

**Commercial ELB Excerpt from the Summary Report of  
Reef Fish Advisory Panel  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
Webinar Meeting**

**Wednesday, February 24, 2021**

**9:00 am EDT – 5:30 pm EDT**

*Discussion: Commercial Electronic Logbooks*

Dr. Lisa Hollensead provided a presentation synthesizing information regarding changes to the commercial electronic logbook program. The presentation highlighted two previous presentations from SEFSC staff that was provided to the Council at its June and October 2020 meetings. Broadly, proposed changes to the program will require electronic reporting at the set-level rather than trip-level, eliminate the need for paper logbooks, include a number of new data entries, streamline reporting timing, reduce entry errors, and will improve indices of abundance for stock assessment. Preliminary results of a pilot study to test the program changes, conducted in 2015, were also presented. This will affect numerous commercial fishery permit holders, and Council staff stated that this topic will be discussed at the upcoming Coastal Migratory Pelagic AP meeting in March 2021. According to the SEFSC's timeline, a voluntary participation period of one year would be first applied before mandatory implementation.

*AP Discussion:* An AP member inquired as to the impetus of the program changes. SEFSC staff answered that the changes were requested by NMFS as well as non-agency partners in 2011 to improve commercial data collection. Several AP members voiced support for the elimination of paper logbooks and a more streamlined reporting approach. However, there was concern that not all commercial fishing practices would benefit from program changes and that the changes seemed more conducive to longline vessels. AP members stated that smaller-scale commercial operations working off smaller center console vessels make several fishing explorations in a single 24-hour day which requires rapid transitions to several fishing sites. It was noted that there are already several monitoring and reporting requirements for the highly-targeted commercial reef fish fisheries in the individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. They expressed that the process of recording catch and effort information during those transitions would be burdensome without providing any improved data over a conventional trip log. Other AP members indicated that providing more 'real-time' information would improve accuracy which is beneficial for data collection. SEFSC staff stated they were working with application vendors to provide as many automated features as possible to reduce data entry requirements. An AP member asked that many of these requirements complement the current hardware/software reporting requirements of the commercial IFQ program, instead of adding additional costs and reporting requirements to the industry. The SEFSC staff noted that many of the concerns expressed by AP members were reported from the 2015 pilot study. SEFSC stated that several definitions of what constitutes a set would be provided to avoid excessive data entries. The AP pointed out that stakeholders who were already aware and generally positive about the program were likely to volunteer for the

program before mandatory implementation. They suggested that further outreach was required to inform the larger industry. The AP determined that more information on the program changes would be necessary to inform feedback from commercial stakeholders.

**Motion: To inform the mackerel, reef fish and shrimp commercial fishermen of the Gulf about these ELB proposals and hear back from them before implementation.**

*Motion carried with no opposition.*

**Commercial ELB Excerpt from the Summary Report of  
Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
Webinar Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 24, 2021**

**9:00 am EDT – 6:00 pm EDT**

*Discussion: Commercial Electronic Logbooks*

Dr. Hollensead provided a presentation which synthesized information provided by the SEFSC from the June and October Council meetings regarding changes to the commercial electronic logbook program (ELB). Broadly, the changes will affect the precision of effort, catch, and spatial data collected from a number of Gulf commercial fleets. Rather than reporting at a trip-level, fishermen would be required to report fishing operation information at a set-level.

The AP asked SEFSC staff what would constitute a set, as the gear used in Gulf commercial fisheries is highly variable between fleets. Dr. Julie Brown indicated that what constituted a set could be more subjective depending on the gear type used. For example, “spot fishing” with short movements between quick gear deployments could be aggregated. She emphasized that delineation of effort was the goal of the program. Several members expressed concern that other data collection programs (i.e., observer and state dealer programs) would overlap with the proposed changes to the commercial ELB program and inquired if reporting would need to be duplicated. SEFSC staff stated that the observer program was limited and that the ELB program would have the ability to reach more of the commercial fleet and that dealers would be responsible for recording harvest weight. However, dealer reports collect harvest weight at the trip-level rather than the set-level. The AP also voiced a number of concerns with the proposed changes. These concerns included the time burden of extra data entry while working on the water, the reporting of proprietary fishing locations, potential safety-at-sea issues regarding the hail-in requirement, duplicate reporting, and any program costs incurred. SEFSC staff

mentioned that the software for the ELB programs would be freely available and would work with any mobile device. They also stated that the presented ELB program changes were proposed and that the Council could frame an associated policy document to address the AP's considerations. The AP agreed that moving commercial reports to an electronic framework would be advantageous; however, more work would be needed to include broad input from the commercial industry and address the concerns of the AP.

**Motion: To recommend the Council reject the Commercial ELB proposal as currently written.**

*Motion carried with no opposition*