

ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE  
FISHERIES  
INFORMATION NETWORK IN  
THE SOUTHEAST REGION  
(FIN)

JANUARY 1, 2020 - DECEMBER 31, 2020

APRIL 2021

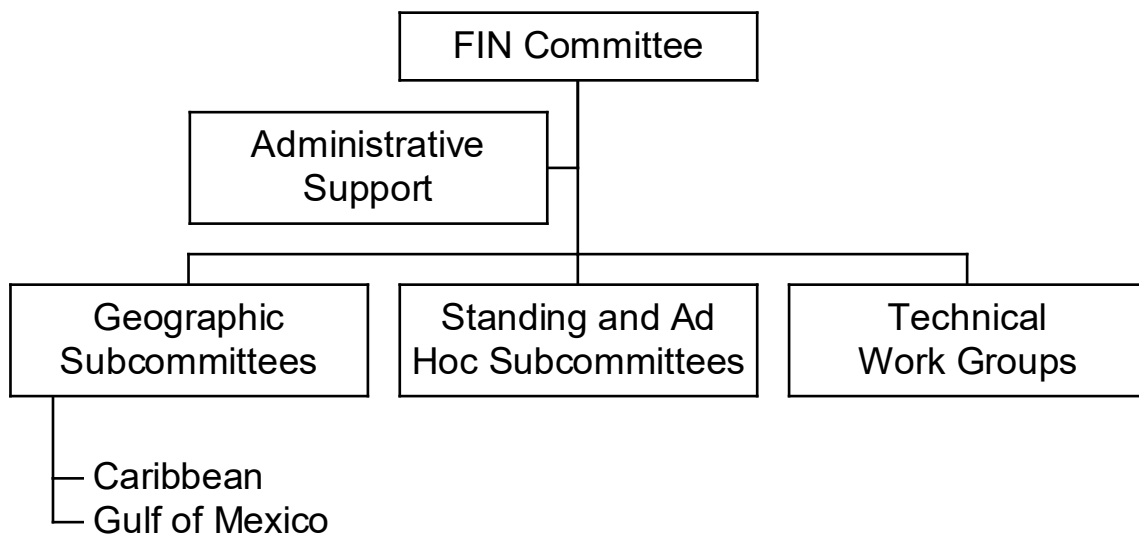
Number 309

## WHO WE ARE

The need for a comprehensive and cooperative data collection program has never been greater because of the magnitude of the recreational fisheries and the differing roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. Many southeastern stocks targeted by anglers are now depleted, due primarily to excessive harvest, 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. The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region. The scope of GulfFIN includes representation from seven state agencies in the region, NOAA Fisheries, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Caribbean Fishery Management Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Program Organization

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



**Figure 1.** Organizational structure of the FIN.

## WHAT WE DO

GulfFIN is a comprehensive program comprised of coordinated data collection activities, an integrated data management and retrieval system, and procedures for information dissemination. Activities during 2020 were associated with addressing issues and problems regarding data

collection and management and developing strategies for dealing with these topics. In addition to committee activities, FIN was involved in various operational activities concerning the collection and management of marine commercial and recreational fisheries data. These activities were conducted by the various state and federal agencies involved in FIN. Each type of activity is discussed below.

## COVID19 Pandemic

In March 2020 the Gulf region started to witness significant impacts to all fisheries data collection efforts as the COVID19 pandemic began to proliferate. As states were forced to implement policies on social distancing to help ensure staff safety, this impacted the abilities for port agents to be in close proximity to anglers and subsequently the fish they harvested. In many cases, field work significantly slowed or stopped at times during March and April 2020. As the strictest restrictions slowly lifted, impacts to sampling productivity was still observed in many areas. States did an amazing job to put policies and procedures in place to allow for field sampling but ensuring port agent safety. Some subregions or sites within states were still prohibited due to high virus transmission rates. For the operational activities listed below, the results are not comparable to previous years due to the negative impacts of the pandemic.

## OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### *Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data*

Marine recreational landings data often provide a direct measure of the effectiveness of management efforts and are important inputs in the stock assessment process. These datasets can also be extremely useful in assessing mortality that results from recreational angling effort. GulfFIN recognizes this need and supports the conduct of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. GulfFIN provides coordination of the surveys, an access-point intercept survey (APAIS) of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRIP methodology which is conducted by state biologists. GSMFC staff oversee the conversion of paper sampling forms to electronic databases. These data are combined with the NMFS Fishing Effort survey data to allow for estimation of total catch and landings for all species encountered along with total fishing effort estimation as well. The states also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coast) charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. GulfFIN also provided partial support for Louisiana Creel field surveys which have been implemented to replace MRIP in Louisiana. The table below shows the number of dockside assignments and angler interviews the state samplers conducted for each mode.



