

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report January 26, 2022 Dr. Greg Stunz, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab E, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab E, No. 2**) of the October 2021 meeting as written.

Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (Tab E, No. 4)

Mr. Dan Luers (Southeast Regional Office [SERO] staff) gave a brief presentation on the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) 5-year review. SBRM is an established, consistent procedure used to collect, record, and report bycatch data in a fishery. This allows for the collection, recording, and reporting of bycatch data that are used with other data to assess the amount and type of bycatch. Bycatch does not include species in catch-and-release fisheries, marine mammals or seabirds, or incidental catch. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed these fishery management plan (FMP)-specific SBRMs for the Reef Fish, Shrimp, Coastal Migratory Pelagic, Spiny Lobster, Red Drum, and Coral FMPs based on four criteria: (1) characteristics of bycatch occurring in the fishery; (2) feasibility of the methodology from cost, technical, and operational perspectives; (3) uncertainty of the data resulting from the methodology, and (4) how the data resulting from the methodology are used to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in the fishery. The SSC was asked to consider, for each FMP: is the SBRM feasible from cost, technical and operational perspectives; can the uncertainty associated with bycatch data be described, quantitatively or qualitatively; are the data adequate to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in the fishery, and; are the data useful in management of these FMPs? Because the Red Drum and Coral FMPs do not allow any harvest, there are no SBRMs for those managed species. Mr. Luers described fleet-specific harvest methods and their associated bycatch characteristics for each FMP, including metrics such as the mean number of discards by fleet, species, and year. Generally, discard mortality is accounted for in stock assessments, and the accuracy of bycatch estimates is fundamental to effective management; if not properly quantified, discard mortality could reduce stock biomass to a depleted level. Recreational discards are typically much greater in numbers of fish than commercial discards, and discards from both sectors are assumed to be known with a generally poor level of precision.

A Committee member asked that, for comparison purposes, commercial and recreational data be presented in the same units (pounds and/or numbers of fish) along with other metrics such as sample size, cost of programs, and other criteria to facilitate a review and evaluation of the programs considered in the document. Further, they asked about the bycatch associated with the Spiny Lobster FMP, which presumed that most fish escape the trap within 48 hours, and inquired if an unobserved escaped lobster would constitute the definition of bycatch. Mr. Luers replied that the assumption was based on empirical research. The SEFSC asked whether the commercial discard data were collected from commercial logbook data, or from some other data source. Mr. Luers replied that the data were collected from the commercial logbooks; the SEFSC replied that a more appropriate source may be the SEDAR stock assessments. Mr. Luers replied that not all of the SEDAR assessments provided data for the target time period of 2015 – 2019.

A Committee member expressed concern about asymmetry in the collection of bycatch data between fleets, and asked if this affected the feasibility estimates. The SEFSC noted low confidence in the commercial logbook reported discard data; further, observer coverage in the Reef Fish Observer program is very low (less than 2% of all commercial trips), which makes validating commercial logbook discards difficult. Recreational discard data are all self-reported, and thus are highly uncertain and difficult to validate. A Committee member thought reviewing these data more regularly may be beneficial, to better target the most effective ways to collect and report these data in the future. The SERO encouraged the recognition of methodologies to collect bycatch data, and the identification of any gaps where improvements are possible.

Dr. Luiz Barbieri briefly summarized the SSC's discussions on the SBRM 5-year review. The SSC requested that the SEFSC consider the collection of bycatch data on specific states' managed species identified by GSMFC TCC Data Management Subcommittee be added to the appropriate bycatch data programs. A Committee member asked about the SSC's opinion on the current adequacy of the SBRMs as presented, to which Dr. Barbieri recalled that they were. He further acknowledged the costs of recommended improvements to the FMP-specific SBRMs, but was optimistic about the potential for these improvements in the future. The Committee considered the adequacy of this report but determined that further deliberation was necessary during full Council prior to making a determination on this report.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.