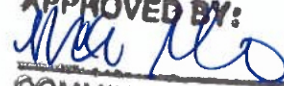


**FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)
MINUTES
Tuesday, October 15, 2024
Gulf Shores, AL**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Vice-chair **Nicole Beckham** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present either in person or via the webinar:

Members

Chris Bradshaw, FFWCC, Charleston, SC
Marie Head, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Nicole Beckham, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Megan Fleming, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Darrin Stewart, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Nicole Smith, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Joel Anderson, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Lisa Hollensead, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Deanna Valentine, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

James Swarthout, ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Eric Gigli, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Andrew Petersen, Bluefin Data, New Orleans, LA
Brett Pierce, Bluefin Data, Miami, FL
Kevin Anson, ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Doug Boyd, Boerne, TX
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Jason Rider, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Approval of Agenda

C. Bradshaw moved to approve the amended agenda as written. **M. Harden** seconded.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on October 17, 2023 in New Orleans, LA were approved as presented.

IRA Funding Update

S. Poland gave a presentation on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) red snapper funding. Congress allocated \$349M for climate-ready fisheries and \$20M was allocated to red snapper science in the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately \$10M is being spending on improving the methods used to collect recreational effort and released catch data. GSMFC also received approximately \$6M to make data management system improvements at the commission and within each state. NOAA is also

using \$2M to implement video and acoustic camera systems with automated image analysis. **G. Bray** updated the committee on the IRA funding that has been received by GSMFC. The Commission completed two workshops in 2024 focused on two high priority areas of recreational data collection. From those workshops a Request for Proposals has been published and the Commission in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries is making approximately \$7M available to support research in 1) Methods for Validating Recreational Fishing Effort estimates and 2) Methods for Improving Recreational Released Catch data. Proposals are due January 15, 2025 and research will hopefully begin in 2025. Bray also discussed there is IRA funding available to support data management system improvements in both the states and FIN. The goal is to make the FIN DMS the centralized warehouse for state recreational survey data and improvements to systems will help improve efficiency of data deliveries and improve quality control processes to improve data accuracy. He also stated some IRA funding is being reprioritized to support the transition to Alabama and Mississippi Creel recreational surveys.

MRIP Update

R. Cody from NOAA OST provided an MRIP update. NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology (OST) staff are developing a program to track information requests and changes to MRIP data for data users outside of the federal government. This will be an important data management tool used at data workshops when reviewing MRIP survey data with state partners. OST staff are hoping to be testing at some point in 2025. OST staff are pleased with increased responses on wave level estimate review but this bringing increased burden to staff to investigate concerns suggested by partners. Staff are looking for ways to make the review process more efficient. OST are seeking for more consultants to help with certification reviews and transition research project evaluations. They expect the requests for consultant support to remain high. Fisheries of the US is going through re-design. Complications with data acquisition along with new automation processes have slowed the report production. NOAA Fisheries OST recreational data standards are going through an independent review. Review will begin in early 2025 and results will be shared with partners once available, likely in early 2026. OST staff are working with Florida FWC staff (and other hurricane impacted states) to re-run sample MRIP draws when possible to accommodate impacts to sites from Hurricanes Helene and Milton. **Bray** suggested that the FIN committee also consider instigating a revision to the MRIP Gulf Regional Implementation Plan to include the Alabama and Mississippi Creel Transition as a high priority data collection need. The committee agreed this was a needed activity. **Bray** will work with staff from Alabama and Mississippi to revise the document and will seek review and approval from the FIN Committee before forwarding to NOAA Fisheries OST for internal review.

Epigenetic Ageing Research

D. Portnoy provided a presentation on epigenetic ageing research advancements. He explained the method for developing epigenetic clocks as a new method for determining biological age in fishes. He demonstrated that accurate clocks can be built for wild caught fishes and including biological information can enhance epigenetic clock accuracy. Validated age estimates from otoliths and bomb carbon techniques are essential in the process. Clocks are expensive to develop but once developed can be used for production ageing at a much lower cost than otoliths. A large benefit of this methodology is fin clips can be easily collected and does not cause any harm to the fish.

Update on SEFHIER Development

L. Hollensead provided an update on Gulf Council discussions on the development of a new SEFHIER program in the Gulf of Mexico. Council staff are working on the amendment document that would provide alternative actions for topics such as trip reporting requirements, methods for trip validation, and the methods for the collection of essential economic data. Staff are also including the concept of reoccurring program reviews to assess the needs for improvements or

changes. Currently the Gulf Council is reviewing the amendment development at every meeting and working to pick preferred alternatives for all essential actions within the amendment.

VESL Development Updates

The committee received a short presentation from **A. Petersen** on VESL development for commercial trip ticket landings reporting. Development of the base VESL system for commercial trip ticket electronic reporting is in the final stages. Currently Texas, Mississippi, and Florida are in full production mode and Louisiana and Alabama should be in production by the end of 2024. Justin Esslinger mentioned all electronic reporting dealers are using VESL in Texas. They are working with approximately 40 paper reporting dealers in Texas to help them transition to VESL to eliminate paper reporting. Chris Bradshaw also mentioned starting July 1, 2025 all dealers in Florida will be required by law to report electronically. **G. Bray** reminded the states that there was likely no GulfFIN money available for new VESL development tasks in 2025 but that the states were free to seek additional sources of funding to accomplish new development work. The commercial technical workgroup should stay connected on new development needs that span across multiple states.

