

MEETING REPORT
ALLOCATION DECISION TREE BLUEPRINT AP MEMBER REVIEW
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Webinar
August 17, 2021

Chairs, vice chairs, and other representatives of the Dolphin Wahoo, Mackerel Cobia, Snapper Grouper, and Spiny Lobster APs met to discuss the draft Allocation Decision Tree Blueprint. Below is a summary of the group's discussions and recommendations.

AP Members

Ira Laks, Mackerel Cobia AP Chair
Stephen Donalson, Mackerel Cobia AP*
Thomas Newman, Mackerel Cobia AP
Bruce Irwin, Spiny Lobster AP Chair*
Jimmy Hull, Snapper Grouper AP Chair
Robert Lorenz, Snapper Grouper AP Vice-Chair
David Moss, Snapper Grouper AP
Chris Burrows, Dolphin Wahoo AP Chair
Jon Reynolds, Dolphin Wahoo AP Vice-Chair
Jon Kavanaugh, Dolphin Wahoo AP

*Not in attendance.

Council Members

Mell Bell, Council Chair
Chris Conklin
Kerry Marhefka

Council Staff

Christina Wiegand, CMP Lead
Dr. Mike Schmidtke, SG Lead
John Hadley, DW Lead
John Carmichael
Cameron Rhodes
Allie Iberle
Myra Brouwer
Julia Byrd
Kim Iverson

Making sector allocation decisions is a difficult and complicated process. To help incorporate other sources of information, in addition to landings, when making sector allocations decisions, the Council is exploring the use of decision trees as an consistent way to determine salient issues when discussing sector allocations. At the September 2020 meeting, the Council endorsed the concept of the Decision Tree Approach and directed staff to work on developing a blueprint with input from its advisors, including advisory panel members. The approach design seeks to be informative without being too prescriptive in the exact outcome that the Council is obligated to take in deciding allocations.

Comments on Decision Tree Questions

Landings, Discards, and Stock Status Questions

- It is possible to go back in time and see the effects of decreased access on commercial landings. Management measures have significantly affected the commercial sector's ability to land fish while the recreational sector has been essentially open access over the same time period.
 - Historically, there have been a lot of management measures aimed at ending overcapitalization of the commercial industry.
 - In addition to limited access permits, the commercial sector has been negatively affected by low catch limits, low market prices and in-season closures.

- In commercial fisheries that are limited access you have a known commodity of fishermen which allows you to allocate based on socioeconomic concerns. However, open access fisheries like Spanish mackerel are expanding up and down the coast due to climate change. It will be important to consider how each fishery and sector is set up.
- The switch to MRIP-FES shows that the recreational industry has played an important role in harvest of south Atlantic species and there needs to be more of an effort to limit recreational harvest in a similar manner to how commercial harvest has been limited historically.
- There needs to be a better understanding of the size of the recreational sector. There is reliable information on the for-hire sector, but there is no information on the number of private recreational fishermen participating in federal fisheries.
 - The number of private recreational fishermen fishing offshore (in federal waters) is likely to vary significantly between states.
 - There have been substantial changes in recreational fishing effort in the last few years. Demand is increasing and everyone deserves the opportunity to fish for a given species.
 - Recreational catch has not been well monitored historically, and now MRIP-FES has affected past estimates. It may not be ideal to base allocations off of controversial data streams.
- The discard mortality threshold used in the decision tree should vary based on the species being considered. While a 50% dead discard rate may be appropriate for red snapper, it is too high of a threshold for the majority of managed species.
 - It can be challenging to get an understanding of recreational discards because of frequent management changes (for example, size limits).
 - It will be important to consider the type of gear being used when discussing discard mortality and allocations. Efficient methods of fishing result in little to no bycatch.
 - Fisheries should be managed to MSY not to a certain discard level otherwise they may become just discard fisheries.
- When discussing allocations, it will be important to focus on the percentage allocation as opposed to the poundage a given sector is allocated. The percentage is what ultimately matters as new assessments are conducted and stock status changes into the future.
 - Stock status changes will necessitate reconsideration of allocations, which means that the Council is going to be considering allocations often.
- Commercial fishermen need a baseline amount of quota to keep the fishery profitable, especially as the recreational industry continues to grow. It would not be so hard to lose percentage allocation if a minimum poundage was guaranteed.
 - Additionally, any allocation needs to ensure there is enough quota to supply the non-boating consumers.
- Recreational fishermen need a certain number of fish to make it worth going out on a trip. A small percentage allocation may result in a low poundage which would have other ramifications for the sector (more restrictive seasons and bag limits, for example).

