

**Joint Meeting of the GMFMC Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel and
the SAFMC Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel**

Key Largo, FL

April 25, 2016

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

SAFMC Advisory Panel

Robert Burton
Richard Diaz
Anthony Iarocci
Bruce Irwin
Bill Mansfield
Gary Nichols, II
Peter O'Bryan
Mimi Stafford
Mickey Whittington
Sean Espenship (absent)
Russell Moore (absent)

SAFMC and Staff

Chester Brewer
Ben Hartig
Jessica McCawley
Kari MacLauchlin (staff)

**Gulf Council Advisory
Panel**

Robert Gaitanis
Joshua Nicklaus
George Niles
Daniel Padron
Simon Stafford

GMFMC and Staff

Martha Guyas
Doug Gregory (staff)
Karen Hoak (staff)
Morgan Kilgour (staff)

Others in Attendance

Tom Matthews (FWC)
Tom Hiu
Gabrielle Renchen
Shelly Krueger (FL Sea
Grant)
Walter Rentz
Yuying Zhang (Florida
Atlantic U.)

Introduction and Chair/Vice Chair Elections

Bill Kelly was elected chair and Daniel Padron was elected vice chair of the Gulf Spiny Lobster advisory panel (AP). Bruce Irwin was elected chair and Bill Mansfield was elected vice chair of the South Atlantic Spiny Lobster AP. The South Atlantic AP approved the minutes from their meeting on April 20, 2011. The minutes of the June 7, 2010, Joint Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel meeting were also approved and the agenda was adopted with modification.

Spiny Lobster Landings and Overage

Staff reviewed landings of spiny lobster, the 2015 Spiny Lobster Review Panel (Review Panel) summary, and the 2016 Review Panel summary. The annual catch target (ACT) has been exceeded in fishing years 2013/2014, 2014/2015, and 2015/2016, and the annual catch limit (ACL) was exceeded in 2013/2014 and will likely be exceeded in 2015/2016. FWC staff noted that we are 40,000 pounds away from exceeding the ACL for 2015/2016, and that landings would be finalized in a few months. Tom Matthews (FWC) gave a presentation on the status of the spiny lobster fishery.

The group discussed the ACL requirement and was notified that an exemption from the ACL requirement would need to come from U.S. Congress not from NMFS. Some members of the APs expressed concern that the larval information does not fluctuate with the status of the fishery and that the recreational data might not actually reflect the status of the recreational sector. It was also noted that the number of recreational licenses and the number of people actually fishing for lobsters is not correlated because a number of people with a lobster endorsement do not intend to fish for lobster as it is easy to get a lobster endorsement bundled with other license packages. The APs spent some time discussing the sport season, recreational data collection, and

poaching. The APs felt that it would be useful to incorporate a tag system for spiny lobster during the two day sport season. Tags could improve data collection because there would be a registered number of participants and will have a directed glossary of individuals to direct surveys.

The APs discussed the inclusion of 'shorts' (undersized lobsters used as attractants) mortality in calculating the total catch. There was concern that the data used to calculate trap mortality and short mortality are dated and do not reflect the current state of the fishery; the APs would like to see an update to the mortality estimate (the current estimate is based on studies and data over ten years old). There was discussion about the decrease in frequency of fisheries staff measuring and gathering size data for lobsters due to the live market and processors not wanting their product handled prior to shipment. The APs would like there to be an update for the size and age structure of the stock.

FWC staff informed the APs that the lobster are growth overfished and many are harvested before they get old enough to have several clutches. Overall, the number of commercial lobster traps and commercial diver fisherman has declined. Additionally, the only way to enter the fishery is through bullynet, but this method of fishing has high turnover.

The APs thought that the Review Panel's motion to recalculate the ACL based on the entire time series would be a good short term solution to the continual exceedance of the ACT. This spiny lobster fishery is healthy, and the ACL is not the proper management metric for this fishery. Additionally, the APs felt that mortality from ghost traps had decreased due to additional regulations and incentives to retrieve lost traps, and also that mortality of short had likely decreased due to improvements to onboard live wells and other equipment installed in recent years in response to the export market for live lobsters. The APs also noted that landings were increasing in recent years but not as high as in the 1990s, and that this indicated that the fishery was recovering from the period of low landings from 2000 through 2010. Last, the APs pointed out several family businesses in the industry whereby younger fishermen are entering the fishery who are interested in becoming more involved in the management process. The APs felt that the ACL needed to be large enough that it is not constantly triggered when the population is healthy and fishing is good. The APs discussed having a rolling average, but was advised that the ACL needs to be a static number.

The APs also discussed accountability measures that could be used to indicate a problem in the fishery. The group felt that declining landings rather than increasing landings would be more indicative of a potential overfishing or recruitment problem. In particular, the commercial members of the APs emphasized that with the finite amount of traps (fishing effort) that can be used to prosecute this fishery as well as other controls on the fishery, such as size and bag limits and a four-month closed season that any increase in landings would be more a reflection of increased population size rather than overfishing. After discussion, the APs made the following motions:

**Motion: South Atlantic AP (SA) – To recommend that the Council accept the recommendation of the review panel
“to calculate the ACL based on landings from 1991 through the most recent landings (2015-2016)”
Motion carried with no opposition**

**Motion: Gulf Council AP (GC) – To recommend that the Council accept the recommendation of the review panel
“to calculate the ACL based on landings from 1991 through the most recent landings (2015-2016)”
Motion carried with no opposition**

There was concern that lobster fishery is not a priority fishery for data collection. The APs made the following motions:

**(SA) That in federal and state trip intercept programs, lobster be made a priority species for size monitoring
Motion carried with no opposition**

**(GC) That in federal and state trip intercept programs, lobster be made a priority species for size monitoring
Motion carried with no opposition**

The APs would like the fishery to be monitored and that there be a response triggered if the fishery falls below a certain threshold. This threshold trigger should include two consecutive years, as one year may yield a low threshold because of hurricanes or other abnormal events. Discussion of what the threshold should be had different alternatives one of which was the mean of the total landings from last ten years minus the standard deviation. The APs made the following motions:

**Motion: (SA) To recommend that there be a lower landing trigger based on the average of the three low landings years (2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004) that would initiate a review panel, if below this average for two consecutive years (5.3 mp total catch)
Motion carried with no opposition**

**Motion: (GC) To recommend that there be a lower landing trigger based on the average of the three low landings years (2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004) that would initiate a review panel, if below this average for two consecutive years (5.3 mp total catch)
Motion carried with no opposition**

Study on Compliance in Closed Areas

Gabby Renchen (FWC) gave a presentation on the compliance with closed areas from lobster trapping. There was more compliance within marked closed areas than in unmarked closed areas. After an education effort, there were fewer traps found within closed areas and few were repeat offenders. The APs noted that buoys would be helpful delineating areas as not all GPS are equal. Council staff gave a brief summary of Amendment 11 including notifying the APs that

the gear marking requirement was removed from the biological opinion as there was not a feasible way to mark gear.

Potential Coral HAPCs in the Gulf

Staff updated the APs about areas in the Gulf that are under consideration for potential habitat areas of concern (HAPCs). The only area that seems to have potential conflicts with lobster gear is Pulley Ridge. None of the AP members was aware of fisherman that use the area currently. The AP discussed how the review panel was populated. It was discussed that a more formal process would be appropriate such as AP review, followed by the review panel, and the SSC.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m.