



2008-2012 Strategic Plan

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

This document presents the strategic plan for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) for the years 2008-2012. Its purpose is to guide implementation and further development of the program. The plan:

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

Overview

The ACCSP is a state-federal cooperative partnership between twenty-three entities responsible for fisheries management, and fisheries data collection on the Atlantic Coast: 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 Understanding.

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, 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 ACCSP is managed collaboratively by committee; the Coordinating Council, composed of high level fisheries policy makers, is the governing body, the Operations Committee provides guidance in standards setting and funding priorities. An Advisory Committee provides industry input into the process. A number of other technical committees provide input into various aspects of the process.

The strategic plan for 2008-2012 builds on basic principles related to the goals stated in the ACCSP MOU, and the 2006 Peer Review Report:

- Development of data collection standards and the implementation of data collection programs will be done cooperatively, across jurisdictional lines,
- Consistent coast-wide data collection standards will be implemented by all Program Partners that include data on all fishing activities -- commercial, recreational, and for-hire fisheries,
- Once achieved, data collection improvements will be maintained,
- These data will be loaded and maintained in a central data repository and provided to data users through a user-friendly query system,
- Program planning will be done collaboratively, by consensus,
- The program will be responsive and accountable to partner and end-user needs, and
- Focus on activities that yield maximum benefit

By establishing and maintaining data collection standards and providing a data management system that incorporates state and federal data, ACCSP ensures that the best available statistics can be used for fisheries management.

Significant Accomplishments

Since its inception, the ACCSP has helped foster an improved atmosphere of cooperation among its partners. The program has succeeded in establishing coast-wide fisheries data standards that all program partners have agreed to adopt. All 23 partners remain engaged in the process, and the program has made substantial progress towards its goals.

Funded at approximately \$3.5M per year, the ACCSP has established a cooperative project system that allows program partners a great deal of flexibility in working towards ACCSP goals. Normally \$2M is distributed to between 10 and 15 partner projects each year, the remaining \$1.5M is used to operate the program itself.

Commercial data collection (landings or catch/effort) by state and federal program partners now largely meet the ACCSP trip level standards. These data are loaded as a matter of routine into the ACCSP data warehouse, and made available to data users.

Recreational catch estimates are also loaded into the data warehouse as a matter of routine. The ACCSP has been quite successful in the creation of unique data analysis tools for recreational data.

Critical Success Factors (driving forces)

Vision - To be the principal source of fisheries-dependant information on the Atlantic coast through the cooperation of all program partners in the collection and processing of common fisheries data, and dissemination of the information for purposes of fisheries science and management.

Mission - Produce dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries that are collected, processed and disseminated according to common standards agreed upon by all program partners.

Values –

- Accurate data are required for good fisheries management decisions.
- Coordination and collaboration amongst the program partners are essential for success.
- The Program must be responsive to the changing needs for fisheries data
- Processes must be open and transparent but confidential data must be protected
- Data shall be accessible and easy to use
- Responsibilities should be matched with available resources

Program Goals

The ACCSP will pursue six major goals during the five-year planning period, from 2008 through 2012 to ensure user needs are met.

1. Create and manage a fully integrated data set that represents the best available fisheries data
2. Continue working with the ACCSP Program Partners to improve fisheries data collection in accordance with the ACCSP standards
3. Strengthen collaboration and involvement among partners at all levels
4. Monitor and improve the usefulness of ACCSP's products and services
5. Improve outreach and education and maintain support from all stakeholders and constituents
6. Support nationwide systems used for collecting, managing, and disseminating marine fisheries information as defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization of 2006

Program Priorities

Early in the program, the ACCSP divided fisheries-dependent data into four major areas, and determined overall program priorities based on these areas. The first phase was to establish common data standards, and collection methods. Then the program would move forward by assisting program partners in achieving these standards, while at the same time building a data warehouse to house fishery data. Recognizing that the collection and dissemination of metadata is an essential component of each program priority, the priorities for 2008-2012 are, in priority order:

1. Catch, effort, and landings (including licensing, permit and vessel registration data)

2. Biological data
3. Releases, discards and protected species data
4. Economic and sociological data

Goal Achievement strategies and issues

Goal 1 – *Create and manage a fully integrated data set that represents the best available fisheries data.*

Ready access to accurate, complete data is a critical requirement of fisheries data users. Achieving this goal will provide tangible benefits to all users of fisheries data by reducing the resources required to obtain, format, and compile disparate data sources.

