

NWX-DOC CONFERENCING (US)

Moderator: Peter Cooper
April 27, 2012
9:00 am CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode. During today's conference we will feature a question and answer session. To ask a question, please press star 1. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. Now I will turn the meeting over to Ms. Margo Schulze-Haugen. Ma'am, you may begin.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: All right, thank you. And so as the moderator said, my name is Margo Schulze-Haugen. I am the Division Chief for the Highly Migratory Species Management Division. This is the division that runs the day to day management of the Atlantic tuna, swordfish, billfish and shark fisheries, including yellowfin tuna.

And so we have hosted this public conference call due to HMS Advisory Panel and public constituent request to discuss yellowfin tuna historical data and future data collection programs, particularly in light of the 2011 ICCAT, which is the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas meeting and the most recent yellowfin tuna management recommendations.

As I indicated, yellowfin tuna was discussed this year at ICCAT, and there were some discussions about establishing reference years for potential future country-specific allocations. This is the first year that a yellowfin tuna total allowable catch limit was set.

And while there was no final decision on country specific allocations, there was some discussion that that may be necessary in the future. And so we wanted to provide this opportunity for interested individuals to discuss the data collection and international measures. As many of you likely know, yellowfin tuna data reporting and monitoring were significant issues in the 1990s for the ICCAT Advisory Committee as well as the Agency.

The Agency spent considerable time and effort reviewing available data sources, and ultimately revised official statistics in 1999 based on that thorough review. Part of the interest at that time was the anticipation that ICCAT in the 1990s would set a country-specific allocation.

At that time there was only a recommendation indicating that there should be no increase in effective fishing effort. ICCAT has not set a country-specific allocation, but there was considerable concern. In response to that recommendation, the United States implemented a yellowfin tuna recreational bag limit, and implemented limited access in the pelagic long-line fishery.

After the U.S. revised its official statistics, we funded a study to continue the review of yellowfin tuna as well as some of the other tunas. Landings information and a report was submitted by (Loftist) and (Stone) in 2003 that continued to identify that some areas where landing statistics may be either under-represented or over-represented.

Since that time the Agency has undertaken a number of MRIP, which is a Marine Recreational Information Program studies on HMS quite generally, but also including yellowfin tuna. And there are a number of projects that have been completed or that are under way, that would address recreational data collection, including yellowfin.

The U.S. in recent years total landings have declined overall, starting in about 2007 and then continuing through current years. And this is largely, we believe, due to some of the fishing effort in the Eastern Atlantic, the Gulf of Guinea, specifically, and that has been of great interest for the United States in getting controls and a time area closure to protect the yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna as well in that area.

And that was, in part, one of the drivers for the ICCAT measure this year. There were a number of measures for bigeye adopted, and then the time area closure in the Gulf of Guinea was expanded as well. And as I mentioned, it was the yellowfin tuna TAC that was established for the first time.

What that recommendation says for the future is that if that TAC is exceeded, that ICCAT would revisit the conservation and management measures. And so at this point, there's no immediate action that the Agency is planning, or that ICCAT is planning, although there was the commitment to revisit the measures if the overall TAC is exceeded.

And so at this point we wanted to provide the domestic constituents time to ask questions about the data collection, what happened at ICCAT, and where things may be headed. And so that's why we set up the conference call today, and I look forward to the discussion.

Coordinator: At this time if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Please unmute your phone and record your first and your last name. Your name is required to introduce your question. To withdraw your question you may press star 2. Once again, at this time if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. One moment please for our first question.

Our first question is from (Bob Zales). Your line is now open.

(Bob Zales): Yes. Several of us for some now have been really trying to get some good data on yellowfin, especially from the Gulf of Mexico, because there's very little data that has been collected over the years. Have the efforts of the MRIP program or any other thing other than - I see to where Louisiana is now going to start collecting their own HMS data, and I would suspect that's because of the lack of data the fishery service has been collecting.

Has there been any kind of improvement in where this data's going to come from in the future? And has there been any real effort to go back and try to backtrack and figure out what reasonable harvest has been taken from the Gulf of Mexico over the past ten or so years?

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Thanks (Bob). Before I answer, also I wanted to introduce some other folks we have on the call from the Agency, specifically Ron Salz from the Office of Science and Technology, who I may ask to answer questions about MRIP, specifically in the Gulf of Mexico. Also on the call is Russell Dunn, the National Recreational Fisheries Coordinator, and Randy Blankinship who works in the HMS Division in St. Petersburg, Florida.

