

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Striped Bass Technical Committee – Meeting Summary

January 30-31, 2006

Washington, DC

Attendance:

Doug Grout – New Hampshire (Chair)
Gary Nelson – Massachusetts
Peter Fricke – National Marine Fisheries Service
Tom Baum – New Jersey
Alexei Sharov - Maryland
Rob O'Reilly – Virginia
Charlton Godwin – North Carolina
Mike Brown – Maine
Laura Lee – Rhode Island
Gary Shepherd – National Marine Fisheries Service
Vic Vecchio – New York

Meeting Summary:

Discussion on specific surveys to provide indices for older fish abundance: Create new surveys or modify existing surveys?

- 1) New Jersey Volunteer Angler Survey
 - Potential to estimate abundance of older fish
 - Survey includes length frequency of fish and effort
 - Data can separated by region in New Jersey
 - Includes about 2,000 logs each year, 12,000+ trips
 - Currently used for annual CPUE
 - Logs contain lengths of retained and released fish
 - Possible concern of bias because not a random sample design
 - Include mostly private trips; shore, boat, party

The Technical Committee determined further analysis

- 2) State citation programs
 - Potential to identify trends and length frequency of harvest
 - Previously explored by Mark Gibson?
 - Analyzed for weakfish

- 3) Massachusetts Tagging Program
 - Difficulty estimating effort/time fished
 - Effort only recorded when striped bass are being caught
 - Possibly add hours fished to questionnaire
 - Possibly compare first and last tag time to estimate effort

- 4) Delaware Bay Spawning Stock Survey
 - If funding was increased substantially increased sampling may provide estimate of older fish
 - Selectivity of gear may be an issue
- 5) Maryland Spring Survey
 - Currently has limited resources and sample size
 - Some past years only 100 females caught
 - Need to increase sampling substantially
- 6) MRFSS
 - Possibly merge MRFSS CPUE data with length frequency data from volunteer angler survey or ALS data to develop old fish index
 - Problem MRFSS weight scales have a 25kg maximum
- 7) Other issues that merit further consideration:
 - Development of stratified charter boat survey designed to catch larger/older fish
 - Consider options to develop a coastwide age 8 and older index rather than disjointed areas with detailed data
 - Consider development of a coastwide volunteer angler survey to generate index
- 8) Need to continue to pursue ageing centers to age older fish
 - Old Dominion University estimates a bout \$6/sample

Maryland Striped Bass Trophy Season Proposal

Doug Grout presented a review of the previous Maryland proposal, the Technical Committee's comments, and the Board actions at the Annual Meeting

Alexei Sharov presented the new Maryland proposal

As part of Maryland's previous proposal an alternate (non-MRFSS) methodology was used to estimate 2005 harvest. The recreational harvest estimate has not been revised. The Technical Committee supported this estimate as part of the previous review.

Maryland presented a series of options to achieve the 2006 trophy season cap for two different quota scenarios: A) the 2005 quota is not adjusted (25,488 fish), B) the 2005 quota is adjusted (41,288 fish).

The Technical Committee raised a concern that some of the options presented resulted in frequent changes to size and bag limits. This may result in confusion with anglers.

No consideration for recoupment was accounted for in any of the options presented by Maryland. Anglers will likely fish “harder” to make up for lost fishing opportunities.

The Technical Committee determined that all of the options presented by Maryland have a reasonable probability of achieving the quota. The options presented in tables 5, 6, and 11 are the best with respect to recoupment, discards, and regulatory complexity.

Options such as the one in Table 7 would likely result in high discards due to having to release all fish over 29” during May 16-31.

The Technical Committee suggested that Maryland better describe the bag limits for the different scenarios.

Maryland Proposal to Eliminate the Spring Trophy Cap

Alexei Sharov presented the Maryland proposal. He stated that if the current methodology were applied back to 1996, only 2005 would have been over the quota.

Maryland proposes to maintain the 2005 regulations and remove the cap. April 16 through May 15 – 1 fish 28” or greater, May 15 through May 30 – 2 fish between 18” and 28” or 1 fish between 18” and 28” and 1 fish 28” or greater.

If approved Maryland would eliminate the quota in 2006 spring season.

Discussion of Change in New Jersey Striped Bass Regulations

Tom Baum stated that New Jersey has changed their striped bass regulations to 2 fish at 28 inches. This is less conservative than their previous regulations. A letter has been sent to the ASMFC and will be distributed to the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board for their review. Doug noted that the technical committee needs to provide their input on this change. The committee agreed that there is no objection to this change in New Jersey.

Discussion of Changing the Annual Compliance Report Deadline from July 15 to June 15

The Technical Committee discussed the feasibility of moving the annual compliance report deadline to June 15. Many felt that June 15 or June 30 would be reasonable, and that it would be helpful to have the reminder and templates sent out in advance, as usual. The Technical Committee recommends moving the annual compliance report deadline to June 15.

Review of Striped Bass Discard Information from NMFS VTR/Observer Data

Gary Shepherd explained the analysis of the VTR/observer data. There are some discard hotspots in the observer data, but these are generally due to the presence of one or two large tows and do not represent common occurrences. Gary N. noted it might be helpful

to show the Management Board frequency plots of discards in the observer data to show that a great percentage of discards come from infrequent large tows. It was pointed out that this information does not cover the inshore and estuarine areas.

This analysis needs to be compared to the discard estimate obtained in the assessment. Gary S. suggested presenting the discard estimates used in the assessment by fishery. Alexei or Gary S. will provide the information on where the discard mortality estimates came from for each fishery. This analysis is NOT an estimate of striped bass discards, and it includes only federally permitted vessels. Also, these data do not represent illegal harvest of SB in the EEZ. Some of the observer trips are looking only for protected species and are not focused on quantifying numbers of fish discards.

