Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel
Atlantic Dolphin Fishery Performance Report
April 2017

The South Atlantic Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) is being tasked to provide information to develop a fishery performance report (FPR) for Atlantic dolphin. The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR format is based on the Mid-Atlantic Council's FPRs (available here: http://www.mafmc.org/fishery-performance-reports/). The FPR for Atlantic dolphin is the first Dolphin Wahoo FPR for the South Atlantic, and will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP). The format of future FPRs may change based on input from the AP, SSC, SEP, and the South Atlantic Council.

Fishery Overview:

The Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Stocks indicates dolphin is not overfished, and is not undergoing overfishing (http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm). Prager (2000) conducted an exploratory assessment of dolphin, but the results were not conclusive due to several issues including limitations on knowledge of the stock structure and lack of fishery independent indices. These issues have not been overcome, and a Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment for dolphin is not expected within the next 5 years.

To inform management decisions on the status of the Atlantic dolphin fishery and stock, the AP is asked to provide input:

- Trends in catch levels and any recent changes
- Markets and economic information
- Appropriateness of existing management measures
- Observations on environmental/ecological factors
- Other observations

The following general information on commercial and recreational landings trends and economics is being provided to elicit discussion and assist the AP in providing information to answer the specific questions that follow.

Overall Landings Trends and Annual Catch Limits (ACLs)

Figure 1 below shows the annual landings of dolphin in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) from the U.S. east coast by sector from 2005-2015. Additionally, **Table 1** shows landings for dolphin in comparison to the current sector and total ACLs. This table is a retrospective analysis and does not pair landings with their respective sector allocation at the time (please note that revised sector allocations went into place in 2016), rather it shows how previous landings relate to the current sector and total ACLs.

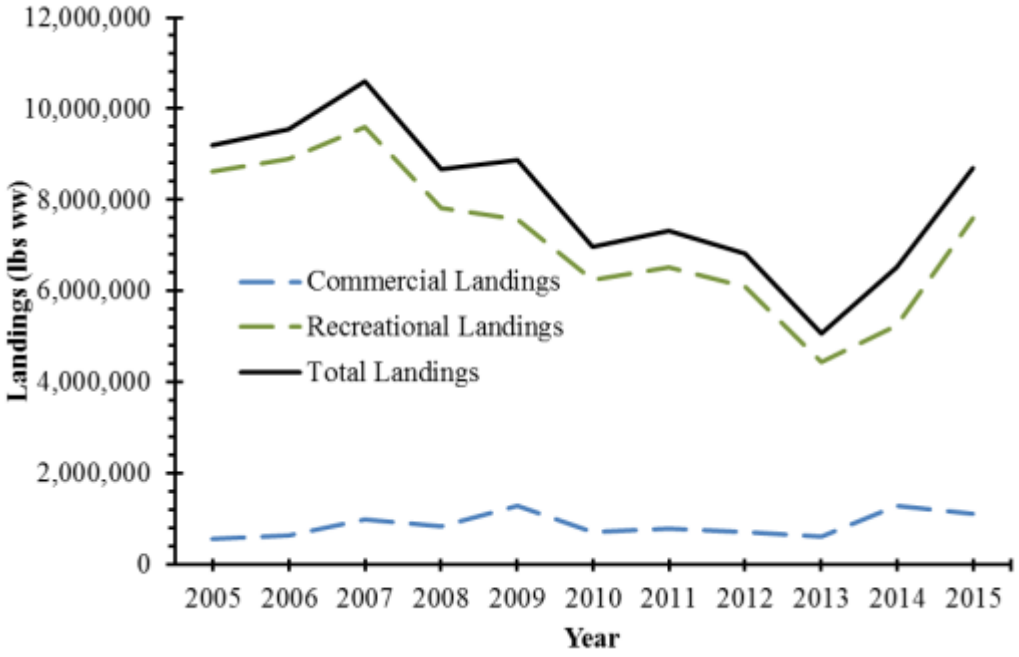

Figure 1. Annual landings of dolphin (lbs ww) for the New England, the Mid- Atlantic, and the South Atlantic Regions during 2005-2015.

Table 1. Dolphin landings (lbs ww) by sector and percentage (%) of current sector ACL harvested each year from 2005-2015. The current commercial ACL is 1,534,485 lbs ww, and the recreational ACL is 13,810,361 lbs ww (as per Amendment 8; effective February 22, 2016).

