MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL
2015 Planned Council Meeting Topics

June 8-11, 2015 – Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Virginia Beach, VA
- Review Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish Specifications for 2016/2017
- Set RH/S Cap for 2016-2018 and review progress on RH/S issues
- Review results of squid latent capacity scoping and establish scope of amendment
- Select preferred alternatives for Deep Sea Corals Amendment and adopt amendment for submission
- Review Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Specifications for 2016
- Review and approve Framework 9 for monkfish
- Species/Fisheries Interaction Workshop -EAFM

August 10-13, 2015 – Holiday Inn Midtown, New York City, NY
- Swearing-in of new and reappointed Council members
- Election of Officers
- Approve Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Specifications for 2016-2018
- Discuss Summer Flounder Amendment FMP goals and objectives
- Discuss potential Scup Amendment
- Adopt Bluefish Specifications for 2016
- Review Draft Comprehensive Research Plan
- Review/develop habitat policies/objectives
- Review blueline tilefish scoping comments and determine management approach

October 6-8, 2015 – Doubletree Philadelphia Center City, Philadelphia, PA
- Review Spiny Dogfish Specifications for 2016
- Review EAFM Guidance Document (First Draft)
- Approve Comprehensive Research Plan
- Review habitat policies/objectives
- Adopt 2016-2018 Dogfish Specifications
- Adopt action for Council role in Cooperative Research
- Review results of unmanaged forage scoping and establish scope of amendment

December 8-10, 2015 – The Westin, Annapolis, MD
- Adopt Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Recreational Specifications for 2016
- Summer Flounder Amendment Update
- Scup Amendment Update
- Adopt SSCs 5-year Research Priority Recommendations
- Review Tilefish 5-year IFQ Program Review
- Update Council on status of Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Excessive Shares Amendment
- Review EAFM Guidance Document (Second Draft)
- Select preferred alternatives for Industry Funded Observer Amendment Public Hearing
Document
2016 MAFMC Council Meetings

February 9-11, 2016: DoubleTree by Hilton New Bern-Riverfront
100 Middle Street
New Bern, NC
252-638-3585

April 12-14, 2016: Montauk Yacht Club
32 Star Island Rd.
Montauk, NY 11954
631-668-3100

June 14-16, 2016: Delaware

August 8-11, 2016: Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront
3001 Atlantic Ave.
Virginia Beach, VA 23451
757-213-3000

October 4-6, 2016: Stockton Seaview Hotel
401 South New York Road
Galloway, NJ 08205
609-652-1800

Dec. 13-15, 2016: Royal Sonesta Harbor Court Baltimore
550 Light St.
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-234-0550
2015 SPRING NRCC MEETING AGENDA
Westin Georgetown, 2350 M. St. NW, Washington, DC
All times are approximate

Wednesday, May 27

0900
1. Welcome, introductions, modifications and additions to agenda, announcements
   (Bullard, Karp, Moore, Gilbert)

0910-1600
2. Stock Assessment Priority Setting: Scheduling and Specific Assessment Topics
   Discussion leader: Karp
   • Stock Assessment Efficiency Initiative, including a presentation on the Alaska
     Approach and update on Standardization Initiative (Rago and Weinberg) (Fall
     2014 Action Item #1)
   • Update on Assessment Prioritization (Methot)
     i. Update of the document
     ii. Provide some prototype examples using data from the Northeast
   • Review Assessment Schedule for FY16 and FY17 (Rago and Weinberg)
     i. Update, as needed, previously established 2016 and 2017 schedules
     ii. Update on Spring 2016 SARC TORS (Action Item #3 from Fall 2014
        meeting)
     iii. Discuss next year’s discard methods review
   • Update on black sea bass assessment
     i. ASMFC data meeting, MAFMC RFP for stock assessment scientist,
        timing of assessment, etc.
   • Delivery of ACCSP data for the June bluefish and scup benchmark assessments
   • Incorporation of the MRIP Transition Plan into priority setting for 2016 and
     2017
   • Update on fall 2015 operational groundfish assessment
     i. Where will they be held? What are the TORs? Will there be a
        preliminary meeting? When will assessment overview panel meet?
   • Update from SAW Working Group (Jim Weinberg)

