

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON RECREATIONAL FISHERY INFORMATION NETWORK (RecFIN) DATA AND SAMPLING REFINEMENTS

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed several issues related to the quality and accessibility of RecFIN data, as well as RecFIN proposals to change discarded fish procedures, average weight computation, and management by numbers. Mr. Russell Porter (RecFIN/PSMFC) attended the session in order to answer questions and provide clarifications.

The SSC recognizes the important role RecFIN is designed to play in terms of providing a centralized repository of recreational data, coordination among the states, and the development of recreational fishery statistics. This role is very important since RecFIN data is intended for use in stock assessments, by the Groundfish Management Team (GMT), and for regulatory analysis and decisions. The SSC identified several areas where RecFIN has not been able to fully achieve these objectives.

RecFIN is not currently serving its role as a central repository of recreational catch and effort data. The data on the RecFIN site is often not complete or up to date, and may be different than data available from the states. As a result, stock assessors and managers commonly use state data, or a mixture of state and RecFIN data. The choice of which data to use rests upon the individual user which can lead to inconsistent data use and may affect the outcomes of analyzes. The SSC, therefore, recommends that stock assessors, analysts, and managers consult with the individual states when they obtain data from the RecFIN website until data coordination between the states and RecFIN is resolved.

More documentation of RecFIN data is necessary, especially documentation of historical changes in the data collection programs. This is necessary for data users to understand the sources of the data, and when data sources or methods have changed. RecFIN has recently implemented a procedure where each state and RecFIN must notify the RecFIN Technical Committee when any changes are made to the programs that would affect fishery statistics. The RecFIN Technical Committee would then need to agree to these changes. The changes will then be published on the RecFIN website. This is a very good idea as it will provide a way for data users to track changes over time. It is recommended that all historical changes be clearly documented and easily available to data users. In addition, there are some instances where information from the states and RecFIN do not agree and changes have not been made to bring them into alignment. There does not appear to be an accepted procedure to determine which data is considered the best-available in these circumstances. This issue should be addressed.

The RecFIN website for data queries needs to be thoroughly updated and revised. The current interface is difficult to use, does not provide adequate error or warning messages, and may lead to inappropriate uses of extracted data. The website should also be enhanced to include more detailed effort data and raw data that stock assessors can use for the estimation of catch per unit of effort statistics. RecFIN established a Database Subcommittee to look at some of these issues; however additional resources and expertise are needed for this to be effective.

With regards to the proposed change in discarded fish recording, and the pooling rules to assign average weight; any changes that promote more consistency across states is encouraged. Also, the use of management by number of fish in the recreational groundfish fisheries will not affect how stock assessments are conducted.

Role of the SSC versus RecFIN Technical Committee

It is not clear how the SSC can best interact with the RecFIN Technical Committee. Additional consideration of how these two bodies can interact effectively is needed.

PFMC
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