Year	Commercial landings (lbs ww)	% of Current (2017) Commercial ACL Harvested	Recreational Landings (lbs ww)	% of Current (2017) Recreational ACL Harvested	Total Landings	% of Current (2017) Total ACL Harvested
2005	577,655	38%	8,629,313	62%	9,206,968	60%
2006	650,121	42%	8,898,207	64%	9,548,328	62%
2007	998,023	65%	9,598,943	70%	10,596,966	69%
2008	835,177	54%	7,833,547	57%	8,668,724	56%
2009	1,296,014	84%	7,570,195	55%	8,866,209	58%
2010	715,334	47%	6,243,399	45%	6,958,733	45%
2011	792,293	52%	6,529,705	47%	7,321,998	48%
2012	709,131	46%	6,104,412	44%	6,813,543	44%
2013	616,953	40%	4,029,380	29%	4,646,333	30%
2014	1,301,757	85%	5,249,693	38%	6,551,450	43%
2015	1,109,581	72%	7,556,535	55%	8,666,116	56%
Average	883,672	58%	7,113,030	47%	7,985,943	48%

Commercial data is from ACL_FILES_12152016.xlsx
Recreational data is from MRIPACLspec_rec81_16wv4_10Nov16_14and15LACreel.xlsx. Landings include north, mid, and south Atlantic regions.

Recreational Sector

The distribution of Atlantic for-hire (charter and headboat) permits by state from 2011-2015 are shown in **Table 2** along with the distribution of recreational landings by region or state in **Table 3**. **Table** 4 includes recreational effort for dolphin in the Atlantic by region or state as well as by fishing mode (for-hire or private/rental vessel).

Table 2. Distribution of Atlantic for-hire dolphin wahoo permits, by homeport state, 2011-2015.

Year	North Carolina	South Carolina	Georgia	Florida	Other States	Total
2011	323	111	20	873	358	1,685
2012	297	107	21	895	330	1,650
2013	281	117	22	844	313	1,577
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Average	295	120	22	863	318	1,617

Source: NMFS SERO Permits Dataset.

Table 3. Distribution of total recreational landings by region/state for dolphin harvested from the Atlantic Ocean, 2011-2015.

Year	NE	MA	NC	SC	GA	FL-E
2011	0%	5%	55%	1%	0.1%	40%
2012	0.3%	2%	43%	8%	0.1%	46%
2013	3%	3%	37%	2%	0.0%	56%
2014	2%	12%	26%	3%	0.5%	56%
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Source: NMFS MRIP Query System

Table 4. Estimated number of angler trips that caught dolphin, by mode and by state, 2011-2015.

Year	NE	MA	NC	SC	GA	FL-E	Total
Charter Mode							
2011	0	1,610	68,181	1,951	122	20,304	92,168
2012	0	1,047	65,227	1,718	204	17,096	85,292
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Source: NMFS MRIP Query System

Commercial Sector

Similarly, **Table 5** shows the current distribution of commercial dolphin wahoo permits by region or state. **Table 6** shows the distribution of commercial landings by region or state. **Figure 2** is included to show the seasonality of commercial landings by gear (pelagic longline v. all other commercial gears), and **Figure 3** displays the inflation adjusted ex-vessel value and price per pound for dolphin from the Atlantic.

Table 5. Distribution of Commercial Atlantic dolphin wahoo permits, by homeport state, April 11, 2017.

New England	Mid-Atlantic	North Carolina	South Carolina	Georgia	Florida	Other States	Total
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Table 6. Distribution of total commercial landings by region/state for dolphin harvested from the Atlantic Ocean, 2011-2015.

