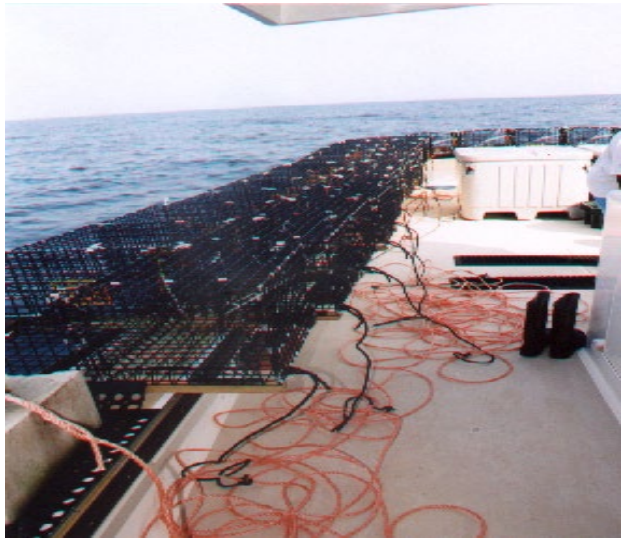

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program: History and Potential Future

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council – Mackerel Committee
June 21, 2022

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Tab C, No. 6(b)

Background of MAFMC RSA Program

- Developed as Framework 1 to the following FMPs
  - Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish
  - **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Back Sea Bass**
  - **Bluefish**
  - Tilefish
- Mission: Meet unaddressed research needs (gear studies, surveys, and mesh studies) and increase science/industry collaboration and build public trust
- Final approval in 2001 and first projects funded in 2002

General RSA Program - Funding

- Need to convert fish into funding available for research
- Funding was generated through the sale of a portion of each species' quota (0-3% of a fishery's TAL)
  - Each species spec cycle the Council would identify % of TAL set-aside
- Compensation fishing
  - Defined under MSA – essentially fishing to offset costs of research activity in support of management. Typically done independent of science
  - Incentives to participate
    - Need for vessel owners to pay for additional fishing opportunities to pay for research
    - Fishing during closed season or directed fishery quota closures
    - Higher trip/possession limits
- Federal EFP and state EFP equivalent needed given incentives

General RSA Program - Participation

- **Grant recipients**
  - Principal investigators awarded RSA quota from different species, depending on research
  - Identified partners/vessels to participate and how to generate funds
- **Methods**
  - Bi-lateral agreements between P.I. and vessel(s) – share proceeds or vessel purchases outright
  - A 3rd party auction – vessels bid on species specific quota lots
    - Note: NMFS or Council do not have authority to conduct/run auctions
- **Sectors**
  - Commercial vessels
  - For-hire vessels
  - State and federally permitted

General RSA Program Roles

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL	NOAA FISHERIES	NEW YORK STATE; 130 Years; DELAWARE DIVISION FISH & WILDLIFE; ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION; VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION; NORTH CAROLINA Environmental Quality
• Program creation • Set aside specifications • Priority setting • Proposal review support • Application of results	• Program/grant administration • Project selection • Project oversight • Technical support • Compensation fishing permitting and oversight • Proposal reviews • Application of results	• Dockside enforcement • Compensation fishing permitting and administration • Quota monitoring, reporting and reconciliation

RSA Program: Funding and Research

- 6 - 10 proposals per year, 2 - 5 funded each year
- Generated on average between $1 - $2 million per year
- From 2002 – 2014, 39 projects were funded totaling $16 million