Working lunch break 1200-1220

1220-1430
3. Continue Assessment Related Discussion
   Discussion leader: Karp

Break 1430-1445

1445-1600
4. Continue Assessment Related Discussion
   Discussion leader: Karp
1600-1615
5. NEFSC SSC Liaison Discussion
   Discussion leader: Karp

1615-1630
6. Update and Discussion of Center’s Strategic Plan
   Discussion leader: Karp

1630-1645
7. NRCC SAFE Report Working Group Follow up Discussion
   Discussion leader: Weinberg

1645-Day 1 Wrap Up; Prep for Day 2 Discussions
1715 Adjourn Day 1
1800(ish): Happy Hour at Bóveda (located at the Westin Georgetown)

Thursday, May 28

0800-0820
8. Update on progress of reconstituting Trawl Survey AP
   Discussion to clarify membership, administrative details, and the NEFSC’s
   suggested TORs
   Discussion leader: Weinberg

0820-0900
9. Report of the NEFSC Climate Ecosystem, Habitat and Assessment Steering
   Group
   Discussion leader: Karp (presenter – Jon Hare)

0900-0945
10. Discussion of efforts to coordinate with Councils and Commission plans for
    EBFM/EAFM
    Discussion leader: Nies

Break 0945-1000

1000-1045
11. Cod stock structure plan
    Discussion leader: Nies
    Discuss the 2012 initiative to review the cod stock structure
    Develop plan so this issue will more forward

1045-1215
12. Bycatch Monitoring Topics
    a. Marine Mammal bycatch – SceMFis (Russ Brown)
b. Lobster/cod bycatch issue: short progress update  
   Discussion leader: Nies

c. Update on potential legislative changes for observer funding coverage and 
   update on Industry-Funded Observer Amendment  
   Discussion leader: Robins

d. Discuss plan for future bycatch monitoring in small mesh fisheries  
   Discussion leader: Stockwell
   i. Background of request: ACCSP future funding is uncertain and the  
      NRCC could discuss how to address monitoring in the future. The  
      Industry-Funded Amendment may be part of the solution, but this  
      needs to be explored.

Working lunch break 1215-1240

1240-1300
13. Update on Catch Limit Specifications Process (Fall 2014 Action Item #7)  
   Discussion Leader: Pentony

1300-1430
14. Priority setting discussion  
   • Discuss prioritization and coordination of resources, as needed

Break 1430-1445

1445-1515
15. Meeting wrap up  
   • Complete any unfinished discussions or unresolved new business  
   • Review action items and assignments  
   • Identify mid-term call date/time  
   • Confirm 2015 Fall (NEFSC host; October 20-21, 2015, Providence, RI) and  
     identify 2016 Spring (NEFMC host) meeting dates  
   • Adjourn meeting

Note: hard stop for all participants at 4:00 pm
MEMORANDUM

Date: 5/7/2015

To: Chris Moore

From: Jason Didden

Subject: Dogfish Names

Based on Council discussions during the spiny dogfish specifications process, I investigated the process of establishing acceptable seafood names as well as how the issue relates to spiny dogfish in particular. Communications with staff (Peter Koufopoulos) at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), led to the following information:

Informal requests involving seafood names may be submitted for review by letter or email with supporting documentation to seafoodhaccp@fda.gov. Formal requests are made through a Citizen petition - further information about this process is available at:

A request was made in 2013 to allow use of the name “Capefish” or “Cape Fish” for any of the species with the acceptable market name of Dogfish Shark including (Squalus acanthias). FDA denied the request, making the following points:

- There is no species of shark known as just fish in the acceptable market name category without the qualifier of shark.
- In the U.S., Dogfish Shark or Cape Shark is considered to be the acceptable market names for dogfish shark species (http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/fdcc/?set=seafoodlist&id=Squalus_acanthias).
- In the late 1990’s, Cape Shark was approved as an alternate market name and FDA discourages the proliferation of names for the same species, believing it to be misleading.
- FDA works to ensure that consumers are not misled and food safety hazards are not misidentified or overlooked due to labeling.