Develop Course of Action for 2007 Benchmark Stock Assessment

The Striped Bass Technical Committee recommends not conducting an annual update in 2006. Reasons for this recommendation include that the time spent doing an assessment update would be better spent preparing for the 2007 benchmark assessment. Annual updates are generally not conducted for species that are not overfished, and with a long-lived species like striped bass, less frequent updates still present the opportunity to implement management action if a change in stock status is discovered.

The 2007 peer review is currently scheduled to take place at the fall SARC (November or December of 2007), and this will mean that it will be more than a year between assessment updates. Perhaps the Technical Committee could provide information on various indices without providing point estimates of F and SSB as has been done in previous years. The Management Board will have to decide which type of work they would like to see the Technical Committee complete in the interim year.

The Technical Committee can provide a critique of the different methods used in the stock assessment (such as VPA, tagging models) and provide suggestions for improving these methods. One of the main problems is not the model, it is the data. Issues such as ageing errors create flaws in the assessment. Since the Technical Committee has over a year to prepare for the benchmark assessment, they have the opportunity to make significant changes to the assessment to improve the estimates. The Technical Committee also needs to determine the approach that will be used in terms of the tagging and VPA estimates – does the TC wish to ultimately combine the two methodologies?

The Technical Committee would like to prepare an action plan based on not completing the full assessment update in 2006. This will begin with an email discussion where TC members are asked to critique the different assessment methods that are currently used and provide suggestions for improvement. All members should provide input on all the methods, tagging and VPA. Information on the various models will need to be sent to TC members along with a list of questions as a starting point for committee members. The chairs of the SASC and Tagging Subcommittees will develop the questions that will address what can be done to improve each of the methods. Subcommittee members will respond to the chair of their respective committee, and the questions and responses will

be compiled and distributed to the TC as a whole. The combination of questions and responses can be done by late fall/winter of 2006. If the Board agrees that a full update is not needed in 2006, this process can begin shortly after the February Board meeting.

Questions were asked regarding whether the entire data workshop process needed to take place before the benchmark assessment. Are there data that could be brought in that aren't already being used and that might be helpful? It was noted that much work needs to be done with the data before the actual assessment takes place. It was also noted that, if an annual update is not going to take place this year, a data workshop could be conducted in August when the SASC normally meets. A data workshop would allow all the data, including the tagging information, to be discussed at one meeting. Supplemental information needs to be submitted with the data, such as information on how representative length samples are of the fishery. Suggestions should be given to the tagging committee so that they can review the basic tagging data at their methods meeting in the spring.

The chair of each of the subcommittees will develop questions. The questions will be emailed to everyone and the questions and answers will be compiled for review by the technical committee. There is a need to look at the compliance reports to see what information is missing, and to better summarize what is there. Special focus needs to be paid to fishery-dependent data. The TC recommends getting Board approval for this as was done with the reports for the fishery-independent monitoring data.

Data QC needs to be done no matter what, but timing will vary with whether the TC has to complete a full assessment update this year.

Assessment workshops will take place with each committee in the summer of 2007 in preparation for the fall 2007 SARC. The TC will review the assessment in September 2007. Once the SARC is complete, the Board will review the benchmark assessment. Presentation of the assessment to the Board should take place at the first Board meeting in 2008.

Development of Discard Mortality Estimates from the NC/VA Wave 1 Recreational Fishery

Discussion: Using discards of tags/total tags = discards of harvest/harvest
Discussion of how to use tagging information to calculate discard mortality for the years before expanded MRFSS survey began (1996-2003). There are a couple of ways that the TC will look at that for the next assessment using the tagging information. Alexei wondered how many TC members were familiar with Jim Uphoff's work on mortality rates for the hook and line fishery comparing circle hooks with J-hooks and looking at temperature effects on salinity. The TC can provide what the Board is looking for.

Discussion on Providing Estimates of Uncertainty Around SSB and F Estimates from the VPA and F from the Tagging Estimates

Statistically one cannot develop variance estimates around SSB and F from the VPA. However, they can give an approximation by running the bootstrap with the unweighted indices and looking at that variance and applying it to the weighted ones. Other than that, there is no way to do this within the modeling except the one that is already produced for the population estimates.

Discussion of the Use of the Catch Equation with the Tagging Data

The Technical Committee reviewed the background information on this issue. *Help with notes here?*

Discussion on Development of a Coastwide Index from Volunteer Angler Surveys

It was noted that there is a lot of interest out there, people want to do something constructive. The TC discussed the best way to tap into the interest of CCA and other groups/individuals. Would it be a volunteer angler survey program or would it be otolith collection? Interested groups and individuals could help with both. If they're already killing a fish, they could get otoliths, and they could write all the information about the fish captured (length, weight, location, etc).

Summary Report on the 2006 Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise

Lydia gave a brief summary of the 2006 cruise, complete with photos.

Other Business

The revised Rhode Island proposal was discussed. The Technical Committee asked the PRT to review this proposal based on the plan. If you change the size limits, are you still constrained by the $F=0.30$ definition? Specifically, if a coastal state decides to vary its size limit, are they allowed to vary the quota based on conservation equivalency? Does the plan allow for this? Are the quotas established on a size-dependent basis? Is a conservation equivalency proposal constrained by the target F, the quota, and whatever currency you use to show an equivalency between the baseline and the thing you're trying to change to?