So in terms of the historical review, (Bob), I think the Agency felt when it went through the process of revising the official statistics that all of the available data sources had been identified and included in those official

statistics. And so I think, through that point, that I think the Agency believes it has done what it can.

If additional data sources have been identified, there may be some room to revisit that, but I think prior to '99, I think we have, we feel we're fairly comfortable with what we have. Ron, could you talk a little bit about the Gulf of Mexico MRIP work?

Ron Salz: Yes, sure Margo. And I only was able to catch part of what (Bob) was saying. I think the connection was not that great, but I think I got the gist of it anyway. And so it sounds like you're asking about any more recent efforts or data collection efforts under MRIP.

And one thing I will say is that for not just yellowfin, but for all species, we went back and re-estimated the 2004 through 2011 time series for the MRFSS. And those numbers are now available and posted on our Web site, and you can actually compare, for yellowfin tuna, you can do a comparison of the old versus the new estimates.

And so that's, you know, that's some new information, and we're certainly recommending that moving forward, you know, that the new MRIP estimates be used. We also have plans to re-estimate further back than 2004, but that's going to take a bit more time, and that will be, sort of, released over the course of time.

We'll go back as far as we can, but we don't think we can go back all the way to the, you know, the early part of the time series. As far as other MRIP projects related to yellowfin, we did several pilot studies in the Gulf of Mexico. We had some in Florida. We did some in Puerto Rico.

And we were looking at HMS recreational data collection in general and trying to characterize those fisheries and get a sense of what gaps there might be or what biases we may have in that the, you know, existing programs for some of those HMS species.

So there are some reports out, but those were, for the most part characterization studies. They were not intended to produce catch estimates that could then feed into any sort of management or assessment framework. They were really done to characterize the fishery, to get as much information as we could, which would then allow us to make recommendations for future data collection programs.

The other thing I'll mention for yellowfin in Louisiana is the State of Louisiana - and this was presented at the latest Advisory Panel meeting, the State of Louisiana is initiating a program for yellowfin tuna landings. And I don't want to, you know, talk too much about that because that's not our program, it's not an MRIP program, but it is something that I'm aware of that's being done, again, to try to improve the accuracy and possibly the timeliness of yellowfin tuna landings information.

So that's, you know, that's basically a summary of what we've been doing as far as, you know, yellowfin tuna.

Randy Blankinship: So, this is Randy Blankinship. I just want to mention a follow-up to what Ron said, that the re-estimation information for MRIP is, as he mentioned, is available on line, and you can get that at countmyfish.noaa.gov. That's a good place to access that information. So that Website is W-W-W dot count my fish, dot NOAA, dot gov.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (Tom Foti). Your line is now open.

(Tom Foti): Yes, I remember the concerns back when we first looked at this, and we were anticipating the action by ICCAT. And that when we looked at the numbers back then, there was no restrictions on the recreational catch. And my concern now, there is, if we move forward, and I'm always afraid that some quota will be set down the line.

How are you going to divide it between the commercial and recreational community, since the commercial community has really no restriction on the amount of yellowfin they catch, and there has been restrictions put on the amount by the recreational sector, which basically influences the total catch?

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Well, as I indicated, there's no immediate need to do that, or action that the Agency is considering. Should ICCAT develop a country-specific allocation, we would certainly put forward that the United States implemented and took action based on the '93 recommendation to limit effective fishing effort, and we would want a thorough review of other countries' efforts to do the same.

And should then we end up in that position where we have a country-specific allocation, we would then need to come home and look at what it was and what may or may not be necessary domestically to ensure that the U.S. stayed within its allocation. There are a number of differences in how the fisheries are managed.

You mentioned the recreational retention limit. That is certainly something we would consider, that that would have a constraining effect on recreational landings. Commercially there are, in the pelagic long-line fishery a number of other kinds of restrictions not specific to yellowfin, but that could affect their catches as well.

And so that, all of that would be factors that we would consider should we get to the point where we need to do that.

Coordinator: Our next question is from John LoGioco. Your line is now open.

