

FRAMEWORK PLAN

for

the Fisheries Information Network
(FIN)

By: FIN Committee

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Number 103

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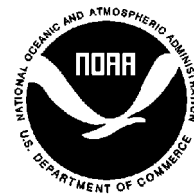


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- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Fish and Wildlife Service
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- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
- Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources
- Caribbean Fishery Management Council
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) establishes a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region.¹ There are two separate programs under the FIN: the Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Southeast Recreational Fisheries Information Network [RecFIN(SE)].

This Framework Plan is the result of combined efforts of program partners which include states and territories of the Region, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the South Atlantic, Gulf, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils, and the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions. This plan presents the FIN missions, goals, and objectives and broadly describes how these programs will be organized, operated, managed, and funded. This Framework Plan will be implemented through detailed, annual operations plans.

The need for a comprehensive and cooperative data collection program has never been greater because of the magnitude of the commercial and recreational fisheries and the differing roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. Many southeastern stocks targeted by commercial and recreational users are now depleted, due primarily to excessive harvest and habitat loss and degradation. The information needs of today's management regimes require data which are statistically sound, long-term in scope, timely, and comprehensive. A cooperative partnership between state and federal agencies is the most appropriate mechanism to accomplish these goals.

Efforts by state and federal agencies to develop a cooperative program for the collection and management of commercial and recreational fishery data in the Region began in the mid to late 1980s. In 1992, the NMFS formally proposed a planning activity to establish the RecFIN(SE). Planning was conducted by a multi-agency Plan Development Team through October 1992, at which time the program partners approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which established clear intent to implement the RecFIN(SE). Following signing of the MOU, a RecFIN(SE) Committee was established and met in January and March 1993 to complete a Strategic Plan and develop an Operations Plan. In 1994, the NMFS initiated a formal process to develop a cooperative State/Federal program to collect and manage commercial fishery statistics in the Region. A concept paper outlined a strategy and schedule for developing the program and completing a strategic plan (Brown 1994). It emphasized a cooperative program in conjunction with state and federal fishery management agencies, regional fishery management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and other organizations concerned with marine fishery management. Due to previous work and NMFS action, the Southeast Cooperative Statistics Committee (SCSC) developed a MOU and a Framework Plan for the ComFIN. During the development of the ComFIN MOU, the SCSC, in conjunction with the RecFIN(SE) Committee,

¹The Southeast Region (the Region) includes the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

decided to combine the MOU to incorporate the RecFIN(SE). The combined MOU creates the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) which evolved from the ComFIN and RecFIN(SE). The MOU confirmed the intent of the signatory agencies to participate in implementing the FIN.

The scope of the FIN includes the Region's commercial and recreational fisheries for marine, estuarine, and anadromous species, including shellfish. Constituencies served by the program are state and federal agencies responsible for management of fisheries in the Region. Direct benefits will also accrue to federal fishery management councils, the interstate marine fisheries commissions, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the NOAA Marine Sanctuaries Program. Benefits which accrue to management of fisheries will benefit not only commercial and recreational fishermen and the associated fishing industries, but the resources, the states, and the nation.

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous, and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a national program. The four goals of the FIN include:

- plan, manage, and evaluate a cooperative commercial and recreational fishery data collection program;
- implementing a State/Federal marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program;
- establish and maintain integrated commercial and recreational fishery data management system; and
- support for the development of a national program.

To carry out the FIN mission, an organizational structure has been created which includes the FIN, Committee; Caribbean and Gulf Geographic Subcommittees; various other subcommittees and working groups; and administrative and coordination support.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of Framework Plan

This document presents a Framework Plan for a marine commercial and recreational fishery statistics program for the Southeast Region of the United States: the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). Under this program, there are two distinct programs: the Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Southeast Recreational Fisheries Information Network [RecFIN(SE)]. From this point forward, these programs will be referred to as the FIN. The FIN is a cooperative effort among agencies that are legally mandated to manage marine commercial and recreational fisheries resources. These agencies need to plan and effect programs to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the Region's commercial and recreational fisheries. The goal of the FIN is to provide sound scientific information on catch, effort, and participation that managers need to prudently conserve and manage marine commercial and recreational fisheries resources in the Southeast. The program will assist managers in reducing the risks of overharvesting, rebuilding depleted stocks, and achieving optimal use of these resources.

This Framework Plan is a combined effort of state² and federal agencies. It was developed under the premise that a cooperative statistics program for marine commercial and recreational fisheries in the Southeast will avoid duplication of effort, reduce overall costs, and provide a better base of information for formulating management policies, strategies, and tactics. This plan presents the FIN missions, goals, and objectives and broadly describes how these programs will be organized, operated, managed, and funded. This Framework Plan will be implemented through detailed, annual operations plans.

B. Need for the FIN

Commercial fisheries are extremely important in the Region. In 1999, commercial landings were 2.2 billion pounds valued at approximately \$955 million (ex-vessel). Because of the Region's productive marine fishery resource base, commercial landings in the Southeast (excluding the Caribbean) account for about 23% of the nation's total commercial harvest (NMFS, 2000).

Recreational fisheries are also very important to the Region. In 1999, recreational anglers in the Region took an estimated 34 million fishing trips and caught approximately 284 million fish. Because of the Region's productive marine fishery resource base and substantial fishing infrastructure, recreational anglers in the Southeast account for about 54% of the nation's total sportfishing effort and 58% of the recreational catch in numbers of fish (NMFS 2000). Along the Region's 30,000-mile shoreline are found an estimated 150 coastal fishing piers; 1,600 marinas; 1,600 charter boats; 180 head boats; hundreds of dive boats and small guide boats; untold miles of

²As utilized in this document, "state" includes the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the territory of U.S. Virgin Islands.

"fishable" beaches, bridges, and jetties; and an unequalled assemblage of natural and artificial fishing reefs. Furthermore, over 2.8 million private recreational boats are used by the Region's coastal residents for saltwater fishing.

Many southeastern stocks targeted by the commercial and recreational sector are now depleted, due primarily to habitat loss and degradation and excessive harvest. In response, state and federal fishery managers have developed and implemented fishery management programs to rebuild depleted stocks and to prevent overharvest of other species.

Management of the Region's fisheries is complicated by their migratory nature. Movements along shore bring many stocks under the jurisdictions of multiple states. Furthermore, many species move between inshore and offshore habitats during different stages of their lives and therefore come under both state and federal jurisdiction at various times. Thus, several fishery management agencies often regulate the same resource or stock. All the agencies face the same problem of conserving important marine resources, while at the same time providing satisfying commercial and recreational fishing opportunities to their constituents.

Catch and effort statistics are fundamental for assessing the influence of fishing on stocks. Information on harvest, fishing effort, size composition, and seasonal and geographic distribution of catch and effort is required to develop rational management policies and plans. Accurate, precise, and timely catch statistics, along with biological, sociological, and economic studies, are integral components of long-term data series needed for fishery modeling and forecasting. Detection of population trends requires statistically consistent data collected over the geographic range of the stock for a time period that is several times longer than the average life span of the animal.

Vital information needed to meet minimum management needs is inadequate for many important fishery resources in the Region. This deficiency has been recognized by management agencies, and attempts have been made to improve and expand current efforts. Although considerable progress has been made in collection of fishery statistics, continuing changes in the nature and status of marine recreational fisheries and increasingly complex management regimes require more comprehensive, accurate, precise, and timely data.