Economic Questions

- MRIP does not accurately reflect demand, especially for low encounter species. It will be challenging to know if there is a shift in to or from a species if demand is not accurately tracked.
 - Just because there is high demand does not mean fishermen need to be increasing their effort. This is especially true for stocks that cannot handle increased effort from either sector.
 - The trend for both sectors is increasing demand (from consumers, private recreational anglers, and charter boat industry).
- Accountability is important – if the recreational sector had limits on participation like the commercial sector, management measures would not need to be so strict.
- We will have more information coming from the for-hire sector with mandatory reporting in place.
 - Having better data doesn't always give a solution to the problem.
- Reallocating unused quota from one sector to another is a no-brainer, but it may be hard to say one sector needs the resource more than the other because everyone needs access to the fishery.
 - Currently both sectors often have access to very little quota. The commercial sector can't grow, and it is continually being reduced by regulations. It is also possible that the private recreational sector is overcapitalized.
- There needs to be an understanding of what it means to be a private recreational angler. There may be no economic impact on a private angler aside from monetary savings from not purchasing for a fish market, but there are other things important to private recreational anglers.
 - It will be important to consider the economic effects of retailers, hotels, boat builders, etc. However, it can be hard to determine if the economic effects from fishing are actually be felt by the local community or by larger corporations.
 - There needs to be a discussion regarding the universe of stakeholders that matter for allocations (just anglers? associated businesses? consumers?).

Social Questions

- Using the fishery performance reports (FPRs) prepared by advisory panels in the decision trees is a good use of the information.
 - Information from fishermen that have knowledge of historical fisheries may also be helpful. For example, the citizen science project FISHstory is a great source of past information on the charter industry.
- Waterfront gentrification in south Atlantic coastal communities is a big challenge for commercial fishing businesses. Fishermen are being kicked out of historic fishing communities because they can't afford to continue living in coastal areas.

- This is having an effect on future participation in the industry. Young kids no longer start out working on deck and work their way up to owning their own boat.
 - Gentrification is also having an impact on the charter industry. It is becoming more expensive to get into the industry.
 - There is no dockage available for commercial fishermen and dockage that is available for for-hire boats has become expensive.
 - The commercial fleet has become more mobile as a result of gentrification.
 - Recreational fishing is becoming increasingly important in coastal areas due to gentrification; however commercial fishing was historically important.
- The influx of the people moving to the coastal southeast region is driving changes in the fishery just as much as changes to individual species regulations.
 - There needs to be an effort made to help fishermen make a living in any possible way so that both the commercial and recreational sectors can exist.
 - It will be important to consider how the allocation decision tool could be used to address new and emerging fisheries or gear types (for example, increasing effort the commercial and recreational dive component of the snapper grouper fishery) given the limited data that would be available.

Comments on the Overall Approach

- In general, the decision trees are going to be beneficial as a way to bring together all the information that should be considered when discussing allocations.
 - Allocations are going to be controversial no matter what approach is utilized.
- There is concern that this approach is moving too quickly, without the Council having a good idea of actual catch levels.
 - Recent stock assessment don't always accurately account for variables such as climate change and increasing or decreasing access to a fishery.
- Ultimately, the devil is in the details and success of the decision tree tool will depend on exactly how this tool is utilized.

Climate Change

- Climate change is an important factor that is not included in any of the decision trees.
 - Species are expanding and/or migrating northward and there is little information on who is fishing and how fishermen are jumping into different fisheries.
 - There is limited information on climate change, which may make it challenging to incorporate into allocation decisions.
 - It can be challenging to tease out whether or not increased landings are the result of the species being more available due to climate change or rather a result of increasing effort.

- Consider including a climate change decision tree for species where the Council has management jurisdiction over the affected range (dolphin wahoo and coastal migratory pelagics). Also consider including those snapper grouper species that are beginning to be caught farther north.

Other Factors to Consider

- The impact of increasing prices on consumer and restaurant access. While fishermen like high prices, there is a breaking point. When the price of local seafood gets too high, consumers will turn to imported seafood from fisheries that are not well managed.
- There should be a decision tree result that recommends a common pool of quota which both sectors could draw from as needed.
- It is important to ensure enough fish are left in the water to support typical predator/prey interaction.
- Reallocation of one species will likely result in additional indirect effects on cooccurring species.
- It will be important to understand the history of management and how certain regulations have affected a given sector's ability capacity to catch fish. Consider providing a history of management at the beginning of the allocation review.

Public Comment

Eric Brazer, Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholder's Alliance

Eric: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Eric Brazer and I'm the Deputy Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance. We're based in Galveston, Texas but we have commercial grouper snapper members in all five Gulf states. First off, I am not a direct stakeholder in your region, but I really appreciate the opportunity to listen in and learn more about how you guys are planning to address allocations. I've got to say my hat is off to Council staff for pulling together what appears to be a pretty comprehensive, methodical, and consistent approach for how your region is going to tackle this issue. As you may know or some of you may know in the Gulf, the Gulf Council recently reallocated 20% of the commercial red grouper quota to the recreational sector by linking reallocation to the calibration process. So it really was a situation of reallocation through recalibration. Now John, you mentioned at the beginning of your presentation that the calibration process and the changing currencies has been driver for this discussion, but I didn't see it specifically addressed in the decision tree. So how does FES calibration factor into this allocation process through the decision tree?

Staff: That's a good question. In short, any forward-looking projections would be in FES terms. Looking backwards if you're looking at whether a sector has used its ACL in the past there may be some circumstances where you would look at Coastal Household Telephone

Survey or MRFSS estimates, or older estimates if you will. But for the most part this allocation decision tool will provide recreational landings and effort in FES terms, or the new currency.