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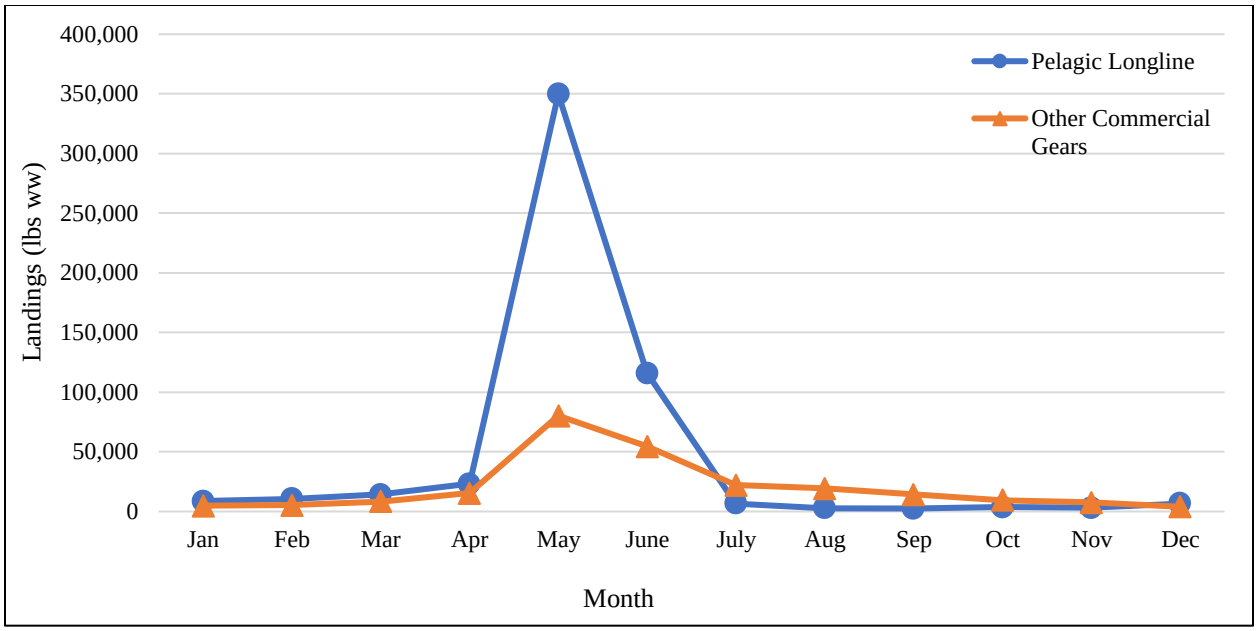
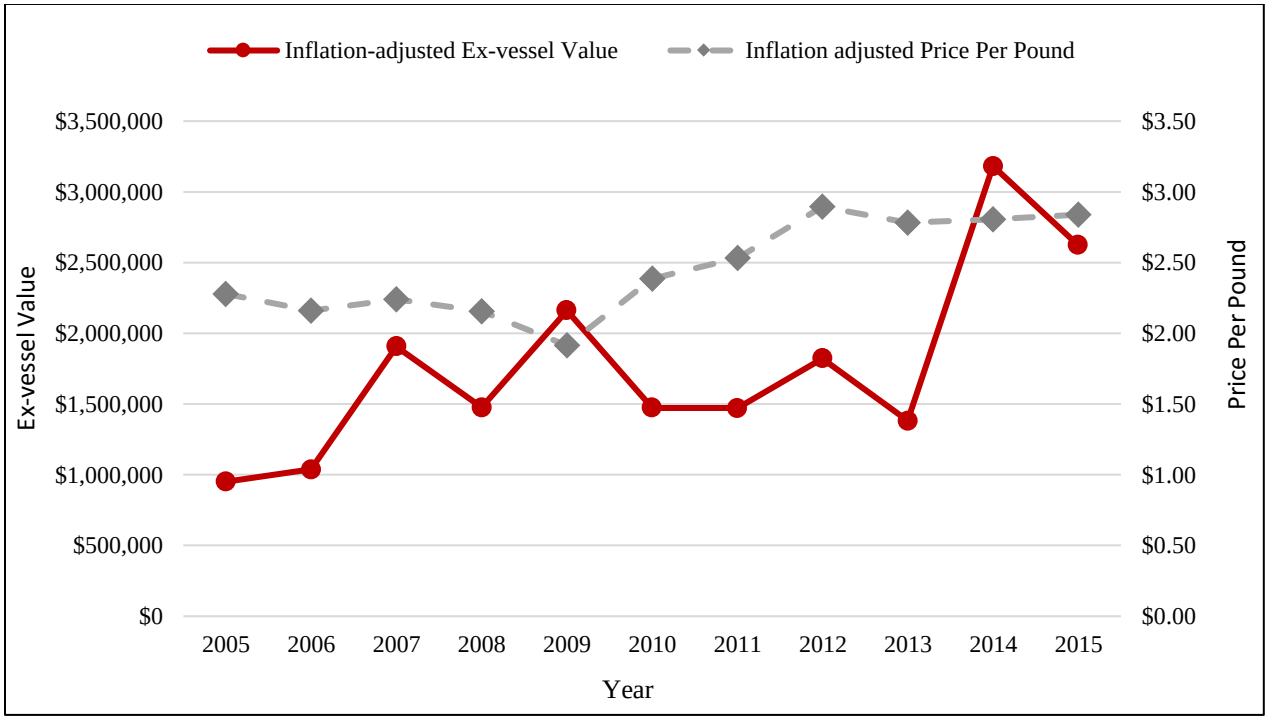
Source: NMFS Commercial Landings Query



