Recreational Management Reform Initiative
Steering Committee Meeting Summary
July 14, 2020

Steering Committee Attendees (in alphabetical order): Julia Beaty (MAFMC staff), Joe Cimino (MAFMC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Committee Vice Chair), Tony DiLernia (MAFMC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Committee Chair), Toni Kerns (ASMFC staff), Mike Luisi (MAFMC Chair), Adam Nowalsky (ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Chair), Mike Ruccio (GARFO staff), Caitlin Starks (ASMFC staff)

Background
The Recreational Management Reform Steering Committee met via teleconference to discuss next steps for the Recreational Management Reform Initiative. More information on this initiative is available at: https://www.mafmc.org/actions/recreational-reform-initiative.

Identifying and Smoothing Outlier MRIP Estimates
The Steering Committee briefly discussed their previous recommendation to develop a standardized process to identify and, if necessary, adjust (or “smooth”) outlier estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).\(^1\) They agreed that it would be appropriate for the Monitoring and Technical Committees to build off their past work and move forward with further developing this approach.

Harvest Control Rule Proposal
The Steering Committee discussed a proposal put forward by six recreational organizations through scoping for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment (see pages 147-152 of this document for the full proposal). This proposal, referred to as a “harvest control rule,” recommended defining recreational “allocation” not as a set percentage of a total catch limit, but as a specific combination of bag/size/season limits preferred by recreational fishermen in each state, which would become more restrictive when estimated biomass declines below the target level. The restrictions would occur in a pre-determined, stepwise manner. The commercial “allocation” would be the commercial quota preferred by the commercial industry when biomass is high and it would be reduced as biomass declines below the target level in proportion with the restrictions on the recreational fishery. This approach is largely conceptual at this stage and is not yet associated with specific proposed measures.

Based on the recommendations of the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT), the Council and Board agreed not to further consider this proposal through the Commercial/Recreational

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\(^1\) See the draft initiative outline developed by the Steering Committee in April 2020 for more information: https://www.mafmc.org/s/2Rec_reform_outline_v6.pdf
Allocation Amendment; however, they expressed a desire to further evaluate certain aspects of it through other avenues. They agreed that the allocation aspects of the proposal are not feasible given current Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements. For example, the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the use of annual catch limits set in pounds or numbers of fish. Management measures must be expected to prevent those limits from being exceeded. In addition, it is not clear how this approach would ensure that overfishing does not occur or how it would function if a specific fishing mortality target had to be achieved in a rebuilding scenario. For these reasons, it is not possible to define a recreational allocation as a preferred set of management measures independent from an annual catch limit.

The Recreational Reform Steering Committee agreed that the proposal’s recommendation for pre-determined recreational management measure “steps” associated with different biomass levels warrants further consideration and could be feasible under current Magnuson-Stevens Act and FMP requirements. A few Steering Committee members asked if the management measure step approach would be desired by stakeholders if separated from the allocation aspects of the original proposal. The group generally agreed that pre-defined management measures at different biomass levels would provide an additional level of predictability to the management process, which would be beneficial to recreational fishery stakeholders.

One Steering Committee member suggested comparing past management measures to harvest as a starting point for determining which measures might be appropriate at each biomass level “step.” Other Steering Committee members cautioned that harvest is impacted by many factors in addition to management measures, such as availability and fishing effort. As past experience managing these recreational fisheries has shown, it can be very difficult to predict future harvest under a given set of management measures even when focused only on the upcoming year. The intent of this approach is to provide stability and predictability by pre-determining management measures which could be used beyond just the upcoming year. One Steering Committee member also noted that, in addition to changes in biomass levels, the distribution of the stocks has changed over time, which would pose additional challenges for predicting future harvest based on the past performance of management measures, depending on the time frame of past measures examined. For these reasons, the Steering Committee agreed that any pre-determined measures would be a starting point for consideration and must be regularly re-evaluated.

The Steering Committee agreed that the proposal’s suggestion of pre-defined upper and lower bounds for the most liberal and most restrictive measures could be retained; however, like the management measure steps, they would be a starting point for consideration and the Council and Board may have to use measures outside of those bounds in any given year. They agreed that extensive input from the recreational fishing community is needed to help define the preferred upper and lower bounds of management measures. As described by one Steering Committee member, the upper bound would represent the highest desired level of access and any liberalizations beyond that would not be beneficial to or “needed” by the recreational community. On the other hand, as described by this Steering Committee member, the most restrictive set of potential measures would be so restrictive that there may not be a conservation benefit to making them even more restrictive. They would also represent the most extreme restriction which could be tolerated without causing severe negative economic impacts such as widespread loss of businesses (e.g., for-hire vessels and bait and tackle shops). It is important to note that the desired
potential upper and lower bounds have not yet been determined or evaluated. It has not been
determined if this concept will be feasible in practice.

All Steering Committee members agreed that further analysis should be done to evaluate the
potential management measures which could be used at different biomass levels. This analysis
may suggest that it is not appropriate to associate a predicted harvest level in years beyond the
upcoming year with a given set of management measures. However, even if this is the case, it
would still be beneficial to do the analysis to evaluate our ability (or inability) to predict future
harvest.

**Other Topics Removed from Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment**

During their June 2020 joint meeting, the Council and Board passed a motion to “consider
initiating an action by the end of 2020 to develop a recreational accountability and accounting joint
action.”

The Steering Committee briefly discussed recreational accountability and accounting in relation
to the Recreational Reform Initiative. They did not discuss these topics in detail as they felt that
they are outside the formal mission and charge of this group.

Multiple Steering Committee members recommended that the Council and Board gain a better
understanding of private angler reporting efforts in other regions before initiating an action to
consider improvements to recreational catch accounting in this region. They agreed that it would
be important to understand what has worked well in these other efforts, as well as the challenges
and levels of compliance. In addition, the Council and Board have discussed if this topic may be
more appropriately considered for all Council and Commission managed recreational species,
rather than just a few species.

A few Steering Committee members said past discussions of recreational catch accounting and
recreational accountability have sometimes confused the two subjects. A better understanding of
the intent of the recommendations for considering changes to accountability measures (e.g., in-
season closures, more frequent repayments of RHL overages) would be beneficial.

**Role of Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee agreed that they have fulfilled their mission and should disband. Further
discussions of this action should occur at the level of the Board and the full Council or the
Council’s committees. They recommended that the Council and Board initiate a management
action such as a framework/addendum to further develop priority approaches considered through
the Recreational Reform Initiative. Further development would follow the standard process with
involvement by a technical group (e.g., an FMAT, the Monitoring and Technical Committees, or
a different group), Council committees or the full Council and Board, as appropriate.

**Next Steps**

In summary, the Steering Committee recommended that the Council and Board initiate a
management action to pursue priority topics and that a technical group (e.g., the
Monitoring/Technical Committee or a separate group) move forward with further developing and
analyzing topics such as identifying and smoothing outlier MRIP estimates and the stepped approach to recreational management measures proposed through the Harvest Control Rule.