

U.S. Virgin Islands Commercial Landings and Biostatistical Data Recovery Project

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March 2005

**Caribbean Southeast Data Assessment Review Workshop Report
SEDAR-AW-1
Sustainable Fisheries Division Contribution No. SFD-2005-XXX**

Preliminary Draft

At the Yellowtail snapper and Spiny Lobster Southeast Data Assessment and Review Data Workshop (SEDAR) held in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands in December 2004, a problem with the commercial landings and biostatistical data from the U.S. Virgin Islands was discussed. The problem was initially identified when US Virgin Islands Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) staff compared known sampling dates with dates in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC), Trip Interview Program (TIP) database. A list of the dates that were determined missing was generated by US Virgin Islands DFW staff through cross checking these two lists.

During the SEDAR8 Data Workshop participants recommended that the missing US Virgin Islands biostatistical and landings sample data be obtained and computerized prior to the upcoming SEDAR8 Assessment Workshop. NMFS, SEFSC offered staff and resources for obtaining these data subsequent to the SEDAR8 Data Workshop meeting and a University of Miami student intern was tasked this responsibility. US Virgin Islands, DFW staff provided the student with a list of missing dates for each island (St. Thomas/St. John, St. Croix).

The data collected from St. Thomas and St. John was stored at the St. Thomas Virgin Islands DFW office while the St. Croix sample data was stored both at the St. Thomas and St. Croix Virgin Islands DFW offices. Data located in the St. Croix DFW office was shipped via Federal Express to the St. Thomas office during the week that the student was working on this task. The data sheets and other papers that appeared relevant or were attached and contained the dates that were listed as missing were copied and shipped via Federal Express back to the Miami SEFSC laboratory.

The St. Thomas and St. John data are grouped together while the data from St. Croix is kept separate. The data sheets were organized by day with one manila folder for each date that the port agents sampled. Within each manila folder there was at least one completed landings form with biostatistical and summary catch data, along with scrap paper on which fish were listed. According to US Virgin Islands DFW staff, the scrap paper was used at the dock when the port agents took the initial records and then the

information was transferred to an official sampling form. Once it was confirmed that the information on the scrap paper was also found on the attached official forms, the scrap paper was no longer copied. There were a few instances, however where only a scrap piece of paper was present in the folder with no official landings form, and for these days, the scrap sheet was copied.

The general procedure followed was that for each missing day on the lists provided by DFW staff, the official form was photocopied if available and, if not available, the scrap paper on which sample data was recorded was copied. The papers copied from each folder (each sampling day) were stapled together such that each packet of stapled materials was from one day of landings. Sometimes multiple sampling forms were present for a given day. If only one sheet of paper is present without a staple, only one sampling event for that day was available. The photocopied sampling sheets were mailed to the NMFS, SEFSC Miami, Florida office for later data entry. It was suggested that prior to distributing the copied data records to data entry personnel, each packet be examined to insure that any duplicates or unnecessary scrap sheets (those where the data had been transferred to an official landings sheet) be separated and discarded immediately to avoid confusion and the mis-entry of information.

The data was found to contain several different types of landings forms, as the forms were changed a few times over the years. It was identified that two predominant types of data were present:

- Landings data, which consists of the species name, number of fish caught in that species and total weight caught for that species, and
- Biostatistical data, defined as the species name, and the length and weight of individual fish.

Often, the biostatistical data would be present with accompanying landings data and the biostatistical data would be for a portion of the total catch for that particular trip. Due to the limited time and people available to enter data, efforts were made to concentrate on the landings data first and once complete, then enter the biostatistical data. The landings

data was completed for St. Thomas and St. John, along with a limited amount of biostatistical data. Data deemed missing from St. Croix has yet to be entered.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All of the missing dates listed (671 dates total) for the St. Thomas/St. John data on the lists provided by US Virgin Islands DFW staff were photocopied and almost all of the dates missing from the St. Croix landings through October of 1994. For the St. Croix data, from January 1983 to December 1994 (261 dates) 96% (250 dates) were copied. From November 1994 through 1999, the missing dates listed on the sheet failed to match up with corresponding data sheets, however these may be among the batch of St. Croix data that arrived late and was not organized due to time constraints. Hence out of a total of 299 missing records from St. Croix, only 250 were retrieved (83.6%). The St. Thomas/St. John data was found to be well organized however, the St. Croix data needs some additional organizational work. Three main organizational problems with the St. Croix data are identified with possible solutions suggested:

- Some data is grouped by month, some data is grouped by year, and some data is grouped by day. It is recommended that all the data be sorted out by date such that the pages corresponding to a particular date (month/day/year) are placed in an individual manila folder. Individuals tasked with this process should ensure that no duplicates are added to the folder; duplicates present should be discarded immediately to avoid confusion.
- The data contains a few different landings forms (biostatistical and summary catch reports), which need to be separated and either filed separately, or within the same folder for a given day.
- More surveys were taken on the St. Croix platform as compared with the St. Thomas/St. John platform because the island is much larger and because they had more port agents than in St. Thomas/St. John. Due to this, there was often more than one survey taken on a given day and the fact that a date is listed in the TIP data base does not necessarily mean that all of the forms from that date are actually entered into the database. It should be verified that the total number of interviews taken on a given day equate to the total number of interviews in the

TIP database. This verification procedure should take place only after the St.

Croix data has been organized by day as recommended above.

The process of ensuring that all of the forms (and data in general) have been entered into the TIP database should be done for the St. Thomas/St. John data as well to make certain that all available data is present in the TIP database.