SIZE FREQUENCY DATA FROM THE TRIP INTERVIEW PROGRAM SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

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The Trip Interview Program (TIP) is part of the Cooperative Statistics Program between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Fisheries Science Center and the eight coastal states in the Southeast Region, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. There are two purposes of this Program. One of the objectives, and the one discussed in this report, is to collect length and weight data from a sample of the commercial fishing trips that are landed at ports in the Southeast Region. The second purpose is to collect hard part and tissue samples to age the fish and determine reproductive characteristics of the stocks.

The overall intent of the Program is to select a random sample of the fishing trips and measure a representative, unbiased sample of the fish from the trip. When the Program was first initiated, the goal was to select a random sample of 10% of the commercial fishing trips to collect a representative sample to estimate catch, effort (trips) and species composition for the commercial sector. However, as the Program evolved, it became apparent that funding and personnel were not sufficient to achieve that goal. In the mid-1990's when Federal budget cuts were occurring, the strategy of the Program was altered to one in which a set of target or assessment species was established and the field agents were instructed to select trips that are likely to include these species and as time permits, sample fishing trips that do not include any of the assessment species. In addition to specific species, sampling targets or quotas have been established for each of the species. These targets are reviewed and revised annually by the Biological Review Panel, which is a committee within the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP).

There are other factors that affect the sample selection for the TIP besides limitations on personnel and funding. The logistics of commercial fishing and unloading has a significant impact on the availability of trips that the field agent can intercept. Fishermen do not always land and unload during normal business hours. Furthermore, fishermen and dealers are not always fully cooperative and allow the field agents access to the catches. If there are multiple landing site (docks) in a field agent's area, it is often difficult to know ahead of time where and

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when boats will be unloading. All of these factors make the sample selection difficult to pre-determine and the selection is often based more on the opportunity to sample than on an established sampling design. Thus, the TIP is often described as an "opportunistic" sampling strategy.

In addition to size frequency data and biological samples (hard parts and tissue samples), the field agents attempt to interview the captain and collect data on the fishing trip. The fishermen are asked to provide information on the type of gear, the quantity, size and configuration of the gear, and fishing location. Information on the number of crew and days away from the port are also part of the data collected during the interview.

The Cooperative Statistics Program began in the early-1980's and by 1984 the TIP was fully operational in the South Atlantic Region (i.e., North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida). However, because of funding limitations, the TIP has not been conducted in North Carolina, although sampling has been conducted on an "as-available" basis by Division of Marine Fisheries biologists and these data have been provided to the SEFSC and are included in the TIP database.

The numbers of length measurements that were taken for the eight species in this SEDAR during 1984 through 2003 are presented in Table 1. As is apparent from this table, there are essentially no length frequency data for misty grouper or queen snapper. The numbers of speckled hind, Warsaw grouper and yellowedge grouper are also fairly low.

As noted in the heading, the length measurements in Table 1 do not include sampling conducted in the Florida Keys. The TIP data that were collected in the Keys are presented in Table 2. The two sets of data are not combined because decisions will need to be made on which samples from the Keys are to be included in the assessment. Some of the samples that were landed in the Keys (Monroe County) may have been caught in the Gulf of Mexico and therefore, should not be included in the assessment of species that are under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Table 1. Numbers of length measurements taken for the 8 deep-water SEDAR species in the South Atlantic region, excluding the Florida Keys, 1983 - 2003.*

Year	Misty Grouper	Snowy Grouper	Warsaw Grouper	Yellowedge Grouper	Speckled Hind	Queen Snapper	Golden Tilefish	Blueline Tilefish
1983		95	3		54			22
1984	2	3,213	25	203	1,097		2,357	1,042
1985	1	4,553	44	372	1,991	1	5,419	1,590
1986		2,928	38	399	1,094		5,415	684
1987	1	1,853	21	102	1,229		542	327
1988	3	1,209	61	97	980		1,060	282
1989	7	1,605	15	43	986	1	834	209
1990		2,394	16	107	578		755	675
1991	1	2,715	14	192	481		6,344	555
1992	1	4,628	45	787	350		11,808	1,708
1993	1	7,110	50	756	248	3	29,517	3,890
1994	1	2,749	7	135	157		11,977	556
1995	1	6,151	2	109	24	2	10,003	815
1996	4	2,899	9	136	24		2,830	512
1997	1	2,433		231	12	3	2,823	175
1998	1	2,131	7	60	6	2	1,805	166
1999		3,454	21	183	19	8	3,841	288
2000	3	3,037	17	214	22	4	5,890	533
2001	2	2,616	13	247	10		2,494	654
2002	3	2,025	23	151	52	1	2,396	523
2003	1	321	19	92	32		302	176

Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Trip Interview Program.

Table 2. Numbers of length measurements taken for the 8 deep-water SEDAR species in the Florida Keys, 1983 - 2003.*

Year	Misty Grouper	Snowy Grouper	Warsaw Grouper	Yellowedge Grouper	Speckled Hind	Queen Snapper	Golden Tilefish	Blueline Tilefish
1984		55						
1985	3	166						
1986		241	2	21	6		2	42
1987		165		19				
1988		63						7
1989		15						
1990		22	1	14			40	41
1991		51	17	10	31	5	12	7
1992	1	93	1	33	6			34
1993	17	66	3	35	9	19	3	173
1994	1	81	4	50		5	48	176
1995		53		36				15
1996		13	3	3	2		31	81
1997	4	98	1	588	183	7	1	156
1998	7	31		60	18	1		19
1999	2	88	8	125	49	3	40	45
2000		123	12	98	41	62	57	81
2001		49	1	42	24	1	139	13
2002		135		34	16	49	94	78
2003	2	3	2		32	1		26

* Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Trip Interview Program.