SEDAR

Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review

SEDAR 30

U.S. Caribbean Queen Triggerfish

SECTION III: Review Report

March 2013

SEDAR
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WORKSHOP TIME AND PLACE

The SEDAR 30 Peer Review Process was conducted via a CIE (Center for Independent Experts) Desk Review in lieu of a Panel Review Workshop. Three reviewers were selected by provided the CIE and provided with the assessment report and background materials. Each reviewer conducted a review of the material and produced an independent review report. Those reports are included below.

1.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:
   a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?
   b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?
   c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?
   d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?
2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.
   a) Are methods scientifically sound and robust?
   b) Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?
   c) Are the methods appropriate for the available data?
3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:
   a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?
   b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

d) Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?

e) Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?

4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:

a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?

b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?

c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?

d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results ?

5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.

- Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods
- Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.

- Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
- Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.

7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.

1.3 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

CIE Reviewers

Massimiliano Cardinale ....CIE Reviewer
Yong Chen ....CIE Reviewer
M. Kurtis Trzcinski...CIE Reviewer

2. CIE REVIEWER REPORTS

Center for Independent Experts (CIE) Independent Peer Review Report of the SEDAR 30 Caribbean Blue Tang and Queen Triggerfish assessment review

Dr. Massimiliano Cardinale

March 2013

Executive Summary

• This document is the individual Center for Independent Experts (CIE) review report of the SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessments conducted during February 2013 and provided at the request of the CIE (see Attachment A).

• This report solely represents the views of the independent reviewer (Dr. Massimiliano Cardinale).

• This reviewer does not completely agree with all of the findings reported in the SEDAR 30 Caribbean queen triggerfish assessment report, while the reviewer is in general agreement concerning the blue tang assessment report. Findings that are reported in the SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessments reports are not necessarily fully repeated in this individual report. This report focuses on clarifications of elements contained in the Summary Report and some additional views of the individual reviewer about how data for queen triggerfish could have been better explored to derive more robust estimates of exploitation rates and thus stock status.

• The assessment team tackled all of the review terms of reference (TORs).

• This reviewer believes that the SEDAR 30 has done a good job in carrying out the assessment, analysing all available source of data, modelling uncertainty and providing a full sensitivity analysis of both the data and the models. However, the reviewer is of the opinion that data for queen triggerfish are underutilised and that the reader is left with the doubt that more could have been done in terms of data analysis to derive estimates of exploitation rates and thus stock status for this species.

• For Caribbean blue tang, the report gives the impression that stability in average length is taken as an indication of a low level of F. The reviewer disagrees with this idea, and considers that given the available information the status of the stock should be considered as unknown.

• Further recommendations aimed at improving the data source used in the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang assessment were made. These are based on additional future research and further re-analysis and modelling of the original data set.

Introduction

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessments reports and associated background documents containing detailed information on the data used in the assessment were provided to the independent reviewer (Dr. Massimiliano Cardinale) well in advance of the deadline scheduled for the 28th of February 2013. The reports were reviewed at the request of the CIE (see Attachment A).

Description of review activities

This review was undertaken by Dr. Massimiliano Cardinale as desk work during February 2013 at the request of the CIE (see Attachment A).

Relevant documents (see bibliography, Attachment B) were made available four weeks prior to the deadline through email and via a link to an ftp or SEDAR 30 website (https://grunt.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Documents.jsp?WorkshopNum=30&FolderType=Assessment). The documentation was reviewed prior to the deadline and the deadline was met. The background information and assessments of Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish was presented through two documents (see Attachment A). Background information relevant to this review are presented in a series of appendices, including: CIE Statement of Work (Attachment A); a bibliography (Attachment B), report format (Annex 1); Terms of Reference (Annex 2); Comments included here are provided following the terms of reference (TORs) (Annex 2) and are those of this independent reviewer only. The list of main documents provided as background material is included in Attachment B. Additional presentations and documentations were made available during the meeting and were continuously updated under the ftp or SEDAR 30 website (https://grunt.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Documents.jsp?WorkshopNum=30&FolderType=Assessment).

Summary of findings

Recommendations

1. Estimate time series of landings per unit of effort (LPUE) for Puerto Rico queen triggerfish and investigate the possibility to derive the proportion of queen triggerfish within triggerfish and blue tang within surgeonfish from the Trip Interview Program (TIP) data. This would allow estimating the total number of fish landed by size class for the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) for both species, combining landings information with the size frequency data from the TIP (see also comments under ToR2).