<b>2020 Numbers of Dockside Assignments and Interviews</b>						
<b>State</b>	<b>Assignments</b>			<b>Interviews</b>		
	<b>SH</b>	<b>CH/PR</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>SH</b>	<b>CH/PR</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Florida - East</b>	136	656	792	846	4,149	4,995
<b>Florida - West</b>	251	1,245	1,496	1,967	7,997	9,964
<b>Alabama</b>	85	335	420	519	2,945	3,464
<b>Mississippi</b>	87	317	404	265	1,873	2,138
				<b>CH</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Louisiana</b>				1,644	10,486	12,130

**2020 For-hire Telephone Survey Response Rates**

RESPONDENTS					NONRESPONDENTS					
State	Active eligible	Inactive eligible	Ineligibles	Subtotal	Refusal	Non-contacts number	attempts	No contact possible	Subtotal	Total
<b>Florida</b>										
Region 1	1743		310	2053	269	0	480	5.0	4	753
Region 2	2673		309	2982	636	0	1459	4.8	39	2134
Region 3	1215		51	1266	508	0	924	5.0	27	1459
Region 4	570		179	749	216	0	694	5.0		910
Region 5	1324		108	1432	336	0	741	5.0	26	1103
FL totals	7525		957	8482	1965	0	4298	4.9	96	6359
Alabama	1551		16	1567	2	0	239	4.6	4	245
Mississippi	258			258	3	0	150	4.9	1	154
<b>Total</b>	<b>9334</b>		<b>973</b>	<b>10307</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4687</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>6758</b>

RESPONDENTS					NONRESPONDENTS					
State	Active eligible	Inactive eligible	Ineligibles	Subtotal	Refusal	Non contacts		No contact possible	Subtotal	Total
<b>Florida</b>										
Region 1	62.1%	0.0%	11.0%	73.2%	9.6%	0.0%	17.1%		0.1%	26.8%
Region 2	52.2%	0.0%	6.0%	58.3%	12.4%	0.0%	28.5%		0.8%	41.7%
Region 3	44.6%	0.0%	1.9%	46.5%	18.6%	0.0%	33.9%		1.0%	53.5%
Region 4	34.4%	0.0%	10.8%	45.1%	13.0%	0.0%	41.8%		0.0%	54.9%
Region 5	52.2%	0.0%	4.3%	56.5%	13.3%	0.0%	29.2%		1.0%	43.5%
FL totals	50.7%	0.0%	6.4%	57.2%	13.2%	0.0%	29.0%		0.6%	42.8%
Alabama	85.6%	0.0%	0.9%	86.5%	0.1%	0.0%	13.2%		0.2%	13.5%
Mississippi	62.6%	0.0%	0.0%	62.6%	0.7%	0.0%	36.4%		0.2%	37.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54.7%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>60.4%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>		<b>0.6%</b>	<b>39.6%</b>

*Southeast Region Headboat Sampling*

The Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) is administered by the Beaufort Laboratory of the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The survey has operated along the southeast U.S. Atlantic since 1972 and in the Gulf of Mexico since 1986. Although not directly supported with GulfFIN funding, monies are provided to assist with the port sampling portion of this projects. Port samplers collect essential data by sampling catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats which operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone from ports along the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. These data are continually used to support stock assessments that provide sound management advice for many economically important species. The Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) dockside sampling has been suspended since March 2020. Biological samples have not been collected from headboats that participate in the survey since this time. During the period since sampling has been suspended, port agents have

closely monitored reporting compliance to ensure captains continue to report trip level catch and effort data via the electronic logbooks. Reported catch and effort data was used to estimate 2020 headboat landings and effort with no disruption. Port agents have continued to maintain QA\QC checks and validations in the database for their area of responsibility. Additionally, they have continued to enter historical data in order to have all SRHS available electronically. Most recently, port agents have provided outreach and support to captains regarding the new for-hire reporting requirements and changes to the VESL reporting application.

Biological samples such as lengths, weights, otoliths and spines will not be collected until NMFS/SEFSC approves measures to resume sampling. Given that headboat dockside sampling necessarily involves interactions between the sampler and headboat anglers and staff, it is unlikely that approval for sampling to resume will occur prior to considerable improvements in the COVID situation.

### *Trip Ticket Program Operations*

To fully characterize marine fishery removals, it is necessary to have accurate landings data from the commercial fishery. GulfFIN supports full operation of a commercial trip ticket program to census the commercial landings in the Gulf of Mexico using the data elements and standards developed by the GulfFIN. In addition, GulfFIN provides funding to contract for implementation and operation of an electronic reporting system as well as reporting of data for the quota monitoring and IFQ programs. For 2020, there were approximately 1,000 commercial dealers and processors in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas who were utilizing this program.