Source: NMFS SEFSC SAFE Dataset

Figure 2. Average monthly commercial landings (lbs ww) of dolphin harvested from the Atlantic Ocean by general gear categories, 2011-2015.



Source: NMFS Commercial Landings Query.

Figure 3. Inflation adjusted ex-vessel value and price per pound (in 2015 dollars) for commercial dolphin, 2005-2015.

Questions for Advisory Panel:

The AP is asked to provide the following information about Atlantic dolphin based on their expertise, as appropriate:

1) Catch levels and demand over the past 5 years:
   - For the commercial sector, how has the price and demand for dolphin changed?
   - How is the demand for charter/headboat trips targeting dolphin, and has it changed?
   - How is the demand for private recreational trips targeting dolphin, and has it changed?
   - Has the availability of dolphin changed?
   - Has the average size of? dolphin changed?
   - Have there been effort shifts to/from dolphin?

2) Assessment of the current fishery:
   - How would you rate the stability of the fishery?
   - How would you rate the quality of the fishery?

3) Management measures:
   - Is the 20-inch minimum size limit off of the east coast of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina for the recreational and commercial sectors appropriate?
   - Is the 4,000 pound commercial trip limit that is effective after 75% of the commercial ACL has been landed set at the appropriate level? What about the 10 dolphin per person/60 dolphin per vessel recreational limit?
   - Others?

4) Environmental/ecological:
   - Have you noticed a shift in the dolphin migration due to environmental variability such as a mild winter or shorter spring “migration” season?

5) Other
   - Where should the Council focus their research priorities for Atlantic dolphin?
   - Is there anything else that is important for the Council to know about Atlantic dolphin?

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel
Dolphin Fishery Performance Report DRAFT
April 2017

At their April 2017 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) reviewed fishery information for Dolphin and developed a Fishery Performance Report (FPR). The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR for Dolphin is the first Dolphin Wahoo FPR for the South Atlantic, and will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP). The format of future FPRs may change based on input from the AP, SSC, SEP, and the South Atlantic Council. Please note that the comments below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements, rather they are direct regional observations of advisory panel members.

Advisory Panel members:

Wendell Barnett (Commercial/SC)
Christopher Burrows (Charter/NC)
Ty C. Conti (NGO/NC)
Richard Harris (Charter/NC)
Glen Hopkins (Commercial/NC)
Fred W. Kinard (Recreational/SC)
H. Tim Nettles (Recreational/FL)
Jonathon Reynolds (Charter/Commercial/FL)
Ray Rosher (Charter/Commercial/FL)
Tim Scalise (Charter/SC)

Fishery Overview

The Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Stocks indicates dolphin is not overfished, and is not undergoing overfishing (http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm). Prager (2000) conducted an exploratory assessment of dolphin, but the results were not conclusive due to several issues including limitations on knowledge of the stock structure and lack of fishery independent indices. These issues have not been overcome, and a Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment for dolphin is not expected within the next 5 years. The dolphin fishery occurs along the east coast of the United States when the species is available; however, effort is primarily concentrated in the South Atlantic region (North Carolina to Florida). Landings of dolphin are variable from year to year, with the recreational sector accounting for the majority of harvest in the fishery. Detailed landings and economic information was provided to the Dolphin Wahoo AP prior to their discussion on the dolphin fishery. This document is attached at the end of the FPR.

Recreational Demand and Market Observations

In the Outer Banks, demand for for-hire dolphin trips often depends on the tuna fishery, as dolphin are often a secondary target on trips targeting tuna. If the tuna bite is not strong, a vessel will often change tactics to target dolphin. If the tuna bite is very good, many vessels may not target dolphin, even if the fish are regionally abundant. For smaller center consoles, dolphin are a more important target and have a higher demand since they can often be found closer to the inlets than tuna.

In South Carolina, many fish, especially the larger specimens, seem to be migrating further offshore towards the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream, affecting the ability for some charter boats to make a profitable trip targeting dolphin. Faster outboard driven vessels have an advantage by being able to reach the fish on day trips.

