Final Report of the

External Peer Review of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP)

September 19-21, 2006
Baltimore, MD

Introduction

Description of the ACCSP Program

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (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. It is envisioned that the ACCSP will be the source of fisheries statistics on the Atlantic Coast. The ACCSP is intended to be efficient, informative, user-friendly, and reliable (Source: ACCSP Mission and Vision Statements on website).

The ACCSP was established in 1995 through a memorandum of understanding signed by the 23 state and federal agencies with responsibility for marine fisheries management on the Atlantic coast. They include the state natural resource agencies responsible for marine fisheries in the 15 Atlantic coast states from Maine to Florida; the District of Columbia; the Potomac River Fisheries Commission; the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); the three regional Fisheries Management Councils (New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic), and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) (Source: ACCSP2004-2008 Implementation Plan).

The program was established 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 complete permit and vessel registration data, and a need for more and better data to support fisheries management. By establishing data collection standards and providing a data management system that incorporates state and federal data, ACCSP is intended to ensure that the fisheries-dependent statistics used for fisheries management are accurate, consistent, and compatible. The ACCSP intent is to build on and complement established programs where possible, and seeks to reduce redundant reporting burdens on fishermen.

The program is built on four basic principles of:
  • Cooperative development and implementation across jurisdictional lines,
  • Coast-wide data collection standards and a single, integrated data management system,
  • Data on all types of fisheries-dependent statistics for commercial, recreational, and for-hire fisheries, and,
  • A modular design for the different types of data (Figure 1, Source: ACCSP2004-2008 Implementation Plan).
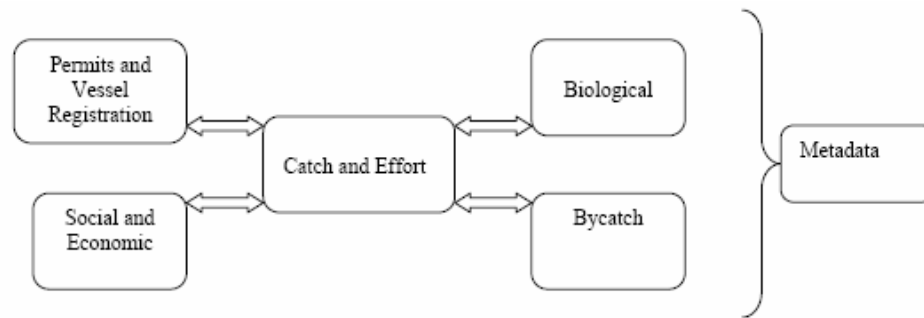
Figure 1: ACCSP Data Collection and Management Modules

Priorities for module implementation according to the 2002-2006 Strategic Plan are:
       1. Catch and effort data -- commercial, recreational and for hire;
       1a -- Permit and vessel registration data;
       2. Biological data;
       3. Bycatch, releases, discards and protected species data;
       4. Quota monitoring data;
       5. Economic data; and
       6. Sociological data.

Technical Source Document 6 (11/04) included priority 4 (quota monitoring) within priority 1 (catch and effort data), combined 5 and 6 (economic and sociological data), and established metadata as priority 6 (not prioritized in 2002 strategic plan).

Since the establishment of the ACCSP standards, ACCSP state and federal partners have contributed substantial resources to establish and maintain data collection programs and to modify existing programs to meet those standards. A congressional appropriation for ACCSP in 1999 provided an increase in funding to $1.5 million that allowed the program to begin financially assisting partners in establishing or modifying programs. Since 1999, the funding increased to the current level of $3.5 million. The ACCSP 2004-2008 Implementation Plan outlines the needs for significant new resources, in addition to the current ACCSP appropriation and partner contributions over the time period described by that document, in order to fully implement the ACCSP and thus significantly improve fisheries-dependent statistics for marine resource management on the Atlantic coast. Without these increases, the program will have made major improvements in commercial statistics for the Atlantic coast, but will not be able maintain status quo for the other types of data in the FY05-FY06 time period. The commercial catch and effort module has had the top priority and it was expected to be 99% complete with or without significant new resources; however, major gaps and shortcomings in the other types of fisheries statistics will not be closed (Source: ACCSP 2004-2008 Implementation Plan).