2. Explore also the quality of the effort data for both species from the TIP, with the aim to produce an effort standardized time series of length frequency distribution (LFD) for queen triggerfish and blue tang.

3. **Queen triggerfish catch data from Puerto Rico traps and pots:** Estimate the total number of fish landed by size class for the main gear (i.e. traps and pots), combining the landings information with the size frequency data from the TIP; Statistical slicing of the total number of fish landed by size class by the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) to estimate the number of fish landed per age class for years with sufficient length measurements (i.e. for years from 1983 to 1988; a general rule of thumb would be to use years with more than 150 or 200 individuals); Estimation of Z from the catch curve or using a pseudocohort analysis (i.e. VIT when only one or few years of data are available); Conducting a yield-per-recruit (YPR) analysis to estimate F_{01} as proxy for F_{MSY} to be compared against estimate of M

4. **TIP data of queen triggerfish:** Explore the use of effort data from the TIP survey to produce an effort standardized time series of LFD for years with sufficient length measurements (a general rule of thumb would be to use years with more than 150 or 200 individuals); statistical slicing of the total number of fish caught by size class by the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) to estimate the total number of fish per age class; estimation of Z from the catch curve or using a pseudocohort analysis (i.e. VIT when only one or few years of data is available)

5. The reviewer considers that ProdBiom method (see Abella et al.,1997) might be more appropriate for the estimation of M as it combines in a single framework the growth parameters, the length weight relationship and information on the longevity of the species. Or at least it should be used along with the other methodologies presented in the reports.
6. The reviewer is of the opinion that the combination of large L_{inf} and low k are the most plausible set of VBF parameters for queen triggerfish, given what has been presented in SEDAR 30 AW 03 and according to information available in the literature, and therefore they should have been given more weight in the evaluation of the stock status.
7. The reviewer considers F_{MSY}=M as a large oversimplification, which ignores selectivity that has a large impact on F_{MSY}. The assessment team should try to estimate catch at age data from LFD (which is possible for certain combinations of years and gear type) and conduct a VIT and an YPR analysis for queen triggerfish based on selected yearly data to verify how realistic is the F_{MSY}=M assumption.
8. For Caribbean blue tang, there is some implication in the report that stability in average length is taken as an indication of a low level of F. The reviewer disagrees with this idea, and considers that given the available information the status of the stock should be considered as unknown.
9. Selectivity studies should be conducted to estimate the effect of the mesh size of the traps on the amount and size distribution of the catches of Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang.

Terms of Reference (ToR)

ToR1: Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:

a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?

b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?

c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?

d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach

Puerto Rico reported landings of Caribbean queen triggerfish and Caribbean blue tang have been adjusted for incomplete reporting using so-called expansion factors to estimate the total real landings. It is however unclear, both from the assessment report and from the background documents, how the expansion factor has been estimated (which is the source of the factors), how large the factors are, and if they vary between years for the different areas.

In general, I feel that the landings and effort data are underutilised, especially for Puerto Rico queen triggerfish, for which landings are reported to the level of species. Even the simple estimation of a LPUE time series for Puerto Rico, would have been an useful addition, especially for evaluating estimated time-changes in mortality derived from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method. Also, simple production models might have been tested as an attempt to validate or corroborate the results from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method.

I accept that it is difficult to utilise landings data for Caribbean blue tang as they are reported within the species-group surgeonfish, but especially for short times series such as St. Thomas and St. John, an assumption of constant proportion of landings of blue tang within the species-group surgeonfish could be made. This would allow building CPUE time series also for the other areas and species. In general, I wonder if the TIP data could provide an estimate of the proportion of both species in the landings, when landings data are provided as a species group instead that at the species level. In other words, it would be a useful addition to know if an estimate of the proportion of queen triggerfish within triggerfish and blue tang within surgeonfish might be derived from the TIP data from which the LFD are also derived.

Although it is reasonable to assume that some form of effort data has been collected during the TIP, it is not clear from the assessment reports if such information exists. This has been specified neither in the assessment reports nor in the background information document (i.e. SEDAR 30 AW 02). Effort data from TIP would give a rather different dimension to the LFD as they could provide information more similar to a survey and thus could be useful for estimating stock parameters such as Z and relative changes in population size, especially for queen triggerfish.

Again, considering the large uncertainty associated with the estimate of Z from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method (i.e. violation of constant selectivity assumption, and uncertainty in the VBF parameters), the assessment team should have tried to produce another source of information concerning the exploitation status of the queen triggerfish stock.