Thus, the continuation of a comprehensive program to cooperatively collect and manage statistics on marine commercial and recreational fisheries in the Region is critical. A long-standing partnership exists among fishery management organizations in the Southeast, which have similar or related mandates to conserve and manage living marine resources in their respective jurisdictions. Southeast fishery management agencies recognize the need for and benefits of a cooperative program for marine commercial and recreational fisheries statistics.

C. Evolution of the FIN

Recreational Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern U.S. [RecFIN(SE)]

In the 1980s, state and federal fishery managers in the Region agreed there was an urgent and compelling need for coordinated collection of comprehensive data on the Region's marine recreational fisheries resources, and recommendations were made through a series of workshops and meetings. In particular, between 1985 and 1992, the Data Management Subcommittee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) conducted workshops that reviewed survey methodologies for recreational fisheries and recommended changes or additions to current survey procedures, including standards for quality control (Lazauski 1986; Osborn and Lazauski 1989; GSMFC 1991, 1992; Osborn 1992). The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) appointed several work groups to review recreational fishery data collection programs in the Atlantic Coast states (Halgren et al. 1988; McGurrian 1990). The resulting recommendations led to the development of the RecFIN(SE).

In 1992, the NMFS, encouraged by the recommendations from the states through the ASMFC and GSMFC, initiated a formal cooperative state-federal program to collect and manage recreational fishery statistics in the Region. A strategic planning proposal outlined a strategy and schedule for developing the program and completing a strategic plan (NMFS 1992). The proposed comprehensive program was to include examination of total information needs, including quantifying statistical and measurement goals; coordination or integration of existing data collection programs; development of alternate survey designs, when appropriate, to meet special information needs; and development of a comprehensive data management and retrieval system to provide information to managers.

The planning proposal was presented in April 1992 at meetings of the GSMFC and the ASMFC. The proposal emphasized a cooperative program in conjunction with state and federal fishery management agencies, regional fishery management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and other organizations concerned with marine fishery management. In response to the proposal, an interagency Plan Development Team (PDT) was organized to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and draft a strategic plan for the RecFIN(SE)(RecFIN(SE) Committee 1993). During this process, the PDT had the benefit of work recently conducted on the Pacific Coast to initiate a similar cooperative program between the NMFS, the states of California, Oregon, and Washington, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (NMFS undated; PSMFC 1990; NMFS et al. 1991). The MOU confirmed the intent of the signatory agencies to participate in implementing the RecFIN(SE) and was signed by early 1993.

Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN)

In the 1990s, state and federal fishery managers in the Region agreed there was an urgent and compelling need for increased coordination of the collection and management of data on the marine commercial fisheries resources, and recommendations were made through a series of workshops and meetings. In particular, during 1991, the GSMFC Data Management Subcommittee began to review

the collection and management of commercial fisheries statistics and information. Their conclusion was that a formal review of all such programs should take place in an effort to design an integrated program to satisfy data and information needs to manage fisheries. As an initial step, a MOU and Framework Plan were developed for the state-federal Cooperative Statistics Program (CSP). These documents established the Southeast Cooperative Statistics Committee (SCSC) which was charged with planning, managing and evaluating the CSP. In addition, a workshop that presented existing commercial fishery statistics programs generated a series of recommendations concerning marine commercial fisheries programs (GSMFC 1994). Those recommendations resulted in a proposal for the development of the ComFIN.

In 1994, the NMFS initiated a formal process to develop a cooperative state-federal program to collect and manage commercial fishery statistics in the Region. A concept paper outlined a strategy and schedule for developing the program and completing a strategic plan (Brown 1994). The proposed comprehensive program was to include examination of total information needs, including quantifying statistical and measurement goals; coordination or integration of existing data collection programs; development of alternate survey designs, when appropriate, to meet special information needs; and development of a comprehensive data management and retrieval system to provide information to managers.

The concept paper was distributed to agency directors for their review. It emphasized a cooperative program in conjunction with state and federal fishery management agencies, regional fishery management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and other organizations concerned with marine fishery management. Due to previous work and NMFS action, the SCSC developed a MOU and a draft framework plan for the ComFIN. During this process, the SCSC had the benefit of the work recently conducted in the Region to initiate a cooperative program regarding marine recreational fisheries [RecFIN(SE)] as well as their own work regarding the development of a MOU and Framework Plan for the Cooperative Statistics Program (NMFS et al. 1993; RecFIN(SE) Committee 1993; NMFS et al. 1994; SCSC 1994). During the development of the ComFIN MOU, the SCSC, in conjunction with the RecFIN(SE) Committee, decided to combine the MOU to incorporate the RecFIN(SE). The joint MOU creates the FIN which is evolved from the ComFIN and RecFIN(SE). The MOU confirmed the intent of the signatory agencies to participate in implementing the FIN(Appendix A).

D. FIN/ACCSP Coordination

In November 1995, a MOU for an Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) was entered into by the fifteen Atlantic coast states, the District of Columbia, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The intent of the ACCSP MOU is to design and implement a cooperative state-federal marine fisheries statistics program that adequately meets the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. In 1998, the South Atlantic states stopped actively participating at the FIN Committee level due to the continued development of the ACCSP; however, those states are still active on various FIN subcommittees and work groups. In addition, the staffs of FIN and ACCSP regularly attend meetings of each other programs. The reason

for these coordinating activities is to ensure continuity, comparability and compatibility of data across regional boundaries and to meet the goal of development of a national program.

E. Scope and Constituency

The scope of the FIN includes the Region's commercial and recreational fisheries for marine, estuarine, and anadromous species with attention to both short- and long-term fishery information needs. Where necessary, it may be expanded to include geographical areas outside the Region. Information that falls within the scope of the FIN includes all forms and types of data collected through fishery-dependent surveys.

The constituency served by the FIN are state and federal agencies in the Region concerned with conservation and management of marine commercial and recreational fisheries. Primary data users will be the MOU signatories that assess stocks, forecast trends, and monitor fishery regulations. These include the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center, state fishery management agencies, fishery management councils and interstate marine fisheries commissions. Also benefitting from the FIN information will be other agencies responsible for the conservation or management of living marine resources in the Region, such as the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and NOAA Marine Sanctuaries Program.

The FIN partners are authorized by various federal and state statutes to collect marine commercial and recreational fisheries data in accord with their missions to conserve and manage living marine resources.

II. HISTORY AND STATUS OF DATA COLLECTION

The collection of statistics for commercial fishing in the United States began in the late 1800s under the auspices of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. These early statistics were comprised mostly of monthly landings for broad market categories of marine and some freshwater species. Federal programs for the collection of information on Southeast recreational fisheries started with small, local creel surveys in the 1950s. Long-term surveys began in the mid-1950s. This section outlines some of major data collection activities in the Southeast Region. For detailed project information, the RecFIN(SE) Committee prepared a summary of their current and historic fishery-dependent data collection projects for marine recreational fisheries in the Region and this is available in a separate document (GSMFC 1993).

A. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

The major FWS program is a saltwater angling survey conducted every five years since 1955 by the Department of the Interior as part of the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. This survey is ongoing, making it the oldest continuing survey in the Region. The 1991 data collection was completed in March 1992. The survey estimates the number of anglers, hunters, and non-consumptive recreation participants (those who enjoy photographing, observing, and feeding wildlife) nationwide and in the 50 states, as well as how often they participate and how much money they spend on these activities. Data collected include the number of participants in different types of hunting, fishing, and wildlife-associated recreation activities; days of participation and trips; species hunted and fished; types of expenditures; and selected socioeconomic characteristics of participants. The 1991 survey sampled 128,000 households in an initial telephone screening and sub-sampled 40,000 anglers and hunters and 28,000 non-consumptive users for detailed in-person interviews.

