



ATLANTIC COASTAL COOPERATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

June 16, 2004

TESTIMONY OF MAURY OSBORN, DIRECTOR OF THE ATLANTIC COASTAL COOPERATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the 23 state and federal partners that form the ACCSP. Our partners have long recognized the need for accurate, timely data to support fisheries conservation and management. In the past, it was difficult to cooperatively share data, there were major gaps, and data were not at a resolution needed for stock assessments. The ACCSP was created in 1995 to address these problems for fishery-dependent data, which are “information collected directly from commercial, for-hire and recreational fisheries.” Since our inception, we have worked to develop coordinated, cost-effective, non-duplicative data collection programs and to establish a central data warehouse for integrated and harmonized data.

Commercial fisheries catch and effort data are our highest priority, and we have made much progress. The partners established the standard of mandatory trip-based reporting, and partners began implementing those programs in the 1990s. In 2002, we created SAFIS, a real-time web-based system for reporting commercial landings. The ACCSP developed and maintains SAFIS as one basic but flexible system that can be customized for each partner. This approach is very cost-effective compared to establishing multiple systems. It integrates state and federal reporting, simplifies quota monitoring, and relieves the fishing industry from reporting to multiple agencies. SAFIS is being deployed for all partners from Maryland north. Partners in the middle and south Atlantic with existing systems are deploying other electronic reporting tools to improve the timeliness and quality of their commercial fisheries data. We anticipate having a

1444 Eye Street, NW Ste. 410 Washington D.C. 20005
(ph) 202.216.5690 (f) 202.289.7265 www.accsp.org

The ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program to design, implement, and conduct marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and to integrate those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen.

complete commercial dataset in our online data warehouse in 2007.

While developing program standards, the partners evaluated numerous options for monitoring recreational fisheries catch and effort. The partners determined that catch data for recreational fisheries should be collected through an access site intercept survey. Effort data for recreational fisheries should be collected through a household telephone survey until a universal sampling frame of anglers is available. The NOAA Fisheries' MRFSS collects recreational fishing data in keeping with the standards established by the ACCSP. We also developed a suite of recommendations that would greatly improve the MRFSS, including higher sampling levels and research. The ACCSP and half of the Atlantic states fund additional MRFSS sampling to improve recreational estimates. Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida currently conduct part or all of the access-site intercept survey, which increases the quality and quantity of the data. Virginia and Massachusetts both fund increased sample sizes to improve their state-level estimates.

Through collaborative research with GulfFIN, the ACCSP partners concluded that effort data for charter and headboats should be collected through a telephone survey of vessel operators. Catch data for charter boats should be collected through an access site intercept survey, while on-board samplers should collect catch data for head boats. The ACCSP adopted this standard in 2002 and worked with NOAA Fisheries to establish the For-Hire Survey in mid-2003. The ACCSP contributed a portion of the funds needed to implement and maintain the new survey. State partners (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida) are conducting the intercept and onboard observer sampling or are adding samples to improve state-level estimates (Massachusetts and Virginia). This new survey will greatly improve the accuracy and precision of catch and effort data for the for-hire fishery. The ACCSP will continue to evaluate the new survey and develop strategies to continue improving these data.

The ACCSP has set standards for biological, bycatch and socioeconomic sampling of Atlantic coast fisheries. Those modules are lower-priority than catch and effort, but are steadily progressing. The ACCSP staff is completing a real-time web-based application to help partners coordinate biological sampling efforts coastwide. The ACCSP's online data warehouse was launched publicly February 2002, and population of the data modules continues as partners implement programs that meet ACCSP standards.

Since the establishment of the ACCSP standards, state and federal partners have contributed substantial resources to begin and maintain data collection programs and to modify

existing programs to meet those standards. A congressional appropriation for ACCSP in 1999 provided an increase in funding to \$1.5 million that allowed the program to begin financially assisting partners in establishing or modifying programs. Since 1999, the funding increased to the current level of \$3.5 million.

In March 2004, the ACCSP partners approved a five-year Implementation Plan that outlines specific actions the ACCSP must take to achieve program goals set in the 2002-2006 ACCSP Strategic Plan and complete a comprehensive coastwide program. The Implementation Plan illustrates that given current levels of funding over the next five years, the catch and effort module will be 99% complete, but little progress will occur in development of the ACCSP modules for other types of fisheries-dependent statistics. Rather, if resources available to the ACCSP remain stagnant, we will have decreases to current data collection levels for recreational and for-hire fisheries, and biological sampling due to increased sampling costs. Bycatch sampling will remain at current levels on the Atlantic coast, with no funding from the ACCSP. Without increased resources, the ACCSP socioeconomic program will remain in the planning stage. The ACCSP data warehouse will continue to expand and facilitate access to harmonized data by scientists, fishermen, and the public, but the completeness and utility of the data will be constrained by the lack of data collection programs. Existing surveys by partners will be incorporated into the data warehouse; however, critical gaps and shortcomings will remain for recreational and for-hire catch and effort, biological samples, bycatch and discards, basic socioeconomic data, and metadata applications to aid in interpretation of the data.

The Implementation Plan demonstrates that with increased resources, the ACCSP will be able to achieve its vision: "The ACCSP will be the source of fisheries statistics on the Atlantic Coast. The ACCSP will be efficient, informative, user-friendly, and reliable. The Program will contribute to the restoration and sustainability of marine fisheries." Work to close the 1% gap in the commercial catch and effort module could be nearly complete by FY08. Most of the higher-priority improvements that have been identified for the recreational and for-hire sectors would be tested and implemented. The program would establish an integrated state-federal biological sampling program that meets annual ACCSP sampling targets. Increased laboratory processing to handle the increase in biological samples would be established with sharing of resources among the partners in the most cost-effective way. The program could begin a series of annual baseline studies to determine bycatch and discard rates for fisheries with little or no coverage to date. The ACCSP would be poised to begin a series of socioeconomic studies of commercial and recreational fisheries. Metadata applications that are critical for understanding trends in data would be developed or in planning stages for data collection systems documentation, statutory

and regulatory histories, fishing technology histories, environmental information, and ancillary socioeconomic information.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members, thank you again for the opportunity to share the progress that the ACCSP has made in fishery-dependent statistics. We very much appreciate the Subcommittee's support over the past several years. I ask that my full testimony be submitted for the record, and I will be happy to answer any questions.