In South Florida, there has been a general increase in recreational effort and demand for private trips, largely reflective of an increase in center console, outboard powered vessels and relatively low gas prices. It seems like there is a tournament every weekend during the season for dolphin, wahoo, and king mackerel. Demand for charter trips is relatively steady. Many clients want to target sailfish but dolphin is an important secondary target when booking charter trips.

In the Florida Keys, the recreational demand for dolphin is strong and an important driver for booking charter trips. It is a very economically important species for the Keys.

Commercial Demand and Market Observations

In North Carolina, there seems to be an increasing demand for dolphin. The CPUE seems to be relatively consistent, with about the same amount of effort needed to land fish, but the price has seen about a 30% increase over the past several years.

In South Carolina, the migration of fish further offshore coincides with the typical area where commercial fishing activity is present for dolphin. This is leading to some very good commercial catches. Large longline landings can depress ex-vessel prices until the market clears.

In South Florida and the Florida Keys, demand is increasing, as dolphin is a very marketable fish. The level of imports plays a large role in ex-vessel prices received. Imports seem to be lower in recent years, helping the price of domestically caught fish. Imports also tend to "dry up" at about the same time that dolphin become abundant locally and pick back up later in the season, creating a steady 12-month supply of dolphin that helps keep it in on the menu year-round.

In the Florida Keys, there is an increasing demand in local markets and the species is very important to provide locally caught fish for restaurants.

Dolphin Effort and Availability

In South Carolina, smaller fish are still available towards the western edge of the Gulf Stream and along the shelf break, but the larger fish mostly seem to now be on the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream, requiring a 70-80+ mile run one way. Commercial vessels typically fish this area, so it is not greatly impacting the commercial fishery, but is very far for many recreational or for-hire vessels to go on a day trip. This is negatively affecting recreational catches but gives an advantage to those with fast vessels.

In South Florida, recreational effort seems to be increasing, especially closer to shore largely due to low fuel prices and increases in the number of recreational vessels. It seems that more effort is required (longer length of time and distance from shore) to have similar success as seen in the past, but fish are still certainly available.

Overall, there have not been major, prolonged effort shifts observed towards or away from dolphin. Availability is often highly variable from year to year. One year can be very good, while the next year sees very poor fishing and dolphin availability. This was most recently reflected in the 2015 fishing year, in which dolphin were abundant, followed by poor abundance in 2016, especially in South Florida and the Keys. Availability of dolphin seems to be cyclical and can be highly dependent on variables such as wind speed, wind direction, and general weather conditions. This variability makes it impossible to determine how the fishing and availability will be from year to year.

Current Management

The 20-inch size limit off of SC, GA, and FL is sufficient and is working. In South Florida, many fish are released and the size limit is very compatible with charter trips. There were differing opinions on whether the size limit should be expanded to the rest of the management zone, given the fast growth of the species and cap on maximum harvest recreationally via the vessel limit of 60 dolphin per trip.

The commercial trip limit of 4,000 pounds when 75% of the ACL is met is sufficient for no. However, a higher trip limit could potentially be considered in the future to prevent dead discards. Conversely, a reduced trip limit may be needed to further slow down the commercial fishery and prevent a harvest closure.

Research Priorities

The AP felt that satellite tagging should be a research priority to better determine migration patterns of the species and potential stock differentiation that effects annual availability in different regions of the coast. There should be a specific focus on identifying ways to bring down the cost of satellite tags and possibly add incentives to tag and release larger fish that are typically kept on most trips.

