

**NOAA Fisheries – State Marine Fisheries
Directors’ Biennial Meeting
2005 – US Caribbean**



Brief description of fisheries

- Boats are typically around 16 - 20 feet in length for fishing inshore and on the shelf using handlines, scuba diving, nets and pots.
- Larger boats – up to about 35 ft are used to fish further offshore for pelagics and deepwater snapper and grouper.
- Pot fishers with substantial numbers of pots install pot haulers on the larger boats.



Essential Fish Habitat Amendment

- CFMC has approved the EIS for the Generic Essential Fish Habitat Amendment to the four CFMC fisheries management plans:
 - Spiny lobster
 - Queen conch
 - Reef Fish
 - Coral and associated invertebrates and plants



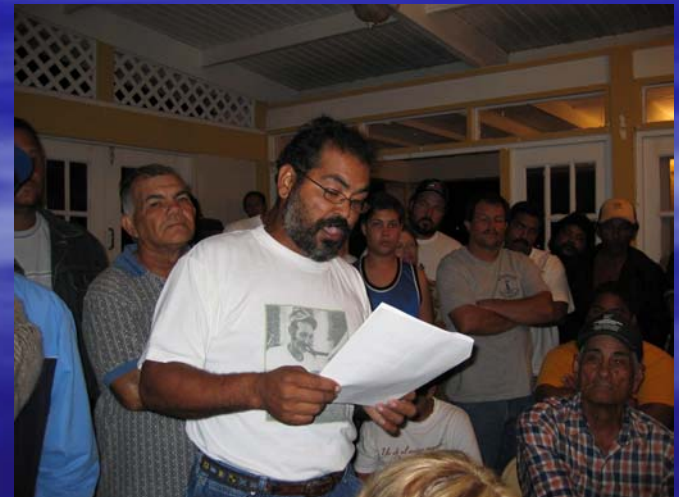
Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment

- Scoping meetings were initially held to solicit ideas and hear about the concerns of fishers and the public.
- SFA Working Group meetings were held to make recommendations on the status of species in the US Caribbean.
- NOAA Fisheries SERO prepared the SFA Draft Amendment based on scoping meetings and Working Group recommendations.
- Because the US Caribbean is data poor with respect to commercial fisheries information, NOAA took a precautionary approach and recommended extensive closed areas, among other management measures, within the limited area on the insular shelves under Council authority.



SFA management measures were highly controversial

- USVI and Puerto Rican fishers, local government and local politicians opposed year round area closures.
- Puerto Rico had recently approved extensive new territorial regulations and strongly recommended that the federal regulations be compatible with theirs.



New Preferred Alternatives

- Contingent upon the USVI Government adopting the following, the Council proposed the following preferred alternatives:
 1. Prohibit the possession of 5 large grouper species from February 1 to April 30 of each year
 2. Prohibit the possession of 2 deep water snapper species from October 1 to December 31 of each year.
 3. Prohibit the possession of mutton and lane snapper each year from April 1 to June 30.
 4. Prohibit the filleting of fish in Federal waters of the US Caribbean.
 5. Prohibit the possession of Nassau grouper and goliath grouper for specified time period to allow recovery.

Compatible regulations

- Compatible regulations are being pursued in the USVI.
 - The St. Thomas Fishermen's Association has held meetings to explain the importance of adopting compatible regulations to commercial fishers.
 - Public hearings will be held in April 2005.
- Puerto Rico already has compatible regulations.
- With compatible regulations in federal and territorial waters, enforcement will be able to be carried out on shore.



Additional preferred alternatives adopted

- Prohibit gill and trammel nets in the US EEZ except for nets used for catching ballyhoo, gar, and flying fish. Nets for harvesting these species must be tended at all times.
- Prohibit the commercial and recreational catch of queen conch in Federal waters of the US Caribbean with the exception of Lang Bank near St. Croix, USVI.
- Close the Grammanik Bank (south of St. Thomas) from February 1 – April 30 of each year.



Status of Fisheries Data in US Caribbean

- Funding for fisheries data collection is provided by the local government in the case of PR (but not the USVI) and NOAA Fisheries.
- Three NOAA Fisheries Grant programs in the US Caribbean are:
 - State Federal Cooperative Statistics Program
 - Inter-jurisdictional Grant Program
 - SEAMAP-Caribbean Grant Program – Fisheries independent sampling



Status of Databases Derived from Grants

State/Federal Cooperative Statistics Program

- Commercial Catch Statistics – Virgin Islands
 - 30 years of CCR have been entered, proofed and forwarded to NMFS for their review and analysis – final years of data entry were completed and submitted March 2005.
 - The entry of 1974 to 1992 data was able to be done because USVI received extra funds from NOAA.
 - In the VI this program is 100% federally funded.
 - Descriptive analyses are being carried out in the USVI.

Status of Databases Derived from Grants

State/Federal Cooperative Statistics Program

- Biostatistical Data – Virgin Islands
 - Originally funded biostatistical sampling in the USVI. However, funding has decreased or remained the same over the years and costs have increased substantially.
 - Substantial biostatistical data has been collected in the USVI. However, as much as 40% of the data is not in the NMFS TIPS database.
 - NOAA Fisheries recently copied data forms which were known to be missing from the TIPS database and is entering this data into the system.
 - However, data copying was not complete and the data includes more than port samples, i.e. landings estimates.
 - DFW is working on organizing the biostatistical hard copies from the inception of the program in the early 1980's to ensure that all this data is included. This is extremely important species specific data on USVI fisheries.