### *Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System (DMS)*

Storage and dissemination of data are a vital component to GulfFIN. Creating a system of secure storage and easy access for state and federal partners to access GulfFIN databases is critical to increasing the amount and quality of data available for science and management. Funding is utilized to support a GulfFIN Data Base Manager and ComFIN Survey Coordinator who will, in conjunction with the ACCSP, work on developing more data modules for the FIN and ACCSP data management systems. This also supports all the hardware and software requirements needed by GulfFIN to implement necessary information technology infrastructure. Responsibilities of staff include further development of data modules structures; routine loading of state commercial catch effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data and maintenance of DMS. More information regarding the GulfFIN Data Management System can be found at <https://www.gsmfc.org/fin-dms.php>.

### *Biological Sampling of Recreational Catches*

Biological age and length data are essential to accurately assessing the status of commercial and recreational species. GulfFIN has worked hard to provide funding to support the collection and processing of age structures from important management species. For



Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas recreational samplers went to sites and collected the necessary biological data through opportunistic sampling efforts. Louisiana and Florida have developed more representative sampling methods to obtain biological data based on random sampling techniques similar to dockside sampling catch landings surveys. The hope is that as methods are refined we could take a standardized approach in all states. GulfFIN provided funding for collection, processing and

analysis of these data. The primary target species include black drum, gag, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, king mackerel, red drum, red grouper, red snapper, sheepshead, flounders (gulf & southern), spotted seatrout, striped mullet and vermilion snapper although many other species are also collected.



STATE	NUMBER OF SPECIES	NUMBER OF AGE STRUCTURES	NUMBER OF LENGTHS
FL	44	2,231	2,401
AL	18	1,225	1,292
MS	5	285	566
LA	11	6,957	6,960
TX	9	3,116	3,116

#### *Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities*

Working closely with the Committee in all aspects of program coordination, administration, and operation was a major function of FIN coordination and administrative support. Other important coordination and administrative activities included but were not limited to: providing coordination and logistical support, including communications and organization of meetings for the Committee, subcommittees, and work groups; serving as liaison between the Committee, other program participants, and other interested organizations; 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; and distributing approved FIN information and data in accordance with accepted policies and procedures.

In 2020 FIN assisted in the administration of funds to support five additional research programs.

- *Caribbean Sampling and Landings Validation* – This task will help determine total commercial landings from Puerto Rico. This is the initial phase of a larger project that will expand similar methods to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- *Development of Electronic Trip Ticket Card Based Interface in Florida – Phase 2:* This work builds upon the existing work being accomplished by Bluefin Data Inc. on the implementation of the new unified electronic trip ticket program. The objective would better position the State of Florida for the eventual move from paper trip tickets to a system capable of 100% electronic reporting and provide a model for other states wishing to prepare for the transition to electronic reporting. Phase 2 is building off of the swipe card interface developed in phase 1 and is developing a bar code reader that would work with mobile devices. The work is being funded through the NOAA Fisheries FIS program 2019 RFP.
- *Cooperative Project on the Validation of Commercial Shrimp Conversion Factors for the US Gulf of Mexico* - The objective of this project is to conduct a cooperative one-year study with the Gulf state partners to improve the quality and accuracy of commercial data by collecting and analyzing shrimp samples to validate, verify, and update conversion factors used to determine whole (live) weight of commercial landings from reported units (ex. Gutted to whole, bushels to pounds, units to pounds). This allows for commercial landings to be reported accurately in common currency for use in stock assessment and management. The work is being funded through the NOAA Fisheries FIS program 2019 RFP.

## COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

### FIN Committee

The FIN Committee meeting was held in March 2020. It was the last in person meeting held before the COVID19 pandemic became widespread in the United States. The issues discussed during the meeting included:

- A presentation on the Barotrauma NRDA project;
- Updates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), specifically a discussion on progress of state survey data calibration, elimination of the incomplete trip method and potential dolphin interaction questions for the access point angler intercept survey (APAIS);
- A presentation on the status of the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program;
- An update on state/federal partner fishery dependent sampling activities;
- Updates on the progress of VESL development in Texas and Florida including the Florida swipe card project;
- Discussion of shrimp conversion factor research efforts;



- Review and approval of GulfFIN program documents such as the 2019 annual report and 2020 operations plans;
- Discussion and approval of FIN funding priorities for 2021;

## Subcommittees and Work Groups

A couple FIN subcommittees met during the year to provide recommendations to the Committee to formulate administrative policies, address specific technical issues for accomplishing many of the FIN goals and objectives, and to examine other issues as decided by the Committee. Many of the normal subcommittees did not meet due to the COVID19 pandemic and other priorities that took up state and federal partner time. A summary of the normal subcommittee activities is provided below.

