

APPROVED BY:
Virtual Approval
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
9/24/2020

**S-FFMC Menhaden Advisory Committee
Webinar
Wednesday, March 4, 2020**

Chairman Himchak called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. with the following in attendance via Webinar:

Members

Peter Himchak, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ray Mroch, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Francois Kuttel, Westbank Fishing, LLC, New Orleans, LA
Chris Swanson, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

Amy Schueller, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC
Robert Leaf, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Borden Wallace, Patronus Consulting, New Orleans, LA
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services, Hammond, LA
Skyler Sagarese, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Benson Chiles, Chiles Consulting LLC, Atlantic Highlands, NJ
David Chagaris, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
Matt Nuttall, University of Miami, Miami, FL
Kim de Mutsert, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
Chad Hansen, PEW Charitable Trust, Crawfordville, FL
Igal Berenstine, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
Nick Farmer, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, New Orleans, LA

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

VanderKooy welcomed everyone and addressed housekeeping issues. The attendees on the webinar were introduced and **VanderKooy** provided the methods by which the meeting would run. He reminded everyone that if they had made plans to attend the Commission meeting in Gulf Shores next week, they need to be sure they had cancelled any registration or hotel reservations if they were not, in fact, attending now.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed. **Himchak** requested that the MAC projects submitted by **VanderKooy** for funding consideration be provided under Other Business. In addition, **Himchak** requested that the discussion of the robustness tests, completed following the last stakeholder workshop, would be covered by **Leaf** during item 4. **Herbert** would like to table item 8, both 8a and 8b until fall MAC meeting. **VanderKooy** apologized for not forwarding the draft minutes ahead of the call and requested to move their approval to the end of the agenda, before Other Business. ***Herbert moved to approve the agenda as modified, Adriance seconded, and the agenda was approved as amended.*** The minutes were provided to everyone via email as the meeting moved on.

Reference Points Discussion

Chagaris (UFL) provided an overview of the potential for implementing ecosystem-based reference points (ERPs) for Gulf Menhaden. In both the Gulf Menhaden FMP and the most recent benchmark assessment (SEDAR63), goals and recommendations included the need for considering ecosystem services and the role of menhaden in the environment. This presentation will show the committee what the Ecosystem Team (**Chagaris, de Mutsert, Schueller, Behrenstein, Sagarese, and Nuttall**) could provide. The MSY based reference points in the last assessment were inestimable or implausible, so proxies based on natural mortality were suggested as thresholds and targets. These can be screened through the current ecosystem models. The BAM reference points could be adjusted based on indicator performance to develop alternative ERPs. In addition, the proposed HCR simulation by Butterworth and Rademeyer is a fixed exploitation rate rule, where the TAC is proportional to abundance, and the team could apply the current HCR in Ecosim, and provide indicators to gauge performance of the HCR from an ecosystem perspective. The results would provide indicators related to ecosystem structure, trophic utilization, and ecosystem resilience. **Chagaris** provided some summary indicators using the northern Gulf and Gulfwide models. The various indicators could be examined individually or in combination looking at aggregates of all fish, all predators, only the upper trophic levels or based on individual groups of predators like Sciaenid predators, HMS and Coastal pelagics, reef fish, as well as specifically for marine mammals or seabirds. The team could provide any portion of these examples for assessment moving forward.

Leaf (GCRL) updated the group on the follow-up document that resulted from the second Stakeholder Workshop last summer to further test the robustness of the HCR. Additional 'extreme circumstances' were suggested by the workshop participants and evaluated by the technical team. These included lower carrying capacity, higher catch rates, and combinations of poor recruitment and increasing natural mortality. **VanderKooy** forwarded the document to everyone in preparation for this webinar. In summary, even with the additional extreme tests, **Leaf** noted that the harvest control parameter was still more successful in reducing impacts much better than with no control parameter in place – increased abundance even with continued but reduced harvest. The team agreed that there are no further scenarios that would actually inform the model at this point. Butterworth and Rademeyer would like to continue to work on this and perhaps if the MAC's proposed research projects are funded through the IJF program, the team could further develop the HCR.

VanderKooy does not want to ask for an overview from the modelers at every meeting if we do not intend to move forward with this. Obviously, it is our intention to have the best stock assessment that tells everything and we've been recommending ecosystem services be considered as these models are developed. Where are we in these efforts? **Himchak** stated that we have taken on a lot over the last year

and is not sure we are ready to implement an ERP working group at this point. We need to come up with the HCR first. **VanderKooy** noted that we have an assessment update coming up in the next couple of years. Is the time right for at least looking at these models as alternatives or sensitivities in some way? **Mroch** stated that while we may not have the ability now to move to ERPs, it is probably the best time to begin to push the envelope and see what these models can provide in comparison to what we are already doing.

