



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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American Eel Technical Committee Meeting Summary

Webinar
December 18, 2023

Technical Committee Members: Danielle Carty (TC Chair, SC), Brad Chase (MA), Caitlin Craig (NY), Chris Adriance (DC), Ingrid Braun (PRFC), Jen Pyle (NJ), Jim Page (GA), Josh McGilly (VA), Keith Whiteford (MD), Kevin Molongoski (USGS), Kim Bonvechio (FL), Mike Porta (PA), Pat McGee (RI), Robert Atwood (NH), Sheila Eyler (FWS), Todd Mathes (NC), Troy Tuckey (VA), Wendy Morrison (NOAA)

ASMFC Staff: Kristen Anstead, Caitlin Starks

Additional Attendees: Chris Batsavage

The American Eel Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar to consider a request from the Plan Development Team (PDT) to discuss and provide recommendations regarding a proposal to consider options in Draft Addendum VII to remove the requirement for states to collect harvester trip-level catch per unit effort (CPUE) data established under Addendum I. Addendum I requires states to implement either harvester or dealer permits for the commercial harvest of American eel, with a requirement to report eel catch and effort on a trip-level basis. Effort data components included in this requirement are soak time and number of units of gear fished.

The proposal being considered by the PDT is to include in the Draft Addendum options to modify the CPUE reporting requirement. The rationale for considering such options is that the CPUE data have not been used in the stock assessment as originally intended. In the 2012 and 2023 benchmark stock assessments, these data were considered but the assessment team decided against their inclusion because they were not considered indicative of trends in the stock as a whole, and differences in baiting practices and bait preference vary geographically which can confound the accuracy of fishery-dependent CPUE data. The 2023 stock assessment peer review panel also noted that given the variety of fishing gears and fishing areas, the analysis of fishing effort would not be straightforward. The 2023 stock assessment and peer review reports indicate that there is no plan to use the fishery-dependent CPUE data moving forward. As such, the PDT is considering including an option that would make it voluntary for states to collect these CPUE data for American eel. This would allow states to continue collecting the data if desired, but relieve some burden from states that do not have a need for them.

The TC discussed this proposal and concluded that there are no concerns with considering an option to make this reporting requirement optional. The TC members reported on whether their state would continue to collect harvester CPUE data if it were not required by the

Commission, and what their states use these data for. All states with commercial fisheries indicated they would continue to collect effort data in their harvester reports, except for North Carolina. Todd Mathes from NC DMF commented that the state uses dealer reports to collect landings data and eel is one of the only species for which they require harvester reporting. North Carolina does not use the data and it did not meet the intended purpose of improving stock assessments, so they do not anticipate collecting the CPUE data if it were voluntary.

Some of the states that collect CPUE data do use it for state purposes. A few TC members mentioned that it is used for tracking compliance and understanding effort and catch by different gear types.

The TC noted that if the PDT includes options in the Draft Addendum to consider removing this requirement, the language should be clear that state collection of the trip level effort data would become voluntary or optional, and it will be determined by the state whether harvester or dealer reporting of these data is required. They also clarified that they do not recommend any changes to the requirements for reporting landings.

The TC also discussed a recently published peer-reviewed study by Hiromi Shiraishi and Kenzo Kaifu entitled *Early warning of an upsurge in international trade in the American Eel*. This study has raised some concerns about the American eel stock and international demand since it indicates there has been a drastic increase in imports of live American eel, specifically glass eel or elvers, in Asia in recent years. Notably, imports of juvenile American eel in Asia have surged from only 2 metric tons (MT) in 2004, to 53 MT in 2021, and then 157 MT in 2022. The majority of these imports originate from Haiti, but there have been increases in the numbers coming from the US and Canada as well. The main concern with this large increase is the potential negative impact on the range-wide population. The TC agreed that this paper should be shared with the Board via email to bring it to their attention. The TC did not recommend that this information should impact the development of and decisions related to Draft Addendum VI on Maine's glass eel quota.