Charge to the Review Panel

The Peer Review Panel was tasked with providing an external review of the ACCSP program, with emphasis on a broad evaluation of how ACCSP is meeting the goals and mission of the program. This is the first external review of the ACCSP that has been undertaken. The Program Design of the ACCSP (November 2004 edition, p. 12) calls for external peer reviews, at least every five years, to evaluate the program's success in meeting the needs of fisheries managers, scientists, and fishermen.

Review Process

The external review panel held a 3-day meeting in Baltimore, MD on September 19-21, 2006. Prior to the meeting, documents were provided to the panel members, including:

> First 10 Year's Report (8/2006 update),
> Program Design of the ACCSP (11/2004),
> ACCSP Strategic Plan 2002-2006 (5/2002),
> ACCSP 2004-2008 Implementation Plan (3/2004),
> Funding Decision Process – ACCSP (8/2/2006),
> Coordinating Council Facilitated Session Executive Summary (8/15/2005), and
> MOU for establishing the ACCSP, including addenda of 5/1999 and 11/2002.

Presentations were made to the review panel by representatives of various committees and by staff of the ACCSP over the first 1.5 days of the meeting. After that time, the committee members deliberated on materials and presentations supplied. The ACCSP technical staff and Operations Committee Chair remained available for consultation when called upon, and were brought in at scheduled times to answer questions that had come up in deliberations. ACCSP staff also assisted the panel by typing outline notes of the topics to be reviewed in the report.

A draft report was completed during the meeting that covered the major topics to be reviewed, and refinements to the document were developed by e-mail. A final consensus document was finalized on September 26, 2006.

Following is a summary of the issues reviewed by the panel, challenges identified by the panel, and recommendations for approaches whereby the challenges might be addressed in the program.

Review of ACCSP Structure

1) Governance – the structure (Program organization chart) under which the ACCSP operates appears to weight the relationship with ASMFC higher than relations to the other partners and fishers.
   a) Observations:
      i) The Coordinating Council reviews budgets, staffing, and priorities. The individuals in this council should become more universally involved.
      ii) The purpose of the Executive Committee appears unclear.

       iii) The Operations Committee is the main communicator between the ACCSP and the various partners. Communication between the Operations Committee and Advisory Committee needs to be improved.

       iv) Historically the Advisory Committee has not been sufficiently engaged. The Advisory Committee needs a stronger sense of empowerment to improve attendance at meetings and achieve appropriate involvement in ACCSP support and development.

  b) Recommendations:

       i) Coordinating Council members should review their role and internal organization, including policy on reporting of fisheries-dependent data.

       ii) Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Committee and Finance Subcommittee. Encourage the Finance Subcommittee to focus on funding opportunities.

       iii) The Executive Committee should do performance reviews of the Director to demonstrate independence between the ACCSP and the ASMFC.

       iv) Develop and implement a communication plan to improve information flow among staff, committees, and partners.

2) Operating Environment.

  a) Observations:

       i) The original design for funding was for pilot projects. These projects would then be turned over to partners for maintenance. Fear of backsliding has forced the ACCSP to continue funding those projects. In an atmosphere of fixed budgets, continuing this practice will reduce funds available for pilot projects.

       ii) Support from the partners seems inconsistent due to multiple duties of staff and available resources within those agencies.

       iii) The perception is that data used for management are inconsistent with industry observations. This makes data collection more difficult.

       iv) The current funding level is not sufficient to maintain or grow ACCSP programs.

  b) Recommendations:

       i) ACCSP must decide whether or not to fund long term projects. If they decide to fund long term projects, they must reorganize proposal rankings.

       ii) Partners, as represented by Coordinating Council members, should strive to make ACCSP roles and responsibilities of personnel within their agency part of their annual performance standards.

       iii) More fully engage the Advisory Committee and Outreach Committee to address negative perceptions of data quality and management uses of data.

       iv) ACCSP needs to better advertise their successes and progress, and use the political weight of the ACCSP partners to seek additional funding.

3) Mission Goals and Priorities.

  a) Observations:

       i) ACCSP has proved to be highly successful at facilitating cooperation between fisheries management, science, and industry. This cooperation is key to achieving all of the ACCSP goals.

ii) The ACCSP Strategic Plan 2002-2006 clearly outlines the structure, mission and vision, goals and strategies, program priorities, and operating environment. However, the Plan is lacking in milestones and timelines for achieving the goals.

iii) Substantial activity and related funding are devoted to maintaining partner programs rather than development of improved data collections. Commitment to both development and maintenance of projects is not sustainable at the current funding level.

iv) ACCSP is trying to accomplish too many things in a short time frame with a limited budget and limited staff.

v) Improving the funding base requires results. Completing one of the modules in the data warehouse and marketing its usefulness to various partners and the public may improve chances for obtaining additional ACCSP funding. Similarly, achieving milestones in other long-term goals may also help increase funding.

b) Recommendations

i) The Strategic Plan should include milestones and timelines for achieving the goals. The section on Critical Success Factors should reflect the needs of partner commitment and cooperation, and sufficient funding.

ii) Develop and implement appropriate performance measures for all goals.

iii) Likelihood of implementation after the pilot project should be a high ranking criteria for funding.