B. Everglades National Park Survey

Marine recreational fishing surveys conducted by the NPS have been directed at monitoring harvest within national park units. Recreational fishing activity and harvest at the Flamingo marina in Everglades National Park were monitored by the University of Miami, under contract to the NPS, from 1958 to 1968 and by the NPS from 1972 to the present. This survey is probably the oldest localized recreational survey in the Region. Data on catch, effort, and fish length are collected through trip reports by fishing guides and boat launch site interviews of non-guided trips. Boating activity is also estimated from land-based counts of trailers and aerial counts of fishing boats. Biscayne National Park has conducted weekly interviews of fishermen, along with trailer counts, since 1976 to collect data on catch, effort, and fish length. Fishermen landings and visual census surveys of fish traps in the nearshore waters surrounding St. Johns, Virgin Islands National Park and Buck Island National Monument have been conducted periodically since 1982.

C. Cooperative Statistics Program

The concept of cooperative data collection and/or statistical programs was discussed and outlined by the NMFS in the late 1970s. Between 1981 and 1984, formal cooperative agreements were agreed to and signed by the NMFS and all states in the Region. The U.S. Congress appropriated \$1.7 million to support the collection of basic fishery statistics in the Region through the state-federal CSP. With this additional funding, two statistics program components were added to the existing monthly landings and Gulf shrimp statistics components. In the South Atlantic region, a program to collect shrimp landings and effort data for individual trips was implemented. The second program consisted of on-site interviews by trained fishery reporting specialists (port agents) to collect fishing effort and location information, species identification and length-weight measurements for individual fish. The CSP consists of three types of fisheries statistics (four distinct program components) - monthly landing statistics, shrimp statistics for individual fishing trips (separate components in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico), and biostatistical data (also known as the Trip Interview Program or TIP). The data collection activities that are performed by state personnel are described in Section B that follows. The NMFS personnel collect detailed shrimp statistics in the Gulf of Mexico, except for parts of Alabama and Mississippi, and monthly landings statistics in parts of these two states. The NMFS personnel also collect bioprofile data in Texas, and Florida.

D. Southeast Head Boat Survey

Since 1972, the NMFS has conducted a head boat survey along the South Atlantic Coast. The survey expanded in 1986 to include head boats operating in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of this survey is to collect data on the number, weight, and size distribution of the catch, along with effort information and biological samples, in order to establish indices of stock status for species of reef fish. Data are obtained by sampling at dockside and occasionally at sea and from logbooks that are now mandatory.

E. Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey

The Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) has been conducted by the NMFS continuously in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal areas since 1979. The survey was conducted in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands from 1979 through 1981 but was discontinued after 1981 due to lack of funds. In 1986, sampling in Texas was discontinued in order to stop duplication with a long-term state sampling program after the state of Texas agreed to provide their survey data to NMFS for fisheries management purposes. Also, in 1986, coverage of head boats in the Southeast Region was stopped in order to decrease duplication of effort with the Southeast Region Head Boat Survey. In 2000, the MRFSS was re-established in the U.S. Caribbean, although there were severe problems with attracting and retaining reliable intercept interviewers in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). Sampling in the USVI was dropped during 2001 to allow development of better ways to field the intercept survey, and intercept and telephone sampling is expected to resume in 2002. Current projections are that sampling in the U.S. Caribbean will continue through 2004.

The telephone survey has always been conducted by a contractor; however, on the intercept survey there has been a transition from contracting to cooperative agreements with the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions. In 1997, the MRFSS staff began a cooperative agreement with the Gulf GSMFC to conduct research into alternate methods to collect charter boat effort data. Through that cooperative agreement, the GSMFC gained experience conducting the charter boat intercept sampling and in 1999, after a bench-marking process side-by-side with the MRFSS Intercept Contractor, conduct of the complete MRFSS Intercept Survey in east Florida and the Gulf of Mexico was transferred to the cooperative agreement with the GSMFC and its member states. That arrangement has continued to the present. Conduct of the MRFSS Intercept Survey in the U.S. Caribbean is currently through the intercept contract but in 2002-2004 it may be done through a cooperative agreement with the GSMFC.

In the mid-1990's, the NMFS began a series of cooperative pilot studies to test alternate methods of surveying fishing effort by the charter and head boat fishery. Based on promising results from early studies, the NMFS funded a cooperative state-federal pilot survey with the GSMFC and its member states to test a vessel directory survey of charter boat angling at the regional level from 1997-1999. For this study, charter boat directories were developed and maintained by participating Gulf state agencies and the GSMFC. From September 1997 through the present, state personnel randomly dialed representatives of 10% of the charter boats for each state. The vessel representatives were asked about : 1) the number of chartered fishing trips in the previous week, 2) the number of paying anglers on each trip, 3) the primary area of fishing for each trip, 4) total hours spent actively fishing, and 5) type of fishing conducted. The pilot survey also included an independent validation survey as a means of estimating possible under- or over-reporting of trips by either weekly interviewing or logbooks, due to concerns over the potential inaccuracy of self-reported data.

The weekly telephone survey produced significantly more efficient, precise, and credible charter angler effort estimates than the traditional MRFSS method. This was primarily due to better coverage of charter angling activity, collecting the fishing area data from vessel representatives rather than their customers, and excellent cooperation rates from the charter fleet.

In the study, the new methodology produced higher charter angler effort in inland waters and lower charter angler effort in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This results in higher catch estimates for predominantly near-shore species and lower catch estimates for predominantly offshore species. The pilot study also indicates a significantly different seasonal distribution of charter angler effort, which the Gulf charter fleet considers more realistic.

The NMFS adopted the weekly telephone survey methodology as the new MRFSS charter method in the Gulf of Mexico starting in 2000 and hopes to implement it nationwide by 2002. To properly benchmark differences between the two surveys and preserve the historical time series, the NMFS will continue to conduct both the traditional MRFSS and the new survey side-by-side for at least 3 years.

In the 1990's the NMFS began two rounds of surveys across three regions (Northeast, Southeast, and Pacific Coast) in conjunction with the MRFSS. The first round was for valuation and the second

round was for expenditures. Valuation surveys are designed to ask questions of anglers that elicit social and demographic information to characterize marine recreational fishing participants while expenditure surveys collect detailed data on anglers' fishing-related expenditures in order to estimate the impacts on regional economies. The valuation surveys were conducted in the Southeast region in 1997 and the expenditure surveys were conducted in the Southeast region in 1999.

F. Texas Creel Survey

The Coastal Fisheries Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department began sampling private boats and shore-based anglers in 1974. Private vessels have been surveyed continuously since 1974. Shore angling at wade/bank and lighted pier sites was surveyed from 1974 to 1975, 1979 to 1980, and 1990 to 1991. Surveys of Gulf head boats began in 1980 and were discontinued in 1984; surveys of bay head boats began in 1983 and were discontinued in 1991. Charter boat angling has been surveyed since 1983. All the surveys collect data on species composition, size and number of catch, and catch per unit effort; social and economic elements were included during 1987-1991. In 1986, an annual mail survey was initiated to determine social and economic characteristics of Texas anglers. During 1991, a study was conducted to determine the characteristics and significance of the nighttime flounder gig fishery. Night interviews were conducted at wade/bank and boat-access sites to estimate effort and catch rates, and to collect social and economic information.