I agree instead with the way the assessment team dealt with the available data for Caribbean blue tang. The large uncertainty in the reported Von Bertalanffy (VBF) parameters and, given the fact that this species presents an initial fast growth but a very high longevity, makes the length data uninformative regarding individual ages after age 5. With such large uncertainty in the basic growth parameters, to which both M and F (and F_{MSY}) depend and, due to the peculiar growth characteristics of the species, I agree with the assessment team that it is not possible to use length data to define the stock status of the species. A further difficulty with the use of length data for Caribbean blue tang is the fact that L_c is almost as large as L_{inf}, which makes most of the age classes for which the age could be in theory derived from length information not fully exploited. In this situation, age data are crucial for a robust assessment of this species.

Recreational data for both species are also presented but they are too sparse for allowing any kind of analysis. In this context, the reviewer agrees with the evaluation made by the assessment team.

Recommendations: Estimate time series of CPUE for Puerto Rico queen triggerfish and investigate the possibility of deriving the proportions of queen triggerfish within triggerfish and blue tang within surgeonfish from the TIP data. This would allow estimating the total number of fish landed by size class for the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) for both species, combining landings information with the size frequency data from the TIP (see also comments under ToR2).

Explore also the quality of the effort data for both species from the TIP, with the aim to produce an effort standardized time series of LFD for queen triggerfish and blue tang.

ToR2: Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.

a) Are methods scientifically sound and robust?

b) Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?

The methodology (i.e Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method) used to estimate Z has been applied correctly and I consider it as one that is robust and is an appropriate alternative for deriving estimates of exploitation given the available data. However, as for the landings data, and considering the uncertainty associated with the method used, I consider that the length data for queen triggerfish have been underutilised. Thus, other methods should have been used in conjunction with the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method to derive estimate of exploitation rates for this species.

For queen triggerfish from Puerto Rico, length frequency data (LFD) from the trap and pot fisheries between 1983 and 1988 are sufficient to estimate the total number of fish caught by the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) by age class, at least for the first 4-6 age classes, which constitutes the main bulk of the catches (compare for example Figures 9 and 10). A recent method has been developed (statistical slicing; see Kell and Kell 2011; Scott et al., 2011) to generate age-structured data for stock assessment from length frequency data and VBF growth curve parameters. The method is very flexible and offers a sophisticated framework for converting numbers at length to numbers at age as well as estimating the mean length at age assuming different distributions of the length data (i.e. Gaussian, gamma and lognormal).

This would allow the assessment team to obtain another and possibly more robust estimate of Z and F (assuming that M is known) from the same length data and to compare them with those derived from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method. In theory, this would also allow for conducting a yield per recruit (YPR) analysis (at least based on the historical part of the times series) and derive estimates of F_{MSY} (using F_{01} as a proxy), which are independent from the estimates of M and take into account selectivity at size/age. Historical estimates of F would be crucial to evaluate the results from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method as well as YPR would be important to define a more robust estimate of F_{MSY}.

However, I also realise that this is conditional on the standardization of the LFD by fishing effort to make them comparable between years and to allow for the catch curve analysis and estimates of Z. For example, the yearly number of trips from which the LFD are derived would be a reasonable index of the effort and sufficient to make the LFD comparable between years. This would allow the use of the statistical slicing method and the catch curve analysis (see also comments and recommendations under ToR2).

Another method that can be used to derive estimates of mortality is the VIT (Lleonart and Salat, 2000), which is even more flexible because it can be used also when a single year of LFD and growth parameters are available, thus no effort standardization of the LDF is needed. The method is extensively used in similar data situations with several Mediterranean stocks (e.g. STECF 2012). VIT conducts a virtual population analysis (VPA) assuming a steady state. This is a rather strong assumption for species such as small pelagic fish species, with highly fluctuating abundance due to both variable recruitment and relatively low number of age classes, but it is a much more likely assumption for demersal fish species such as triggerfish for which the population is made up of several age classes. As it requires knowledge of the catches over one year only (Lleonart and Salat, 2000) it might be used for years, areas and species for which the data allow for such an analysis. In addition to the above mentioned data, VIT requires a number of biological parameters as growth, length-weight relationship, natural mortalities and percentage mature by size or age, and proportions caught by each fishing gear (when available, but these parameters are not necessary). These parameters are all available for queen triggerfish and reported in SEDAR 30 AW 02 and thus they might be used.