- The annual Otolith Processor Training Workshop was cancelled as it was planned for May or June 2020. Age sample collection and processing remains an essential data component in the stock assessment process. Overall, the state labs that are processing and reading otoliths do an exceptional job which is represented in the low average percent error (APE) from the historical reference set readings. State processing labs continued to work as possible to process and read age structures. Florida was able to move equipment into a home garage to accomplish cutting and reading to maintain production for upcoming stock assessments. GulfFIN fills a large data gap by providing the majority of recreational samples available for the Gulf of Mexico and East Florida. You can see the results from the last five years of reading exercises in the table below. For most species an APE of 5 or lower is a good result. We are in the process of getting reference sets distributed and finding out when we might be able to work toward another meeting as the region becomes safer to travel.

Species	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Black drum	0.11	0.00	0.00	NR	0.00
Red drum	1.05	1.83	1.33	0.00	NR
Spotted seatrout	1.09	0.86	4.97	NR	0.00
Southern flounder	4.57	6.48	1.85	3.79	2.29
Striped mullet	2.58	3.12	2.67	2.04	NR
Sheepshead	0.33	0.00	0.00	NR	0.00
Red snapper	3.33	0.98	0.00	1.22	0.97
Gray snapper	0.44	0.80	0.50	0.53	NR
Species	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Vermilion snapper	6.70	7.47	8.93	6.48	6.08
King mackerel	4.71	7.84	5.79	2.89	7.20
Greater amberjack	4.96	10.88	9.65	6.79	10.30
Gray triggerfish	10.64	22.33	11.08	6.02	11.37
Gulf menhaden	7.69	14.36	10.70	5.67	8.86
Gag				6.25	3.74
Atlantic croaker				0.00	0.00
Southern kingfish				6.11	3.63

- The Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee met in October 2020 via virtual meeting to discuss commercial shrimp data issues; update on Florida Swipe Card II project; progress updates on shrimp conversion factor research; update on the transition to electronic tablets for the MRIP APAIS; update on the DARP Barotrauma project; and updates on COVID19 related ongoing impacts to fishery dependent data programs.
- The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee also met via virtual meeting in October 2020 to determine the activities for inclusion in the 2021 FIN cooperative agreement; to discuss and approve 2021 SEAMAP funding; and to receive an update on the IJ states small grant program for 2021.

## Information Dissemination

Committee members and staff provided program information in 2020 via a variety of different methods such as distribution of program documents, presentation to various groups interested in the FIN, and via the Internet:

- FIN Committee. 2019. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2019 - December 31, 2019*. No. 303 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 34 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2019. *2019 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 290 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 20 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2018. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2018 - December 31, 2018*. No. 289 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 43 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2018. *2018 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 273 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2017. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2017 - December 31, 2017*. No. 277 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 51 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2016. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016*. No. 272 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 51 pp + appendices.
- *Current Issues Facing Recreational Fisheries Management*. No. 271 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 13pp.
- FIN Committee. 2017. *2017 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 252 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2016. *2016 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 251 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2015. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2015*. No. 250 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 53 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2015. *2015 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 232 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 29 pp + appendix.

- FIN Committee. 2014. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014*. No. 248 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 22 pp + appendices.
- Variety of informal discussions occurred throughout the year during ASMFC, GSMFC, NMFS, and other participating agencies meetings and workshops.
- The FIN has developed a data management system that provides access to commercial and recreational data for the Gulf States. There are two levels of access: confidential and non-confidential and users can request access via the FIN DMS web site ([www.gsmfc.org/data.html](http://www.gsmfc.org/data.html))
- NMFS provides a user-friendly data management system (DMS) for the MRIP that is accessible via the web ([www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/recreational/index.html](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/recreational/index.html))
- GSMFC has developed a home page that provides programmatic and operational information regarding FIN.

If you are interested in any of the documents, they are available upon request from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission office.

**TABLE 1. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR GulfFIN IN 2019 – 2021**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<b>Planning, Management, and Evaluation</b>			
Operations plans			
B1-Development of annual operations plans	X	X	X
B2-Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries Surveys	X	X	X
B5-Define approach for assessing partner needs and requirements	X		
Information dissemination			
B3-Disseminate Program Information	X	X	X
B4-Coordinate with ACCSP and NMFS to develop outreach/education materials	X	X	X
B4-Use Internet communications	X	X	X
Program review			
B5-Conduct periodic FIN strategic planning			X
<b>Data Collection</b>			
Operational activities			
A1-Operation of Trip Ticket Programs	X	X	X
A2-Design, Implementation, Maintenance of Data Management System	X	X	X
A3-Collection of Recreational Fisheries Data	X	X	X
Quality control/assurance			
B6-Port Samplers Workshops	X	X	X
B7-Otolith Processors Training Workshops	X	X	X
B8-Review of commercial QA/QC standards	X		
B10-Expand approach for validating commercial conversion factors	X	X	
B11-Review of recreational QA/QC standards	X		
Coordination of data collection			
B9-Evaluate biological sampling strategies	X	X	
B11-Development of recreational data standards	X	X	
B13-Explore Strategies for In-Season Quota Monitoring	X	X	X
B14-Improve Timeliness of Data to Support Quota Monitoring	X	X	X
Innovative collection technology			
B12-Evaluate innovative data collection technologies	X	X	X
<b>Data Management</b>			
Hardware/software capabilities			
B15-Review hardware/software capabilities	X	X	X
Innovative data management technology			
B12-Evaluate innovative data management technologies	X	X	X
<b>Development of National Program</b>			
Long-term and coordination with other programs planning			
B16-Implementation of Long-Term National Planning	X	X	X
B17-Coordination with ACCSP and Pacific RecFIN	X	X	X