John LoGioco: Hi Margo, this is John from the Atlantic Tuna Project. First, thanks very much for hosting the call. It's, from my standpoint of trying to promote, you know, tagging, catch and release among the Atlantic Tuna (sort of) sector, I think this is perfect timing to be discussing this.

So the one thing I wanted to comment on is that, from my experience on the tagging program, recreational fishermen in terms of their willingness to present data, the biggest question I get is, how is the data going to be used? And of course, down the line, you know, will it come back to bite us?

So I think that when we think about future data collection, what's very interesting in this aspect is that the data is really used to make better management decisions, and so specifically, let's say off the coast of New Jersey and New York and the Mid-Atlantic, getting that recreational data on landings is, I think absolutely critical.

Because if you do get management changes, let's say, in the Gulf of Guinea, we would love to see what those measurements would do on the effects of our fishery. So under that guise, one of the ideas that I'd love to see or commented would be to have a system where if fish folks are catching yellowfin and bringing them back to the docks, that there is a tag system where each fish that comes back would have to have a, you know, a fin tag in it.

So these folks, the system is self-policing, where if people are bring yellowfin back on the dock and they're tagged, everybody sees that they're sort of legit. And then of course, those folks that would bring back yellowfin that wouldn't be tagged, they would sort of stick out.

So I think that, something like that would get some real data back to you guys, and that would give you a benchmark on, you know, if there's any international measures that come, are they helping our fishery or hurting it?

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay, thank you. One thing I would note is that that kind of program is under development and is anticipated to be deployed this summer for bluefin tuna in the State of Massachusetts, so the Agency is certainly supportive of that kind of program, and we'll take that comment for yellowfin into consideration as well.

John LoGioco: Okay, great. Thanks.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (David). Your line is now open.

(David Shalleet): Hi Margo, it's (David Shalleet).

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Hello.

(David Shalleet): I have two questions. I'll give them both to you at the same time. This ICCAT initiative to start developing data on yellowfin, will this also, are they also looking with a view toward collecting data on, from commercial fishing on yellowfin? And the second question, so what are, specifically, your ideas in terms of data collection in the near term on recreational yellowfin catch?
Thanks.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay. So, the United States - this is in response to your first question on commercial landings as well, the United States has been reporting yellowfin data both commercially and recreationally for a very long time. The - ICCAT requires all landings, commercial, recreational for ICCAT managed species which includes yellowfin.

And so that information is submitted through what's called Task 1 and Task 2 data every July. So what was done in 1999 was a revision of those official statistics for both recreational and commercial data. So I think the commercial data is totally included as well.

In terms of data collection for recreational fisheries in the near term, specifically for yellowfin, I think where I have been looking to is the MRIP process and the projects underway there where a number of HMS data collections needs have been identified, and pilots and projects have been completed, and we're working different stages of that, implementing the recommendations or getting the pilots under way.

And I think they do include efforts that will address yellowfin tuna. We're certainly interested in ideas and projects that may be more specifically targeted to yellowfin tuna, because this is a very important recreational and commercial fishery for the United States, so.

(David Shalleet): Great.

Ron Salz: Yes, Margo, this is Ron. I'll just add to that, that if you go to that same Web site that Randy gave out, countrymyfish.gov, there is the reports from some of these pilot studies that we did, which you can access. And in the reports we provide specific recommendations for future data collection, or data collection

options for HMS more generally, but in some cases we specify a particular species.

And so that would be, you know, one place to start. As far as what we've already got planned in the works for 2013, we're going to be launching a new intercept survey design, what used to be the MRFSS Intercept Survey will now be an MRIP Intercept Survey design which will differ significantly from the MRFSS design, and some of those differences, I anticipate, will improve the accuracy and precision of, in particular, yellowfin tuna estimates.

Just as an example, we're going to include tournament sites. They'll be allowed to interview at tournament sites, whereas under the previous design, they were not. They were instructed not to go to official tournament way stations.

We're also expanding the distribution of interviews across a 24 hour period, and so rather than instructing interviewers to try to be at sites during the peak fishing hours of the day, we are now going to have particular assignments throughout, you know, all hours of fishing.

And one thing we found for the Gulf of Mexico is, a lot of their HMS trips are overnight trips, and they tend to return to the dock at times of day that are not necessarily the same as your, the majority of your trips, non-HMS trips return. And so those are two examples of, you know, what I view as improvements in the intercept survey design which will have a positive effect on the estimates we get for some of these HMS species.

