

Data Collection Committee Report August 19, 2024 Ed Walker, Vice-Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda after including a discussion on the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) permit database under Other Business (**Tab F, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab F, No. 2**) of the June 2024 meeting.

Discussion on For-hire Data Collection Program (Tab F, Nos. 4, 4a, and 4b)

Discussion of the methodology for trip validation

Council staff provided a presentation reviewing two potential approaches for trip validation in the new for-hire data collection program. One technical method would include the use of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or some combination of VMS with a geofence. A non-technical approach would require several components to satisfy this requirement including submitting a logbook before offloading catch, dockside intercepts, a combination of trip declaration/pre-landing notification, landing fish at approved landing locations, and “did not fish” reports.

A Committee member asked NOAA General Counsel whether a technical validation method using VMS would be legally defensible given the previous lawsuit decision. General Counsel responded that because the technical validation options require the collection of continuous location data they would be difficult to justify given the privacy concerns and given that there is a non-technical approach that appears viable. Several Committee members stated that the non-technical approach would be preferable to VMS but acknowledged that funding limitations may make this option difficult to operationalize. The Committee agreed that exploring collaboration with the state for-hire surveys would be ideal to help any potential financial shortfalls and avoid interruptions in sampling effort.

A Committee member asked about the status of the for-hire data collection program in the South Atlantic. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council liaison stated they were reviewing their program. A Committee member replied that coordination between the two Councils would be beneficial, as for-hire data collection is being developed in both regions. Council staff added that staff from both Councils are in frequent communication and are exchanging regular updates on the progress of the two programs.

The Committee also discussed the progress of an electronic reporting program being developed by the Office of Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS). The Committee asked several questions regarding the timeline of the HMS program and inquired how potential differences in program structures would affect participants with multiple permit types, such as Gulf reef fish, HMS, and Atlantic Charter/Headboat for snapper-grouper. The Committee suggested inviting HMS staff to provide an update on the development of their electronic reporting program at a future meeting.

A Committee member expressed an opposition to the use of “did not fish” reports and indicated that this extra requirement would be burdensome to the industry. Additionally, he expressed concern that a vessel operator may be penalized for forgetting to submit this extra report. Council staff stated it would be possible to explore the timing of “did not fish” reports to find an option that would limit reporting burden on program participants and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

The Committee recommends and I so **move**: **To move forward with non-technical solutions for for-hire trip validation.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Discussion of Draft Document

The Committee was presented the latest version of the draft document and reviewed the current document actions. For Action 4, which considers the collection of economic data, the Committee suggested modifications to the options under Alternative 3. Alternative 3 would implement a survey design for sampling program participants completing and submitting an economic survey. A Committee member expressed a desire to include an option for sampling up to 10% of trips. Another Committee asked if removing Action 4 and dedicating another document for this program component would be possible. Several Committee members advocated for leaving Action 4 within the document to provide guidance on the sampling design for economic data collection. The Committee decided to modify Action 4 Alternative 3 by adding one option and removing another:

The Committee recommends and I so **move**: In Action 4, to make an Option e.

Option e: Up to 10% of trips

Motion carried with 1 in opposition.

The Committee recommends and I so **move**: In Action 4, to remove Option a.

Option a: Up to 50% of trips

Motion carried with no opposition.

Council staff stated that, for the next revision of the document, an action outlining the non-technical approaches for trip validation, as well as an action to review the program with some frequency (e.g. five years), would be included. In addition to exploring options for the timing of submitting “did not fish” reports, staff will also report back on options for what a program review would entail that may be most appropriate for the new program.

Other Business

SERO staff provided an update on issues related to the permit database. SERO staff have identified Reef Fish Amendment 59 and the shrimp vessel and effort monitoring program framework action as documents that rely on permit information for their development. SERO staff are working with contractors to develop a “snapshot” permits dataset that would provide the Council and Interdisciplinary Planning Teams permits data through 2023 for use in amendments. By mid-September, SERO will report whether this “snapshot” solution is viable and if it will be available in time for staff to develop these documents for the November 2024 Council meeting. A Committee member noted that the updates in the permits office had resulted in more timely processing and encouraged SERO to continue working on improvements with the permits office.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.