**TABLE 2. FIN COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2020**

Nicole Beckham  
Alabama Marine Resources Division

Ken Brennan  
NOAA Fisheries  
Beaufort Laboratory

Steve Brown  
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**TABLE 3. FIN SUBCOMMITTEE AND WORK GROUP MEMBERS FOR 2020**

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Geoff White  
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**APPENDIX A**  
**2020 Operations Plan**

2020 Operations Plan  
for the  
Fisheries Information Network  
in the Southeastern United States  
FIN

by: FIN Committee

March 2019

Number 295

**2020 Operations Plan for the  
Fisheries Information Network in the  
Southeastern United States (FIN)**

January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020

**I. INTRODUCTION**

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. The FIN is comprised of a commercial fisheries component and the recreational fisheries component.

The FIN is a cooperative state-federal marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection program. It is intended to coordinate present and future marine 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. This operations plan implements the FIN Framework Plan for 2020. All tasks will be completed dependent upon availability of funds.

**II. MISSION AND GOALS**

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial and recreational fisheries 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.

The goals of the FIN are:

- To plan, manage, and evaluate data collection and management activities;
- To implement data collection activities;
- To establish and maintain a data management system; and
- To support the establishment of a national program.

The goals and objectives of FIN are found in Appendix A.

### III. OPERATIONS

#### A. Operational Activities

The tasks below cover all 2020 objectives (see Appendix A). A “C” denotes a commercial activity; an “R” denotes a recreational activity; and an “F” denotes a commercial/recreational activity.

Task A1: Operation of Trip Ticket Programs (Goal 2, Objective 4) (C)

Objective: Operation of trip ticket program for the Southeast Region.  
Team Members: Gulf States and Commercial Technical Work Group  
Approach: For Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, this task will provide funding for the operation of their trip ticket programs. In addition, GSMFC will contract with Bluefin Data to implement and maintain electronic trip ticket reporting for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Accomplished by meetings, telephone, and mail and in conjunction with the ACCSP, where applicable.  
Resources: Operational and implementation costs, telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.  
Product: Gulf-wide trip ticket program  
Schedule: Operations of trip ticket will continue in 2020 for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Task A2: Design, Implementation and Maintenance of Data Management System (Goal 3, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: To design, implement, and maintain a marine commercial and recreational fisheries data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs (e.g., trade and tourism).  
Team Members: FIN and ACCSP program partners, GSMFC Systems Administrator, SEAMAP/FIN Oracle DBA, and ComFIN Programmer/Survey Coordinator  
Approach: The FIN will continue to develop the Data Management System (DMS) including the development of standard protocols and documentation for data formats, input, editing, quality control, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application. The ComFIN Programmer/Survey Coordinator will continue to receive routine delivery of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida trip ticket data into the FIN DMS. The Oracle DBA will also maintain the historical data in the system and provide support of outside users of the system. In addition to the commercial data,

regular loads of recreational and biological data into the DMS will be accomplished. FIN will continue to work in conjunction with the ACCSP to ensure compatibility and comparability between the programs.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, mail costs, and staff time.  
Product: FIN data management system  
Schedule: Routine delivery and loading of data will continue in 2020.

**Task A3: Collection of Recreational Fisheries Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)**

Objective: Collection of recreational fisheries data in the Gulf of Mexico.  
Team Members: Gulf States, GSMFC, NOAA Fisheries  
Approach: This task will provide for the conduct of the MRIP survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. This task will provide for coordination of the survey, an intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRIP methodology, and entry of the data. The states will also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. NOAA Fisheries will produce expanded estimates using cleaned data provided via GSMFC of catch and effort by wave using the existing MRIP methodology. This also provides partial support for LA Creel Program which was implemented to replace MRIP in Louisiana. Where possible, the Committee will work with the ACCSP to ensure comparability and compatibility between the two programs.

Resources: Operational costs, travel/meeting costs, mail costs, and staff time.  
Product: Collection of recreational fisheries data for the Gulf of Mexico.  
Schedule: This is an on-going task.

**B. Committee Activities (see Section E for Committee and Work Group membership)**

The tasks below cover all 2020 objectives (see Appendix A). A “C” denotes a commercial activity; an “R” denotes a recreational activity; and an “F” denotes a commercial/recreational activity.