Russell Dunn: Ron, this is Russ Dunn. Can you hear me?

Ron Salz: Yes I can.

Russell Dunn: Okay. One question about the Louisiana State study, to what extent have they reached out and worked with MRIP or the Agency in terms of having that data usable within the NMFS system so that it can potentially be factored into assessments or landings data that we currently have?

Ron Salz: Right, well I think they're just launching it this year, so I don't know if they're even at the point of having data to be able to share with us or to integrate into, you know, our databases. But I have not had too many discussions with them about that.

You know, I think they spent a lot of time getting the program in place and, you know, getting it designed, and maybe that's the next step is, you know, talking to them about the actual data when they start getting some results.

Russell Dunn: Okay, thank you.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Yes, this is Margo. Yes, they are just implementing that this year. We have had a lot of success in working with the State of Louisiana in sharing data in other contexts. And the State of Louisiana rep on the advisory panel has been very helpful in coordinating and providing information to us. So I would hope that that would continue when they actually have some data in hand. But I think it's a good point on something we should follow up on.

Randy Blankinship: And this is Randy, and they may even actually be on the call. There may be a representative from Louisiana on the call, we just don't know. So, but we may hear from them yet.

Coordinator: At this - sorry, at this time I would like to remind all participants if you would like to as a question to please press star 1. And our next question is from Jason Adriance. Your line is now open.

Jason Adriance: Thanks Margo, and yes, I am on the call.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Thank you.

Jason Adriance: Most of what I was going to mention was touched on, and we certainly don't have a problem reaching out and discussing what we collect with you. The intent is to share that data with National Marine Fisheries. As was mentioned, it's starting this June, and rationale is, we just see need for better landings data with yellowfin.

And an example is that 2009 charter catches on the MRIP site for Louisiana have no yellowfin tuna landed, and we know that's just not the case. So that - as I mentioned earlier, most of what I was going to say was touched upon, so if you had anything specific, I can certainly try to answer it.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Thanks Jason.

Russell Dunn: No I didn't. I just was curious, of course, you know, as we, as different hands do data collection or what not, it's just always good if it's collected in a way that's compatible so it can be shared and used to enhance, you know, the other programs out there. And I assumed that that would happen, but just didn't know the extent to which, in the setting up of the survey design and all that, if there had been coordination or not, so thanks.

Jason Adriance: Okay, and it is angler-driven. The reporting will come from charter captains and recreational anglers.

Ron Salz: Yes, this is Ron again. I also did want to mention that we have, for the area from Virginia through Maine, we have the Large Pelagic Survey that has been in effect, which provides much higher precision on estimates of yellowfin and other HMS than compared to the MRFSS. And so our feeling is that for that area, we are getting very good information from the recreational landings of yellowfin tuna.

We also have, in North Carolina, which is a big state for yellowfin tuna landings, the state agency adds on, has been adding on to the MRFSS program in terms of sample size, to improve on the precision of all species, but in particular they get very good precision on yellowfin tuna, as well.

So from what we've found from some of the MRIP pilots was, is really in the Gulf of Mexico where we had some concern about the reliability of our yellowfin numbers, and so we're glad to hear that Louisiana is initiating this program. Because we also found Louisiana was one of the, actually the biggest, seemed to be the biggest state in terms of yellowfin landings from the characterization studies in the Gulf of Mexico.

So, you know, we feel like the approach they're taking is addressing what was a concern for us, because the MRFSS and even the MRIP are not specifically designed to produce very precise estimates for some of these, what you might consider more rare event species, where you have less targeted effort. So, you know, I think we're all very interested in the outcome of that program in Louisiana.

Coordinator: Our next question is from John LoGioco. Your line is now open.

John LoGioco: Hi guys. The question is, from third parties like the tagging program, do you want the catch data from programs like that? And if so, is there a standard format that you'd like the data coming in? And the next question is, when it pertains to yellowfin, one lesson I learned on the, collecting the bluefin data was to not only ask for, you know, how many fish were caught, but also how many fish were released.

