

Minutes of the Weakfish Technical Committee Conference call, February 17, 2004

Des Kahn

During this conference call, the primary topic was preparation for the stock assessment during 2004. We discussed whether it would be practical to update through 2003 or only for 2001 and 2002. The last stock assessment (Kahn, D. M. 2002. Stock assessment of weakfish through 2000, including estimates of stock size on January 1, 2001. A report to the Weakfish Technical Committee of the ASMFC, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, Dover DE) covered data through 2000.

The primary impediment to updating through 2003 is the availability of the commercial landings data by state from NMFS for those states that do not estimate their own landings, including New Jersey and New York, primarily. Doug Vaughan volunteered to pursue this with NMFS to learn when the data will be available and request that they expedite, if possible.

In the past, our assessments have not included any estimates of discards. Kahn learned that NMFS observer data does include weakfish bycatch and discards, primarily from work done by Eric Powell of Rutgers. Janaka has experience with this database from work on croaker, and he volunteered to obtain the data from NMFS and work up the weakfish estimates.

We agreed to pursue the assessment as the recent SEDAR (South East Data Assessment Review??) workshops that developed the Croaker and Menhaden assessments. The process consists of an initial workshop to develop the catch at age matrix and other data needed for the assessments. The next step, some months later, will be the assessment workshop where the stock assessment models and reference point models will be run. The data workshop will take several days and will require attendance by a representative of every state. At this workshop states will present their data and explain how they processed it and obtained it. The raw data will be processed into catch at age and other estimates. Any states that develop their own catch at age matrix, including Delaware, Virginia and North Carolina will explain how they developed the estimates and will bring all raw data used in the process.

It is essential that states bring any weakfish data they possess to the data workshop, including any length frequency and age-length data, as well as any weight-at age or weight at length data whether they think it is needed or not. If it exists, please bring it. The Atlantic croaker assessment was rejected at the peer review because it came to light that some data on scrap landings had not been included in the assessment. This occurred primarily because a key person in the assessment process left for another job in the middle of the process.

Some additional data that is essential for the data workshop is each states' commercial landings by gear and month. Lee will make sure that the North Carolina scrap landing data and inshore observer data from North Carolina, including any fly-net observer data, will be provided. Another critical component of the data workshop will be the survey indices.

Lee will bring the length frequency and any age-length data for the SEAMAP stations in North Carolina waters. Last time, we used North Carolina DMF age-length data to develop the SEAMAP indices at age.

Jim Uphoff will take responsibility for the NMFS fall survey data. We mentioned that Charlie Wenner had revised this survey for the last weakfish stock assessment, using only stations that regularly caught weakfish, but the wisdom of this was debated, since the stock may expand its distribution in times of higher abundance. Kahn will supply the Delaware Bay trawl survey indices from DDFW. New Jersey's survey may not have age samples but we need the length frequency and catch per tow data. Hopefully Russ Allen will supply this.

Vic Crecco will update his Recreational CPUE index, using MRFSS data.

ASMFC will bring a portable computer network to the workshop so we can swap data like crazy. WE will probably break down into separate workgroups focusing on various aspects. To get an understanding of how this will develop, read the Methods section in Kahn (2002). I tired to give the methods followed in detail.