LA Wallet Trip Ticket Project

M. Harden provided a presentation on the LA Wallet development project. He stated LA wallet was launched in 2018 as the first digital driver's license in the US and is accepted by LA government statewide. LA wallet is being implemented in the upcoming deployment of Bluefin's VESL Application via the use of a QR code for instigating commercial trip ticket transactions in Louisiana. **Harden** stated the goal of LA wallet is to provide commercial fisher license, vessel registration and license status electronically to minimize license errors, reduce QC time and provide dealers the ability to validate licenses and registrations. Development should be finishing up in 2024 with testing occurring in early 2025.

Commercial Trip Ticket Data Discussion

T. Moncrief mentioned a Mississippi commercial fisherman that had a Louisiana commercial fisherman license was issued a Louisiana citation for shrimping in Louisiana state waters and not having a proper Louisiana dealer license. **N. Smith** said Louisiana law states shrimp caught in Louisiana state waters must be landed in Louisiana and reported via the Louisiana trip ticket program. An out of state fisherman must have a Louisiana whole sale/retail dealer license to be able to transport commercial landings back to their respective state. **Moncrief** said Mississippi law states a licensed Mississippi commercial fisherman must report via the Mississippi trip ticket program upon first point of sale. **Moncrief** mentioned this particular situation will result in double reporting of landings. **Smith** stated any solution to this problem would need to come from Louisiana legislation. **Moncrief** mentioned a potential solution could be for MDMR staff to give the state of LDWF a monthly summary of shrimp landings and their value that were caught in Louisiana state waters and reported via Mississippi trip tickets.

Discussion of Standardized Approach to Aquaculture Reporting

G. Bray mentioned a NOAA Fisheries FIS project for the assessment and benchmark of state level aquaculture data reporting process is being conducted and the project has suggested use of trip ticket systems in the FINS to account for aquaculture raised species. He commented most of the states are reporting some aquaculture through trip tickets but asked if there are standards across the states for the collection of this data. **Harden** stated Louisiana reports aquaculture oysters on trip tickets and it is confined to its own species, gear, and are reported by numbers not in pounds. **N. Beckham** mentioned Alabama has been reporting aquaculture oysters since 2013 on regular trip tickets just as a wild caught oysters. **Beckham** said the data conversion must be completed before being sent to GulfFIN due to reporting aquaculture oysters in numbers and wild caught oysters in pounds. **D. Stewart** said Mississippi aquaculture oysters have been reported on trip tickets since 2022 by numbers and not pounds. **Stewart** mentioned Bluefin Data designed a form

in the VESL app to capture the aquaculture oysters but they are also reported on paper tickets for tracking purposes. **J. Esslinger** stated Texas currently collects mariculture oysters on an excel spreadsheet and the shrimp farms are required to report annually. **Esslinger** mentioned Texas is working with VESL to develop a reporting form for mariculture oysters and will need future development for the shrimp farms to report. **C. Bradshaw** said Florida requires total pounds of aquaculture oysters to be reported monthly through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Safety. The fisherman can voluntarily report through the trip ticket program. **Bradshaw** mentioned these data from the Florida trip ticket program can be distinguished from the wild caught oysters by using the disposition code of aquaculture and license number that starts with AQ instead of SP.

Discussion of Conversion Factor Research

D. Bellais stated the snapper/grouper/black drum conversion factor project's final report has been drafted with a completion date in December 2024. **Bellais** reported the multi-species 2023-2024 conversion factor project is close to the completion of the sampling and analysis phase. FL FWC has collected 1,183 samples of blue crab, 1,001 samples of striped mullet, and 53 samples of silver mullet. These samples have been processed and analyzed. ALDCNR staff has collected 56 samples of king mackerel and 13 samples of great barracuda. Alabama staff are awaiting the fall run of king mackerel to collect the remainder of samples but may lack in the number of barracuda samples due to landings not being plentiful as previous years. **Bellais** stated LDWF staff have collected the target number of samples for blue catfish and will continue to collect gar samples. **Bellais** stated TPDW has collected 1,462 samples of oysters and 240 blue crab samples with the intention of collecting another 200 blue crab samples by end of November. **Bray** mentioned GulfFIN's Data Management System should have a summarization of the reports and results for all completed conversion factor projects with these documents being available on GSMFC's website.

Hoshin Strategic Plan Progress

G. Bray discussed the progress GulfFIN is making with regards to its most recent Hoshin Strategic Plan. The three main areas of focus are centralizing fishery depending data at GulfFIN, integrated recreational surveys, phasing out pc trip ticket and paper reporting for commercial trip tickets. The process of developing a centralized warehouse for recreational data at GulfFIN will begin through a workshop being held in February 2025. The transition plan for Alabama and Mississippi Creel is a step toward integrated recreational surveys with three states utilizing the same state survey methods. Texas discussed they no longer have anyone using PC trip ticket and are actively working with 40 paper dealers in hopes to transition them to the VESL system. Florida also announced that starting July 1, 2025 all commercial dealers will be required to report electronically through VESL. The committee agreed this was positive progress toward all three priorities and quarterly updates on progress was sufficient.

Election of Officers

The committee discussed election of officers. **N. Beckham** was nominated as chair. **M. Fleming** was nominated as vice-chair. The nominations were closed and both were approved without opposition.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.