

Data Collection Committee Report
January 29, 2024
Ms. Susan Boggs, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab F, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab F, No. 2**) of the October 2023 meeting as amended.

Discussion on For-hire Data Collection (Tab F, Nos. 4a and 4b)

The Committee reviewed the meeting summary of the Ad hoc Charter-For-hire Data Collection Advisory Panel (AP). Captain Jim Green (AP chair) presented the AP's motions and provided the AP's rationale for its recommendations. A Committee member asked if the AP had any preferences on approaches for trip validation. Captain Green stated that the AP did not; however, the AP was opposed to a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) recording 24 hours. He continued that the group offered possible alternatives to VMS for the purpose of trip validation, some of which had been explored when the Southeast For-hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program was operational, but the group did not want to be too prescriptive on alternatives at this point. The Committee discussed the AP's motion regarding optional reporting of depredation events as part of the new program. A Committee member stated that the AP discussion was more conflicted on depredation reporting than reflected on the voting results for the motion. While some members of the AP are not opposed to providing a voluntary report of depredation information, they contested making those data fields a standard reporting requirement. Several AP members contended that no one from the office of Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) has specifically asked for this type of information, nor has HMS communicated explicitly how those data maybe used. Additionally, they argued adding data fields would be counter to objectives to streamline the new program. A Committee member asked about the AP's discussions of the economic survey questions. Captain Green stated that the AP had a better understanding of how the economic information is used when assessing management alternatives, but that there was still some consternation among the industry about reporting economic data. Recently, specific consideration for the for-hire industry has been included in federal law to assess disaster relief determinations and the Committee stated for-hire economic data in the Gulf could be used for those future assessments.

Dr. Jessica Stephen (Southeast Regional Office staff) presented information collected from one year (2022) of the SEFHIER program. The Committee asked why it appeared fishermen were landing species outside of the fishing season. Dr. Stephen responded that it was difficult to assign a specific reason for that observation. She stated those catches could have been incorrectly reported as retained rather than discarded by the vessel operator or it is possible that more outreach on management measures is needed to help educate program participants and bring them into compliance. She continued that investigations were underway to send an error message to program users to alert them if they marked a species as retained outside of the fishing season. Several Committee members said that linking permit renewal to program compliance was an effective measure and that mechanisms are in place to help get reporting issues resolved and permits renewed.

The Committee then reviewed each AP motion one-by-one, referencing each motion by numbered order in which they appeared in the AP summary report. The Committee categorized

the AP motions into those that could be addressed in an initial draft document, those that would require more exploration before possibly being incorporated in a document, and those that do not pertain to document development at this time.

When discussing AP recommendations that could be incorporated directly into an initial draft, several Committee members provided comment. One Committee member stated that a lot of time and resources had been dedicated to setting up the VMS portion of the SEFHIER program. He requested open mindedness to the use of VMS when exploring approaches for effort validation. NOAA General Counsel cautioned that if prescriptive data fields for the program were included in the document, progress to modify survey questions could be hampered in the future. The Committee discussed the desire, within the document, to define a trip to avoid multiple hail-outs for non-fishing operations, which was realized during the SEFHIER program, and advised an approach to review a range of reasonable alternatives to define when a hail-out would be required. A Committee member reminded the group that any consideration for assessing when a trip occurred would require an associated validation measure.

The Committee recommends and I so **move**: **To direct staff to include motions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, & 11 from the January 2024 Ad Hoc Charter-for-Hire Data Collection Advisory Panel into the charter-for-hire electronic data collection document.**

1.MOTION: To adopt the following objectives for a new charter-for-hire data collection program:

- Increasing the timeliness of catch estimates for in-season monitoring;
- Increasing the temporal (and/or spatial) precision of catch estimates for monitoring;
- Reducing biases associated with collection of catch and effort; and,
- Increasing stakeholder trust and buy-in associated with data collection.

2.MOTION: To recommend the Council not require 24-hour tracking.

3.MOTION: To recommend to the Council that Trip Declarations include the following components:

- Vessel Registration Number
- Captain's Name
- Departure Date and Time
- Estimated Return Date and Time
- Location
- Trip Type

4.MOTION: To recommend to the Council that Trip Declarations are only required for for-hire fishing trips before departure.

6.MOTION: To recommend to the Council that a trip report include the following components:

- Vessel Registration Number
- Captain's Name
- Departure Date and Time
- Actual Return Date and Time
- Location
- Trip Type
- Angler Count
- Passenger Count
- Crew Count
- Average Depth Fished
- General Area Fished (GPS Format)
- Individual Species Data
 - Kept
 - Discarded
- Fishing Occurred (y/n)
- Primary Gear Used
- Primary Target Species

11.MOTION: To recommend the Council maintain the component of the SEFHIER program that allowed safe dockage before submitting report and off-loading fish.

Motion carried with no opposition.

The Committee then discussed AP recommendations that would require more exploration by staff. Both the optional depredation reporting and economic questions were the topic of focus. The Committee generally agreed that more information regarding what data would be collected and how that information would be used needs to be communicated by NMFS to the Council before considering those elements in a draft amendment. For the economic survey, Council staff provided some context on the use of those data and noted that the for-hire industry sells trips. When evaluating potential effects of management measures on the for-hire industry, changes in economic value are needed. The determination of economic value, which is the amount of money a for-hire operator earns in excess of the cost of providing a trip, requires for-hire business costs and revenues. Staff noted that the last comprehensive economic analysis of the for-hire industry was published in 2012¹. The values in that report, adjusted for inflation, are still being used in current economic analyses. Several Committee members expressed an interest in collecting economic data in a new for-hire data collection program with guidance from fishery economists. However, at the time of Committee discussion, no guidance was provided regarding the collection of economic data for the for-hire fishery.

¹ Savolainen, M.A., R.H. Caffey, and R.F. Kazmierczak, Jr. 2012. Economic and attitudinal perspectives of the recreational for-hire fishing industry in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. Center for Natural Resource Economics and Policy, LSU AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. 171 pp.

www.laseagrant.org/wp-content/uploads/Gulf-RFH-Survey-Final-Report-2012.pdf

The other AP recommendations were considered by the Committee. The recommendation for one-stop reporting was interpreted by the Committee as a goal, rather than an immediate program need, and encouraged continued work towards that effort. The lists of potential validation measures put forth by the AP would be used as guidance for the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) while they consider development of the document. Regarding linking permit renewal with program compliance, the Committee referred to their earlier discussion where existing methods allow for program participants and the permits office to resolve issues as they arise. The recommendation for outreach planning, such as using port ambassadors, can be developed separately but simultaneously with the amendment. For the AP's motion to avoid any consideration for any Individual Fishing Quota, the Committee noted that no such program existed, was not a charge of the AP, and would not be included in any data collection for-hire document. The Committee also acknowledged the AP's request to move progress as quickly as practical in getting a new for-hire data collection system implemented.

Update on the implementation timeline status of the commercial electronic logbook

Council staff provided a verbal update on the implementation timeline for a joint amendment with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to transition the coastal commercial logbook program to electronic reporting. The document has been finalized by the IPT and is currently being reviewed by the South Atlantic Council chair. Formal transmission of the document to NOAA is expected before the South Atlantic Council's March 2024 meeting.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.