

Data Collection Committee Report
April 6, 2022
Ms. Susan Boggs, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab F, No. 1**) as written and approved the minutes of the January 2022 meeting (**Tab F, No. 2**) as amended.

Modification to Location Reporting Requirements for For-Hire Vessels and Equipment Failure Exemption Implementation Plan (Tab F, No. 4a and b)

Council staff reviewed the latest version of the framework action (Tab F, No. 4a) and Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff provided a presentation (Tab F, No. 4b) on the technical aspects of implementing the equipment failure exemption. A Committee member asked if it was necessary to include language in the document that would stipulate future progress reports on the program. SERO agreed that regular updates to the Council are needed and it would not be necessary to include any formal language in the document to achieve those updates. A Committee member asked for clarification on dually permitted for-hire and commercial participants and the equipment failure exemption. SERO staff responded that those individuals would be subject to the more stringent commercial regulations and the equipment failure exemption would not apply to them. The Committee member also asked if any participant had reported any vessel monitoring system (VMS) issues so far, and SERO staff replied that no issue had been reported to date. Council staff asked for clarification regarding who would be able to submit an equipment failure exemption (the permit holder or the vessel operator, or both). SERO staff indicated that the permit holder would be responsible for submitting the equipment failure exemption, thus the document would be updated with that clarification for final action in June.

Update on Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program (Tab F, No. 5)

SERO staff provided an update report which included summary information on program compliance (Tab F, No. 5). Additionally, the presentation proposed a modification to the hail-out regulation language that would exempt a declaration report for non-fishing trips with a duration less than an hour. A Committee member stated that several stakeholders had reported difficulty reaching SEFHIER staff to obtain information about the program from the help call line; however, it was possible they were not calling the official helpline. SERO staff directed the Committee to the contact information included in the presentation and indicated that recent inquiries to the SEFHIER call line had been regarding set up of the VMS units and reporting requirements.

A Committee member asked about the rationale on the recent decision to cap the reimbursement for cellular VMS devices at \$950. SERO staff indicated that, previously, the reimbursement fund had prioritized the SEFHIER program; however, the nation-wide fund was now executing payments to SEFHIER participants on a first-come first-serve basis. The new maximum reimbursement value is based on the average price for a cellular VMS unit. The Committee asked why compliance for the program was not higher and what steps could be taken to increase

buy-in. SERO staff indicated that non-compliant permit holders would not be able to renew their permits and it is likely compliance will increase as permit renewal applications are submitted throughout the year. Additionally, VMS information is now available to determine whether these observations are due to latency or are attributable to non-compliance. Another Committee member asked whether SERO had encountered any technical issues with data reporting, management, or storage especially related to data sent to the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). SERO staff replied that two dedicated technicians were working on integrating the OLE and SEFHIER databases.

The Committee discussed the merits of the proposed modification to the trip declaration (i.e., hail-out) requirements. Several Committee members indicated that 1- hour may not allow enough time to complete non-fishing tasks that may require the vessel to leave the dock. The Committee also discussed the pros and cons of including an action to address the hail-out issue into the existing VMS exemption document. While combining these efforts in one document would be advantageous, the Committee agreed that greatly extending the equipment failure exemption implementation timeline should be avoided. The Committee decided to proceed with exploring actions to reduce the burden associated with multiple hail-outs for a single for-hire trip and provide staff flexibility to proceed as efficiently as possible with document development.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **to direct staff to develop an abbreviated framework document addressing the trip declaration requirements.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

The Committee discussed the frequency of SEFHIER updates at future meetings. The Committee generally agreed that summary updates on compliance numbers would be helpful at each meeting with the potential to decrease the frequency of the updates in the future. The Committee also requested a report of preliminary summary data collected from the program sometime in early 2023 to assess program outputs and help identify any data collection issues observed during the first year of full program implementation.

NMFS-SERO Use of Council Funding Utilized by the Permit Office

SERO staff indicated that funds acquired from the Council last year had been applied to overhauling and expanding the permit application system. The improvements to the system have reduced errors and decreased the amount of required paperwork. SERO is currently working on outreach and education approaches to help introduce the system to permit applicants. At a future meeting, Mr. Kevin McIntosh will present more technical information to the Council.

Update on Workshop to Evaluate State-Federal Recreational Survey Differences

Staff with the Office of Science and Technology (OST) provided an overview on a two-day workshop convened in late February to address a Congressional mandate to investigate recreational fishery surveys and work to complete the transition process for estimating recreational harvest. A report from the workshop, including recommendations from independent statistical consultants, will be made available soon. The Gulf Transition Team will meet again on April 13th.

A Committee member asked about a tentative timeline for completing the transition process. OST staff indicated that long-term research projects to investigate survey differences would take several years. In the short-term, progress has been made to investigate the use of Florida recreational survey data in the recent gag stock assessment analysis. Council staff inquired as to whether the recent work with the Transition Team would be used to modify the previously published NMFS paper titled “Recommended use of the Current Gulf of Mexico Surveys of Marine Recreational Fishing in Stock Assessments”¹ and OST staff stated that paper would need to be updated. Council staff suggested updates to the document also include information on integrating calibrated data into the stock assessment process and outline implications for management. OST staff agreed to continue keeping the Council informed on the transition process.

Other business

A Council member asked about the feasibility of including additional questions in the SEFHEIR reporting that could assist with filling data gaps with information necessary for considering ecosystem-based management approaches. SERO staff replied that additional reporting questions were subject to stipulations within the Paperwork Reduction Act and that program vendors would have to be consulted when modifying electronic reporting requirements. Another Committee member inquired when NMFS would be able to report information on wenchman snapper to the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee. Southeast Fishery Science Center staff replied they were not sure what that timeline would be but could follow up at full Council.

SERO staff reported the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council had begun work on the development of a document to implement commercial electronic reporting and suggested that the IPT include Gulf staff members so that the document could be a joint action. The Gulf has had this item on the action schedule for some time and would work to bring draft options to the Council in June. The action will allow for existing paper commercial logbooks to be submitted electronically.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

¹ <https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/I-5-NOAA-Recommended-Use-of-the-Current-Gulf-Surveys-of-Marine-Recreational-Fishing-in-Stock-Assessments.pdf>