Status of Databases Derived from Grants

State/Federal Cooperative Statistics Program

- Commercial Catch Statistics – Puerto Rico
 - Commenced in 1968 under Public Law 88-309 and later funded under the State/Federal Cooperative Statistics Grant Program
 - PR has maintained this database on an annual basis.
 - Daniel Matos of the PR DNER Fisheries Research Laboratory publishes a summary of the catch report statistics annually.
 - PR collects biostatistical data from fishers (started 1980) and annually provides a report that is published in the GCFI proceedings.
 - PR Government provides significant local funding to support this program.

Status of Databases Derived from Grants

Inter-jurisdictional Grant

- US Virgin Islands
 - This grant is used to collect biostatistical data. Because of its small size (about \$12,000) sample size is inadequate. Data collected only on St. Croix.
- Puerto Rico
 - When PR had tuna canneries, DNER received substantial funding which enabled it to establish the biostatistical program throughout the island with about 12 port samplers.
 - Port samplers collected biostatistical and landings data.
 - The size of this grant has been greatly reduced over the years (from nearly \$500,000 to about \$12,000 today).
 - With reduction of funding in recent years, the number of port agents has been reduced to 4.
 - Funding for salaries is from local government and the grant currently pays only travel costs.

Status of Databases Derived from Grants

SEAMAP-C

- Fisheries independent sampling program
- Established as a data collection program only
- Periodic data analysis undertaken when extra funding available.
 - Data from PR last analyzed in 2003.
 - VI data analyzed in 2004 but it was found that about 60% of sampling trips were missing from the database.
 - Missing data has been entered and the complete database is currently being analyzed with extra funds made available this year.

Status of Databases Derived from Grants

SEAMAP-C continued

- Surveys include
 - Reef fish – trap and line surveys – commenced about 1993 and done for two to three consecutive years on a five year cycle
 - Conch – scooter transects – once every five years
 - USVI since 1981
 - PR since 1995
 - Lobster – Witham collectors to determine trends in abundance of spiny lobster puerulus – commenced 1996 and carried out twice.
 - Habitat mapping using side scan – one year to establish program
 - Whelk survey – one year
- Problems in the VI – limited sample size owing to funding constraints. PR local government supplements the SEAMAP- C funds by paying salaries.

Federal (CFMC) and Local Fisheries Management – where do we stand?

- DATABASE MANAGEMENT – NOAA Fisheries has vastly improved database management for PR and the USVI in the past four years.
- IMPORTANCE
 - SFA National Standard 1 requires MSY and OY – without data impossible to carry out stock assessments and impossible to see trends in the status of stocks when new management measures implemented.
 - The first SEDAR in the US Caribbean commenced in November 2004 on yellowtail snapper and spiny lobster.
 - The latter was one of the species initially designated at risk in the CFMC SFA document. Fishers and local governments objected to this designation and it was decided to wait for the outcome of the SEDAR to determine the status of this species.
 - The SEDAR data and assessment workshops have been held.
 - The review workshop will be held in May in San Juan.
 - NEED – All USVI data need to be available for SEDAR stock assessments
 - Last of CCR data only recently submitted to NOAA Fisheries
 - All USVI TIP, landing estimate data needs to be entered in databases and proofed

Federal (CFMC) and Local Fisheries Management – where do we stand?

CFMC

- CFMC will hopefully be finalizing the SFA Amendment at the next Council meeting in the beginning of May.
- NOAA Fisheries needs to consider how it will assist state governments in funding all the work that they must do to assist in meeting Congressional mandates with respect to fisheries management.
- US Caribbean fisheries are small scale fisheries, not industrial fisheries.
 - They provide alternative employment in the Caribbean for
 - People who like to work in the sea and like the independence
 - For people with limited education
 - In times of economic down turn
 - They do not generate large amount of tax revenue or extra funds to employ government personnel to deal with federal fisheries matters or fisher representatives.
- In the US Caribbean funding for fisheries management is particularly important because most of the fishable habitat is within the jurisdiction of the territorial governments.

What's next in the US Caribbean?

- Threatened status of *Acropora palmata* and *A. cervicornis*
 - These species have been devastated by hurricanes and disease
 - Fishing gear has traditionally had only a minor impact on these species.
 - Are fishers going to be targeted?
 - Is traditional pot fishing going to be restricted? Banned?
 - How will anchor impacts and groundings by recreational boaters be addressed, especially in Puerto Rico with its 65,000 registered boats?
 - What will be the response of fishers, local governments, etc?
 - Will NMFS increase enforcement?



What's next in the US Caribbean?

- Who is going to determine the current status of species that have been undergoing rebuilding?
These include:
 - Nassau grouper
 - Goliath grouper
 - Queen conch
- Who is going to establish baseline data for species that will be managed under the proposed new regulations?
- Who is going to monitor the effectiveness of the SFA rebuilding plan?