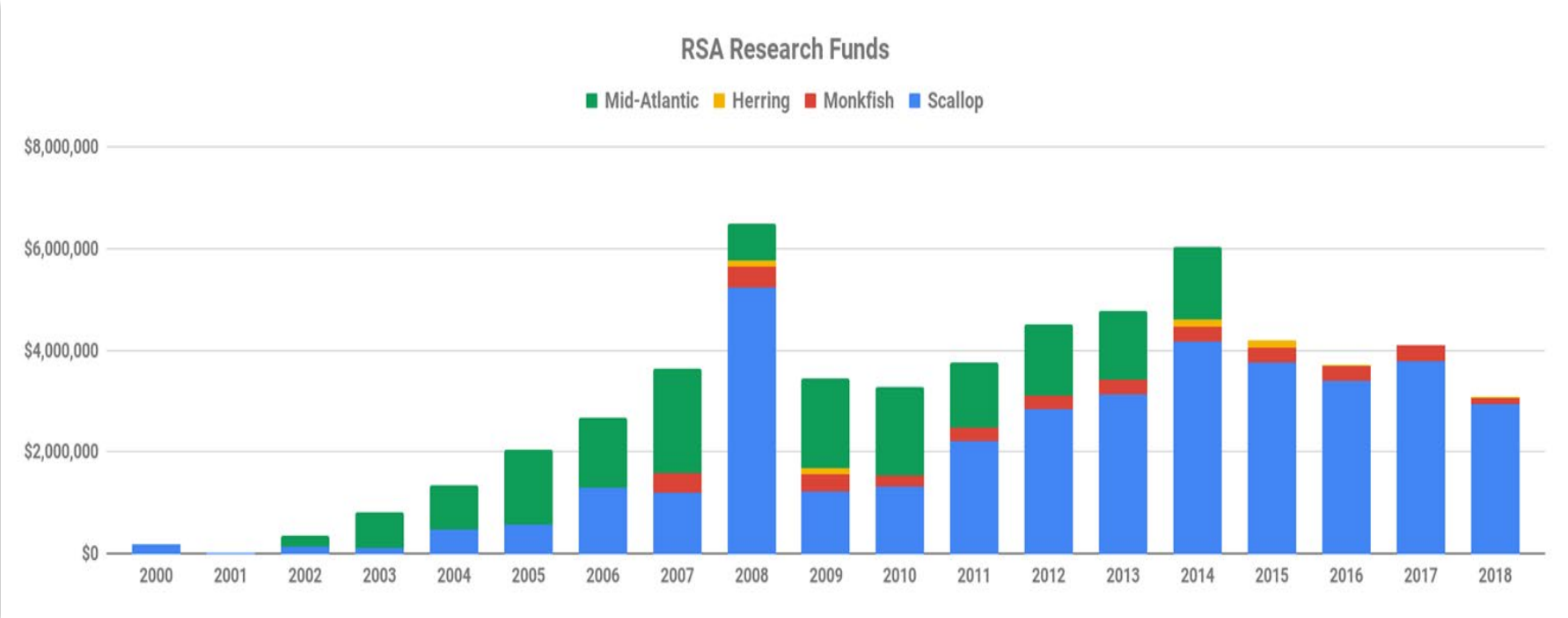

Figure from R. Sylva, GAFFO 2021

RSA Projects Informing Management

- Example Studies
  - Gear conservation projects focusing on black sea bass and scup trap vent sizes and shapes
  - Northeast Area Monitoring & Assessment Program (NEAMAP) survey have been incorporated into numerous stock assessments

Fisher and Rudders 2003, RSA

Funding Opportunities vs Research Needs

- Not all species have the same "value" – both in actual price and incentives available to support participation – but all have research needs
- 75% of funds raised by a species was to support research on that species; 25% for other species
  - Exceptions for multispecies research
- However, value today might not be the same in the future (+/-)