Review of 2019 Gulf Menhaden Season and Forecast for 2020

Mroch provided a review of the 2019 Gulf fishing seasons. In the Gulf, the final landings in 2019 were 486,980 mt, which was a slight decrease from 2018, but still above the five-year average. It was a wet spring, resulting in the opening of the Bonnet Carre Spillway and an active hurricane season in the Gulf but nothing severe. Looking at the landings by month, we had the highest landings in August which was the highest landings for that month in over 20 years and catches returned to average through the rest of the year. The three Gulf plants fished 33 vessels; 28 regular steamers and 5 run boats. There are still no age comps available for 2019 but we are in the process of completing the 2018 samples. The forecast for 2020 is based on similar activities as 2019. With no change in plants and vessels and an effort at 290,000 VTWs, **Mroch** estimates landings in 2020 to be around 434,000 mt.

Mroch is preparing to send out the CDFRs next week. The previous printer of the forms has gone out of business so they are working with a new printer. In addition, **Mroch** is implementing electronic measuring boards and scales for the 2020 port sampling effort. **Mroch** is interviewing a new sampler to replace one that is leaving in western Louisiana and will work with the GSMFC to get the three samplers under contract soon.

Herbert asked about forecast which is the lowest we have seen in many years. Why is this the case when the landings are relatively high? **Mroch** stated that this is based on the participation (VTWs) of the same vessels and landings for the last five years averaged. **Mroch** will check on the calculations in the formula since there may be a discrepancy between the effort reported here and in the NOAA Menhaden Newsletter sent out prior to the meeting.

Himchak asked how the Gulf port sampling is working now. **Mroch** stated that there is a gap happening when the freezer is full. Louisiana is providing transport for the samples from Empire but we need to coordinate the effort between the plants and samplers better. The samples from the bailers may need to be picked up on a more regular basis, maybe every two weeks rather than monthly.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

In the Atlantic, **Mroch** reported that the total landings in 2019 were 145,671 mt out of the 152,392 mt available under the TAC for reduction. Nine vessels fished for reduction along with one which fished for bait. This was the fourth year of high abundances, so an episodic event was declared for bait. Effort continues to decline, but landings have been stable due to the TAC in the Atlantic. As of the last 2014 benchmark, the stock was determined to not be overfished so there were a series of increases to the TAC from the original 170K mt in 2012 to 216K mt in 2018 where it remains. The 2019 benchmark assessment has passed peer review both for the single and the multi-species assessments.

Himchak noted some points on behalf of Ben Landry regarding the Virginia non-compliance issue. In October 2019, the ASMFC voted Virginia out of compliance on Amendment 3 for not fully implementing

the Chesapeake Bay cap of 51K mt. The Secretary of Commerce upheld the determination and issued a moratorium on Virginia's fishery, effective June 2020. The Virginia legislature has approved legislation to move regulatory authority to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC). Once signed by the Governor, the VMRC can implement a Bay cap by April or May prior to the next ASMFC Menhaden Board meeting.

Updated Indices of Abundance (IOA) from Louisiana Fishery-Independent Sampling

Adriance updated the group on the IOA in Louisiana waters which was sent out ahead of the call. The gear used for this includes the 16-ft trawl, 50-ft bag seine, and the 750-ft experimental gill net. The lengths and CPUE were displayed for each gear. The seines are generally on average in recent years. The trawls have been higher the last decade, but is generally falling with variation around four-year peaks. The gill net samples are up over the last decade, but generally stable. **Mareska** asked if there were any regional differences in CSAs, eastern vs western, especially considering the amount of freshwater the eastern CSAs have been receiving the last year or two. **Adriance** did not look at regional but will check and get back. Did flooding effect regionally as well as coast-wide and could it be dropping the value the last year on each series? **Himchak** reminded that these are the types of data we will need as we move forward with **Leaf's** index development which is in the IJF Research Proposals and would be critical for monitoring any HCR.

Leaf asked if any of the stations were removed that did not have any positive catches similar to the way they have been done in past SEDARs? **Adriance** doesn't treat the indices the same exact way that **Schueller** does. **Leaf** and **Schueller** will look into this and share the Gulf code to standardize with SEDAR indices.

Marine Stewardship Certification (MSC) of Gulf Menhaden

Himchak stated that MSC certification was achieved in October 2019. Under the Client Action Plan (CAP), the industry must improve their overall 6 conditional scores to 80 or better over the next four years. Current conditional scores are either a 70 or a 75. The two stakeholder workshops have begun addressing the harvest control rule and harvest strategy issues CAP. The most recent work with the NMFS is for a multiyear project exploring observer coverage of the menhaden fleet. It is a \$3M Restore Act project which will include a proof of concept using video observation and drones to look at marine mammal and sea turtle interactions.

Two of the industry CAP action items, long term objectives and fishery strategies are also required and the industry needs to improve communications with state MAC members on those two issues. We are now five years out of the last revision to the Commission's Gulf Menhaden FMP and it is probably time to request another revision, especially in keeping with the requirements of the Client Action Plan. **Kuttel** stated that we discussed revising the FMP at the October 2019 meeting of the MAC. **Himchak** has been talking with **VanderKooy** and knows that it is a large undertaking, especially for **VanderKooy** and **Mroch** who would have traditionally been the ones revising the document.