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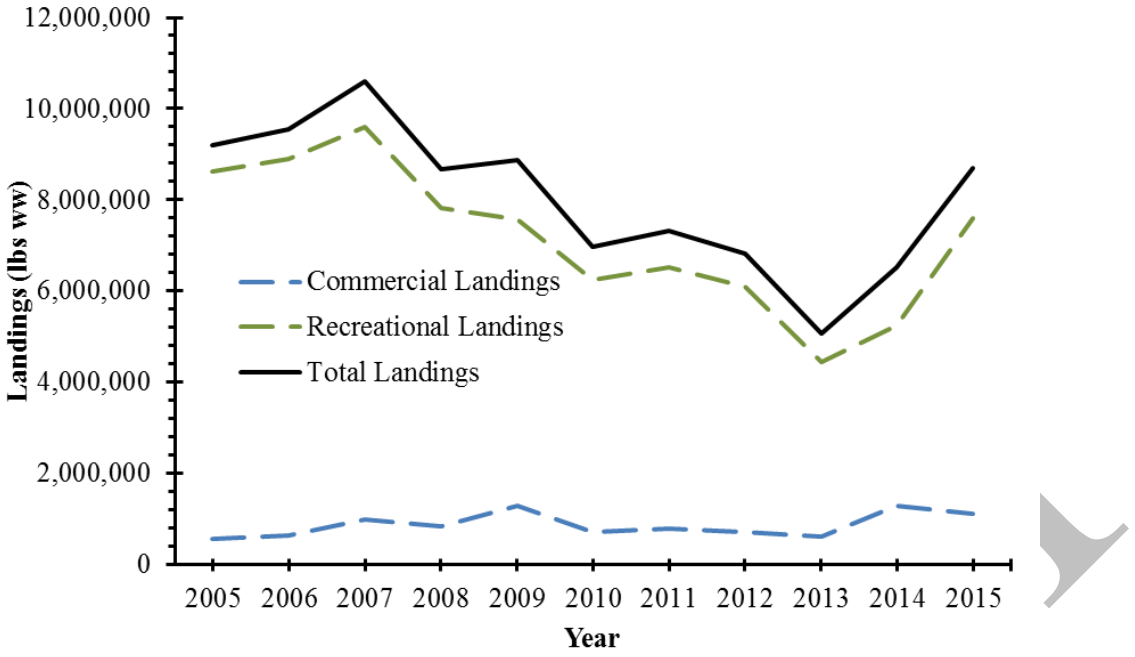

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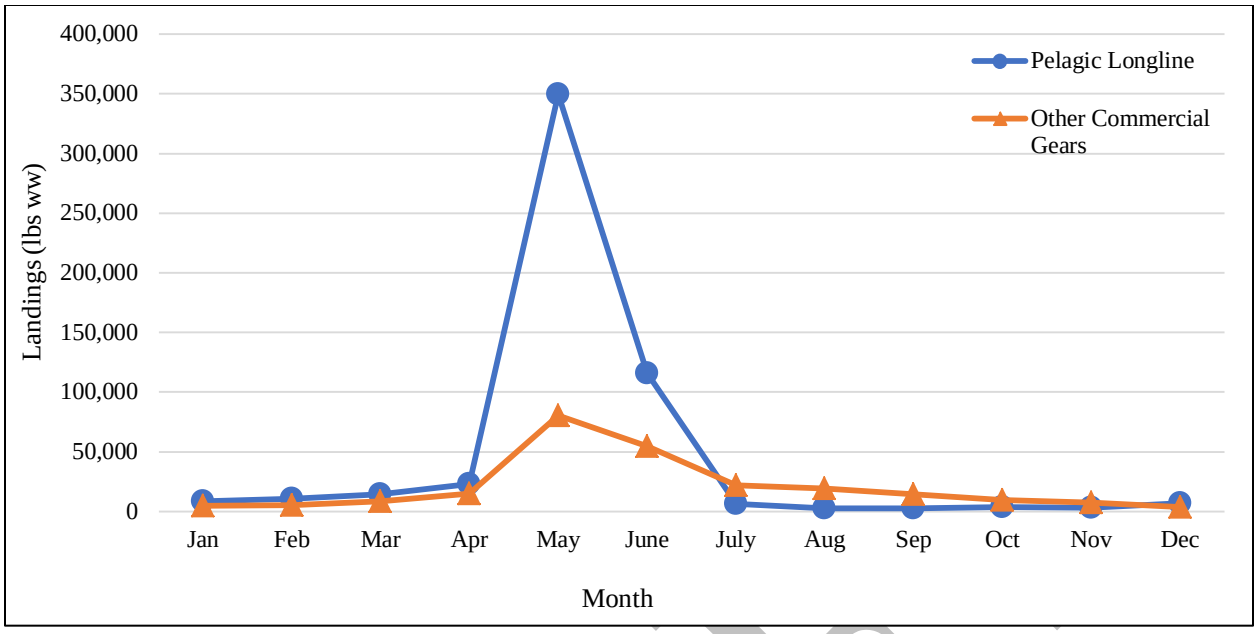

