

Red Drum Technical Committee

August 28, 2006
Raleigh, NC

MEETING SUMMARY

Participants

Lee Paramore, Chair (NC DMF)	Wilson Laney (USFWS/SAF)	Rob O'Reilly (VMRC)
Spud Woodward (GA DNR)	Ray Rhodes (CofC)	Charlie Wenner (SC DNR)
Doug Vaughan (NMFS)	Michael Murphy (FL FWRI)	Gabe Gaddis (GA DNR)
Helen Takada (NC DMF)	Nichola Meserve (ASMFC)	

Meeting Summary

The Red Drum Technical Committee last met in 2002. The main items on the agenda for this meeting were: 1) planning for the 2009 stock assessment; 2) discussion of a potential 2007 red drum summit; 3) review of South Carolina and Georgia red drum programs; and 4) discussion of the pending red drum longline survey.

Approval of agenda

The agenda was approved with one addition: discussion of electing a vice chair for the TC. Michael Murphy was nominated and unanimously approved to serve as the Red Drum TC's vice chair.

Public comment

No members of the public present at this time. See comment under "Proposal: 2007 red drum summit" by Dick Brame (CCA).

2009 stock assessment

Background and Meeting Planning

The TC discussed the next red drum stock assessment scheduled for the spring of 2009 through the SEDAR process. This is to be a combined Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic assessment, but with split assessment for the two regions. While this feels far off, the TC agreed that it should get started as early as possible for the assessment. The TC would like to see the data workshop pushed up in time. Members wanted to know how the split is going to work.

The TC agreed that their next meeting would be in early 2007, with the main goal of deciding what data to pool together for use. At the data workshop that will follow, the TC will need to be ready to make serious decisions about the data that should be prepared and summarized beforehand. The pre-workshop meeting will provide an opportunity to trouble shoot for problems prior to the SEDAR process actually starting and prepare a historical document about where the data are from, how they have been used in the past, indices descriptions, current methodology and assumptions, etc. It is believed that the lack of such a document to put things in context and provide a historical perspective was one reason that the weakfish assessment faced problems. There was much emphasis placed on avoiding such a situation.

Data Sources and Concerns

The TC had preliminary discussion on potential data sources, such as ACCSP, MRFSS, and state

surveys (those used in past assessments and some additional indices such as electrofishing and whole seining in certain states). Although there was some discussion on the recent NRC critique of the MRFSS, it will be used for recreational data. It was thought that fishery-dependent CPUE should be calculated, but TC members weren't sure what data to base the catchability coefficient on. Some concerns expressed were: the shifting baseline with red drum, the interplay of regulations and fishermen behavior, and data/techniques that have failed peer review elsewhere.

Task: Nichola Meserve will research how much red drum data ACCSP has and email the TC.

Task: TC members will begin to compile red drum data available.

Data Storage

Regarding data storage, the TC determined that ACCSP would be Plan A, but that a Plan B was also required. Plan B is for the TC to create its own access or excel data sheets for data storage, which would either be stored in and worked on from a secure central website (preferred option) or circulated among users. The secure central website would safeguard against data being lost and the problems encountered when TC membership changes, as well as foster innovation with analyses and techniques and serve as a reply to the common critique about data storage for these assessments.

Task: Wilson Laney will research a storage site used for habitat information that could be of use.

Task: Lee Paramore will talk to the Shad TC chair and John Carmichael about other options that may be available.

Task: Mike Murphy will research this with Kerry Norris.

Task: Nichola Meserve will ask Bob Beal if he knows about other options.

Assessment Methodology

Lee Paramore inquired about the methodology and whether the TC sees itself sticking with that used in the last assessment. The current toolbox of ADAPT needs to be researched.

Spud Woodward commented that there would be some difficulty with the assessment because of the many different size and bag limits between the states. Mike Murphy asked whether a model with different mixing schedules, like that under development by Clay Porch (SEFSC) for the Gulf, could be used along the Atlantic. Clay is also doing a statistical-catch-at-age model and maybe that could be looked into as well (although the SEFSC has adult purse seine data that the TC lacks).

There will be a north-south split in the Atlantic assessment, with North Carolina providing the majority of the data for the northern section. Because some states have promised their constituency that they would be doing a state-specific stock assessment for red drum (ex. Georgia), there will be a collective southern section assessment and state-specific assessments. The TC also discussed the need for separate assessments due to the differences in regulations between states, particularly the southern section. There is a lot of tagging data to support the separate state-specific assessments, but again this is why a document with background is necessary. Additionally, the separate and collective assessments should support the findings of the other.

Biological Reference Points

There was lengthy discussion on the Biological Reference Points. An intermediate step of 10%SPR was recommended and implemented by the states through Amendment 1. Amendment 2 implemented state specific management measures designed to get to the goal of a 40% target, but with a 30% threshold. There was discussion on where in the 20-40% range the SPR target

should be. The main points included: the maturation age of red drum (3-5 years); their longevity (potentially 50+ in NC); what target and threshold mean (i.e., biological vs. management goal); what impacts fishing and coastal degradation are having on the spawning stock and recruitment; what the literature and the TC's data supports (ex. a study by Gabriel *et al.* determined that the goal should be 20%SPR for Georgia red drum, some TC data suggests that red drum can maintain the current recruitment level with a lower %SPR); the number of unknowns in the data (ex. no night MRFSS sampling, little bycatch data); the time at which an anatomically mature fish actually contributes to the spawning stock; and the use of a 30% escapement goal in the Gulf of Mexico stock.

The overall conclusion was that the TC needs to make sure that 40% SPR is the right goal as it moves forward with its assessment. The TC will review the current literature and make sure to include information to defend their choice for the assessment.