Review of ACCSP Goals and Strategies

Goal 1 – Produce complete, timely, and accurate fishery statistics

1. Observations:
   a. The SAFIS program is an excellent example of ACCSP's leadership in collecting data from the partners by supplying state of the art information technology and information management programming in the collection and management of data.
   b. ACCSP has been highly successful in achieving unified data collection standards among partners. The effort of developing those standards may have taken longer than originally anticipated, though is understandable due to its degree of difficulty. As this task was critical to all succeeding efforts, it may have caused delay in the initiation of other tasks.
   c. The ACCSP data housed in SAFIS is currently being accessed for quota monitoring in some fisheries.
   d. The data warehouse will require identifying and loading the critical data necessary to provide useful fishery statistics for management and assessment. Different uses of fishery-dependent statistics will depend on different amounts of data availability, ranging from relatively short-term to very long-term datasets.

      e. In general, ranking of program priorities in the Strategic Plan is appropriate, but ranking of program priorities will change depending on achievement of data collection measures.

      f. Appropriate performance measures have neither been defined nor implemented.

      g. ACCSP and its partners are insufficiently funded to complete this goal.

2. Recommendations:

      a. Priorities for populating the data warehouse need to be defined with milestones and timelines in order to achieve adequate and timely data for specific uses.

      b. An Outreach Coordinator and more active Coordinating Council are necessary to enable ACCSP to help partners in obtain adequate and stable funding in addition to ACCSP limited resources.

      c. ACCSP should look for opportunities to more fully involve the Advisory Committee in addressing industry concerns regarding data accuracy. Consider alternative ways to increase participation of industry members in technical committees.

      d. Develop and implement appropriate performance measures for all goals.

Goal 2 – Increase public and industry confidence in fishery information

3. Observations:

      a. SAFIS data are not yet in ACCSP data warehouse.

      b. ACCSP has provided public access to non-confidential data where available in the data warehouse and appears to have sufficient practices in place to ensure protection of confidential data.

      c. The SAFIS system gives data providers the opportunity to audit their own data. Auditing of partner data that is loaded into the data warehouse occurs at the partner level.

      d. Until at least one module is populated regionally or programmatically, ACCSP is not ready to promote awareness of the data warehouse.

      e. ACCSP is actively engaged in publishing documentation about their data and applications.

      f. ACCSP refers to metadata in two contexts, 1) documentation of data, and 2) environmental and auxiliary data. This is often confusing.

4. Recommendations:

      a. Integrating SAFIS data into the ACCSP data warehouse is an opportunity to quickly develop customer awareness and loyalty in using the data warehouse.

      b. Continuing documentation of partner data is a priority.

      c. Need to clearly distinguish between metadata and environmental and auxiliary data.

      d. Goal 2, Strategy 5[1] is out of the scope of ACCSP.

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[1] Encourage management agencies to make the stock assessment process and other high-level analyses more understandable.

e. As soon as a data warehouse module is useful, Outreach needs to promote its use and benefits to its appropriate audience.

f. Outreach should work with IS to produce demonstration and training materials for the use of the data warehouse.

Goal 3 – Develop and maintain active support and participation by all Program partners

5. Observations:
    a. It is unclear where each of the partners stand in relation to each ACCSP module.
    b. Working with over 20 partners and numerous committees is challenging and requires cooperation and understanding at the Coordinating Council level.
    c. Attendance at meetings needs to be improved.
6. Recommendations:
    a. The Information Systems group should continue mentoring and assisting partners in improving their data management activities.
    b. Recommend periodic review of partner fisheries-dependent data collections and data management capabilities that support ACCSP goals every 2-5 years, in order to assure continued consistency with ACCSP standards and procedures.
    c. Encourage and assist partners in the development of proposals that fulfill ACCSP goals.
    d. Development of a Communication Plan should improve coordination and understanding between partners and advisors.
    e. Consider web-based training and conferencing to improve communication, reduce travel, and increase participation.
    f. ACCSP Director and staff should visit partners to develop partner specific implementation plans.