G. U.S. Virgin Island Recreational Fisheries Survey

The U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife began a recreational fishery survey in 1981 to determine harvest and effort of marine sportfishes. The survey was conducted through intercept interviews, telephone interviews, and tournament sampling. A survey was conducted in 1986 to evaluate the efficiency of phone surveys for obtaining reliable data. Port sampling has also been utilized on St. Croix (1986-87) and on St. Thomas and St. John (1986-89) to determine the effectiveness of fish aggregating devices in attracting pelagic fish species. Port sampling was conducted to determine catch and effort for billfish from 1989-1991. In 1991, two ongoing projects were started that include intercept interviews to obtain catch and effort data on tuna species (in a study to determine the seasonality and feeding habits of tunas and to develop recreational live-bait techniques to harvest yellowfin tuna) and on pelagic sport fish (in a study on the biology of flying fish and needlefish in relation to their importance as baitfish).

III. PROGRAM MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

A. Fisheries Information Network

Mission Statement

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development and operation of national program.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To plan, manage and evaluate a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program for the Region.

Objective 1 To establish and maintain a FIN Committee consisting of MOU signatories or their designees to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the program.

Objective 2 To develop and periodically review a Framework Plan that outlines policies and protocol of the program

Objective 3 To develop annual operation plans, including identification of available resources, that implement the Framework Plan.

Objective 4 To distribute program information to the cooperators and interested parties.

Objective 5 To conduct a program review at least every five years of operation to evaluate the program's success in meeting needs in the Region.

Goal 2: To implement and maintain a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program for the Region.

Objective 1 To characterize and periodically review the components of the commercial and recreational fisheries and identify the required data priorities for each component.

Objective 2 To identify and periodically review environmental, biological, social and economic data elements required for each fishery.

- Objective 3** To identify, determine, and periodically review standards for data collection, including statistical, training and quality assurance.
- Objective 4** To identify, evaluate and periodically review the adequacy of current programs for meeting FIN requirements.
- Objective 5** To coordinate, integrate and augment, as appropriate, data collection efforts to meet FIN requirements.
- Objective 6** To evaluate and recommend innovative data collection methodologies and technologies.

Goal 3: To establish and maintain an integrated, marine commercial and recreational fishery data management system for the Region.

- Objective 1** To periodically review and make recommendations regarding the location and administrative responsibility for the FIN data management system.
- Objective 2** To periodically evaluate the hardware, software and communication capabilities of program partners and make recommendations for support and upgrades.
- Objective 3** To implement, maintain, and periodically review a marine commercial and recreational fishery data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs.
- Objective 4** To develop, maintain, and periodically review standard protocols and documentation for data formats, inputs, editing, storage, access, transfer dissemination, and application.
- Objective 5** To identify and prioritize historical databases for integration into the marine commercial and recreational fisheries database.
- Objective 6** To evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.
- Objective 7** To protect the confidentiality of personal and business information, as required by state and/or federal law.

Goal 4: To support the development and operation of a national program to collect, manage and disseminate marine commercial and recreational fisheries information for use by states, territories, councils, interstate commissions and federal marine fishery management agencies.

Objective 1 To provide for long-term national program planning.

Objective 2 To coordinate FIN with other regional and national marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs.

Objective 3 To encourage consistency and comparability among regional and national marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs over time.

IV. PROGRAM OPERATIONS

A. Organizational Structure and Administration

The organizational structure will consist of the FIN Committee, two geographic subcommittees (Caribbean and Gulf) standing and ad hoc subcommittees, technical work groups, and administrative support. (Figure 1).

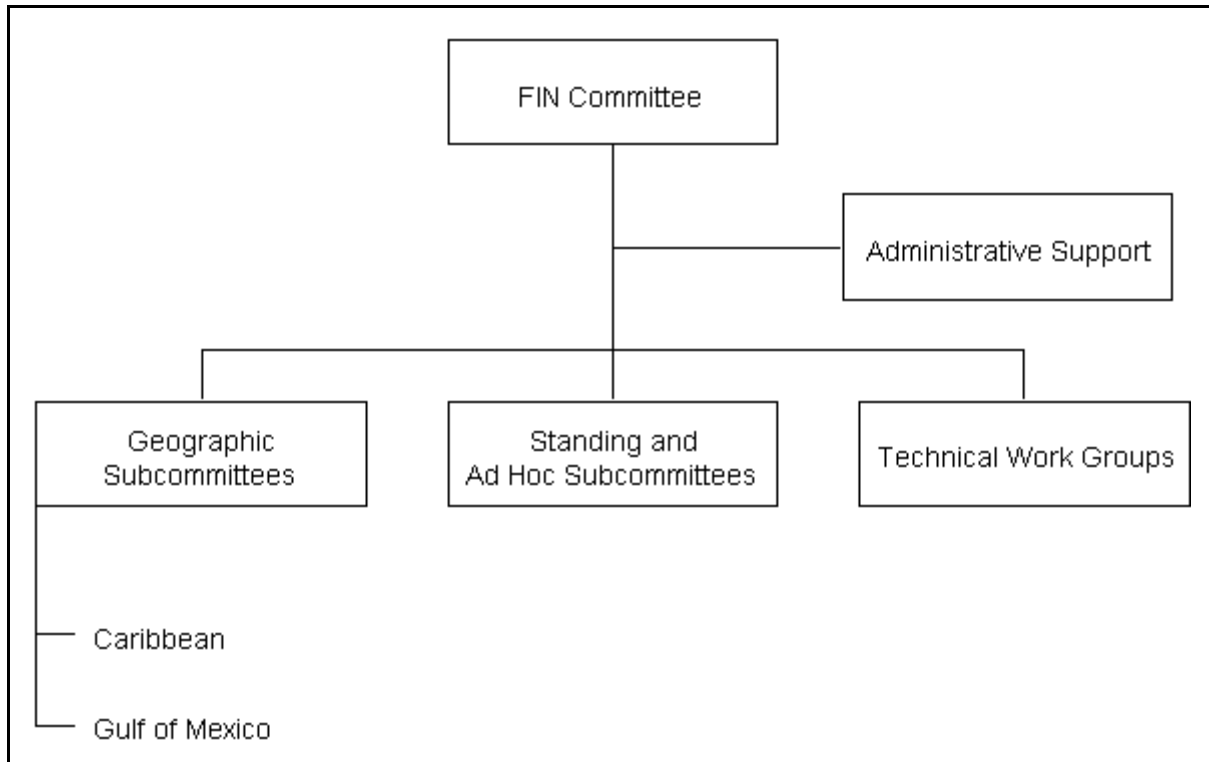


Figure 2. Organizational structure of the FIN.

FIN Committee

The FIN Committee consists of the signatories to the MOU or their designees. Agencies represented by signatories to the MOU are voting members of the Committee:

- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
- Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources
- Caribbean Fishery Management Council
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

As mentioned early, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, North Carolina Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission no longer actively participate on the FIN Committee. Although there is no participation from these agencies on the committee level, there are many coordination activities among FIN and ACCSP staff to ensure comparability and compatibility between the programs.

The FIN Committee will meet at least annually to carry out their responsibilities. It is anticipated that most decisions of this Committee will be reached by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, the will of the Committee will be expressed by majority vote of a quorum (2/3 of all members) to determine the preferred action. Each member agency of the Committee will have one vote, even if an agency has more than one Committee member. The duties of the FIN Committee will include but not be limited to:

- Establish and implement program policies, priorities, and standard operating procedures;
- Establish and disband technical work groups and ad hoc subcommittees;
- Review, approve, and implement annual work plans and other reports;
- Review funding proposals and make funding recommendations to the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee and Caribbean Fishery Management Council;
- Direct the evaluation of the program;
- Support development of national commercial and recreational cooperative data collection programs; and
- Sponsor appropriate forums.