And I'm thinking, now just to the yellowfin fishery, I know in New Jersey in the last two years there's been a tremendous amount of yellowfin caught but actually put back because they were 30 inches, 27 inches and, you know, not very interesting from an angler perspective to keep, but from a data perspective, that's incredibly valuable. Those small fish, you know, weren't around several years ago, so those two questions are interesting to me.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: In terms of, is that third party catch data wanted, I think, you know, we welcome information from all sources. The specific data formats are one that I personally don't know, but I can work on connecting you with the scientists that ultimately will use that information, and so, unless Ron, you have information that you could share at this point.

Ron Salz: Don't really have much to add to that but, you know, I will say that we do estimate releases on our surveys, and there are some pieces of the puzzle that you can't necessarily get from a landings only program. So, you know, the program that's being developed, I believe in Louisiana is focused on landings.

And so if you still need to know your releases and get information on that, then we often see these census-based programs as being complementary with a survey, not necessarily replacing a survey, because a survey includes in addition to releases, you get a lot of other more detailed information about the

fishing trip, which you don't always get on, say a catch card program or some other census-based landings data collection.

John LoGioco: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (Molly Ledcavage). Your line is now open.

(Molly Ledcavage): Good morning, and good morning Margo and Ron and everyone else. I think it's clear that there's a focus here, which is a great one, on much better catch information, as you've been discussing for yellowfin. But right now I think there's very little basic biological or fishery, recent fishery independent information on some of the non-bluefin tuna species like yellowfin in the Atlantic.

And what we see are, you know, the focus entirely on the fishery dependent side of a highly migratory species, using bluefin tuna as an example, can really, as Ron alluded to, give not a complete picture or even help us develop an understanding of the real dynamics of yellowfin in the Atlantic.

Now, there's been some opportunities for Gulf of Mexico research, clearly from the Gulf Horizon, and there's been work done by the EU and ICCAT on the early life history areas, the Gulf of Guinea. But we, it's - to me it's really shocking that in 2012 there is so little basic biological and demographic information for yellowfin, bigeye, albacore in the Atlantic.

And with the focus of research funding and attention for the last, say 15 years on bluefin, which is clearly needed, I think all the work on say the fishery independent biological sampling for bluefin has shown us, including the electronic tagging and conventional tagging, what we need to know for these

other species. So I was wondering, will NMFS consider expanding research funding opportunities for non-catch related studies for non-bluefin species?

There has been an RFP for the last couple of years. We've had the opportunity to propose scientific research for bluefin that at least to our knowledge since the Large Pelagics had extramural funding for people to compete for, we've seen very opportunities to propose scientific work for other tunas such as yellowfin and bigeye in the Atlantic and not the Gulf of Mexico.

So I wonder, will NMFS be considering, as part of scientific initiatives expanding funding opportunities through competitive RFPs for doing more work other than catch related information collection on species like yellowfin? Thank you.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Hi (Molly). So, yes, this is something that I think the Agency has been working on, in terms of an integrated HMS research plan that is broader than just bluefin. Bluefin certainly has been a large area of focus for a number of years, and we recognize that there are other species and other data needs.

Of course, budgets and funding are fairly tight, and (unintelligible) commitment, I think, is not one that we're able to give right now, but it is certainly something in front of the Agency, in front of the Agency's leadership as well, and so we are working on that, and I would encourage folks that are involved in HMS research to continue to share that information.

The ICCAT Advisory Committee meeting next week will be providing research objectives and priorities, and so I would encourage all of the folks that are part of that to continue to voice these interests and concerns for non-bluefin HMS research.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (Ellen Peel). Your line is now open.

(Ellen Peel): Hi Margo, a couple of questions. You have, or the Agency has a catch card pilot program in Puerto Rico. You know, I've got three or four things, all, you can answer at the end. Does that offer some possibility to, you know, to follow for yellowfin? On that same note, TBF, you know, would be happy to establish a program specific to the Gulf of Mexico.

We already have release cards, we already accept data. We do get, you know, some tuna tagging data occasionally, but we can't implement a Gulf of Mexico release card program and share that data, you know, with you guys as well as the science centers. I think we, as anglers, could also help by encouraging our state fisheries agencies, perhaps to look at the Louisiana program and follow suit.

If they started collecting, that would be helpful to all. And that's it, I was just curious - oh, one other thing. Could you not require all tournaments that include yellowfin to report, or all those that are selected and select all those, say, in the Gulf of Mexico? Just some suggestions coupled with some questions. Thank you.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Yes, so I'm going to ask Ron to respond to the catch card pilot in Puerto Rico. In terms of your last question about requiring tournaments that are selected to report yellowfin, currently if they have any billfish award category they are already selected to report, and so we should be getting probably a subset, but hopefully a sizeable subset of the tournaments there, because if they're selected for a report, they're supposed to be reporting all things on HMS.