For several years, the sample size of queen triggerfish from Puerto Rico is too low to conduct such kinds of analyses. However, this also applies to the estimation of average length used in the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method and constitutes a further argument why the assessment team should have combined different approaches to estimate Z and tried a more thorough utilisation of the available data, especially for those years with large sample size of individual length data.

The situation is different for blue tang due to the large uncertainty in the reported Von Bertalanffy (VBF) parameters and, given the fact that the species presents an initial fast growth but a very high longevity, it makes the length data uninformative regarding individual ages after age 5. Therefore, for blue tang, the exploration of the slicing method and the VIT are not feasible and the reviewer agrees with the assessment team concerning the methodology used for assessing this species.

Another method to estimate M is ProdBiom (Abella et al., 1997). The main advantage of this method is that it combines in a single framework the growth parameters, the length weight relationship and information on the longevity of the species. Also, it is able to derive estimates of M by age class, which are very useful in VIT models. It generally gives values of M which are slightly smaller than other methods, thus also avoiding failure to detect overfishing because of unrealistically high values of M. The reviewer considers that Prodbiom might be more appropriate for the estimate of M or it should be used along with the other methodologies presented.

In general, the reviewer considers that the reader is left with the doubt that much more could have been done if there had been a few more assumptions for the queen triggerfish, or at least the assessment team should have explored the possibility of using different methodologies than the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method to derive estimates of exploitation rates and F_{MSY}.

Recommendations:

Queen triggerfish catch data from Puerto Rico trap and pots

- Estimate the total number of fish caught by size class for the main gear (i.e. traps and pots), combining the landings information with the size frequency data from the TIP.

- Statistical slicing of the total number of fish landed by size class by the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) to estimate the number of fish landed per age class for years with sufficient length measurements (i.e. for years from 1983 to 1988; a general rule of thumb would be to use years with more than 150 or 200 individuals).

- Estimation of Z from the catch curve or using a pseudocohort analysis (i.e. VIT when only one or few years of data are available).

- Conducting an YPR analysis to estimate F_{01} as a proxy for F_{MSY} to be compared against using M as a proxy for F_{MSY}.

TIP data of queen triggerfish

- Explore the use of effort data from the TIP survey to produce an effort standardized time series of LFD for years with sufficient length measurements (a general rule of thumb would be to use years with more than 150 or 200 individuals).

- Statistical slicing of the total number of fish caught by size class by the main gear (i.e. traps and pots) to estimate the total number of fish per age class.

- Estimation of Z from the catch curve or using a pseudocohort analysis (i.e. VIT) when only one or few years of data is available.

Use the ProdBiom method (Abella et al., 1997) to estimate M along with the other methodologies presented here.

ToR3: Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:

a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?
b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?
c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

Generally, a lot of emphasis is given in estimating the uncertainty, which is obviously fine, but with little critical considerations of the likelihood of each of the tested scenarios. This will automatically overestimate the uncertainty and make the evaluation of the stock status even more complicated. This is a more prominent issue for Caribbean queen triggerfish compared to blue tang. As the assessment team correctly pointed out, the key items here are the VBF parameters, which are used to estimate Z, M and F (and F_{MSY}) for both species. It is clear from Table 7 in the assessment report and Table 2 in SEDAR30 AW 03 that the L_{inf} of queen triggerfish estimated by Manooch and Drennon (1987) is generally lower or much lower than L_{max} estimated by other studies in the same area, although no details are given on the number of individuals analysed in these studies. L_{inf} is assumed to range from 37.3 to 45.6, which is in the lower range of the reported L_{max}. The impression I have is that L_{inf} is likely larger than 46.5 and thus the sensitivity analysis should have included also larger L_{inf} and lower k as L_{inf} and k are generally negatively correlated. This has direct consequences on the estimation of M and F, which are likely to be over- and underestimated, respectively. Moreover, L_{inf} and k are negatively correlated, which makes several of the scenarios tested and presented in figure 17, 19 and 21 unrealistic and also inflates the level of uncertainty in the Z estimates. Interestingly, figure 17, 19 and 21 showed that Z estimated for the combination of extreme range of L_{inf} and k are very similar, again corroborating the idea that uncertainty is largely overestimated by the way the sensitivity analysis is set up.

The reviewer is of the opinion that the combination of large L_{inf} and low k are the most plausible set of VBF parameters, given what has been presented in SEDAR30 AW 03 and therefore they should have been given more weight in the evaluation of stock status.