**Task B1: Development of Annual Operations Plan, 2020 (Goal 1, Objective 3) (F)**

Objective: Develop 2020 Annual Operations Plan including identification of available resources that implements the Framework Plan.  
Team Members: FIN Committee  
Approach: Through meetings and email, the Committee will develop and complete an Annual Operations Plan for 2020.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.  
Product: 2020 Annual Operations Plan.  
Schedule: Annual Operations Plan will be drafted by fall 2020 and addressed by the Committee at the March 2020 meeting.

Task B2: Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries (MRF) Surveys (Goal 1, Objective 3) (R)

Objective: Support the establishment of long-term, comprehensive MRF surveys in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.  
Team Members: The Recreational Technical Work Group/NOAA Fisheries/GSMFC  
Approach: The Work Group has been working on this issue for several years. 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. Sampling in Puerto Rico began in 2001 however this only lasted for the 2001 sampling season. In 2012, the GSMFC reinstated the coordination and administration of the recreational data collection activities in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately in 2014 GSMFC discontinued coordinating recreational data collection due to difficulties in obtaining support staff from Puerto Rico DNER and inability of PRDNER staff to adhere to new MRIP methods. An MRIP Implementation Team for the Caribbean was established in 2016 and the GulfFIN Program Manager participated in those discussions to develop sampling priorities for that region.  
Resources: Travel, copy and mailing expenses and staff time.  
Product: Develop a long-term MRF surveys for the Caribbean.  
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B3: Dissemination of Program Information (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties.  
Team Members: FIN Committee and staff  
Approach: The Committee will distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties. Each committee member is responsible for maintaining a list of information distributed and providing that list to the staff. In addition, the MRIP staff has developed a home page where users are able to access the MRIP data for their use. The user is able to specify the area, species, gear, etc. that he/she is interested in obtaining. Also, the GSMFC has developed a home page that includes information concerning the FIN. The GulfFIN Committee

has identified creating more effective outreach materials for FIN stakeholders as a priority for 2020.

Resources: Copy and mailing expenses and staff time.

Product: Improve and update information being disseminated through GSMFC website specific to GulfFIN. Results-oriented tables were included in the FIN Annual Report in 2009 and will continue in 2020. GSMFC Program Manager will look for ways to further improve the annual report.

Schedule: This task will be an ongoing activity.

Task B4: Implementation of Outreach Program (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Implement an outreach program for FIN.

Team Members: FIN Outreach Work Group/FIN Committee

Approach: The FIN Committee has identified improved program outreach as a high priority task. FIN Committee members have identified improved website information, more frequent presentations at commission and council meetings summarizing current FIN actions, and producing joint press releases between partner agencies.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: FIN outreach program

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be holding quarterly conference calls in 2020 to discuss specific changes and improvements.

Task B5: Define Partner Needs and Requirements (Goal 2, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Survey state and federal GulfFIN partners to determine current needs for data collection, quality control, and data management.

Team Members: State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee/FIN Committee

Approach: To promote improvements in data collection activities and improve the GulfFIN Data Management System, GulfFIN needs to survey its state and federal partners to determine and define each partner's data needs. Recent strategic planning sessions were a good method for obtaining input on needs from state and federal partners. It's likely that continuing that approach every 3 years would be the most successful way to obtain this information.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Develop a list of partner needs and research focus for data collection, quality control, and data management that can be used to guide future improvements.

Schedule: FIN Committee subgroup is working on this topic in 2020 to begin discussions on approach and timeline.



Task B6: Port Samplers Workshops (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Convene workshops of state and federal port samplers to discuss commercial data collection activities

Team Members: State and federal commercial port samplers and GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries

Approach: In an effort to provide a forum for discussing various issues concerning commercial data collection activities, the FIN Committee decided to convene workshops of state and federal port agents. The Gulf of Mexico workshop will be attended by the state and federal port agents from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, NOAA Fisheries and GSMFC staff as well as other interested personnel. In addition to commercial issues, the group will also dedicate some time to discuss biological sampling issues. Some of the suggested topics for these meetings include species identification workshops, trip ticket information, sampling and sub-sampling techniques and other pertinent topics.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Provide a forum for field personnel to discuss problems and issues related to commercial data collection activities. Develop a list of recommendations regarding commercial data collection activities.

Schedule: The need for a 2020 meeting will be evaluated based on available funding and the amount of essential agenda topics.

Task B7: Otolith Processors Training Workshop (Goal 2, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Convene an annual workshop of state, federal, and university otolith processors to discuss issues related to analyzing hard parts (otoliths, spines, etc.)

Team Members: State and federal processors and GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries

Approach: In an effort to provide a forum to ensure quality control and quality assurance for otolith processing, the FIN Committee decided to convene workshops of state and federal processors. Processing personnel from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and NOAA Fisheries, GSMFC staff as well as other interested persons will attend the workshop.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Provide a forum for processing personnel to discuss problems and issues related to analysis of age structures.