The ACCSP accomplishes this by providing a unified dataset that combines disparate partner data into a standardized data warehouse, representing the best available data, presented in an appropriate format for the purpose. The ACCSP will work with each partner to incorporate the best available data into the data warehouse.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Identify fishery dependent data sources and develop processes to integrate these data sets
2. Identify, document, and address gaps and deficiencies in the ACCSP data warehouse
3. Develop, implement, and maintain quality assurance / quality control standards
4. Populate historic data from 1980 to present for catch/effort
5. Populate historic data from 1980 to present for biological data

Goal 2 -- *Continue working with the ACCSP Program Partners to improve fisheries data collection in accordance with the ACCSP standards.*

The ACCSP partners recognize that improving fisheries statistics starts with the information gathered in the field. The program aims to implement ACCSP standards in data collection programs, and ensure that program partners maintain existing standards for trip level fisheries data. The standards will be maintained through the collaborative action of ACCSP committees.

The implementation of electronic reporting, and the redevelopment of trip level reporting systems in some partner agencies has contributed to substantial data improvements.

The implementation of data collection programs will continue to follow the ACCSP priorities by module of 1) catch/effort, 2) biological sampling, 3) at-sea observer & discards, 4) economic and sociological data. Achieving this goal is the first step to accurate, reliable, and timely fisheries statistics.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Improve coast-wide data collection systems and processes through the collaborative development process
2. Develop, implement, and maintain quality assurance standards
3. Create value-added tools for partners and data providers to improve and accelerate their ability to implement their data programs
4. Periodically review standards for minimum data elements and codes through the ACCSP committee process
5. Monitor and report on partner implementation of ACCSP standards

Goal 3 -- *Strengthen collaboration and involvement among partners at all levels.*

ACCSP partners' understanding and involvement of ACCSP activities is crucial to the success of the program. Not only are their expertise and endorsement key to the development of data collection standards, activities taken on by the program are meant to meet their needs. Their participation requires cooperation and collaboration across the numerous state and federal agencies operating on the Atlantic Coast. This goal aims to strengthen relationships by engaging partners as active participants, and improving infrastructure for information exchange and communication.

The ACCSP has always been managed by collaborative committees. Committees are formed as necessary with the exception of the Coordinating Council, Operations Committee, and Advisory Committee, which are standing committees. These committees have been very successful in fostering the collaborative environment essential to the success of the Program.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Engage high level managers in the ACCSP process
2. Manage and maintain committee processes
3. Provide an efficient internal communications infrastructure
4. Create processes to monitor the programs success in achieving partner expectations and user needs

Goal 4 -- *Monitor and improve the usefulness of ACCSP's products and services.*

The ACCSP recognizes success will be measured by the user experience in utilizing ACCSP data in fisheries management decisions. The Program strives to be the principal data source for fisheries scientists and managers.

Fisheries management agencies need the ability to access fisheries statistics quickly and easily. The ACCSP will respond to user needs by providing flexible tools to accurately represent and disseminate available data. Achieving this goal will improve awareness and acceptance of the ACCSP and improve our utility to all users.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Improve integration of ACCSP data in stock assessment processes
2. Provide protection of confidential data while providing public access to summary data
3. Coordinate with the various fisheries management agencies to identify and develop innovative data products.
4. Expand online query tools, documentation, and user training opportunities
5. Respond efficiently to custom data queries
6. Create processes to monitor the programs success in achieving user expectations

Goal 5 -- *Improve outreach and education and maintain support from all stakeholders and constituents.*

The ACCSP aims to foster active support and participation of program stakeholders and constituents. The first step in building a network of ACCSP advocates is raising awareness and interest in current products and services. Groups targeted are those that have the greatest interest in fisheries data: fisheries managers, stock assessment scientists, social and economic scientists, commercial and recreational fishermen, non-governmental organizations, legislators and media.

In addition to information sharing among constituents, ACCSP strives to strengthen relationships by engaging partners as active participants. Many ACCSP outreach activities will be coordinated through states, fishery management councils and federal Partner agencies. Tactics involve the ACCSP's

Outreach Coordinator utilizing all available resources, including the ACCSP's Outreach Committee, Partner organizations and established third party entities, such as membership organizations and media.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Improve public and partner understanding of ACCSP mission, vision, products and services through expanded information and education to stakeholders and constituents via a new Outreach Strategic Plan
2. Establish metrics designed to measure the success of the ACCSP in general, and the ACCSP's role in the fisheries management decision making process
3. Provide incentives for more active participation by the fishing community
4. Establish a public recognition process to acknowledge the contributions of volunteer partners
5. Increase the public visibility of the ACCSP and the use of ACCSP data
6. Encourage the use of the data warehouse
7. Increase partner participation in the ACCSP process
8. Raise awareness of the need for increased program funding

Goal 6 -- *Support nationwide systems for collecting, managing, and disseminating marine fisheries information as defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization of 2006.*

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization of 2006 designates the ACCSP as the Atlantic coast anchor of the national Fisheries Information System (FIS). The ACCSP has been an active participant in the FIS since its inception, providing regional input in the creation of the program and providing assistance in crafting the program structures and processes. FIS is analogous in many ways to the ACCSP in terms of the standardization of processes and data. ACCSP has been able to share much of its experience with the FIS.

