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August 10, 2015

Jennifer Mondragon
Chris Rilling
National Marine Fisheries Service
Sent via email

Dear Jennifer and Chris:

This follows up on our conversation about pot cod at the EMWG. As you know, the results from our first phase of research, Pot Cod 1, indicate that using EM to monitor this fishery looks promising. Our intention in the second phase, Pot Cod 2 (PC2), is to see if we can get weights in a cost effective / non-intrusive way and to further refine the use of RFID. We want to make this research as useful as possible, and as Don Lane and I mentioned at the meeting, we would appreciate two things from NMFS: 1) Guidance on data, and, if possible, 2) Funding.

Guidance on Data

- 1) In PC2 we plan to collect lengths of discards. Table 4 (p.17-18) in our report on PC1 (attached) describes the discard species we expect to see. Can NMFS provide length-weight conversion tables for those species for which it would be important to have weights?
- 2) Species like octopus, crab, and other invertebrates are rarely encountered in this fishery and may not have length-weight conversion tables. Our intention is to provide piece counts for those species. Does NMFS have additional guidance on this?
- 3) We also plan to estimate discard weights by multiplying piece counts x average weights. Can NMFS provide average weights for the discard species of significance? Do you have additional guidance on this?
- 4) Does NMFS have guidance on the importance of collecting the condition of discards in this fishery? Would this be important information for management of this fishery? Our findings in PC1 confirm industry statements that bycatch in this fishery is quite low. We think that accurately assessing the condition of bycatch may require an additional camera pointed at the water in hopes of collecting images of discarded fish behavior once they hit the water. Even with that camera it is difficult to predict the results. Do you have guidance on this?
- 5) To “ground truth” our data we would like to compare our findings, particularly species composition, with observer data from the pot cod fishery. Can NMFS provide a summary of catch composition for this fishery based on observer data?

Funding

The project period for PC2 is July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. At the EMWG Don mentioned that the budget and, consequently, sample size for PC2 are quite small: 2-3 boats and a total of 8-9 trips or approximately 24-27 sea days. (As a comparison the first project, PC1 included 6 boats and a total of 145 trips and 252 sea days.)

Additional funding would allow us to 1) increase the sample size and/or 2) validate the data by putting an observer onboard for a number of trips –assuming willingness of the volunteer vessel operators. Jennifer asked what that would cost.

1) We estimate we could double the sample size for PC2 from 8 trips to 16 trips for approximately \$44,000. This includes data acquisition, retrieval, review, project management, and vessel incentives.

2) Assuming we could persuade the volunteer vessels to agree, we could validate the data by placing an observer onboard for 6 trips for \$55,000. This would include the cost of the observer, observer travel (including meals and lodging), comparative data review, a statistical analysis of the data, project management, and vessel incentives.

Future Funding

I am concerned about future funding, specifically when the pot cod season opens in September 2016. In its letter of support for PC2 the NPFMC wrote:

“The Council supports extending the NPFA research with additional funding to evaluate approaches to capturing the weight of discards, as outlined in the proposal. If the pot gear fieldwork is sufficiently far along, the Council could be in a position to include a pot cod EM option into the regulatory analysis for 2016, which may allow for simultaneous implementation of EM for pot and longline vessels in 2018.”

At the EMWG, Bill Tweit mentioned, in reference to the longline EM funding, that it would be strange to see a big bubble of funding in 2016 and then a drop off in 2017 before implementation in 2018. The same would be true of pot cod (minus the big bubble) unless funds are allocated in 2016-17 for continued work in this fishery. We believe strongly that PC2 will answer the data questions hanging from PC1, particularly if the sample size is increased, and that this fishery is well suited to EM. It would seem logical and consistent with the NPFMC’s priorities to include funding for pot cod for Sept-Dec, 2016 and both A and B seasons in 2017 in order to build the foundation for possible implementation in 2018.

Thank you in advance for any guidance you can provide regarding data collection in this fishery. NPFA and I appreciate your interest and support of this work. Please let me know if you would like any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nancy Munro

Nancy Munro
President
Saltwater Inc.