The situation is different for blue tang due to the large uncertainty in the reported VBF parameters, which, together with the fact that the species presents an initial fast growth but a very high longevity, makes the length data uninformative of individual age after age 5. Thus, the reviewer agrees with the assessment team that it is not possible to precisely define the stock status for the Caribbean blue tang and that age-based data are crucial in the future. Stability in mean length is difficult to interpret in this case, and without a robust estimate of the absolute vale of Z it cannot be interpreted as an indication of sustainable fishing. Thus, I consider that the stock status is unknown and age data are needed in the future as also pointed out by the assessment team in their general conclusions.

A lot of emphasis has been given to test the effect of L_c on the Z estimates, which was then revealed by the sensitivity analysis to be very small, instead of critically assigning different likelihood to the different scenarios. The authors correctly stress that the estimates are dependent on the parameters but they fail to give critical support to one or fewer scenario over the others to reduce the number of scenarios and help with the evaluation of the stock status.

The impression is that the assessment team is more prone to consider queen triggerfish as being not subject to overexploitation although they correctly stress the fact that the data are not enough to make firm conclusions on the stock's status. However, from Tables 19 and 21, several scenarios indicated that F was in excess of F_{MSY}, which I would interpret as an indication of overfishing being highly likely but this does not emerge from the text of the report. The reviewer also considers F_{MSY}=M as a large oversimplification, which ignores selectivity that has a large impact on F_{MSY}. I would try to estimate catch at age data from LFD and conduct an YPR analysis based on selected yearly data to have an idea of how realistic is this assumption.

For Caribbean blue tang, there is some implication in the report that stability in average length is viewed as an indication of a low level of F. The reviewer disagrees with this view, and considers that given the available information the status of the stock should be considered as unknown.

Recommendations

The reviewer is of the opinion that the combination of large L_{inf} and low k are the most plausible set of VBF parameters, given what has been presented in SEDAR30 AW 03 and therefore they should have been given more weight in the evaluation of the stock's status.

The reviewer considers F_{MSY}=M as a large oversimplification, which ignores selectivity that has a large impact on F_{MSY}. The assessment team should try to estimate catch at age data from LFD and conduct a VIT and an YPR analysis for queen triggerfish based on selected yearly data to have an idea of how realistic is this assumption.

For Caribbean blue tang, the report gives the impression that stability in average length is taken as an indication of low level of F. The reviewer disagrees with this view, and considers that given the available information the status of the stock should be considered as unknown.

ToR 4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:
a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?
b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?
c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?
d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results ?..........................

The ToR could not be conducted due to data restrictions.

Recommendations

None.

ToR 5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.
• Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods.
• Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

See comments under ToR3.

Recommendations

None.

ToR 6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.

• Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
• Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.

The assessment team do provide an exhaustive shopping list for future data to be collected, which would greatly improve the capability of assessing the status of the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang stock. However, I also suggest that effort should be devoted to selectivity experiments aimed to evaluate the theoretical changes in selectivity linked with the historical changes in the mesh size of the traps.

Recommendations

Conduct selectivity studies on the effect of the mesh size of the traps on the amount and size distribution of the catches of queen triggerfish and blue tang.

ToR 7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.

See comments under ToR 2 and 3.

Recommendations

None

The key information contained in the introduction of both the assessment for U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and the one for blue tang is the management table and the table with the changes in management regulations. The management table should indicate the unit for the value of MSST, MSY and OY, which are now missing. On the other hand, the table with the changes in management regulations is very detailed but without any information about the selectivity of the different mesh size for the traps. Therefore, the reported information is rather uninformative and it is basically impossible to evaluate how these changes might have affected the selectivity of the fisheries. This is crucial information as violating the assumption of time invariant selectivity would affect directly the model output in this case and makes the utilisation of the landings data more complicated. I suggest that effort should be devoted to selectivity experiments aimed to evaluate the theoretical changes in selectivity linked with the historical changes in the mesh size of the traps (see also recommendations in ToR6).

Conclusions

The assessment team should be commended for their effort, timing and clarity in presenting the results. However, I consider that data are underutilised and the uncertainty overestimated by the sensitivity set up used. Also, the lack of alternative estimates of Z beside those coming from the Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) method makes it difficult to evaluate the results and assess the status of the Caribbean queen triggerfish stock. A series of recommendations on how to improve the data utilisation and provide alternative estimates of the exploitation rates have been given under the specific ToRs.

For Caribbean blue tang, the report gives the impression that stability in average length is an indication of a low level of F. The reviewer disagrees with this view, and considers that given the available information the status of the stock should be considered as unknown.