Goal 4 – Support the development and operation of a nationwide system for collecting, managing, and disseminating marine fisheries information

7. Observations:
    a. ACCSP has been a leader in the development of standards for fisheries data collections.
    b. ACCSP actively participates in the national Fisheries Information System Program.
    c. ACCSP has contributed to improved data collection in the recreational For-Hire sector along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.
    d. ACCSP has participated in numerous national data workshops.

8. Recommendations:
    a. Continue to promote and develop data standards to facilitate integration of data collections in the development of regional and national fisheries information systems.

Conclusions

As a whole, the review panel found the presentations very instructive in the operations of the ACCSP. They were well thought-out, and presented a variety of views on the program and how it related to committees and partners to the program. We believe that aspects of those presentations also served to communicate issues between panels that might otherwise have relatively little contact, unless they are holding joint meetings.

The ACCSP was established in 1995 under an MOU between 23 partner entities. The program was established to address deficiencies that existed in data collected by those agencies and create a repository for data that would allow persons to access from a single location. Data residing at ACCSP would use a uniform set of structures, and be linked using standardized codes that would allow similar data from multiple sources to be seamlessly linked to provide a more complete picture of recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries.

Over the past 10-plus years, ACCSP and its partner entities have worked to achieve the mission of one-stop shopping for data that would allow decision makers to use "good data" to make "good decisions". ACCSP efforts have achieved successes and have lead staff down paths where valuable lessons were learned.

The ACCSP staff and their partners have demonstrated successful completion of data collection and data integration that would not have been possible without such a facilitating organization. We expect additional achievements in the near term. While this document intentionally highlights areas that could be improved, the Peer Review Panel recommends that ACCSP staff and partners continue to work together to develop innovative solutions to data collection and storage problems that are best resolved cooperatively.

ACCSP Successes

ACCSP has helped foster an atmosphere of cooperation among partners that did not exist prior to the establishment of ACCSP. All 23 partners that signed the original MOU remain engaged in the ACCSP process.

Development of data collection standards within the ACCSP community has set the stage for a unified, coast-wide database of fisheries-dependent data. Promotion of these standards has now advanced toward national standards.

SAFIS development has allowed the ACCSP to populate its landings data tables sooner that would have occurred under previous data collection systems and allowed ACCSP to

expedite the use of commercial catch and effort data standards several years sooner than would otherwise have occurred.

Important Lessons Learned

ACCSP tried to develop too many projects too quickly, generating unrealistic expectations of when products would be implemented and ready for use. A better strategy would have been to focus on a realistic suite of projects and demonstrate successes with those projects to foster good will among end users.

Participation of some partners, especially as represented on the Coordinating Council, are not sufficient to achieve organization goals. ACCSP goals should be developed in line with the needs of its partners to maintain active engagement of partners and industry in achieving ACCSP goals. People and agencies associated with ACCSP must be vested in the successes and failures of the program. This includes everyone from fishermen to the ACCSP Coordinating Council and the agencies that they represent.

The Future

1. Update the ACCSP Strategic Plan. Include milestones and timelines that can promote and identify ACCSP successes. Focus resources and energies on implementing the catch and effort module by all partners in order to maintain momentum of the program and develop customer buy-in, loyalty, and commitment.
2. Revisit Program organizational structure in order to address communication and partner participation issues.
3. Expand Outreach to focus on advertising successes, including user training for ACCSP products.
4. Develop an ACCSP communication plan to improve ties among committees, ACCSP staff, and staff from partners.
5. Expand fundraising to support ACCSP goals.

