Data Collection Committee Report
October 28, 2026
Ed Walker, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda **(Tab F, No. 1)** and approved the minutes **(Tab F, No. 2)** of the August 2026 meeting.

Presentation: Results of MRIP-FES Pilot Study (Tab F, No. 4 and Tab B No. 10a and b)

Dr. Richard Cody (NOAA Office of Science and Technology) reviewed the results of a pilot study examining how recreational fishing effort estimates are affected by survey question order and modifying administration timing of the survey from two-month to monthly time periods. In addition, a report on the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) discussions of the pilot program was provided by Mr. Trevor Moncrief (SSC Chair). A Committee member asked about how many effort surveys were mailed and what proportion of those were returned as completed. Dr. Cody responded that the number of mailers sent out depended on the state and time of year. Generally, several million surveys are administered nation-wide each year with a return rate between 20-30%. He was not sure what proportion of those mailed surveys were specific to the three Gulf states (Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi) that currently participate in the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey.

Dr. Cody stated that the reduced recreational estimates from the pilot study was most pronounced in low activity waves and the magnitude of the reduction varied by state and species. The general reduction in the estimates is the result of switching the question order to first ask anglers about their trips over the past year before asking them about the specific monthly sampling period. This allows the angler to first report any fishing activity they may have undertaken during the year before focusing their response to the bounded reporting period. The survey uses a rolling administrative approach asking about fishing effort in two-month segments and those estimates are tabulated to an annual estimate of recreational effort. A Committee member asked if it would be possible to receive a copy of the effort questionnaire and Dr. Cody replied that he would send a copy of the survey to the Committee. A Committee member thanked the SSC for their discussions regarding approaches to split recreational landings along the Monroe County in Florida and encouraged further deliberations to address that issue.

A Committee member stated that, with the completion of the pilot study and the development of state recreational survey programs, the Council should begin considering updates to catch limits as appropriate. He continued that having annual catch limits in the same units as the program in which they are monitored would be ideal for management. Council staff asked when the 2026 recreational estimates would be ready for the Gulf. Dr. Cody replied that his office had set a target of early November for publishing preliminary results for waves 1-3 with finalized 2026 estimates available in mid-April 2027. Dr. John Walter (Southeast Fisheries Science Center) stated he was willing, working with state agency partners, to put together a process document with timelines for the Council to review as it considers how these various surveys may inform management.

Overview of Mississippi and Alabama Creel Surveys (Tab B No. 10a and b)

The state of Mississippi will discontinue its Tails n' Scales data collection program in January 2027 and will collect recreational data through MS Creel. Because of this transition, representatives from the state are interested in updating their red snapper private recreational calibration ratio (currently at

0.503:1). The Committee was supportive of Mississippi's decision to move toward MS Creel however, several Committee members expressed concern about applying same ratio used for the state of Louisiana to MS Creel. These Committee members stated that a review process was warranted before considering a calibration ratio for MS Creel. A Committee member indicated that the SSC reviewed and discussed the red snapper calibration ratios previously and that process should remain consistent as new state surveys come online. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission has funded a contractor to work on reviewing the state surveys from Louisiana through Florida to explore how data from those various surveys could potentially combined. The results from that examination are expected to be available late next year. Another Committee member stated that Mississippi's current calibration ratio is informed by Tail n' Scales relationship with MRIP's legacy Coastal Household Telephone Survey and, with the termination of Tail n' Scales, the state wanted to remain in compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Mississippi contended that implementing the same calibration ratio as Louisiana was appropriate because it posed little conservation risk to the stock and would remedy the issues Mississippi has observed with MRIP not accurately estimating recreational harvest in the state. The Committee decided to continue discussion of this topic at full Council.

Madam Chair, this concludes my report.