Guidance for industry on acceptable market names is provided by FDA at:
http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/ucm113260.htm. While there are cases where “coined names” can be used, based on the FDA response to the previous spiny dogfish request, it appears that absent additional justification, it is unlikely that FDA will approve acceptable market names for spiny dogfish that do not have the word “shark” in them and/or are not already commonly used.
Mid-Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Management

Scoping Document

http://www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish

May-June-July 2015

WHAT IS SCOPING?

Scoping is the process of identifying issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issue at hand. It provides the first and best opportunity for the public to make suggestions or to raise issues and concerns as development of an action begins.

This is the public’s opportunity to inform the Council about: blueline tilefish and/or other deep-water fisheries, actions that the public believes should or should not be taken, or any other concerns the public has.

Your comments early in the process will help us identify management issues and develop effective alternatives that address issues of public concern in a thorough and appropriate manner.

No management measures have yet been analyzed for their effectiveness or impacts. Please comment on which kinds of management measures may or may not be useful or practical, and explain your rationale. Please also comment on any other issues you believe should be addressed and the appropriate level of environmental analysis. The list of relevant issues may be expanded as suggestions are offered during the scoping process.
INTRODUCTION

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (“Council”) is seeking public input for the development of a fishery management plan (FMP) for blueline tilefish and/or other deepwater species, or adding blueline tilefish to the existing golden tilefish FMP. This potential action will likely focus on the management of blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic, and follows a Council request to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for emergency limits on blueline tilefish landings from waters off the Mid-Atlantic (i.e. north of North Carolina).

Blueline tilefish management was identified as a priority during a February 2015 special webinar-based Council meeting (http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/2015/february-2014-blueline-tilefish-webinar-meeting), and the Council is now seeking public input to inform development of management for blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic. The Council would like your comments on the appropriate range of issues, information that should be considered, and level of environmental analysis.

WHY IS THIS ACTION BEING PROPOSED?

The Council is proposing to develop this action because there is currently (as of May 26, 2015) no federal management of blueline tilefish north of North Carolina and no state management north of Maryland. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council have requested different emergency regulations (detailed below) limiting blueline tilefish landings from waters north of North Carolina. At the time this document was posted, NMFS had not decided which request, if any, to implement. This document will be updated when NMFS makes a decision. Once NMFS makes a decision regarding emergency action, those measures can generally only remain in effect for 366 days. Because of this timing constraint, the Council is moving ahead promptly with scoping to begin development of long-term management and conservation measures for blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic through the normal rule-making process. Since other deep-water species (e.g. sand tilefish, snowy grouper, and black-bellied rosefish) may have similar management issues in the future, the Council is also considering development of a deep-water species complex FMP.

CURRENT OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION

• Consider management of blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.
• Consider management of other deepwater species off the Mid-Atlantic by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.
WHAT APPROACHES MAY BE CONSIDERED?

The Council is likely to consider a variety of measures for managing blueline tilefish and/or other deep-water species off the Mid-Atlantic. These could include, **but would not be limited to:**

- Definition of the stocks and/or geographic range to be managed
- Limits on total catch: Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) and Annual Catch Limits (ACLs)
- Criteria for overfished/overfishing determinations
- Permitting and reporting requirements
- Commercial and recreational trip/possession limits
- Essential fish habitat designation and related management measures
- Other management measures as required or allowed under law and deemed appropriate by the Council

A draft Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement will be developed for public comment and used by the Council to evaluate any proposed measures. The Council will consider the biological and socio-economic impacts of any management measure before making a final decision.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The Council would like your input on the range of issues and information that should be considered during development of this action, including the specific issues identified in this document, as well as any other issues that might be of concern to you regarding blueline tilefish or other deep-water fisheries. Please also comment on the level of environmental assessment/impact analysis you believe would be appropriate (an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement - [http://www.epa.gov/reg3esd1/nepa/eis.htm](http://www.epa.gov/reg3esd1/nepa/eis.htm)). If there are any particular kinds of analyses you believe would be important to help evaluate measures for blueline tilefish, please also comment on those.

