

Weakfish Technical Committee Report

January 22, 2004

The Technical Committee met during TC meeting week in Providence, RI, on October 24, 2003. Below is a summary of that meeting.

Attendees:

Technical Committee Members

Jim Uphoff, Chair
Des Kahn, Vice Chair
Lee Paramore
Doug Vaughan
Vic Crecco

Rob O'Reilly
Russ Allen
Janaka de Silva
Greg Skomal
Brian Murphy

Other

Lance Garrison, NMFS SEFSC
Brad Spear, ASFMC Staff

Multi-species Model

Lance Garrison and Jason Link have been working with the Commission to develop a multi-species VPA model. Lance presented the significant progress that has been made to TC members. He also noted the gaps in information that should be filled to make the model robust. Ideas were exchanged between Lance and committee members. Lance asked for members' emails so that he may follow up on questions and possible data sources mentioned at the meeting. Lance has been using the XSA catch-at-age model with shrinkage and preliminary estimates of recent F on weakfish were 0.50, considerably higher than the ADAPT results.

Effect of Recreational Regulations in Amendment 4

Des Kahn put together a report on the potential effects of the recreational regulations chosen by the Board through Amendment 4 in November 2002. Des presented his methods and results to the committee. The group commended Des on the amount of work he did. If you'd like a copy of Des's report please contact him (DKAHN@STATE.DE.US) or Brad Spear (bsppear@asmfc.org). The results of this analysis will be forwarded to the Management Board at their next meeting.

2004 Stock Assessment

The committee discussed plans for the 2004 stock assessment. The Stock Assessment Subcommittee will be working through a series of data and assessment workshops. It is expected that the assessment will be peer reviewed through the Fall 2004 SARC. The committee agreed that it would be best to hold a preliminary conference call to make a list of the data that will be needed for the workshops.

The committee also agreed that there should be a distribution of work for the upcoming assessment, because the amount of work required will be great. We will have to update with two or three years of data, since the last assessment included only data through 2000. We need to redo the New Jersey and New York catch-at-age to include effects of Amendment 3 and 4 minimum size regulations in those states.

The issue of including commercial discards in the assessment came up. Desmond informed the TC that NMFS has observer data on commercial discards; Eric Powell (Rutgers) has a draft manuscript with estimates based on these data. Des will look into it and get a handle on the methods Powell used. The group suggested that fluke be looked at as a potential model.

The assessment will likely be an update through 2002. Maybe 2003. Several other models were suggested for trial in addition to ADAPT and surplus production: XSA (new package, Excel compatible, peer-reviewed), ICA, age structured production model (Punt and Butterworth), and forward projection. Any changes or additions to indices or other parameters will need to be forwarded to Lance Garrison.

TC Response to PRT Tasks

Bycatch Reporting in North Carolina

The situation posed to the TC was as follows:

“Amendments 3 and 4 require that weakfish taken under the 150-pound (and now 300 pound) bycatch allowance during any otherwise closed season be quantified in State reports. As a first cut, this can be done by dividing the weakfish landings reported during the closed season by the number of trips and hope that the results are less than the allowance. Individual violations would not be tracked by this method.

What are the requirements for states with no closed season who want to take advantage of the bycatch allowance when using trawl and gill net gear with mesh sizes less than the appropriate L25? North Carolina is the only state with no closed season and a bycatch allowance. It has never specifically accounted for the bycatch because it has no closed season.

The intent of the accounting provision is to insure that no directed fishery develops during the closed season on the bycatch allowance. With no closed season, the North Carolina bycatch allowance simply provides a mechanism to account for otherwise unavoidable bycatch in smaller mesh fisheries.

In North Carolina, the bycatch allowance has primarily been used in the southern kingfish fishery and the shrimp trawl fishery. Landings of weakfish from those 2 fisheries should account for much of the bycatch associated with the allowance. However, landings of weakfish from trawl or gill net gear with mesh sizes less than those required for our minimum size of 12 inches are possible. Unfortunately, North Carolina does not collect mesh size information on trip tickets and, therefore, does not have that information.

Does the Technical Committee believe North Carolina should make an effort to account for those landings? North Carolina offers that the information provided will likely be an underestimate. Is there utility in going through the effort, since the data are not used in the assessment [underline is mine], as far as the PRT knows.”

In response to the PRT, legal-sized bycatch estimates are used in the assessment if they are reported. What we don't do is make any judgement of what is excessive bycatch (what proportion of the total catch should be bycatch). However, if each state reports their bycatch relative to total catch, then judgement can be made by the PRT or Board.

The TC recommended that NC attempt to provide bycatch estimates of weakfish. The TC pointed out that the NC area closure was considered equivalent to a season by the TC when it was approved and was not exempt from bycatch reporting. This information may prove to be useful in future management. The NC representative at the meeting agreed to develop a mechanism in the state that would allow him to provide estimates for bycatch in the annual report.

Standardizing Compliance Reports

The annual state compliance reports for weakfish are not standardized. The PRT has difficulty determining compliance and drawing comparisons among the reports. The ISFMP Policy Board approved a standardized report format that is required of all states for the next annual report. The standardized format allows for flexibility to customize reporting for individual species. The PRT asked for input from the TC and SAS regarding information (beyond that required in the standardized format) that should be included.

The PRT suggested that the SAS recommend that states update reports annually to include data relevant to the stock assessment. The TC agreed with that concept and Des volunteered to develop a proposal on how to do that. Staff ran this idea by R&S Director, Lisa Kline, and she was very open to proposals and recommendations from the TC/SAS. She suggested that weakfish could be used as a pilot for customizing its annual reports to include a framework for stock assessment data to be included.