Stock Status and New Studies

Lee Paramore commented that in North Carolina there is some anecdotal evidence supporting an improving stock, such as the numbers of fish tagged, their distribution, and their size which suggest that more fish are moving through the slot limit. There are some additional NC State studies: a telemetry study to characterize spawning grounds; another using hydrophones and nets that has found good evidence of fish spawning in Pamlico Sound; and others on mortality, length frequency distribution, and selectivity at age. Spud Woodward commented that fishermen are developing new tactics and behaviors (new tackle, boats, etc.) to get the larger resident fish in the estuaries. There is also increasing effort in the fishery. To this point, Mike Murphy showed a graph of the increasing number of angler trips in Florida since 1988 (MRFSS data). At this time, Spud Woodward provided a handout updating the Georgia fish carcass project. He discussed how the carcass recovery project data was used to complement the MRFSS data.

Logbooks

The TC discussed the status of logbook use in the South Atlantic and if this might be a good time to increase their use. For example, Lee Paramore thought that the timing to implement log books in North Carolina might be right since the state is implementing a recreational fishing license in 2007. The idea of volunteer logbooks was also suggested, such as that used in Maryland for striped bass and summer flounder. The Maryland system has a dedicated website with a coordinator that maintains a sufficient level of interest. Virginia also has volunteer tagging program that uses some logbooks. Georgia and South Carolina have some volunteers keeping logbooks. Ray Rhodes warned that one issue with volunteer logbooks is the self-selection of the participants. There was general consensus that a consistent, well-planned logbook system would produce valuable data for the TC.

Task: Rob O'Reilly will research Maryland's volunteer survey and how the website works.

Proposal: 2007 red drum summit

Spud Woodward brought forward an idea to have a red drum summit that looks at the past, present, and future of the red drum fishery. This would be a joint GSMFC-ASMFC-state-industry effort to bring together managers, scientists, fishermen (commercial, recreational, tournament), industry representatives (tackle, vessel), sporting media, etc. to have a "where are we now" type meeting. Spud envisioned a several day affair in which there would be fishing, a trade show, and formal meetings on red drum including a research agenda. This would give an opportunity for stock assessment scientists from the Gulf and Atlantic states to share knowledge and form bonds for future collaborative efforts. Scientists and managers would have the opportunity to inform the fishers why we need their help in collecting data for assessments and

how it can be done. While there is a ton of money going into the fishery from the hands of fishermen, little of that is transferred into managerial and research efforts. The public could also be convinced to serve as the middleman between the government and the scientists to get the funding required for better data collection. Managers and scientists would also learn more about how fishermen behavior has changed, the latest fads in the fishery, and what is currently available to them. By reaching out and keeping the public informed of the situation, the hope is to have more and better communication and cooperation between all these groups in the future and maintain a sustainable fishery. Funding would come from both management and industry.

There was mostly positive response from the TC for this idea, although some members felt that the involvement might be too broad with both the Gulf and Atlantic states, that similar efforts in other fisheries had not yielded the desired outcomes, that a biased sample of the fishing constituency would attend, that it would be an organizational nightmare, that the timing before the assessment might not be right, and that only a stock collapse would result in more research funding rather than a long-term data survey need.

From the one public participant at the meeting, the response was favorable. Dick Brame of the CCA thought that only federally-funded data collection programs could be long term and that public pressure would be required to achieve such funding. As such, management needs to get the public involved.

Task: Spud Woodward will prepare a recommendation to the Board from the TC regarding the workshop, to be approved by the TC prior to Board submission.

State Red Drum Programs

Two presentations were given at the TC meeting:

- Peach State Reds Initiative. Background and status of Georgia's stock enhancement program by Spud Woodward.
- SCDNR Program. Background and status of multiple South Carolina programs, including a stock enhancement program, by Charlie Wenner.

Regarding stock enhancement protocols, Spud Woodward noted that the Board was very interested in seeing a subcommittee formed to address enhancement protocols and prepare a document to include: what has been done, what has been successful, how to move forward, including guidelines/rules and a state program review and approval procedure. Similar documents created for Atlantic striped bass and Atlantic sturgeon could serve as templates, along with two others that might be coming out of South Carolina and Florida shortly. The subcommittee would include an appropriate representative from each state, recommended by the TC, to be brought to the Board at the 2006 annual meeting.

Task: Nichola Meserve will research the approved procedure for setting up such a subcommittee

Task: The TC will prepare a recommendation on state representation for the proposed Red Drum Stock Enhancement Subcommittee.

Task: Nichola Meserve will get any existing South Carolina documentation from Mel Bell or Wally Jenkins. Mike Murphy will check if Florida's stock enhancement panel has anything written yet and email to Nichola Meserve.

Red Drum Longline Survey

Unfortunately, there was not much to update on the status of this program—it is still held up by

the Biological Opinion which is in the hands of the General Counsel's Office at SERO. Due to this delay, the first year may be a wash because a certain amount of time will be required to find good sites, work out the kinks, etc. The program is currently funded for two years, but the TC felt it might be hard to get additional years' funding because nothing has been done with the money yet. One merit of the longline survey program that was pointed out in particular was that the data would identify when red drum really begin contributing to the spawning stock. The data expected to result from the program would be of both short term and long term value, with data to include: a long term CPUE index of adults, age/size frequency, tag retention rates, fin clip data, escapement rates, recruitment rates, etc. It was thought that maybe some kind of assessment model could be built for future assessments that would be able to include the new information. The TC has already fleshed out what they hope to get out of the program in another document.

Meeting Adjourned