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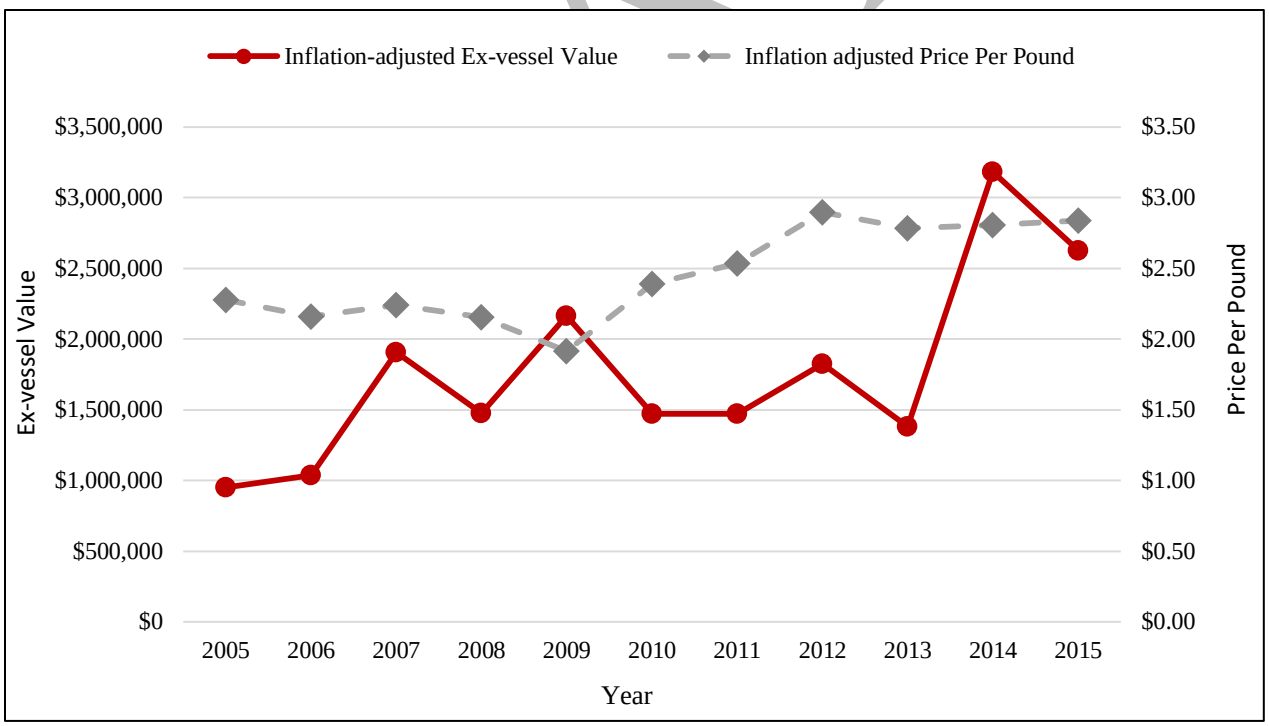

Source: NMFS Commercial Landings Query.

Figure 3. Inflation adjusted ex-vessel value and price per pound (in 2015 dollars) for commercial dolphin, 2005-2015.

Questions for Advisory Panel:

The AP is asked to provide the following information about Atlantic dolphin based on their expertise, as appropriate:

1) Catch levels and demand over the past 5 years:
   - For the commercial sector, how has the price and demand for dolphin changed?
   - How is the demand for charter/headboat trips targeting dolphin, and has it changed?
   - How is the demand for private recreational trips targeting dolphin, and has it changed?
   - Has the availability of dolphin changed?
   - Has the average size of dolphin changed?
   - Have there been effort shifts to/from dolphin?

2) Assessment of the current fishery:
   - How would you rate the stability of the fishery?
   - How would you rate the quality of the fishery?

3) Management measures:
   - Is the 20-inch minimum size limit off of the east coast of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina for the recreational and commercial sectors appropriate?
   - Is the 4,000 pound commercial trip limit that is effective after 75% of the commercial ACL has been landed set at the appropriate level? What about the 10 dolphin per person/60 dolphin per vessel recreational limit?
   - Other fishery management measures?

4) Environmental/ecological:
   - Have you noticed a shift in the dolphin migration due to environmental variability such as a mild winter or shorter spring "migration" season?

5) Other
   - Where should the Council focus their research priorities for Atlantic dolphin?
   - Is there anything else that is important for the Council to know about Atlantic dolphin?