But that would be an avenue that we could pursue, in terms of expanding that data collection to include all yellowfin tournaments as well. That would be something that we could consider. Ron, can you talk about the catch card program in Puerto Rico?

Ron Salz: Sure. Hi (Ellen).

(Ellen Peel): Hi.

Ron Salz: Yes, so we are, actually we've completed the data collection, so now we're in the report writing phase for the Puerto Rico catch card program. It was based very similar to the catch card programs that we have for bluefin as well as billfish in Maryland and North Carolina.

And we were looking for a way to improve on - there's the current, you know, mandatory requirement, of course, which can be accomplished either through a phone call or through online for reporting all landings of billfish. But we were looking to improve on the accuracy of those reports in Puerto Rico.

And so, you know, catch card programs and the need for some sort of census-based approach, we see that as being more important in cases where the landings of that particular species is such a rare event that it's extremely difficult to try to survey that type of an event. And so we feel like you couldn't put enough effort into a survey to come up with precise estimates for some species because it is such a rare event that a census approach is the best way to go.

But as far as your question related to releases for, you know, at least for looking at Puerto Rico, releases are much more common for marlin than of course landings, and we feel like a survey could be designed to, you know, we

can make improvements on the current surveys to get more precise and accurate estimates of releases through a survey.

But, that said, that doesn't mean that we wouldn't necessarily consider also gathering release information through other types of data collections. And one thing that there was a project that's just wrapping up, there'll be a report out soon. It was an MRIP project that looked at voluntary angler surveys, and involving anglers and captains in providing information that could, you know, possibly be useful for management purposes.

And, you know, I think there could be some applications where, you know, that type of information would be useful if it's, you know, collected in the right way and, you know, follows all of the proper procedures for data collection and so on.

So I don't know if that directly answers your question but, you know, I think for the most part catch card programs and census-based in general programs are based on landings, and for the HMS programs, it's a mandatory requirement that, you know, that many of these species that are landed get reported.

So, you know, we're also, as Margo mentioned, piloting a study this year in Massachusetts for bluefin tuna landings. And again, there we're trying to improve on the current system of phone or internet reporting, which we know has a very low compliance rate. So if you're going to do a catch card program, and the data is going to be useful for management, it's critical you have if not 100% compliance but very, very near that mark for the accuracy of your information.

Coordinator: At this time I would like to remind all participants if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. And our next question comes from (Rich Murlay). Your line is now open.

Rich Ruais: Yes, hi, this is Rich Ruais from American Bluefin Tuna Association. I'm sorry for coming on late, so I missed a lot of the earlier discussion. But I did hear the Louisiana representative say that where catches of yellowfin were reported as zero in some years that in fact he's quite certain that that's not correct.

And I think at the U.S. delegation (tike) has been held back since probably the early 1990s because the recreational community didn't have any confidence in the numbers that were produced for yellowfin, in the even ICCAT gets a little bit more serious about yellowfin management and wants to either break it down into country quotas or something else.

So, historical catches for yellowfin tuna are extremely important. The commercial catches from long-line and purse seine have always been collected and are pretty good. We're comfortable on the purse seine side, and I think the long-line group is comfortable.

But the recreational catches, particularly the historical catches always seem to come up, and I'm wondering if Louisiana was the only state that has noticed that catches have not been recorded, and whether Louisiana and other states have the capability to go back and try to rebuild, if you will, the historical database.

ICCAT's always willing to accept new information and revise the data and, as long as it passes the chest of SCRS it's accepted, and the historical tables are revised. So - and you never know where ICCAT's going to go with yellowfin tuna management in the future. And I think that, you know, we all will be

better off if we have the most accurate long term historical information as possible.

So I guess I'd ask - I'm not sure who to ask, but can Louisiana and any other states that find that their recreational landings are under-reported, can you work to fix the historical record? Thank you.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: So Rich, I will jump in - this Margo, and then I'll ask Jason to answer for Louisiana. One of the things that I said in the introduction was the extensive efforts that the Agency put into trying to uncover and include as much of the historical data as possible, and U.S. official landing statistics were revised based on that extensive review in 1999. That included commercial and recreational sources of information.