LEARN MORE

Find additional information and background documents about the action at: [http://www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish](http://www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish). Please contact Jason Didden at 302-526-5254 or jdidden@mafmc.org if you have any additional questions.

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GET INVOLVED

ATTEND A SCOPING HEARING

Public scoping hearings will be held on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Hyatt Place Long Island/East End 451 E Main St, Riverhead, NY 11901. Telephone: (631) 208-0002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1, 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Congress Hall Hotel 251 Beach Ave, Cape May, NJ 08204. Telephone: (888) 944-1816.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2, 2015</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Dare County Administration Building Commissioners Meeting Room, 954 Marshall C. Collins Drive. Manteo, NC 27954. Telephone: (252) 475-5700.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 16, 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront 3001 Atlantic Ave, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451. Telephone: (757) 213-3000.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 17, 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Ocean City Chamber of Commerce Eunice Q. Sorin Visitor &amp; Conference Center. 12320 Ocean Gateway, Ocean City, Maryland 21842. Telephone: (410) 213-0552.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 18, 2015</td>
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SUBMIT WRITTEN COMMENTS:

In addition to providing comments at any of the scoping hearings, you may submit written comments. Written comments are due by July 6, 2015, 11:59 p.m., EDT and may be sent by any of the following methods:

1. ONLINE at [http://www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish](http://www.mafmc.org/actions/blueline-tilefish)
2. EMAIL to jidden@mafmc.org
3. MAIL to Chris Moore, 800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
4. FAX to 302.674.5399

*Please include “Blueline Tilefish Scoping Comments” in the subject line if using email or fax or on the outside of the envelope if submitting written comments.*

All comments, regardless of submission method, will be compiled into a single document for review and consideration by the Council.
BACKGROUND AND RECENT FISHERY DEVELOPMENTS

To assist the public in developing comments, background information on the blueline tilefish fishery is provided below, with a focus on the Mid-Atlantic. Detailed information on the historical blueline tilefish fishery is available in the Environmental Assessment for Amendment 32 to the South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Fishery. Catches of other relevant deep water species in the Mid-Atlantic such as wreckfish, barrelfish, sand tilefish, snowy grouper, and black-bellied rosefish appear to be low in recent years, but if the public has comments regarding management of these or other deep-water species in the Mid-Atlantic, then the Council will consider such comments.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) manages blueline tilefish south of Virginia, but there is currently (as of May 26, 2015) no management of blueline tilefish in Federal waters north of North Carolina. Two states, Virginia and Maryland, have enacted tilefish regulations that apply to vessels landing in their states, with both implementing 300 pound incidental commercial trip limits and a 7-fish recreational possession limit for all tilefish species combined. These measures were designed to proactively prevent a large directed commercial fishery and constrain fishing mortality in the recreational fishery for blueline tilefish that emerged in the early 2000s. There are currently no regulations (Federal or state) for blueline tilefish north of Maryland, and fish caught off of Virginia and Maryland can be landed without restriction north of Maryland. The Council recently expressed concern to the other Mid-Atlantic and southern New England states that this unmanaged loophole fishery was used to dramatically increase landings in 2014 of blueline tilefish caught off the Mid-Atlantic and poses a threat to the sustainability of this resource.

While some other states may follow Virginia’s and Maryland’s lead, the lack of coordinated federal management tailored to the characteristics of the fishery off the Mid-Atlantic has undermined effective conservation thus far. Blueline tilefish are susceptible to overfishing due to their life history (relatively long-lived, sedentary, slow growing, and late maturing) so the Council is considering developing management measures. These potential measures could be considered via an amendment to the Council’s golden tilefish FMP, or a new FMP for blueline tilefish and/or other deep-water species.

