that some level of training would be advantageous to help program participants. The AP suggested some training be conducted prior to the implementation of any program changes.

The Data Collection AP recommends Gulf Council and NOAA staff work with ACCSP, and other vendors to create a method for industry to beta test the Commercial Coastal Logbook Program prior to the implementation of the Commercial Coastal Logbook Program Amendment.

Motion carried unanimously.

Update on Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting

Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff provided an update on the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program. The program lost \$750,000 for operating its validation survey in the 2022/2023 fiscal year. An AP member asked how the remaining budget, approximately 1.5 million annually, is allocated. SERO staff indicated that the funding generally goes towards funding Vessel Monitoring System support, data auditing, and SEFHIER-specific staff. The AP discussed the differences between the program's power-down exemption and the equipment failure exemption. The AP illustrated some scenarios they had experienced with the power-down exemption and recommended SEFHIER staff continue to outreach with program participants on the program exemptions.

State-Specific Private Angler Licensing and Reporting Requirements

Council staff provided a presentation regarding state-specific private recreational fishing licensing and catch reporting. Additionally, the presentation included recent discussion of this topic from the Council's January 2023 meeting. The Council is in the process of exploring the potential merits of a federal private recreational permit or endorsement.

The AP agreed that identifying the universe of private anglers in the Gulf was an important step toward improved management for this sector. Several AP members commented that the private recreational sector represents millions of users and that it continues to grow. While some licensing information is being collected by the states, the marked differences in those data collection programs make directly comparing estimates across states difficult.

Some AP members advocated that every individual fishing in federal waters should be mandated to possess a permit. Other AP members contended that taking smaller initial steps might be a pathway to achieving that broader objective. Council staff stated that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has been focusing its initial examination on standardized licensing data collection and a corresponding education component for federal private recreational management. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has also begun scoping the concept of a federal permit for its private recreational snapper/grouper fishery.

Some AP members expressed concern with mandating a permit for federal private recreational anglers. One member stated that it is likely to take years for the Gulf states to standardize their licensing data collection. Another member replied that mandating such a large user group was going to be a tough sell and suggested a more voluntary approach that could increase buy in from the sector. The AP agreed that making improvements in data collection is important. Another AP member expanded on this idea and stated that endorsements are a good tool for data collection and outreach with anglers, as well as increasing awareness of regulations and promoting conservation best practices.

The Data Collection AP recommends the Council work with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA staff, and state representatives on the Council to standardize licensing and data collection to clearly define the universe of private recreational angler effort fishing in federal waters.

Motion carried with 2 opposed.

Update from Mote Marine Laboratory on Electronic Monitoring Research

Staff from the Mote Marine Laboratory (Mote) provide an overview, rationale, and some initial results on research of electronic monitoring (EM) in the commercial fleet. Mote staff indicated that results generated by EM research serve as a complimentary data collection design to the commercial observer program and aid in gathering some biological discard information. Research has been ongoing for approximately six years with the highest concentration of collaborative commercial vessel conducting work in the eastern Gulf. Some results of this research have been made available during the Data Workshop phase of the Southeast Data and Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process for species such as scamp, grouper, and sharks via development and presentation of working papers.

The AP was supportive of the work conducted by Mote. The AP recommended that Mote staff expand future research initiatives to include the for-hire and private recreational sector. An AP member stated he used to provide customers on for-hire vessels a video recording of their fishing trips and that these records were well received. He continued that he would be willing to restart this idea and provide Mote a copy for its research. Another AP member mentioned that private recreational anglers may also be interested in participating, and Mote staff indicated that the advent of portable camera systems would allow units to be transferred between boats quickly.

Update on Development of Fishery Ecosystem Plan

Council staff updated the AP on the development of a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for the Gulf of Mexico. The Council's Ecosystem Technical Committee (ETC) will meet in April 2023 to discuss the outputs from LGL's FEP proposal to develop the document around Fishery Ecosystem Issues (FEI). The AP highlighted the importance of engaging the fishing community and taking a more holistic approach to fisheries management. Staff commented that the Council recognizes the importance of stakeholder feedback, and the Outreach and Educational Technical Committee has been charged to develop a stakeholder engagement plan. An AP member asked if there were any plans to update the Ecosystem Status Report for the Gulf of Mexico. Staff responded that the ETC will also discuss the potential update on the Ecosystem Status Report and consider available resources dedicated to the various proposed ecosystem initiatives that would be outlined in the coming year.

Other Business

The AP reviewed a January Council motion that outlined some possible initiatives for improving management of the recreational fishery. The AP expressed concerns with a few of the proposed initiatives and inquired as to what staff would be responsible for completing initiative tasks. The AP suggested the creation of an Ad hoc committee may be an appropriate group for this work. The Council representative stated that, at the moment, the Council would prefer to keep all the listed initiatives for consideration. The AP agreed that the motion had spurred some deeper discussion of the topic, and suggested the motion be discussed at the Council's next meeting.

The AP then discussed red grouper management. An AP member expressed concern regarding the recent overharvest of red grouper by the recreational sector. The member asked if anyone from the group had any suggestions or comments. Another AP replied that SERO was better suited to address this concern since it monitors the fishery. Stakeholders are seeing improvement in the stock, but the recent interim analysis did not reflect that observation. An AP member stated that perhaps Mote's EM work could be used as a supplemental data source to help bridge the time gap between assessments and management decisions.

Public Comment

No members of the public commented.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm EST.

Participants List:

Data Collection AP

Michael Colby
Troy Frady, Chair
Sepp Haukebo
Scott Hickman
Dylan Hubbard, Vice chair
Charlotte Marin
John Marquez Jr.
Ashford Rosenberg
Eric Schmidt
Zac Sturm

Council Representative

Susan Boggs

Council Staff

Lisa Hollensead
Carly Somerset
Natasha Méndez-Ferrer
Bernie Roy
Charlotte Schiaffo
Carrie Simmons