VanderKooy explained that if the MAC requests an update, it would go to the Commission for their consideration and approval. We currently have stayed away from developing FMPs because they are not actual plans akin to a federal FMP. They do not require adoption by the states, but are considered best management practices without regulatory action. That is why we have moved to Biologic and Management Profiles instead. That said, if the Commission does approve a revision, it is likely that a

Technical Task Force (TTF) would need to be formed which would include the state reps on the MAC or a designee. The mechanism is irrelevant at this point, if the MAC thinks an FMP revision is necessary, they should make a motion for the Commission to consider at their meeting next week rather than wait until October. The details of how to accomplish it could be discussed over the summer and implemented prior to October. If a revision is approved, the Operational Assessment (OA) currently on the SEDAR calendar for 2023 would need to be moved up to 2021. The revision has to be completed by 2022 and the timing of the assessment is critical to completing it. If the Commission approves, **VanderKooy** will request that the Gulf Menhaden OA date be moved up by the SEDAR Steering Committee and another OA be added to the calendar for 2024 to keep **Schueller** on the schedule. **Kuttel** provided a motion. *The MAC moves to request the GSMFC allow the MAC to revise the 2015 Gulf Menhaden Fishery Management Plan and update the stock assessment with a completion date by 2022. The motion was seconded by **Herbert** and passed without objection.*

VanderKooy will provide the motion in the report to the Commission next week along with any details. The assessment would actually begin mid-year so we can get a longer terminal year included. The rest of the FMP could be developed and the assessment simply plugged in near the end. It will make more work for the MAC state members if they are also part of the TTF, but the timing is not an issue.

Approval of Minutes

The MAC reviewed the draft minutes from the last meeting on October 15, 2019 in Biloxi, Mississippi. **Leaf** indicated that the entire group, not the ENGOS, requested the additional robustness tests and the minutes don't really reflect that. **VanderKooy** will change it to indicate that all the participants made the request. In addition, **Himchak** noted his name was misspelled on the last page. ***Herbert** moved to accept the minutes as modified, **Adriance** seconded, and the minutes were accepted.*

Other Business

VanderKooy informed the group of several potential research projects to be presented to the Commission's Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) which is the science committee for the Commission. There are 19 proposals which have been submitted from five subcommittees (Table). These are being reviewed by the TCC and will be ranked according to their priority determination. **Himchak** pointed out that everyone has seen the MAC submission and participated in the development of the MAC list. If any of the MAC projects make the TCC's list, we will develop full budgets and work plans over the summer, and the Commission will consider what they can fund with the amount of funding available. We should know next week if we make the list and October if we are approved, and work could begin in January of 2021.

Project #	Research or Data Need	Source and Priority
1	Commercial Catch Biological Sampling of the Crab Fishery	Crab Subcommittee 1
2	Recreational Crab Fishing Survey	Crab Subcommittee 2
3	Bycatch and Incidental Catch in Commercial Crab Traps vs BRD Traps	Crab Subcommittee 3
4	Alternative Gear Studies for Blue Crabs – trawls, seines, and traps	Crab Subcommittee 4
5	Inter-Annual Assessment of Menhaden Harvest Control Parameter (index development)	MAC 1
6	CDFR Electronic Reporting Pilot (at sea log book)	MAC 2
7	Analysis of Menhaden Tag/Recapture Data (historic)	MAC 3
8	Regional Predator/Prey Trophic Interactions (diet studies)	MAC 4
9	Tag and Recapture Offshore for Adult Red Drum Abundance Estimates	Red Drum TTF 1
10	Socio-economic Survey of Red Drum Fisheries	Red Drum TTF 2
11	Predator/Prey and other Biological Sampling Related to Red Drum	Red Drum TTF 3
12	Environmental Changes Affecting Red Drum	Red Drum TTF 4

13	Habitat Changes Affecting Flounder Abundances	Flounder TTF 1
14	Temperature Effect on Flounder Sex Ratios	Flounder TTF 2
15	Flounder Telemetry Work	Flounder TTF 3
16	DWH Impacts on Flounder Populations	Flounder TTF 4
17	Lack or Changes in Patterns of Cobia Migration	Cobia TTF 1
18	Cobia Reproduction, Genetics, and Age and Growth	Cobia TTF 2
19	Economic Values of the Cobia Fishery(s)	Cobia TTF 3

VanderKooy noted that he was disappointed that a number of other interested parties were invited to join in the call but didn't participate. We do appreciate the participation from **Hansen** and **Chiles** who have been on this webinar. **VanderKooy** asked if they had any questions or comments. **Hansen** indicated he appreciated the opportunity to join in.

VanderKooy pointed out that fall 2020 GSMFC meeting will be in Florida. Details will be provided over the summer. It will be a regular MAC meeting in person.

With no other business, the webinar adjourned at 10:35 a.m.