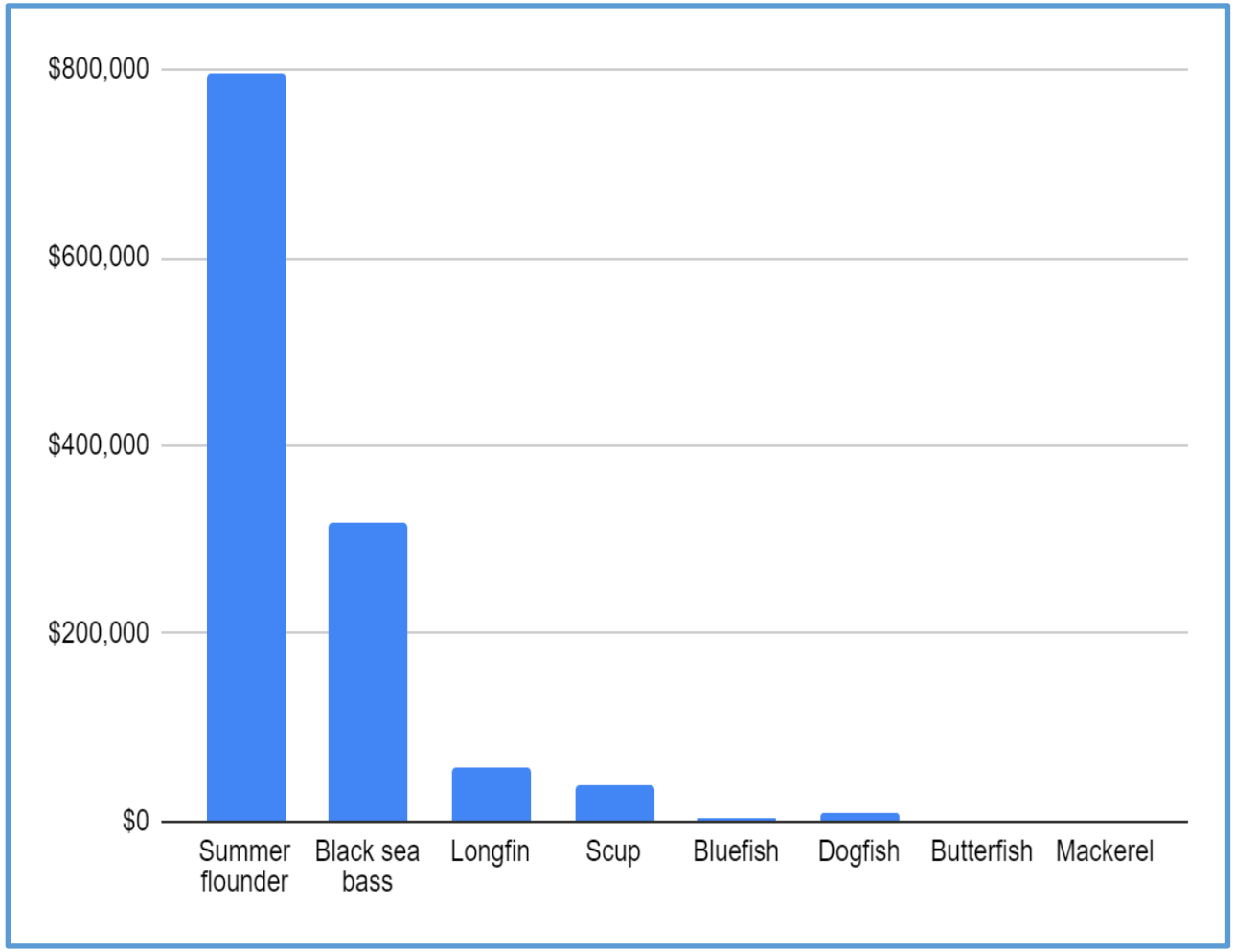

Figure from R. Sylva, GARFO – data from 2014

Program Strengths

- Funds high priority research that is supported entirely by the industry (no Federal dollars)
- Empowers the Councils in the decision process on what research gets carried out
- Gets fishermen and researchers working together (cooperative research)
- Gives NOAA Fisheries a new way to work with the Councils and fleet to solve problems

However……..

MAFMC RSA Program Issues

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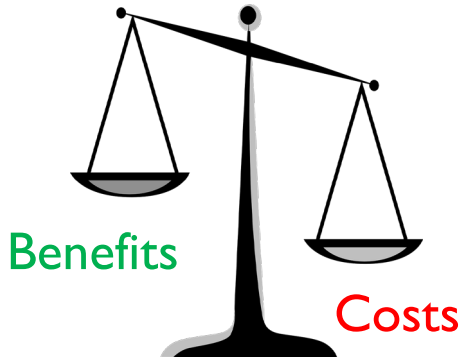
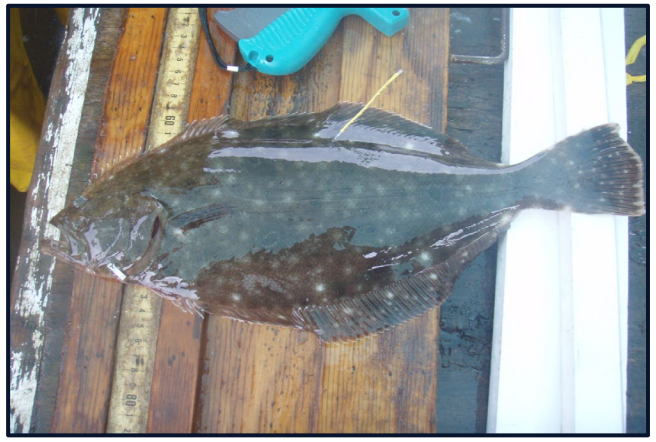