Geographic Subcommittees

The FIN Committee will be each divided into two standing subcommittees representing the major geographical areas of the Region: Caribbean and Gulf. These subcommittees will be responsible for making recommendations to the Committees on the needs of these areas. Because meetings will involve fewer members and shorter travel distances, subcommittees may be able to meet more frequently, at lower travel costs, to deal with specific sub-regional and general programmatic issues.

Standing and Ad Hoc Subcommittees and Technical Work Groups

Standing and ad hoc subcommittees may be established as needed by the FIN Committee to formulate administrative policies, to serve as nominating committees for the FIN chair and other positions, or to address other issues as decided by the FIN Committee. Members of these subcommittees will be members of FIN Committee.

Technical work groups will be established as needed by the FIN Committee to carry out tasks on specific technical issues. Work groups will be appropriate for accomplishing many of the specific FIN objectives. Each group will be comprised of persons selected by the Committee for their expertise on the specific subject to be addressed and may include members of the FIN Committee, as well as nonmembers.

Work groups will be charged in writing by the Committee with specific tasks and may be disbanded by the Committee when that task is completed. "Standing" work groups may also be authorized by the Committee and be assigned a series of related tasks over a period of time.

Coordination and Administrative Support

Coordination and administrative support of the FIN will be accomplished through the GSMFC. All participants will be consulted concerning administrative and coordination issues. Major tasks involved in the coordination and administration of the various levels of the FIN include but are not limited to:

- Working closely with the Committee in all aspects of program coordination, administration, and operation;
- Implementing plans and program directives approved by the Committee;
- Providing coordination and logistical support, including communications and organization of meetings for the Committee, subcommittees, and work groups;
- Developing and/or administering cooperative agreements, grants, and contracts;
- Serving as liaison between the Committee, other program participants, and other interested organizations;
- Assisting the Committee in preparation or review of annual spending plans;
- Preparing annual operations plans under the direction of the Committee;
- Preparing and/or supervising and coordinating preparation of selected documents, including written records of all meetings;

- Distributing approved FIN information and data in accordance with accepted policies and procedures as set forth by the Committee;
- Assisting in the identification of regional and geographic needs that can be satisfied through FIN activities; and
- Conducting or participating in other activities as identified.

B. Support Requirements

Resources will be required to support FIN administrative and programmatic functions. Solicited funds and in-kind contributions from participating agencies will be used to meet these needs.

Administrative Functions: Funds will be needed for administrative, travel, and meeting expenses for the FIN Committee, geographic subcommittees, standing and ad hoc subcommittees, and technical work groups. Consulting costs for statisticians and other experts selected to participate on work groups may be necessary.

Programmatic Functions: Ongoing data collection, management, and dissemination activities are agency-funded. Additional funding will be required to maintain current levels of commercial and recreational activities as well as for new or augmented FIN needs.

C. Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

The FIN is a comprehensive program comprised of coordinated data collection activities, an integrated data management and retrieval system, and procedures for information dissemination, as outlined in the mission, goals, and objectives of this Framework Plan. These three program components will be directed by the FIN Committee. Involvement of all program participants in planning and implementation through the FIN Committee, geographical subcommittees, and technical work groups should ensure development of a program strategy that will best meet the fishery management needs of the signatories to the MOU. It is recognized that the needs of individual parties, in some cases, are quite different and that it will be impossible to meet all needs with a common effort. However, by considering the information needs and ongoing surveys of all FIN partners, the present variety of separate data collection and data management activities may be coordinated and/or modified to maximize the return on expenditure of statistical survey monies and the utility of the results. Implementation of annual operations plans will be the means of accomplishing the goals and objectives of this Framework Plan. A detailed annual operations plan for each year will present tasks to be accomplished that year and the approaches for their implementation. The data collection, data management, and information dissemination activities for each year will be determined through repeated monitoring, evaluation, and identification of needs (Figure 2). In addition, the FIN will interact with outside users of the data in various activities and issues (Figure 3).

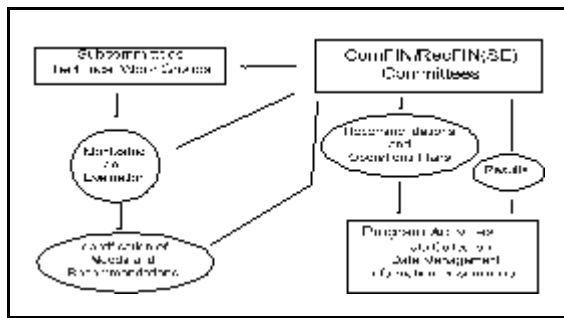


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of the FIN internal operations process.

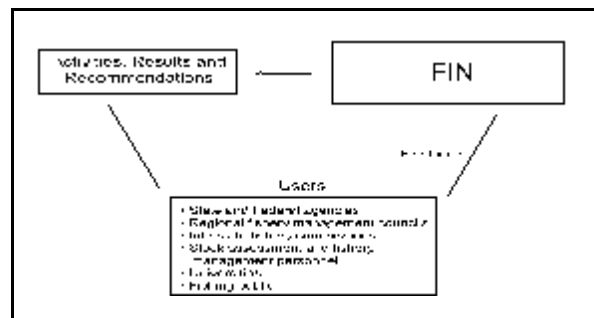


Figure 3. Schematic diagram of the FIN external operations process.

This process is described below for each of the three categories of FIN activities.

Data Collection

The development and implementation of the data collection activities by the FIN partners will be accomplished by:

Committee activities

- The Committee will charge the subcommittees and/or technical work groups in writing with specific tasks that address data needs and standards. These tasks will include, but will not be limited to: determination of catch rates and species composition for night fishing and tournaments; development of data collection plan; evaluation of fishery-independent data activities; modify marine recreational fishing licenses to meet criteria for use as sampling frame; development of a social/economic pilot data collection study and other needed activities;
- The Committee will evaluate innovative, cost-effective data collections technologies. The Committee will make recommendations to the appropriate personnel/agency;
- The Committees will periodically review marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection activities accomplished by participating agencies.

Operational activities

- The partners will continue to develop and implement tripticket programs in the Gulf of Mexico. Ultimately, each state will have an operating trip ticket program which will capture all of the commercial fisheries landings in the Gulf of Mexico;
- The partners will continue the collection of recreational fisheries data in the Gulf of Mexico using the MRFSS methods to survey shore, for-hire, and private boat modes.

The GSMFC will continue to provide for the coordination of the survey as well as entry of the intercept data. The NMFS will continue to produce expanded estimates of catch and effort by wave using the existing MRFSS methodology. In addition, the Gulf States will conduct weekly telephone calls to a sample of the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. Regarding head boats, the FIN will coordinate with the ACCSP and await the outcome of the South Carolina pilot survey which is comparing the MRFSS RDD, captain telephone survey, and mandatory logbook methodologies;

- The partners will continue to sample gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels which operate in Louisiana; and
- The partners will continue to sample catches, collect catch reports from head boat personnel, and gather effort data on head boats which operate in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida.
- In addition to these on-going activities, the Committee will be addressing a variety of issues and conducting pilot studies to address them. These issues were addressed under Committee activities.

Data Management

A comprehensive data management system will be a fundamental component of the FIN. This system is envisioned to be integrated and distributed from which information on marine commercial and recreational fisheries is easily and effectively retrievable. Communication with the Pacific and Atlantic coasts will also be established and maintained to coordinate with and benefit from its data management efforts and to ensure compatibility with a planned national commercial and recreational fisheries data base system. Development of the data management system will be accomplished by technical work groups established by agency and FIN staff and the FIN Committee. Development and implementation of the system will be accomplished by:

Committee activities

- The hardware, software, and communication capabilities of program partners will be periodically evaluated and recommendations will be made to the FIN Committee for changes and upgrades; and
- The evaluation of innovative, cost-effective data management technologies will be examined by the FIN Committee and the Committee will make recommendations to the appropriate personnel/agency.