Schedule: The meeting will be scheduled for early to mid-2020 if the states and NOAA Fisheries continue to request attending this workshop.

Task B8: Review of Commercial QA/QC Standards (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Review the existing FIN commercial quality assurances/quality control (QA/QC) standards.

Team Members: Commercial Technical Work Group, Data Management Subcommittee

Approach: The current development of a unified Gulf Trip Ticket program coupled with a planned redesign of the FIN Data Management System will aid in reviewing and editing the Commercial QA/QC standards also. The Commercial Technical Work Group will be involved with development of the new unified trip ticket system. The Data Management Subcommittee will be provided several presentations regarding progress of the new system development. This task will be accomplished by meetings, conference calls, and mail. New standards resulting from the new unified trip ticket system will be included in GulfFIN QA/QC standards documentation.

Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.

Product: Updated FIN QA/QC standards

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Commercial Technical Work Group and keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B9: Evaluate and Standardize Biological Sampling Strategies (Goal 2, Objective 3) (R)

Objective: Update GulfFIN biological sampling strategies to meet needs of stock assessors.

Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group

Approach: Current biological sampling methods prioritize sampling for specific species. Methods likely need to switch to focusing on trip types instead of specific species. An analysis to provide recommendations on proper sampling methods for complete fishery coverage is a necessary step. We plan to contract with an analyst to support this work.

Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.

Product: Updated FIN Biological Sampling Standards and Methods

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Recreational Technical Work Group and keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B10: Expand Approach for Validation Commercial Conversion Factors (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Expand approach for updating commercial conversion factors.  
Team Members: Commercial Technical Work Group  
Approach: Previous work has shown that many of the conversion factors used in commercial data are outdated and have no details as to how they were generated. Many states have questioned the accuracy of conversion factors for several key species. A method has already been tested by FL FWC in conjunction with ACCSP that appears to be suitable. GulfFIN has selected shrimp as the first species for data collection and analysis and received FIS funding to support this work in 2020. The Commercial Technical Work Group will be involved with the Gulf of Mexico research and will work to identify next priority species and methods for obtaining funding.  
Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.  
Product: Updated commercial conversion factors  
Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Commercial Technical Work Group and kept abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B11: Review and Update of Recreational Standards (Goal 2, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Review and modify the existing FIN recreational standards documentation.  
Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group  
Approach: The current Recreational Standards document is outdated and in need of improvement. Each state has developed specialized recreational surveys to try and obtain more accurate estimates of harvest for reef fish or specifically red snapper. Work is ongoing to implement logbook electronic reporting in the for-hire sector and this standards document needs to include these types of data collection programs. This task will be accomplished by meetings, conference calls, and mail.  
Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.  
Product: Updated FIN QA/QC standards  
Schedule: The Recreational Technical Work Group will reconvene in 2020 with the goal of providing a revised FIN Standards document to the FIN Committee in 2020.

Task B12: Evaluation of Innovative Data Collection Technologies (Goal 2, Objective 6) (F)

Objective: Evaluate and recommend innovative data collection technologies

Team Members: FIN Committee and other appropriate personnel.  
Approach: Communicate results of evaluation and recommendations regarding marine commercial and recreational fisheries surveys to the appropriate personnel.  
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time  
Product: Communication and presentation of recommendations to ongoing programs.  
Schedule: This is an ongoing activity.

Task B13: Exploration of Strategies for In-Season Quota Monitoring (Goal 2, Objective 6) (R)

Objective: Explore strategies for implementing in-season quota monitoring for the recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.  
Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group  
Approach: In the past, FIN has recommended that in-season quota monitoring for recreational fisheries not be implemented; however, it appears the in-season quota monitoring has become an important recreational issue with shorter seasons for many key species. Some work has been accomplished specific to red snapper data collection pilot programs in each Gulf State. The FIN will continue to work in conjunction with the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to explore this issue.  
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time  
Product: Potential strategies for implementing in-season quota monitoring.  
Schedule: The MRIP will provide periodical reports to the FIN Committee to keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B14: Improve Timeliness of Data to Support Quota Monitoring (Goal 2, Objective 6) (C)

Objective: Improve timeliness of commercial data to support quota monitoring for the commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.  
Team Members: NMFS and FIN staff  
Approach: NMFS instituted a rule in 2011 that all federally-permitted dealers are required to report their commercial landings via electronic means. In 2016 GulfFIN contractor began creating a new electronic trip ticket program to meet evolving dealer technology needs. In 2018 GulfFIN started working on developing new QA/QC processes to provide cleaner data in a more timely fashion. The goal of this work is to better address this task.  
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time

Product: Increased electronic reporting.  
Schedule: NMFS, Gulf States and FIN staff will continue to increase the number of commercial dealers who report via electronic means and improve the reporting system to meet scientific needs.

