STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE
ATLANTIC COASTAL COOPERATIVE
STATISTICS PROGRAM

2002-2006

May, 2002

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Introduction and Background

This document presents the strategic plan for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) for the years 2002-2006. Its purpose is to guide implementation and further development of the program. The plan:

- Reaffirms the program's mission to be the single, integrated source of data for Atlantic Coast fisheries management;
- Presents the partners' vision for the next five years; and
- Sets key program goals and describes strategies to accomplish them.

ACCSP Overview

The ACCSP is a state-federal cooperative partnership between twenty-three entities: the 15 Atlantic coast states and the District of Columbia, two federal fisheries agencies (Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service and Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), three regional fisheries management councils (New England, Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic), the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Partner agencies are listed in the ACCSP Memorandum of Agreement, which is incorporated by reference.

The program was established in 1995 to address deficiencies in the data available for fisheries management along the Atlantic Coast. These included incompatibilities between state and federal data systems, a lack of standardized trip-level catch and effort reporting by partner agencies, the lack of universal permit and vessel registration data, and a general need for more and better data to support new directions in fisheries management.

The strategic plan for 2002-2006 builds on the program's four basic principles:
- Cooperative development and implementation across jurisdictional lines,
- Coast-wide data collection standards and a single, integrated data management system,
- Data on all fishing activities -- commercial, recreational, and for-hire fisheries, and
- A modular design.

By establishing data collection standards and providing a data management system that incorporates existing state and federal data systems, ACCSP will ensure that the statistics used for fisheries management are accurate, consistent and compatible. Incorporating all harvesting components into the system ensures that they will be complete, effective and equitable.

Modular design facilitates complete, linked data for fisheries management. The core *catch and effort data* module provides basic information about fishing trips. Other linked modules provide *biological data*, *sociological data*, *economic data*, *quota monitoring* information, *permit and vessel registration* information and data on *releases and discards, including protected species*.

Status

Between 1995 and 2001 the ACCSP program was in the developmental stage but making steady progress toward becoming an operational system. A detailed program design was approved in 1998 and a process for proposing projects and making funding decisions was approved in 1999. Detailed operating plans are issued annually. A strategic plan was prepared for outreach activities in 2001. The data management system became operational in 2002.

State and federal partner agencies contribute resources to support the program, with current targeted federal appropriations of approximately $3.5 million from the Atlantic Cooperative Management and ACCSP line items, and a portion of the $2.35 million for the National Fisheries Information System. Even though program partners strive to increase efficiency and are using or reprogramming current resources to meet program standards, increases in funding will be necessary to fully implement the program. Expected levels of increased funding are detailed in the 1999 National Marine Fisheries Service Report to Congress on Proposed Implementation of a Fishing Vessel Registration and Fisheries Information System. Increased funding is should be phased in to ensure orderly implementation, which is anticipated to take 5 to 10 years before achieving full operational status. Nearly 40 projects were funded by the program for partner implementation from 1999 to 2002.

Structure

The Coordinating Council of policy-level partner representatives provides top-level leadership and direction, establishes policy and is the final decision-making authority. An Executive Committee provides interim policy and program guidance.

The ACCSP Director manages the program based on guidance from the Coordinating Council. A small central staff reporting to the ACCSP Director coordinates technical operations, information systems support, outreach and administration.
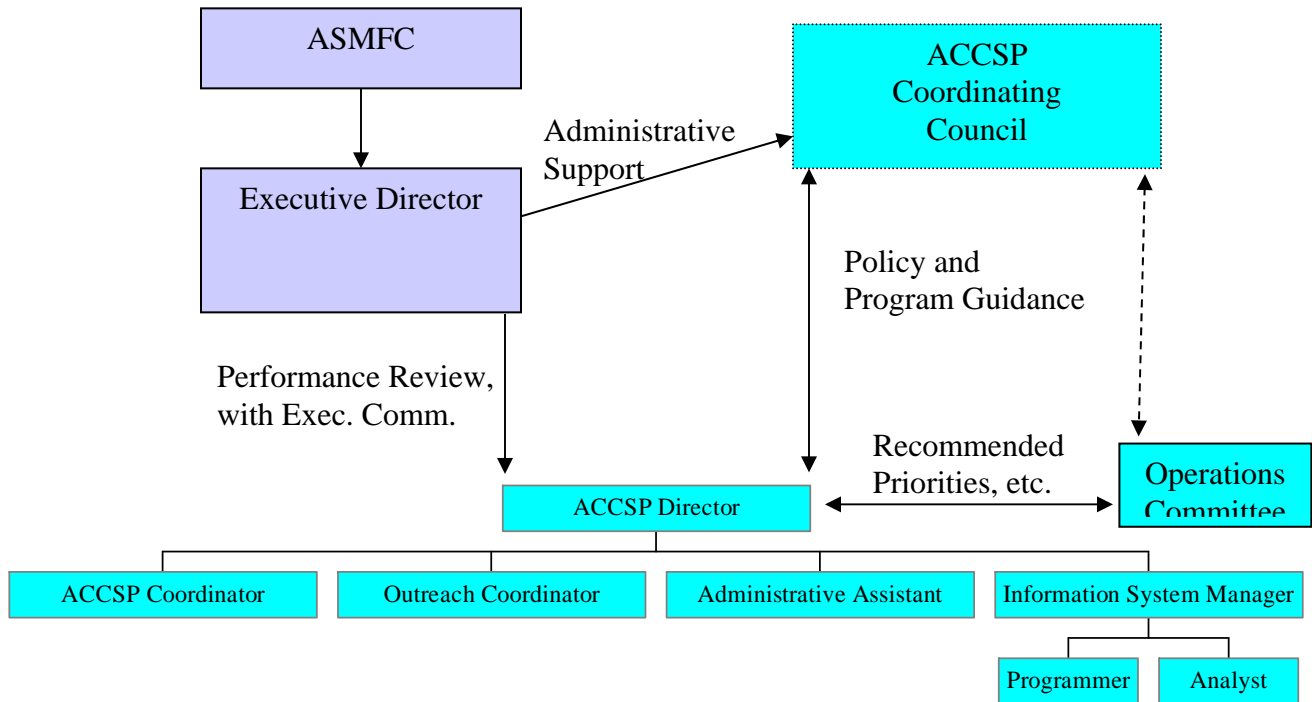
The Operations Committee includes representatives of all program partners. It recommends program priorities, funding criteria and other actions as requested by the