Operational activities

- Data management module designs have been conducted for commercial and recreational catch/effort, biological sampling, and metadata. There are plans to design the registration tracking, social/economic, quota monitoring and discards modules; and
- Standard protocols and documentation, including quality assurance/quality control standards, for data formats, data element definitions, input, editing, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application will be developed.

All of these activities will be coordinated with the ACCSP to ensure comparability and compatibility among the FIN and ACCSP.

Information Dissemination

The information dissemination component of the FIN will consist of activities associated with distribution of three types of information. These tasks may be accomplished by any or all of the groups in the FIN organizational structure.

- Administrative information will document program operations and will include annual work plans; annual reports; reports and/or minutes of the FIN Committee, subcommittee, and technical work group meetings; and reports documenting the results of work group studies;
- Data base information will include data base inventories, data summaries, system requirements, system design reports, and other data base documentation that will provide critical information to users; and
- General program information which will be primarily descriptive, will keep the FIN partners and other interested groups informed about relevant events and issues and will generate interest in the program. This will be accomplished through the development and implementation of an outreach strategy. Means of communication may include informal newsletters, informational articles in newspapers or journals, and presentations to public groups or at technical meetings.

External Review of the Program

At the end of each fifth year of operation or early, the FIN Committee will arrange for a formal external review of the program. This review will be a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in achieving its respective goals and objectives. A written report will be prepared by the review team and presented to all the FIN signatory agencies, with recommendations for the improvements of the FIN.

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APPENDIX A.

**Fisheries Information Network
Memorandum of Understanding**

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

AMONG

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

PUERTO RICO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT CO UNCIL

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

FOR
ESTABLISHMENT OF A
FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK
FOR THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES
(FIN)

APRIL 1996

PREAMBLE

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) confirms the intent of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS); the National Park Service (NPS); the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions; the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils; and the marine fishery management agencies of the states and territories in the Southeast Region³ of the United States to develop and implement a cooperative program to collect and manage marine commercial and recreational fishery statistics. This MOU recognizes the long-standing cooperation and partnership existing among these organizations in management of and research on the Region's living marine resources and their habitats.

The signatures of senior agency officials on this MOU in no way obligate the signatory agencies to provide personnel or funds for planning and implementation of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN).

Statistical data and information are necessary to achieve optimal benefits from the use of fishery resources and to reduce the risk of overharvesting. Development of a cooperative commercial and recreational fisheries statistics program among state, territory, and federal partners can avoid duplication of effort, reduce overall costs, promote education of resource users, and provide a more complete base of information for formulating management policies, strategies, and tactics.

BACKGROUND

Need for Information

Catch and effort statistics are fundamental for assessing the effects of fishing on stocks of living marine resources. Information on total catch, fishing effort, and seasonal and geographical distribution of the catch and effort is required to develop rational management policies and plans. Accurate and timely catch statistics, along with associated biological, social, and economic data, are required to provide management agencies with the information necessary to plan for the wise use of fishery resources. Statistics are needed by management agencies for assessing the status of stocks and developing and monitoring fishery management plans.

State and territory fishery management agencies and federal agencies with local authority (e.g., the NPS) have long managed the fishery resources within their respective jurisdictions. Recreational and commercial catch and effort statistics have been fundamentally important to these agencies in assessing the influence of fishing and making decisions on appropriate management measures to maintain and enhance fishery resources. In 1976 the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and

³The Southeast Region (the Region) includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Management Act (MFCMA) created regional fishery management councils and greatly increased the involvement of state, territory, and federal agencies in the conservation and management of fishery resources. The MFCMA mandates a national fishery management program and directs that fishery management plans (FMPs) be prepared by regional councils or the NMFS for resources that are in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. Through their member states, congressionally established interstate marine fisheries commissions prepare FMPs for fishery resources which occur either partially or entirely in interstate jurisdictional waters. States and territories also prepare FMPs for fishery resources within their jurisdictions. Consideration of both commercial and recreational harvests is a significant component of all these FMPs.

The major fishery resources of the southeastern United States require interjurisdictional management because of their transboundary distributions. Stocks of fish routinely cross interjurisdictional boundaries, and commercial and recreational fishermen, and other harvesters cross these same boundaries in pursuit of those resources. Because of these movements, information on fisheries in one jurisdiction is useful to adjacent jurisdictions. Adequate information about fishing and other resource uses is also needed by state, territorial, and local government agencies to determine the biological and economic impacts of land and water use decisions.

In season regulatory changes and catch quotas have become common fishery management strategies. Timely, accurate and precise harvest information for both recreational and commercial fisheries is required to determine the need for and effects of these management measures.

Historical Programs

Individual management agencies have conducted numerous statistical surveys over the years to provide information for the management of fisheries within their jurisdictions. The collection of statistics for commercial fishing in the United States began in the late 1800s under the auspices of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. These early statistics were comprised mostly of monthly landings for broad market categories of marine and some freshwater species. In the mid-1950s, a program was initiated to collect detailed data on the amount and value of shrimp landings by species and size for individual fishing trips in the Gulf of Mexico. In the late 1970s, the concept of cooperative data collection programs was discussed and between 1981 and 1984, formal agreements were signed by the NMFS and all states, commonwealths and territories in the Region to collect and manage commercial fishery statistics.

Programs to collect statistical information on marine recreational fisheries began in the 1950s with local creel surveys and were followed by saltwater angling surveys conducted every five years (1960 to the present) by the U.S. Department of the Interior through its National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Associated Outdoor Recreational Activities. Since 1979 the NMFS has conducted the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistical Survey (MRFSS), which produces annual estimates of total fishing effort and catch by species. Management agencies have conducted numerous other surveys, either as enhancements to the MRFSS or as independent surveys.

Data Deficiencies

In response to the recent increase in fishery management information requirements, management agencies in the Region have recognized the need to improve their marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection programs. Cooperative efforts to identify specific problems have revealed the following major deficiencies:

- State, territorial, and federal data bases are not always compatible or continuous over time or area;
- Some duplication and field sampling conflicts may still be occurring among different surveys;
- Improvements in the estimation of fishing effort and catch for some sectors of the commercial and recreational fishery are needed;
- Significant recreational fisheries for molluscan shellfish and crustaceans are not covered regularly by most surveys;
- Information on highly migratory species and "rare-event" catches is not sufficient to determine the impact of commercial and recreational fisheries on the resources;
- Information about discarded catch and the disposition of landed catch, including consumption, has not been verified or routinely collected;
- The nature and extent of tournament catches are poorly known;
- More precise catch and effort estimates are needed at various geographical levels;
- Better information on length frequencies and catch-at-age by time/area strata is needed for the level of statistical confidence required by decision makers and the precision required by stock assessment scientists;
- Social and economic data on commercial and recreational fisheries are very limited and, in many cases, nonexistent;
- The ability to access and analyze most commercial and recreational fishery survey data bases is severely limited; and
- There is no common forum for concerned agencies in the Region to plan, coordinate, and evaluate marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection and management activities.