Appendix A – Agenda

External Peer Review of ACCSP
Final Agenda
September 19-21, 2006

<u>Tuesday, September 19</u>

9:00 AM   Introduction and Overview – M. Osborn

10:30AM   Break

10:45 AM   ACCSP Committee Presentations
          10:45 AM   Operations Committee – C. Patterson
          11:15 AM   Advisory Committee – D. Stone
          11:45 AM   Commercial Technical Committee – C. Patterson

12:15 PM   Lunch

1:30 PM   ACCSP Committee Presentations, Continued
          1:30 PM   Recreational Technical Committee – K. Knowlton
          2:00 PM   Information Systems Committee – M. Cahall
          2:30 PM   Biological Review Panel – R. Wiggers
          3:00 PM   Bycatch Committee – John Lake

3:30 PM   Break

3:45 PM   ACCSP Committee Presentations, Continued
          3:45 PM   Committee on Economic and Social Sciences – Robert Robertson
          4:15 PM   Outreach Committee – Forbes Darby

4:45 PM   General Q&A, Wrap-up

5:00 PM   Adjourn

<u>Wednesday, September 20</u>

9:00 AM   Partner Perspectives
          9:00 AM   Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission – B.Beal
          9:30 AM   South Atlantic Fishery Management Council – TBD

10:00AM   Break

10:10 AM   Discussions about Partner Projects and Implementation – Participants: Peer
          Review Panel; Eric Smith (Coordinating Council Vice-Chair); Greg Power
          (NMFS NERO); Dave Van Voorhees (NMFS HQ); Bob Beal (ASMFC); Bruce
          Joule (ME); Cheri Patterson (NH); Tom Hoopes (Massachusetts); Harley Speir
          (MD); Dee Lupton (NC); Kathy Knowlton (GA); Maury Osborn and Mike
          Cahall (ACCSP)

12:10 PM	Lunch
1:15 PM	Panel Deliberations, ACCSP staff and Operations Committee Chair available for questions
3:30 PM	Break
3:45 PM	Panel Deliberations, ACCSP staff and Operations Committee Chair available for questions
5:00 PM	Adjourn

Thursday, September 21

9:00 AM	Panel Deliberations, ACCSP staff and Operations Committee Chair available for questions
10:30AM	Break
10:45 AM	Panel Deliberations, ACCSP staff and Operations Committee Chair available for questions
12:00 PM	Lunch
1:30 PM	Preparation of Panel Report, ACCSP Staff available with Word files and computers
3:30 PM	Break
3:45 PM	Preparation of Panel Report, ACCSP Staff available with Word files and computers
5:00 PM	Adjourn

Appendix B – Peer Review Panel and Attendees

1) Panel Members

Darrell Brannan, Elected Chair of Review Panel	Economist working with NPFMC & GMFMC	352-466-0936	d.brannan@hughes.net
Harry Blanchet	Louisiana DW&F	225-765-2889	hblanchet@wlf.louisiana.gov
Dan Georgianna	Umass Dartmouth	508-999-8414	dgeorgianna@umassd.edu
Don Orth	Virginia Tech	540-231-5919	dorth@vt.edu
Karen Sender	NMFS – PIFSC	808-985-5387	Karen.sender@noaa.gov
Jon Volstad	Versar, Inc., ESM Operations	410-740-6085	Jvolstad@versar.com

2) Attendees

Robert Beal, ASMFC Representative	ASMFC	202-289-6400	rbeal@asmfc.org
Megan Caldwell, ASMFC Representative	ASMFC	202-289-6400	mcaldwell@asmfc.org
Bruce Joule, ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee Member	Maine DMR	207-633-9500	Bruce.joule@maine.gov
Kathy Knowlton, ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee Chair	Georgia DNR	912-262-3122	Kathy_knowlton@dnr.state.ga.us
John Lake, ACCSP Bycatch Committee Chair	Rhode Island DFW	401-423-1942	John.lake@accsp.org
Dee Lupton, ACCSP Operations Committee Vice Chair	North Carolina DMF	252-726-7021	Dee.lupton@ncmail.net
Cheri Patterson, ACCSP Operations Committee Chair	New Hampshire F&G	603-868-1095	cpatterson@nhfgd.org
Greg Power, ACCSP Operations Committee Member	NMFS NERO	978-281-9143	greg.power@noaa.gov
Robert Robertson, Representative of ASMFC - CESS	UNH – Dept. of Research Economics	603-862-2711	robertr@christa.unh.edu
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Harley Speir, ACCSP Partner Member from Maryland	Maryland DNR	410-260-8303	hspeir@dnr.state.md.us
Dick Stone, ACCSP Advisory Committee Chair	ACCSP Advisory Cte	910-454-9888	Dstone9958@aol.com
Robert Wiggers, ACCSP Biological Review Panel Chair	South Carolina DNR	843-953-9363	Wiggersr@dnr.sc.gov
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David VanVoorhees, ACCSP Operations Committee Member	NOAA HQ	301-713-2328	Dave.van.voorhees@noaa.gov