

**DRAFT
SUMMARY OF THE STANDING AND
SPECIAL REEF FISH SSC**

**CONFERENCE CALL
JULY 26, 2007**

ATTENDEES:

Members:

Standing SSC

Dr. Walter Keithly, Chair
Mr. Doug Gregory, Jr., V. Chair
Dr. Chuck Adams
Dr. Luiz Barbieri
Mr. Harry Blanchet
Dr. Benjamin Blount
Dr. George Guillen
Dr. Michael Jepson
Dr. Albert Jones
Dr. Will Patterson
Dr. Joe Powers
Dr. Elbert Whorton

Special Reef Fish SSC

Mr. Robert J. Allman
Dr. Bill Lindberg

Staff

Wayne Swingle
Rick Leard
Steven Atran
Stu Kennedy
Trish Kennedy

Council

Joe Hendrix

Others

Dr. Mauricio Ortiz
Dr. Clay Porch
Dr. Alex Chester
Bonnie Ponwith
Susan Bunsick
Dennis Heinemann
Dennis O'Hern

The SSC meeting was brought to order by Dr. Keithly at 10:15 a.m. The agenda was approved without additions and the minutes from the March meeting were approved with three minor changes.

Evaluation of Lorenzen M Values for Gag Grouper

Stu Kennedy gave a short presentation of the report on the status of Gulf of Mexico gag grouper based on the changes recommended by the SEDAR Review Panel. The SSC had reviewed the technical aspects and results of all the changes except for the application of the Lorenzen M technique for gag grouper at their June, 2007 meeting because they were not available at that time. The Lorenzen equation scales natural mortality (M) across all exploited ages on the concept that natural mortality is expected to decrease with age (size). Mauricio Ortiz and Clay Porch provided explanations of the procedures and analyses. There was considerable discussion of natural mortality estimation procedures, including how Hoenig's (1983) regression was developed and the variance around the estimates. There was concern that the effect of changing the first exploited age in the Lorenzen M regression from age 0 to age 3 or above shifted the status of the stock from overfished to not overfished while there were other indicators of status that suggested a more cautious approach such as

significant reduction in numbers of spawning males due to a combination of protogynous hermaphroditism, high spawning site fidelity, and aggressive feeding behavior. For this reason, some SSC members felt that the base-case assessment should use either a constant M across all ages or the Lorenzen curve using all ages (0 through 30). However, Some SSC members countered that assessments for gag and red grouper should use similar decisions for the sake of consistency. In that case, the Lorenzen curve should use ages 3 through 30 which are the exploited ages and best match the decisions made by Hoenig when he developed his regression for estimating M. Included in the development of these two positions were discussions of the sensitivity of the equations to maximum age, the level of exploitation of the stock (Hoenig's equation was developed using lightly exploited stocks), the confidence in selection of maximum age, and the need for better fisheries-independent data for M.

Several questions and statements were made by the public. The use of the Lorenzen M regression was questioned because it was a relatively new concept and only applied to assessment models in the Southeast. The response was that while relatively new, it is accepted that natural mortality declines with age, and more work needs to be done to develop standard application procedures. It was stated even after discard mortality in the recreational fishery was reduced based on the last Review Panel's recommendation, the estimates were still too high. The response was that the current estimates do not account for delayed mortality or predation and therefore may be underestimated.

After considerable discussion about the reasons and effects of decisions for calculating M and scaling M, a motion was made:

Whereas, the SSC considers the SEDAR 10 gag assessment with the changes made by the SEDAR Review Panel the best available scientific information. The SSC further recommends that the base-case model used for the SEDAR 10 assessment be based on the age-dependent Lorenzen M vector with ages ranging from 3 to 30.

With little further discussion, the SSC passed the motion with no objection.

The SSC then took up the Generic Aquaculture Amendment at 11:45 AM.