

SSC Report to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council

July 21, 2021

SSC Met July 14

Issues Discussed

SEFSC Caribbean Branch

National SSC update (SCS7)

Data Poor Tech Memo

Red Hind Spawning Dynamics and Closed Seasons

PR Electronic Reporting/Monitoring

National SSC

Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS7)

- Rescheduled for August 15-17, 2022 in Sitka, AK
- Overall theme is Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM)
- Three main focal areas
 - Incorporating ecosystem indicators into stock assessment
 - Needs for managing interacting species
 - Assessing species with shifting distributions
- All aspects need to be renegotiated – 1st Conf Call is August 2021
- Expect travel support for 3 SSC members from each Council

NS1 Technical Guidance Subgroup 3 Tech Memo:

Managing with ACLs for data-limited stocks in federal fishery management plans - Review and recommendations for implementing 50 CFR 600.310(h)(2) flexibilities for data limited stocks

- All about flexibilities for setting OFLs/ABCs/ACLs
 - When catch data are lacking or insufficient
 - Examples of Alternative Reference Points
 - Average length, Juvenile/adult ratio, CPUE, Average density.....
 - Can use multiple indicators at one time
- Tech Memo gives guidance on use of (h)(2) flexibilities
 - Qualification: When flexibilities may be available
 - Potential alternative: ACL expressed in terms of rates, etc.
 - Stocks that qualify for (h)(2) but lack data for Rate-based ACL

The SSC endorses the (h)(2) flexibilities for assessing the overfishing status of data-limited stocks presented in the Draft Tech Memo, given that all stocks within the US Caribbean would benefit, a point that has been long recognized. Nevertheless, while we see great promise with this enhanced flexibility, we anticipate there will be operational difficulties to overcome in their application and expect a period of testing before such methods can be routinely applied.

The SSC recognizes that there will be a substantial process involved in prioritizing which species should be addressed first using this enhanced flexibility, due both because of the high number of species within the US Caribbean that would benefit and the limitations within the SEFSC, particularly the number of assessment staff.

An additional identified benefit is that some standard fishery management tools, such as size limits, closed areas/seasons, etc. more directly relate to potential OFL/ABC/ACL limits that may result from these more flexible approaches.

The SSC notes that the timing of this effort dovetails nicely other efforts within the region to improve monitoring and assessment, including efforts to improve the quality, amount and statistical validity of landings data (e.g., a recent pilot study of the PR commercial catch resulted in over 14,000 length estimates), the formation of the Caribbean Branch within the SEFSC and their more targeted efforts to increase and improve available data, the initiation of electronic monitoring of catches, and the initiation of integrated stock assessments through the SEDAR process. While weight and number-based OFLs are the ideal, improvements in data collection and application of (h)(2) flexibilities create the bridge ultimately to achieve that goal.

Red Hind Spawning Dynamics and Closed Seasons

SSC heard and discussed the presentation by Dr. Scharer

As co-investigator, Dr. Appeldoorn recused himself as chair for this topic

Dr. Appeldoorn and Dr. Scharer did not participate in voting on recommendations

SSC Recommendation:

Amend the PR FMP to modify the seasonal closures for fishing for or possession of red hind in federal waters west of 67° 10' W longitude and for the Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra Bank red hind spawning aggregation areas to Dec 15 - March 15 each year.

Rationale: Reduce the impact on red hind spawning stock at the west coast spawning aggregations on the last few days of their reproductive period, due to a shift in the timing of the aggregation. An FSA does not form before December 15th, but FSAs can remain after March 1st.

SSC Recommendation:

Support the implementation of continued, long-term FSA monitoring to determine changes in the spawning stock/populations of red hind off western PR

Rationale: Measure the benefits of management measures for red hind populations off the west coast of Puerto Rico

The SSC requests the Council to ask SEFSC to evaluate the seasonal closure (from February 1st to April 30th) for red, black, tiger, yellowfin, and yellowedge grouper in federal waters in the U.S. Caribbean, as applicable, to ensure it coincides with the timing of the spawning aggregations for these species.

Rationale: Closed seasons should coincide with the spawning seasons as much as possible

Electronic Reporting and Monitoring

SSC was given a presentation on the implementation of Puerto Rico's Electronic Reporting Program by Alfredo Sfeir of Shellcatch

Also presented was a preview of upcoming capabilities using electronic monitoring (boat-based video), eventually in conjunction with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Due to time constraints the SSC did not consider any recommendations