Coordinating Council, the Executive Committee and the ACCSP Director. It coordinates technical committee input into the program.

Numerous technical and advisory committees provide recommendations on various aspects of ACCSP design and implementation.

The ASMFC provides administrative support to the ACCSP. The ASMFC Executive Director conducts the Director's performance review with oversight by the Executive Committee.

ACCSP Organization Chart

Mission and Vision

Mission

> **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**

Vision

The partners' vision for the program for 2002-2006 is that:

> **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**

The vision involves making the program operational during the next five years. It identifies fisheries restoration and sustainability as the end result, emphasizes the role of ACCSP as the single source of Atlantic Coast data for fisheries management decision-making, and specifies the attributes that ACCSP must exhibit to be effective.

Goals and Strategies

ACCSP goals and strategies for 2002-2006 are set forth below. They are designed to realize the partners' five-year vision for the program -- becoming the source of fisheries statistics on the Atlantic coast; contributing to the restoration and sustainability of marine fisheries; and becoming an efficient, informative, user-friendly and reliable statistical system.

- **GOAL 1 - Produce complete, timely, and accurate fishery statistics.**

    Strategy 1.   *Develop partner-specific implementation plans and schedules that specify resource requirements.*

    Strategy 2.   *Identify and correct data gaps and deficiencies.*

    Strategy 3.   *Establish coast-wide data collection systems, standards and processes.*

    Strategy 4.   *Establish a unified and consistent data management system.*

    Strategy 5.   *Help the partners obtain adequate and stable funding, the human resources required and necessary statutory authority.*

    Strategy 6.   *Increase and improve industry participation.*

    Strategy 7.   *Develop and implement performance measures.*

- **GOAL 2 – Increase public and industry confidence in fishery information.**

    Strategy 1.   *Ensure protection of confidential data.*

    Strategy 2.   *Provide public access to fishery data.*

    Strategy 3.   *Give providers of the data the opportunity to audit their own data.*

    Strategy 4.   *Identify and promote awareness of uses and benefits of ACCSP-quality fishery data.*

    Strategy 5.   *Encourage management agencies to make the stock assessment process and other high-level analyses more understandable.*

    Strategy 6.   *Conduct public education, public information, and outreach activities.*

    Strategy 7.   *Develop and implement performance measures.*

- **GOAL 3 –** **Develop and maintain active support and participation by all Program Partners.**

  Strategy 1. *Develop partner-specific implementation plans and schedules that specify resource requirements.*

  Strategy 2. *Help the partners obtain adequate and stable funding, the human resources required and necessary statutory authority.*

  Strategy 3. *Develop a model for partner participation and funding.*

  Strategy 4. *Improve liaison between ACCSP staff and the partner agencies.*

  Strategy 5. *Communicate program status to partners on a routine basis.*

  Strategy 6. *Identify and promote awareness of uses and benefits of ACCSP-quality fishery data.*

  Strategy 7. *Develop and implement performance measures.*

- **GOAL 4 –** **Support the development and operation of a nationwide system for collecting, managing, and disseminating marine fisheries information.**