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL EMERGENCY ACTION REQUEST

In response to the catch increases allowed by lack of federal management north of North Carolina, the Council has already requested that NMFS take emergency action to implement a 300 pound (whole weight) commercial trip limit and a seven fish per-person recreational possession limit for blueline tilefish in Mid-Atlantic waters north of North Carolina. This request was the result of a February 25, 2015 Council Meeting, the details of which (including the emergency request letter) may be found at: http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/2015/february-2014-blueline-tilefish-webinar-meeting.

These emergency measures are intended to prevent depletion of blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic on an interim basis (generally for a maximum of 366 days) while the Council develops long-term management measures through the normal rulemaking process. The Council’s request was based on the life history of blueline tilefish, and observations of both where blueline tilefish were being landed (Figure 1) and where they were being caught in the Mid-Atlantic (Figure 2, Tables 1 and 2). The Council has also noted that 2014 Vessel Trip Report (VTR) catch off Delmarva (Statistical Areas 625, 626, 621, and 622) was more than 32 times the 2001-2013 average and that this level of catch off Delmarva is a

recent development relative to the history of the blueline tilefish fishery. As of May 26, 2015, NMFS has not indicated whether and/or how it will respond to the Council’s request.

Figure 1. Mid-Atlantic/New England Blueline Tilefish Landings (source: unpublished NMFS northeast (NE) dealer weighout data)

Figure 2. NMFS Northeast Statistical areas used on Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) (source: unpublished NMFS NE VTR data)
Table 1. Blueline tilefish NE VTR commercial kept catch in pounds by statistical area and year, 2001-2014 (source: unpublished NMFS NE VTR data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>635, 636, 631, 632</th>
<th>625, 626, 621, 622</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>18,131</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>19,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23,853</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>3,181</td>
<td>29,608</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,435</td>
<td>1,882</td>
<td>5,330</td>
<td>8,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,209</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>3,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,958</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>11,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>6,806</td>
<td>12,459</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>19,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>9,910</td>
<td>6,905</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>18,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>12,502</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>1,825</td>
<td>16,986</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>65,838</td>
<td>4,020</td>
<td>1,713</td>
<td>71,571</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>28,029</td>
<td>4,588</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>34,941</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>39,290</td>
<td>4,063</td>
<td>4,423</td>
<td>47,776</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>42,994</td>
<td>17,416</td>
<td>4,010</td>
<td>64,420</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>44,116</td>
<td>146,347</td>
<td>5,181</td>
<td>195,644</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Blueline tilefish NE VTR recreational party-charter kept fish by statistical area and year, 2002-2014 (numbers of fish) (source: unpublished NMFS NE VTR data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>635, 636, 631, 632</th>
<th>625, 626, 621, 622</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2,564</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>1,683</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>3,421</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4,664</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>3,811</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>2,101</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>3,232</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>4,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>9,844</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>10,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>10,576</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>11,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,408</td>
<td>13,975</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>15,843</td>
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**AMENDMENT 32 AND THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL’S EMERGENCY ACTION REQUEST**

Through the SAFMC’s Amendment 32 to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery, and in response to an assessment that found overfishing to be occurring\(^3\), NMFS implemented a 112 pound (whole weight) commercial trip limit and a one fish per boat per trip recreational trip limit (with a limited season) for the South Atlantic (waters south of the North Carolina/Virginia border). The SAFMC has also requested that the Amendment 32 rules be extended north for all Federal waters off the U.S. East Coast via an emergency rule. The outcome of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s and SAFMC’s emergency requests was not known as of May 26, 2015.

**ADDITIONAL MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES**

In the interim, while this action is considered and possible emergency actions are implemented, the Council has committed to funding a genetic analysis of the blueline tilefish population along the east coast of the U.S that will begin this year. NMFS is also coordinating development of a deepwater survey throughout the range of the blueline tilefish fishery that, together with the genetics analysis, will provide additional information regarding the abundance and distribution of blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic region.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After the initial phase of information gathering and public comment, if the Council decides to proceed, the Council will evaluate potential management alternatives for inclusion in an FMP or amendment.