PURPOSE

Having determined that there is an urgent and compelling need for statistical data on marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the southeastern United States, the signatories to this MOU confirm their intent to establish a cooperative, State/Federal, southeastern Fisheries Information Network. The FIN is intended to coordinate present and future commercial and recreational fisheries data collection and data management activities through cooperative planning, innovative uses of statistical theory and design, and consolidation of appropriate data into a useful data base system.

While this MOU establishes the FIN, with its component programs the ComFIN and the RecFIN, for the Southeast Region, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing development of a unified, Atlantic coast cooperative statistics program under the auspices of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. When established, this program will provide coordination and appropriate standardization of protocols and avoid duplication of effort in the collection and management of fisheries data along the Atlantic coast. Throughout the development of this Atlantic coast program, there has been close coordination with the ComFIN and the RecFIN programs of the Southeast Region. It is expected that upon its establishment, a formal linkage between the Atlantic coast program and the FIN will be developed and implemented. Such a linkage will assure interregional and national coordination and cooperation, as stated in the goals and objectives of this MOU, will avoid duplication of effort among regions, and will provide for a unified approach to the collection and management of marine fisheries data throughout the nation.

AUTHORITY

Authorization of the parties to this MOU to collect and manage data for use in marine fishery resource management includes the following statutes:

National Marine Fisheries Service:

- Section 1854 (e) of Title 16 of the U.S. Code, part of the Magnuson Act, requires the Secretary of Commerce to initiate and maintain, in cooperation with the fishery management councils, a comprehensive program of research regarding fishery conservation and management and on the economics of the fisheries.
- Section 1525 of Title 15 of the U.S. Code authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to engage in joint projects on matters of mutual interest with other government agencies, and non-profit organizations, where the cost of such activities is equitably apportioned among the parties.
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other laws and directives (Regulatory Flexibility Act and E.O. 12291) delineate federal analytical responsibilities for assessing the impact of fishing activities.

- The NMFS Strategic Plan (1992-96) details specific goals and objectives referring to the need for collection of marine commercial fisheries statistics.
- The Migratory Game Fish Study Act of 1959 [16 U.S.C. 760(e)] provides for a continuing study of migratory marine fishes, including the effects of fishing on the species.

Fish and Wildlife Service:

- The FWS conducts national surveys of fishing primarily under the authority of the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 777-777k, the Dingell-Johnson, or D-J, Act). The D-J Act was expanded in 1984 by Public Law (P.L.) 98-369 (98 Stat. 1015), referred to as the Wallop-Breaux Amendment.
- The FWS also is authorized to collect data under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1956 (U.S.C. 742d-f) and the NEPA.

National Park Service:

- Under the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, the NPS is charged with the management of the parks to "...conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for enjoyment of future generations."
- The General Authorities Act of 1970 defines the National Park System as including all the areas administrated by the NPS "...for park, monument, historic, parkway, recreational, or other purposes" and declares that all units in the System will be managed in accordance with their respective individual directives, in addition to the Congressional direction found in the Organic Act, providing the legislation does not conflict with specific provisions.

Alabama:

- Code of Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Title 9, Subsection 2-4, Subheading (a), provides the Department with full jurisdiction and control of all resources existing or living in the waters of Alabama.

Florida:

- Florida Statute 370.02 directs the Department of Environmental Protection to secure and maintain statistical records of the catch of marine species by various gear, by areas and other appropriate classifications.
- Florida Statute 370.0607 directs the Department to establish a marine fisheries information system in conjunction with the licensing program to gather marine fisheries data.

Georgia:

- Georgia Code Section 27-1-3(a) declares all wildlife of the state to be within the custody of the Department of Natural Resources for purposes of management and regulation.
- Georgia Code Section 27-1-3(b) authorizes Department of Natural Resources employees to check creels for adherence to daily limits and size limits.
- Georgia Code Section 27-1-6(3) confers upon the Department of Natural Resources the power to enter into cooperative agreements with educational institutions and state, federal, and other agencies to promote wildlife management, conservation, and research.
- Georgia Code Section 27-1-23 authorizes the Department agents to inspect business premises and records of commercial license holders.
- Georgia Code Section 27-1-24 authorizes the Department to board, inspect and examine the vessel, its equipment, wildlife on board, and required documents.
- Georgia Code Section 27-4-118 requires any commercial fishing boat or vessel to maintain and carry a record book showing information pertaining to their catch.
- Georgia Code Section 27-4-135 requires the maintenance of records by sellers and reports of oysters and clams harvested.
- Georgia Code Section 27-4-136 requires the maintenance of records by seafood suppliers.
- Georgia Code Section 27-4-171 requires licensed bait shrimpers to report maintain records and report information pertaining to bait shrimp sales.
- Georgia Code Section 50-18-70 states that all public records be open for inspection to the general population.
- Georgia Code Section 50-18-72 refers to the limited application of provisions and refusal to disclose identity of informant.

Louisiana:

- Louisiana Revised Statute 56:6(6) confers upon the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries the authority to collect, classify, and preserve such data and information as will tend to conserve and protect marine resources.

Mississippi:

- Mississippi Ordinance 9.002 directs the Department to obtain statistical information on recreational fisheries landed or processed in the State of Mississippi.
- Mississippi Code of 1972, Section 25-61-1 refers to the Public Records Act of 1983 concerning data confidentiality.
- Mississippi Code of 1972, Section 79-23-1 refers to the Commercial and Proprietary Information Act concerning data confidentiality.

North Carolina:

- North Carolina General Statute (GS) 113-131 charges the Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources with stewardship over the state's marine and estuarine fishery resources.
- Research and collection of statistics are authorized by GS 113-181 and the endorsement to sell is authorized by GS 113-154.1.
- Collection and protection of statistical information are authorized by GS 113-163.

Puerto Rico:

- Act Number 23 of June 20, 1972, as amended (known as the Department of Natural Resources Organic Act), and Act Number 83 of May 13, 1936, as amended (known as the Puerto Rico Fisheries Act), confer upon the Department of Natural Resources authority over the natural resources of Puerto Rico and the aquatic resources within jurisdictional waters of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

South Carolina:

- South Carolina Code Section 50-5-20 gives the Division of Marine Resources jurisdiction over all saltwater fish, fishing and fisheries, all fish, fishing and fisheries in all tidal waters of the state and all fish, fishing and fisheries in all water of the state whereupon a tax or license is levied for use for commercial purposes.
- Section 50-17-280 requires license and permit holders (including the recreational shrimp baiting fishery) to keep records and provide information.
- Section 50-20-40 (effective July 1, 1992) requires charter boats, rental boats, and commercial piers to provide catch, effort, and participation data.

Texas:

- Code of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Sections 66.217, 76.302, and 77.004 direct the Department to conduct continuous research and study of the supply, economic value, environment and reproductive characteristics of finfish, shrimp and oysters.

U.S. Virgin Islands:

- U.S.V.I. Code, Title 12, Section 303-326 (Act 3330), authorizes the Department of Planning and Natural Resources with jurisdiction and control of all marine resources.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission:

- The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Compact (P.L. 77-539) provides for a regional approach to improve utilization and prevent waste of the marine and estuarine fisheries resources of the Atlantic Coast.
- The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (P.L. 99-659) provides authorization for the interstate compacts to develop interstate fishery management plans.
- The Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act (P.L. 98-613 and amendments) gives the Commission management authority for Atlantic striped bass in state waters.
- The Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Title VIII of H.R. 2150) directs the Commission to adopt fishery management plans for coastal fisheries, and establishes an affirmative obligation on the part of the states to implement the Commission's plans. The Commission is required to continuously review state implementation, and report its results to the Secretaries. If it finds that a state is not in compliance, the Commission must report that finding to the Secretaries. If the Secretary of Commerce agrees with the Commission, he may impose a moratorium on all fishing for the species in question within the offending state until they come into compliance.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission:

- The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Compact (P.L. 81-61) provides for a regional approach to management, monitoring, and utilization of marine fisheries resources.
- The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (P.L. 99-659) provides authorization for the interstate compacts to develop interstate fishery management plans.