Since that time I don't believe additional sources have been identified. And I don't know how many state representatives are on the call besides Jason to speak for their individual abilities, but I just want to make note that at the time that this was, I think, most in front of the Agency in the '90s, there was a considerable agency effort to find that data and get the most accurate historical information possible to ICCAT.

So, Jason, do you want to speak to the state? Jason, are you still on the call?

Coordinator: I'm going to get his line open, one moment please. All right, Jason, your line is open.

Jason Adriance: Okay, thanks Margo. I'm not sure. I'd have to look into that, how, if it's even possible that, to go back and rebuild that. I'm not sure, you know, if there were any other collection methods besides MRIP, and we may have to look at some participation. And maybe if we have better landings from here forward,

maybe it's possible but I couldn't speak to that right now as to rebuild that historical record.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay, thank you.

Coordinator: One moment please for our next question. Our next question is from (Tom Foti). Your line is now open.

(Tom Foti): Yes, I'd like to follow up on Richie's question. I mean, we in New Jersey, we were very concerned with those figures in the '90s. And we had pointed out to Bill Figley's, the study that NMFS had paid for, and the data showed that the landings were very out of whack compared to that survey, and yet that information was really never used.

And even when they finally came to what National Fishery Services said, that they basically revised the figures it still was very, you know, a lot underestimated what the catch is. And again, you know, I know we're not talking about managing right now, but there's always those concerns because we've seen it happen before.

And we're afraid we're going to get, you know, the recreational community or even the commercial community, just because they will get the short end of the stick because of the under-estimation of the catch. And I think, you know, I know we're not doing anything now, but it's always our fear that, you know, some day down the line, and all of a sudden we wind up in trouble because of data poor stock assessments again.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Yes, so I - are you talking about the (Stone and Loftist) report, specifically?

(Tom Foti): I don't - you know, it's been a while, and my memory's not as good as it used to be. But I remember, you know, I was very involved in the '90s. I've kind of backed off over the last couple of years on yellowfin and concentrated on a lot of other species, but I know we had dramatic concerns and there was, I think it was a Bill Figley report that did a survey just on HMS that NMFS had paid for in New Jersey.

And we tried to get that information included and, you know, as I have found out over the years, even when NMFS pays for a study, like when they paid for our (food) tournament study, nobody ever looks at the data. And we, you know, and that's been, that's my concern. I mean, I'm, as I said, I'm fearful we will soon or later get a quota on yellowfin.

We all divide the pie up, and because of the under-estimation of the catch, somebody will get the short end of the stick.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay, thanks. Honestly, I'm not familiar by the study by Bill Figley. I can look into that.

(Tom Foti): Okay.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: I just, I want to reiterate, though, that it's a very extensive review that the Agency did when - to support the revision of the historical estimates in 1999. That was an exhaustive review of information that was provided to the agency data sources that were usable. And so that ultimately ended up in the revision of the statistics to ICCAT. If the Figley report was after that...

(Tom Foti): It was before that.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: It was before that? So, like I said, I don't have the details on that report but my understanding is that if there was anything usable, reliable, it went into those revisions.

And since that time, the other efforts by the Agency have been not actually as specific on yellowfin, but more broadly addressing recreational and data collection programs and things that would included yellowfin but weren't so focused just on yellowfin, things like the MRIP programs in Puerto Rico and Massachusetts and Florida and number of other places.

So I will look into that. I will be seeing the lead scientist on that revision of statistics next week so I can ask him about that.

(Tom Foti): Yes, I was - (Bruce Friedman) was on the call, but (Bruce) just got back and he couldn't be on the call this morning, because (Bruce Friedman) was part of that study. And I will, you know, Margo, maybe you can reach out to (Bruce Friedman). I'll contact you off line and we'll basically talk about that.

Because we had put a lot of information from New Jersey together, and we thought the catch was totally underestimated, even after the revision.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay.

Coordinator: Our next question is from Randy Gregory. Your line is now open.

Randy Gregory: Hey Margo and Randy, this is Randy Gregory in North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. I have also got on the line and listening is Doug Mumford with our MRIP or with our recreational sampling program is on as well. We, I just want to reiterate what I've said at many HMS meetings that North Carolina is very concerned with yellowfin.