  Strategy 1. *Enhance liaison with the existing regional statistics programs.*

  Strategy 2. *Ensure information transfer between the ACCSP and the other regional statistics programs.*

  Strategy 3. *Participate in national workshops that address fishery statistics.*

Program Priorities

Achieving substantial progress toward the ACCSP vision requires making the program modules operational. All modules can not be made fully operational by 2006, so establishing priorities is important. The priorities for module implementation are:

1. Catch and effort data -- commercial, recreational and for hire.
    1a -- Permit and vessel registration data
2. Biological data
3. Releases, discards and protected species data
4. Quota monitoring data
5. Economic data
6. Sociological data

Catch and effort data and permit and vessel registration should be emphasized until these modules become fully operational. The catch and effort module is the heart of the ACCSP system. It is critical to assessment and has the highest priority for implementation. Commercial catch and effort data have top priority within the module, but the other two sub-modules are nearly as important because their data are necessary for managing specific fisheries. Implementing the permit and vessel registration module is almost as important as catch and effort data. That module is essential to managing data used for fisheries assessment because it tracks the source of the trip data in the catch and effort module.

Critical Success Factors

Demonstrating a positive impact on the fisheries management process is critical to the short-term success of ACCSP. Stakeholders expect the management process to be understandable, to be based on accessible data, and to yield decisions that produce tangible, beneficial effects. Creating this result requires:
- Complete coverage of all areas and fisheries,
- Data accuracy, and
- Data timeliness.

Operating Environment 2002-2006

The main factors expected to influence operations during the planning period are:

1. The availability of funding and human resources

Budget limitations and stagnant or eroded funding are a barrier to program progress, as are restrictions on the level of human resources that agencies can allocate to programs. Further, government hiring restrictions and salary structures frequently prevent the partners from acquiring or replacing people with the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities.

2. Pressure to produce tangible, beneficial results

All governmental levels are experiencing pressure to demonstrate results. Performance-based management ("managing for results") requires programs to develop performance goals, use them as a basis for budgeting and measure the results. For programs like ACCSP -- relatively new, "infrastructure-type" intergovernmental programs -- developing and measuring quantifiable results may be difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

3. Trends in fisheries management approaches and processes.

Current fisheries management -- balancing resource conservation with resource use -- generates demands for new and different kinds of data, more accurate and comprehensive information, more timely data and other statistical improvements. Environmental and conservation interests in particular are demanding more data.

There is also a trend toward managing smaller-scale units. State-by-state and even sub-state (rather than regional) allocations are one example of this trend, as are quotas for defined time periods. Management with precise temporal and spatial resolution requires more data collection for proper allocation decisions and real-time information for in-season quota management.

Other trends that are likely to affect the ACCSP program during the planning period include:
- The need for recreational fishing licenses.
- Industry concerns about discards and management regulations that are considered unnecessarily restrictive.
- Creating separate management categories for "for-hire" fisheries and multi-species fisheries.
- The inability of fisheries-dependent data to describe the status of resources. There is an increasing need for fishery independent data.

4. *Technology*

Technological change will continue to impact ACCSP. Automated data reporting, high-speed processing and data warehousing technology will give ACCSP the means to improve timeliness and accuracy, improve efficiency, provide access to individual data by fishermen and processors, and help provide a better basis for fisheries management decisions. However, privacy concerns must be alleviated. Fishermen are concerned about data confidentiality -- who has access to what data in the system and how it will be used. Such concerns will likely increase as the system expands to include social and economic data.

5. *Industry Perceptions*

Some members of the fisheries industry are suspicious of governmental fisheries data collection and fisheries management. Fisheries agencies and their data products are often viewed as biased, and some management decisions are seen as unnecessarily injurious to the industry. Recreational fishing interests have difficulty understanding statistical surveys in general and there are many misconceptions concerning the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey (MRFSS). A commonly heard perception is that the data used for management are inconsistent with what fishermen observe as they go about their occupation or hobby. Consequently, some portions of the industry have been reluctant to engage in trip-level reporting and to provide complete, timely, and accurate data. There have also been reporting roadblocks, including duplicate reporting requirements. Data accessibility and privacy are also an industry concern. Fishermen must be able to retrieve their own data from the system but also require confidentiality and system security. Within this overall climate, the ACCSP must establish itself as an independent, scientific, and objective data collection agent.

6. *Partner Participation*

Several partner participation issues need to be overcome. These include a lack of uniformity among partners in the willingness to move forward with the catch and effort data, a perception of inequitable participation and funding by the partners, and a lack of stakeholder involvement in ACCSP in some areas.

Documents Incorporated by Reference

1. ACCSP Memorandum of Understanding
2. ACCSP Program Design
3. ACCSP Outreach Strategic Plan
4. Proposed Implementation of a Fishing Vessel Registration and Fisheries Information System, 1999 National Marine Fisheries Service Report to Congress