Caribbean, Gulf, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils:

- The MFCMA (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.) requires the fishery management councils to develop FMPs according to national standards, including use of the best available scientific information. Each council, through the FMPs, can require the submission of fishery statistics by fishermen and processors (16 U.S.C. 1853).

PROPOSED PROGRAM

The FIN will consist of two major components: the Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Recreational Fisheries Information Network in the Southeast Region [RecFIN(SE)]. Each program has its own mission, goals, and objectives and address specific issues related to its area of emphasis.

ComFIN

The mission, goals, and objectives of ComFIN are preliminary and may be refined as the Framework Plan and operations plans are completed.

Mission

The mission of the ComFIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial and anadromous fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a inter-regional program.

Goals and Objectives

- GOAL 1: To plan, manage and evaluate a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial fishery data collection program for the Region.
- Objective 1 To establish and maintain a ComFIN Committee consisting of MOU signatories or their designees to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the program.
 - Objective 2 To develop and periodically review a Framework Plan that outlines policies and protocol of the program
 - Objective 3 To develop annual operation plans, including identification of available resources, that implement the Framework Plan.

Objective 4 To distribute program information to the cooperators and interested parties.

Objective 5 To conduct a program review at least every five years of operation to evaluate the program's success in meeting needs in the Region.

GOAL 2: To implement and maintain a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial fishery data collection program for the Region.

Objective 1 To characterize and periodically review the commercial fisheries and identify the required data priorities for each.

Objective 2 To identify and periodically review environmental, biological, social and economic data elements required for each fishery.

Objective 3 To identify, determine, and periodically review standards for data collection, including statistical, training and quality assurance.

Objective 4 To identify and evaluate the adequacy of current programs for meeting ComFIN requirements.

Objective 5 To coordinate, integrate and augment, as appropriate, data collection efforts to meet ComFIN requirements.

Objective 6 To evaluate and recommend innovative data collection methodologies and technologies.

GOAL 3: To establish and maintain an integrated, marine commercial fishery data management system for the Region.

Objective 1 To periodically review and make recommendations regarding the location and administrative responsibility for the ComFIN data management system.

Objective 2 To periodically evaluate the hardware, software and communication capabilities of program partners and make recommendations for support and upgrades.

Objective 3 To implement, maintain, and periodically review a marine commercial fishery data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs.

- Objective 4 To develop, maintain, and periodically review standard protocols and documentation for data formats, inputs, editing, storage, access, transfer dissemination, and application.
- Objective 5 To identify and prioritize historical databases for integration into the marine commercial fisheries database.
- Objective 6 To evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.
- Objective 7 To protect the confidentiality of personal and business information, as required by state and/or federal law.

GOAL 4: To support the development and operation of an inter-regional program to collect, manage and disseminate marine commercial fisheries information for use by states, territories, councils, interstate commissions and federal marine fishery management agencies.

- Objective 1 To provide for long-term inter-regional program planning.
- Objective 2 To coordinate ComFIN with other regional and national marine commercial fisheries programs.
- Objective 3 To encourage consistency and comparability among regional and national marine commercial fisheries programs over time.

RecFIN(SE)

The mission, goals, and objectives of RecFIN(SE) are preliminary and may be refined as the Strategic Plan and operations plans are completed.

Mission

The mission of the RecFIN(SE) program is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine recreational fisheries (MRF) statistical data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Southeast Region and to support the development and operation of a national program.

Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: To plan, manage, and evaluate a coordinated state-federal MRF data collection program for the Region.

Objective 1: To maintain a RecFIN(SE) Committee consisting of MOU signatories or their designees to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate the program.

Objective 2: To develop and periodically review a Framework Plan that outlines policies and protocols of the program.

Objective 3: To develop annual operations plans, including identification of available resources, that implement the Framework Plan.

Objective 4: To distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties.

Objective 5: To conduct a program review at least every five years of operation to evaluate the program's success in meeting needs in the Region.

GOAL 2: To implement and maintain a coordinated state-federal MRF data collection program for the Region.

Objective 1: To periodically review the components of the fishery (modes, areas, etc.) and the required data priorities for each component.

Objective 2: To periodically review data elements (environmental, biological, sociological, economic) required for each fishery component.

Objective 3: To determine, maintain and periodically review standards for data collection, including statistical, training, and quality assurance and quality control standards.

Objective 4: To periodically review and evaluate the adequacy of current programs for meeting the RecFIN(SE) requirements.

Objective 5: To coordinate, integrate, and augment, as appropriate, data collection efforts to meet the RecFIN(SE) requirements.

Objective 6: To evaluate and recommend innovative data collection technologies.

GOAL 3: To establish and maintain an integrated, MRF data management system for the Region.

Objective 1: To periodically review and make recommendations regarding the location and administrative responsibility for the RecFIN(SE) data management system.

Objective 2: To periodically evaluate the hardware, software, and communication capabilities of program partners and make recommendations for support and upgrades.

Objective 3: To implement, maintain, and periodically review an MRF data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs (e.g., trade and tourism).

Objective 4: To develop, maintain, and periodically review standard protocols and documentation for data formats, input, editing, quality control, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application.

Objective 5: To identify and prioritize data bases for integration into the MRF data management system.

Objective 6: To evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.

Objective 7 To protect the confidentiality of personal and business information, as required by state and/or federal law.

GOAL 4: To support the development and operation of a national program to collect, manage, and disseminate MRF information for use by states, territories, councils, interstate commissions, and federal marine fishery management agencies.

Objective 1: To provide for long-term national program planning.

Objective 2: To coordinate the RecFIN(SE) with other regional and national MRF programs.

Objective 3: To encourage consistency and comparability among regional and national programs over time.

IMPLEMENTATION

Participants in this MOU recognize the critical need for a comprehensive program to collect and manage marine commercial and recreational fisheries data in the Region. Participants acknowledge that existing resources to achieve program goals are inadequate. Participants also agree on the appropriateness of cooperative agreements and grants (financial assistance awards) and/or contracts to fund approved projects, subject to the availability of funds and in accordance with applicable agency administrative policies and procedures.

It is hereby agreed that the undersigned will establish and implement the FIN in accordance with the mission, goals, and objectives of the ComFIN and RecFIN(SE), contingent upon available resources. This agreement will become effective with an agency upon signature of the authorized official of that agency.

The terms of this agreement may be modified at any time by mutual agreement of the participants, including the provision for the ComFIN and RecFIN(SE) Committees to extend invitations to other agencies with fishery management or research authority to become participants in the program. Further, it is agreed that any signatory to this MOU may terminate its involvement upon 90-days written notice to the GSMFC. The GSMFC will notify the other signatories of the proposed termination.

OTHER PROVISIONS

Nothing herein is intended to conflict with current state, territory, council, commission, Department of the Interior, or Department of Commerce regulations, policies or directives. If the terms of this MOU are inconsistent with existing practices of a participant entering into this MOU, then those portions of this MOU which are determined to be inconsistent shall be invalid; however, the remaining terms and conditions of this MOU shall remain in full force and in effect. Such changes as are deemed necessary will be accomplished by either an amendment to this MOU or by entering into a new MOU, as determined by the pertinent participants.

Signatories of the FIN MOU

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