- Costs:
  - Administrative and enforcement costs not considered initially
  - Value of fishing opportunities very different across species
  - Costs outweigh benefits
- Enforcement:
  - Uncovered financial incentives to not report trips/all RSA landings leading to noncompliance
    - National Standard 1 (prevent overfishing) concerns
  - Recreational landing reporting is not verifiable through dealer reporting
  - Capacity to monitor and enforce all RSA trips
    - 2014: 103 vessels, more than 2,000 trips
- Research:
  - Number of projects failed peer review
  - Application and utility to management
  - P.I. interest - limited number of projects, some long-term

All leading to a lack of public trust in program and suspension in 2015

Differences between NEFMC and MAFMC RSA

- Foundation is similar but implementation and associated challenges are different
  - Single vs multiple FMPs
  - Diversity of fishery sectors
    - Within sector
    - Commercial and for-hire
  - State vessel permitting and administration
  - Fixed vs variable RSA specifications
  - Management panel review event



Council Interest in Possible RSA Redevelopment

- Research needs and priorities continue to grow and funding needs remain
- Council agreed as part of 2020 Implementation Plan to *"Initiate a workshop to review and consider redevelopment of the RSA program"*
- Series of four exploration workshops in 2021-2022
  - Led by the Council's Research Steering Committee
  - Review operation and issues of old program, identify potential new/revised approaches to address concerns of old program
    1. Research
    2. Funding
    3. Law Enforcement, Monitoring, and Administration
    4. Review and Recommendations
- SSC Economic Work Group – provided technical information and strategic advice on economic considerations and trade-offs of a revised program

Prioritized & Refined Draft Goals

- **Goal 1** – Produce quality, appropriately peer-reviewed research that maximizes benefits to the Council, management partners, and the public and enhances the Council's understanding of its managed resources (Research)
- **Goal 2** – Ensure effective monitoring, accountability, and enforcement of RSA quota (Enforcement and Administration)
- **Goal 3** – Generate resources to fund research projects that align with the priorities of the Council (Funding)
- **Goal 4** – Foster collaboration and trust between scientific and fishing communities and the general public

Prioritized Draft Goals & Objectives

Goal 2: Ensure effective monitoring, accountability, and enforcement of RSA quota (Enforcement and Administration)

1. Apply enhanced, adaptive, and consistent enforcement standards and controls
2. Ensure compliance with the reporting and use of the RSA quota
3. Increase state-federal science, enforcement, and administration collaboration and cooperation
4. Minimize law enforcement and administrative (agency and researcher) burdens
5. Provide support for administrative and law enforcement activities
6. Improve states' ability to revoke RSA fishing privileges

Goal 3: Generate resources to fund research projects that align with the priorities of the Council (Funding)

1. Maximize revenues from RSA quota
2. Provide equitable opportunity to fund research across all Council-managed species
3. Increase scientific and industry partnerships
4. Evaluate fairness in fishing community access to RSA quota

Areas of Consideration in Revised Program

Administration/Enforcement

- Call-in/notification/reporting requirements
- Shore-side monitoring of RSA quota
- Number of landing locations
- Number of vessels participating
- Verification of for-hire harvest
- Administrative burden and costs relative to benefit

Funding

- Species/FMP potential RSA allocation was available
- Portion of Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) set aside
- Funding mechanisms
- RSA quota allocation
- Lack of trust in third party quota process
- Disconnect and less collaboration between researcher and industry

Research

- Principal investigator disinterest/lack of project proposals
- Perceived conflicts of interest
- Quality research/peer review
- Funding for species research
- Data availability/open access
- Projects not used in science and management

Specific Examples of Proposed Changes in New Program

Administration/Enforcement

- Detailed pre-trip and pre-landing notification requirements
- Standardized electronic reporting specific to RSA program and data fields
- No mixing of trips for targeted RSA species
- Requiring vessels to be equipped with VMS or AIS
- Allowing states to opt out/in of shore side participation

Funding

- Allocate RSA quota by sector
- Encourage greater compensation fishing with research activity
- Developing guidelines for 3rd party auctions

Research

- Limit support for long-term projects
- Enhanced pre/full proposal requirements
- Changes to identifying research priorities
- Outreach/communication of results

Next Steps

- Council to consider continued redevelopment at June Council meeting
- If decide no, RSA program would remain suspended
- If yes, hold Research Steering Committee meetings to address critical issues that remain
  - Administrative burden and vessel monitoring
- Form FMAT/PDT to specify program details and alternatives through an omnibus framework or amendment
  - Will need to be done jointly with ASMFC
- Potential implementation in 2024

Questions?

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