Task B15: Evaluation of Information Management Technologies (Goal 3, Objective 6) (F)

Objective: Evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.  
Team Members: FIN Committee and industry personnel  
Approach: Committee members will report any new technologies, which will aid in the management of marine commercial and recreational fisheries data.  
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, conference call costs, report costs, and staff time.  
Product: Progress reports.  
Schedule: This is an ongoing activity.

Task B16: Implementation of Long-term National Program Planning (Goal 4, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Provide for long-term national program planning.  
Team Members: FIN Committee  
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ASMFC staff will attend Pacific RecFIN, PacFIN, ACCSP Operations Committee, and other pertinent meetings and coordinate activities as appropriate. This task will be accomplished by mail and meetings.  
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.  
Product: Record of coordination activities.  
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B17: Coordination, Consistency and Comparability with Other Cooperative Marine Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Programs (Goal 4, Objective 2 and Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Coordinate FIN with other regional cooperative marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs and encourages consistency and comparability among regional programs over time.  
Team Members: FIN Committee  
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ACCSP staff will coordinate activities with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission as well as attend the national Fisheries Information

System (FIS) meetings. The FIN and ACCSP staffs periodically meet jointly to discuss the activities that each program is involved in and where the two programs can work together. This task will be accomplished by mail and meetings.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.  
Product: Ensure adequate information exchange, consistency and comparability between all regional fisheries programs and compilation of a record of information exchange.  
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

### **C. Administrative Activities**

Coordination and administrative support of FIN will be accomplished through The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Major tasks involved in the coordination and administration of the various levels of FIN include but are not limited to the following:

- Work closely with the FIN Committee in all aspects of program coordination, administration, and operation;
- Implement plans and program directives approved by the FIN Committee;
- Provide coordination and logistical support, including communications and organization of meetings for the FIN Committee, subcommittees, and work groups;
- Develop and/or administer cooperative agreements, grants, and contracts;
- Serve as liaison between the FIN Committee, other program participants, and other interested organizations;
- Assist the FIN Committees in preparation or review of annual spending plans;
- Prepare annual operations plans under the direction of the FIN Committee;
- Prepare and/or supervise and coordinate preparation of selected documents, including written records of all meetings;
- Distribute approved FIN information and data in accordance with accepted policies and procedures as set forth by the FIN Committee;
- Assist in the identification of regional and geographic needs that can be satisfied through FIN activities;

- Conduct or participate in other activities as identified.

## D. Time Table

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>
<b>Planning, Management, and Evaluation</b>			
FIN Committee			
Maintenance of FIN Committee	X	X	X
Framework Plan			
Review of Framework Plan			
Operations Plans			
Development of annual operations plans	X	X	X
Define approach for assessing partner needs and requirements	X		
Information dissemination			
Coordinate with ACCSP and NMFS to develop outreach/education materials	X	X	X
Use Internet communications	X	X	X
Program Review			
Conduct periodic FIN strategic planning			X
<b>Data Collection</b>			
Quality control/assurance			
Review of commercial and recreational QA/QC standards	X		
Expand approach for validating commercial conversion factors	X	X	
Coordination of data collection			
Development of recreational data standards	X	X	
Evaluate suitability of new data sources and integrate FIN data system	X	X	X
Evaluate biological sampling strategies	X	X	
Innovative collection technology			
Evaluate innovative data collection technologies	X	X	X
<b>Data Management</b>			
Hardware/software capabilities			
Review hardware/software capabilities	X	X	X
Data maintenance	X	X	X
Integration of databases			
Identify appropriate databases for integration in DMS	X	X	X
Innovative data management technology			
Evaluate innovative data management technologies	X	X	X
Protect data confidentiality	X	X	X
<b>Development of National Program</b>			
Long-term and coordination with other programs planning			
Coordination with ACCSP and Pacific RecFIN	X	X	X



## **E. Committee, Subcommittee, and Work Group Membership**

### **FIN Committee**

Nicole Shaffer Alabama Marine Resources Division	Matthew Kamman Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife
Ken Brennan NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Laboratory	Daniel Matos-Caraballo Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources
Steve Brown Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute	Beverly Sauls Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Chris Denson Alabama Marine Resources Division	Tom Sinclair U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Gregg Bray Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission	Tom Sminkey NOAA Fisheries Headquarters Office
Justin Esslinger Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Nicole Smith Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
John Froeschke Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council	Carly Somerset Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
Graciela Garcia-Moliner Caribbean Fishery Management Council	Jessica Stephen NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
David Gloeckner NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center	Darrin Stewart Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
Faye Grubbs Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	
Michael Harden Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries	

### **FIN Administrative Subcommittee**

Ken Brennan  
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Gregg Bray  
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### **FIN Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee**

Nicole Shaffer  
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Fisheries

## **APPENDIX A**

### **FIN 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 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 protocols 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 an internal 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 commercial and recreational 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 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 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.