



UNITED STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, Florida 33149 U.S.A.

November 15, 2006

Robert Mahood
Executive Director
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Southpark Building, Suite 306
1 Southpark Circle
Charleston, SC 29407

Dear Bob,

This letter is to inform you that a data error has been discovered in the 2006 U.S. South Atlantic gag stock assessment. SERO and SAFMC staff noted a discrepancy in landings data between the Data Workshop report and the Assessment Workshop report. Investigations into this discrepancy led to the discovery of an error in the data input for the gag stock assessment model.

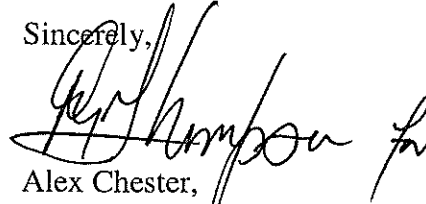
The error occurred with Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) landings data (1982-2004), when the assessment scientists were compiling Data Workshop data into a single spreadsheet for model input. The Stock Assessment scientists retrieved "landings + discard" data instead of "landings" data for their analyses – as a result, *discard estimates* (commonly referred to as B2 fish) were included in both the "landed" data and in the discard data.

The following recommendations will serve to avoid this and other errors in data compilation:

- A. Have the Data Workshop participants and other stock assessment scientists review the model input file created by the Assessment Workshop scientists.
- B. Have the Data Workshop compile a single model input data file (*rather than a series of files to be compiled by Assessment Workshop participants, as is currently the case*) by the close of the Workshop. Stock Assessment scientists would be responsible for providing a template of the structure and format for the single input data file. The input data file would then be: 1) reviewed and certified by all Data Workshop participants (*currently not the practice*); and 2) reviewed by Assessment Workshop participants prior to the assessment. All subsequent changes to the input data file by the assessment scientists would be reviewed and approved by Data Workshop participants.

We are currently doing preliminary model runs with the corrected discard estimates, however, because of the amount of work involved, and to ensure no further errors, it will not be possible to complete the updated analysis and documentation in time for the December, 2006 SAFMC meeting. We anticipate that the revised assessment will be completed by February 2007.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Chester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Alex Chester,
Acting Center Director

Cc: Gregg Waugh
Roy Crabtree
Peter Thompson
John Carmichael
Nancy Thompson
Aleta Hohn