Regional collaboration has been the backbone of the ACCSP since its inception, especially with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Fisheries Information Network (GULFIN). Much of the early work of the program was done in direct collaboration with GULFIN.

The ACCSP adopted the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics System (MRFSS) as its standard for recreational data collection, and has been very involved with recreational data issues. The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) represents the next evolution of recreational data collection, and it is critical that the ACCSP stay involved as the program is changed.

The ACCSP will meet its responsibilities to the FIS, continue active collaboration with other regional Fisheries Information Networks, and participate in the Marine Recreational Program.

Strategies to Achieve Goal

1. Support and participate in the FIS process and execute projects as appropriate
2. Work with FIS information systems personnel to ensure that data from the ACCSP are made available to the FIS database system
3. Conduct routine coordination meetings with the GULFIN
4. Work with GULFIN information systems staff to ensure that data systems remain compatible
5. Support and participate in the MRIP process as requested by the NMFS
6. Coordinate with MRIP personnel to ensure that MRIP data products are compatible with existing ACCSP systems
7. Participate in national workshops that address fishery statistics

Major Milestones

Develop and implement a comprehensive Communications Plan (Goals 4 and 5) – 2008

A comprehensive Communications Plan is essential for the success of all of the outreach and partner satisfaction-related goals. This plan will cover internal and external communications with the goal to keep interested parties informed and educated.

Begin a review of the collection and management of Biological Data (Goals 1 and 2) – 2008

The second major program priority is the collection, storage and dissemination of biological data. As we expect to have the catch/effort priority largely accomplished, it is appropriate to begin this process.

Develop Program Success Metrics (Goals 4 and 5) - 2008

Measuring the success or failure of the program is critical if we wish to enjoy the confidence of fishery managers and stakeholders. The intention is to create a set of metrics that can be repeated over time to gauge the relative position of the program.

Begin Routine Program Assessments (Goals 4 and 5) - 2009

Implement the metrics developed in 2008.

Complete the Phase two of the Population of the Catch/Effort data base (Goals 1 and 2) – 2009

The catch/effort data set will be populated in two phases. The first phase (roughly back to the mid 1990s) was completed in 2007. The second phase will populate the database from 1980 to present

Develop a data collection and management plan for Biological data - 2009

Based on the review to be completed in 2008, an integrated plan for biological data will be developed.

Perform a Program Standards Review (Goals 1 through 5) – 2010

By 2010, the ACCSP standards will be 12 years old (dating from the initial publication of the Program Design). The standards will be reviewed for completeness and relevance, and a new Program Design will be published based on the results.

Complete the population of the Biological Data Warehouse (existing data sets) (Goals 1 and 2) - 2012

There are vast arrays of existing biological data sets that must be surveyed, transformed and loaded into the data warehouse. The ability to couple catch/effort data and the biological data in the data warehouse will be a major step forward for the ACCSP.

Operations Planning Process

ACCSP will use this Strategic Plan as a guide for Operations Plans used to direct activities of ACCSP staff, committees, and partners in continued progress of the ACCSP. These plans are developed annually based on current priorities and progression of committee, staff, and partner work. Annual Operations Plans derive directly from the Strategic Plan with modifications based on progress to date.

Challenges to Success 2008-2012

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

1. *The availability of funding and human resources*

State and federal agencies are always under funding pressure. While the ACCSP partners recognize the importance of adequate funding for fisheries statistics, programs compete with other initiatives that are perceived as having more immediate, tangible benefits. In order for the program to succeed, additional funding and human resources will have to be allocated to both the ACCSP and agency statistics programs.

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.

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, as ACCSP strives to improve data access, privacy concerns must be continually recognized and addressed. Partners and industry are concerned about data confidentiality -- who has access to what data in the system. Such concerns will likely increase as the system expands.

5. Industry Perceptions

Industry has been historically mistrustful of government data collection and regulations. There is a perception that collected data are inaccurate and that consequent regulatory actions are often not necessary.

Research findings suggest that this may be because historically, they have not felt included in the process. They are not involved with analyzing the data, and they feel that they do not have access to the data once it is collected. The ACCSP attempts to mitigate this by including industry representatives on its advisory panel.

Compounding these frustrations is their general consensus that agencies take too long to process the data, making it less useful as a basis for real-time management decisions. One of the ACCSP's overriding objectives is to prove to this audience that it is making the process more efficient, credible and attentive to industry's needs.

Incorporated by reference

- I. MOU creating the ACCSP
- II. Strategic Plan for the ACCSP, 2002-2006
- III. ACCSP Outreach Strategic Plan
- IV. ACCSP Program Design