The Council will then develop a draft FMP or amendment, incorporating the identified management alternatives for public review. The Council will also prepare draft environmental analyses as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and subject those analyses to review and comment by the public as appropriate.

Finally, the Council will choose preferred management measures for submission with the appropriate environmental analyses to the Secretary of Commerce for review and consideration for approval. Approved management measures would be implemented through publication of proposed and final rules, which include additional opportunity for public comment. While there are many opportunities for public comment in the process, this scoping comment opportunity is particularly important for assisting the Council in establishing the overall focus and direction of this action.

**Figure 3. Action Development Process (for an FMP or FMP amendment)***
Science and Technology

Transition Plans for Modifications to Recreational Fishing Catch and Effort Survey Methods, NMFS PD 04-114

Guidance and Procedures for the Transition Process for Modification of Recreational Fishing Catch and Effort Methods

NOTICE: This publication is available at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/op/pds/index.html

Type of Issuance: Initial

SUMMARY:

The document specifies guidance and procedures for the transition process for modification of methods to estimate recreational fishing catch and effort that fall under the Marine Recreational Information Program to implement Policy Directive 04-114. It establishes and describes the role and responsibilities of the MRIP Transition Team, the general transition approach when new survey designs are implemented, and an example of a transition plan outline. It also describes the Terms of Reference for the Transition Team.

Signed

Ned Cyr, Ph.D.                                Date
Director, Office of Science and Technology
Introduction

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) recognized the need to appropriately transition from current to new recreational fishing surveys, in light of substantial design improvements. This procedures guidance implements Policy Directive 04-114, for transition to new recreational fishing catch and effort survey methods. The objective of the policy is to assure the comparability of long-term time series of recreational fishery catch and effort statistics as new, more statistically valid survey designs are implemented to replace legacy survey designs and the efficient integration of appropriately calibrated statistics into fishery science products and fishery management measures. Specifically, the PD 04-114 provides that a Transition Plan must be prepared for the implementation of any modifications of survey sampling or estimation methods that may result in consistently higher or lower statistical estimates of catch or effort. The MRIP Executive Steering Committee (ESC) established the MRIP Transition Team to develop and recommend standardized processes for transitioning from historical estimates to estimates derived from improved sampling and estimation designs. This procedure establishes and describes the role and responsibilities of the Transition Team and the general transition approach when new survey designs are implemented. An example transition plan outline is included to be used as a general guide for the Transition Team.

Transition Team Role and Responsibilities

The Transition Team is co-led by NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology and Office of Sustainable Fisheries. The team comprises representatives from NOAA Fisheries, the regional fishery management councils, the interstate marine fisheries commissions, and several state agencies. In order for a new survey method to be implemented, historical catch statistics first need to be converted into the same ‘currency’ as the new estimates. The Transition Team develops and executes appropriate transition plans to ensure this happens. It is critical to establish processes that will enable scientists and fishery managers to make “apples to apples” comparisons between new and historical catch statistics, providing a framework that decision-makers can use for integrating new data into science and management activities at the regional and state level. The Transition Team plays an important role in coordinating consistent approaches and methods for councils, interstate commissions, and NOAA Fisheries Regions to apply to recreational catch estimates derived from new or improved survey designs for:

1. Determining the status of exploited stocks.
2. Setting annual catch limits.
4. Assessing the need for and selection of accountability measures.
5. Conducting analyses leading to the adoption of recreational fishing regulations.

General Transition Approach

The first step in the process is to develop a transition plan for the new design that describes the most appropriate processes for transitioning from historical estimates to estimates derived from improved sampling and estimation designs. Several steps must be taken before estimates based on any new design can be used effectively in the management process.
1. **Benchmarking:** The newly designed survey should be conducted side-by-side with the legacy survey to allow measurement and evaluation of consistent differences in the statistical estimates produced. During this benchmarking period, statistical estimates produced by the legacy design are still considered the “best available scientific information” for use in fishery stock assessments, establishing overfishing limits and annual catch limits (ACLs), monitoring catches relative to ACLs, and making management decisions.