And anything that we can do, anything that we need to change, add, work with, help out, add, you know, we started the catch card stuff in '99 for bluefin tuna. So, you know, anything we can do, whether it's collecting parts or life history information that we are willing and able to do that, as far as I can say at my position level.

So I just wanted to put that out there, and anything that you guys have a question for me, shoot them.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Thanks, Randy.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (Aram Whittaker). Your line is now open.

(Aram Whittaker): Good morning, Margo.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Hi (Aram). I didn't think you were going to be able to join us.

(Aram Whittaker): Well, unfortunately the ocean was very rough down here this morning and we, at low tide we couldn't get out of the inlet. But I appreciate you gathering information about the yellowfins. You know, I've been concerned for them for a while. But, and I have a couple of comments and then I do have a question but I'm totally in agreement with (Molly's) comments on doing some research, you know.

We're at what I would say a five-year low in yellowfin tuna fishing here in my area. And everybody asks me, you know, where have they gone? Where have they gone? And I'm scratching my head. I don't know if it's because we've caught up the stock on the Western Atlantic, or whether they've been caught

up off of the Gulf of Guinea, or whether their weather patterns have drove them away from here.

I'm not sure of the answer, but it seems like we have the technology now to solve some of the answers, so I'm all for, you know, helping with any research that I can to try to figure out where they've gone and how to get them back. My second comment is, I do feel, as I've mentioned in most of the meetings that the data is way understated, or the amount of fish being reported is understated, especially on the recreational side.

And, you know, I'm not sure exactly how we correct it. I know MRIPs has gone back in and, you know, readjusted some numbers on some states, but still, if it's not there to start with, it's hard to readjust it. So anybody that's listening that has any, even whatever type data that could be of help, then I would say get it out and try to look at what your state is reporting and see if that compares what your fishing fleet is reporting, or catching.

And I know if ICCAT decides to put a quota on it, I'm just, I'm hoping that they'll go back - I'm not sure how far they go back or what numbers they look at but, you know, our fishing year, I just was looking at reported numbers in ICCAT for yellowfin tuna. In 2004 was like 6500 and some metric tons. And for 2010 it's only 2648, so right there you can see we had a tremendous decrease in our yellowfin numbers just over the last five years, or six years.

So hopefully they will go back, I think Rich said they would go back historically and look at the bigger numbers. But we want to make sure that we push them back and look at the best numbers, because hopefully it'll come back. And another point to that is that even before the government put the limit at three, that most of the charter industry on the East Coast set a, self-imposed a limit of three tons.

So back in the heyday years our numbers could have been much higher, other than we imposed our own limit, so I just want to throw that in there because we were doing it, I know, three or four years before it was required. And - let's see, I think that's about it for right now, thank you.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay, thanks (Arram). Yes, I know we've been watching that landings decline as well, and that was a major source of concern for us, and part of the reason that the United States was pushing very hard in the multiple years it took to get the Gulf of Guinea closure revisited and expanded, was the concern that the fish were not recruiting out of the Gulf of Guinea and into our fisheries.

On the declines that we've seen, you're right, they dropped from between 5000 and 7000 metric tons down to about 2500 in the span of just a couple of years. And that drop-off was seen in both the commercial and recreational fisheries. So it really seemed that the availability of yellowfin to the United States fisheries was being affected.

So I think we were successful this year in expanding that time area closure, and hopefully it will be effective and enable fish to recruit into our fisheries again. And so I think, you know, your point about the bag limit affecting our landings that came up earlier. That's certainly something that we would take into consideration.

And if we do get to the point of setting allocations at ICCAT, we would most certainly argue for a very long time period so that we fully cover and include our historical highs, not just the last couple of years where it's been low due to the availability to the U.S. fisheries - good points there.

Coordinator: I am showing no further questions at this time.

Margo Schulz-Haugen: Okay. Well, let me say thank you to everyone that called in. I thought we had a lot of really good questions and concerns. I've got some follow-up actions based on the call. And I would just say that I think this discussion will likely continue next week at the ICCAT Advisory Committee meeting.

And so I look forward to seeing some of you there. And please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any additional questions or concerns. My phone number is 301-427-8503. And thank you for participating.

Coordinator: This now concludes today's conference. You may disconnect at this time.

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