2. **Calibration model development:** Differences between new design and legacy design estimates that are consistently unidirectional should be evaluated to determine possible sources of bias to explain those differences. In addition, literature research should be conducted to assess how biases identified in the legacy design would most likely have changed over time. Based on the information gained, one or more calibration models should be developed and evaluated for possible use in correcting past catch statistics. Alternative models should be considered and one should be selected and defended as the most appropriate, validated by an external peer review.

3. **Re-estimation of historical catch statistics:** Once a calibration model has been developed, independently reviewed, and approved, the model should be used to generate a corrected time series of recreational catch statistics that were generated by the legacy design. The revised time series should immediately be made available to stock assessment scientists and fishery managers.

4. **Incorporation of new estimates into stock assessments and economic analyses:** The revised catch statistics derived from the calibration model should be incorporated into stock assessments and economic analyses as soon as possible to provide the most accurate assessments of stock status, new ACLs for use in fisheries management, and update information relevant to sector allocations and economic impacts. Stocks with very substantial mortality levels due to recreational fishing (high proportion of total mortality relative to that caused by commercial fishing) should be identified as “key stocks” and prioritized for assessment scheduling. Depending on the magnitude of the estimation changes and potential disruption of the management process, assessments scheduled for key stocks may have to be moved to earlier dates while those scheduled for non-key stocks are moved to later dates.

5. **Incorporation of new estimates and ACLs into management actions:** As soon as catch statistics and new assessment results become available, management should begin to use both for decision making. If revised statistics are available but new assessments are not, then managers may need to continue using the statistics based on the legacy design until new assessment results are available. In years when the legacy design is no longer being conducted, the approved calibration model would be used to convert catch estimates based on the new design into estimates that are compatible with the legacy design for use in management.

An example of a plan outline is as follows:

I. Executive Summary
II. Introduction and Purpose
III. Description of Approach and Timeline
IV. Potential Stock Assessment Impacts and Schedule
V. Potential Management Impacts and Schedule
VI. Identification of Unknowns
VII. Lessons Learned
VIII. Appendices
Attachments

Attachment A: Example Terms of Reference for the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Transition Team

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries)**

**Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Transition Team**

**Terms of Reference**

**April 14, 2014**

1. Develop and recommend a standardized process for transitioning from historical estimates to estimates derived from improved sampling and estimation designs. The recommended process will describe and provide consistent approaches and methods for Councils, Interstate Commissions, and NOAA Fisheries Regions to apply to recreational catch estimates derived from new or improved approaches for:
   a) Setting annual catch limits;
   b) Monitoring catch against catch limits;
   c) Assessing the need for and selection of accountability measures; and
   d) Conducting analyses leading to the adoption of recreational fishing regulations.

   The process description should include flow diagrams and timelines for illustrative purposes.

2. Develop and recommend methods to be used to compare legacy estimates to estimates produced by using new or modified MRIP designs in a statistically robust manner.

3. Determine when calibration or other means of linking legacy data sets with MRIP-derived data sets are feasible and necessary, and identify the requirements and methods for making such linkages.

4. To minimize disruptions to stock assessments, catch monitoring, and management regulations, establish guidelines, in consultation with Regional Implementation Teams, to facilitate decisions on when and how implementation of changes to MRIP survey methods are introduced.

5. Report to the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) on the status of the transition and any impediments to progress, along with suggestions for overcoming the impediments, at least on an annual basis.

6. All recommendations will be submitted to the MRIP ESC for approval and conveyance to the NMFS Science Board and Regulatory Board.

In carrying out its work under these Terms of Reference, the Transition Team will consult with the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams and with the affected NOAA Fisheries Regional Offices and Fisheries Science Centers, the NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries and Office of Science and Technology, and the States, Interstate Commissions, and Regional Fishery
Management Councils. The Transition Team may establish one or more Work Groups to develop proposed processes and analytical methods.