The basic data and model framework were adequately presented through documents and were circulated well in advance of the review. A possible improvement for the presentation of the result in the report could be the creation of a *Glossary* and an *Acronyms* list at the end of the document. This will greatly facilitate the reading of the report for the public.

Reference list

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Laurence T. Kell and Alexander Kell. A comparison of age slicing and statistical age estimation for mediterranean sword_sh (xiphias gladious). Collect. Vol. Sci. Pap. ICCAT, 66(4):1522{1534, 2011.

Lleonart, J. & Salat, J., 2000. VIT (version 1. 1): Software for fishery analysis. User's manual. On ligne: http//www.faocopemed.org/es/activ/infodif/vit.htm.

Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Assessment of Mediterranean Sea stocks – part 1 (STECF 12-19). (eds. Cardinale M. (Chairman) Osio C. & Charef A.). 2012. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, EUR 25602 EN, JRC 76735, 502 pp.

Scott F, Osio G, Cardinale M 2011. Comparison of age slicing methods - Working Document in support to the STECF Expert Working Group 11-12 Assessment of Mediterranean Sea stocks - part II. EUR 25054 EN. Luxembourg.

Attachment A: Statement of Work for Dr. Massimiliano Cardinale

External Independent Peer Review by the Center for Independent Experts

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

Scope of Work and CIE Process: The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Office of Science and Technology coordinates and manages a contract providing external expertise through the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) to conduct independent peer reviews of NMFS scientific projects. The Statement of Work (SoW) described herein was established by the NMFS Project Contact and Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), and reviewed by CIE for compliance with their policy for providing independent expertise that can provide impartial and independent peer review without conflicts of interest. CIE reviewers are selected by the CIE Steering Committee and CIE Coordination Team to conduct the independent peer review of NMFS science in compliance the predetermined Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review. Each CIE reviewer is contracted to deliver an independent peer review report to be approved by the CIE Steering Committee and the report is to be formatted with content requirements as specified in **Annex 1**. This SoW describes the work tasks and deliverables of the CIE reviewer for conducting an independent peer review of the following NMFS project. Further information on the CIE process can be obtained from www.ciereviews.org.

Project Description SEDAR 30 will be a compilation of data, an assessment of the stock, and an assessment review conducted for Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish. The CIE peer review is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the best possible assessment has been provided through the SEDAR process. The stocks assessed through SEDAR 30 are within the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council and the territorial waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review are attached in **Annex 2**.

Requirements for CIE Reviewers: Three CIE reviewers shall have the necessary qualifications to complete an impartial and independent peer review in accordance with the tasks and ToRs described in the SoW herein. The CIE reviewers shall have expertise in stock assessment, statistics, fisheries science, and marine biology sufficient to complete the tasks of the scientific peer-review described herein. Each CIE reviewer's duties shall not exceed a maximum of 10 days to complete all work tasks of the peer review described herein.

Location of Peer Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the desk review during 4-7 February 2013, therefore no travel will be required.
Statement of Tasks: Each CIE reviewer shall complete the following tasks in accordance with the SoW and Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables herein.

Prior to the Peer Review: Upon completion of the CIE reviewer selection by the CIE Steering Committee, the CIE shall provide the CIE reviewer information (full name, title, affiliation, country, address, email) to the COR, who forwards this information to the NMFS Project Contact no later the date specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables. The CIE is responsible for providing the SoW and ToRs to the CIE reviewers. The NMFS Project Contact is responsible for providing the CIE reviewers with the background documents, reports, and other information pertinent to the desk review arrangements. Any changes to the SoW or ToRs must be made through the COR prior to the commencement of the peer review.

Pre-review Background Documents: Two weeks before the peer review, the NMFS Project Contact will send (by electronic mail or make available at an FTP site) to the CIE reviewers the necessary background information and reports for the peer review. In the case where the documents need to be mailed, the NMFS Project Contact will consult with the CIE Lead Coordinator on where to send documents. CIE reviewers are responsible only for the pre-review documents that are delivered to the reviewer in accordance to the SoW scheduled deadlines specified herein. The CIE reviewers shall read all documents in preparation for the peer review.

Desk Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the independent peer review in accordance with the SoW and ToRs, and shall not serve in any other role unless specified herein. **Modifications to the SoW and ToRs shall not be made during the peer review, and any SoW or ToRs modifications prior to the peer review shall be approved by the COR and CIE Lead Coordinator.** The CIE Lead Coordinator can contact the Project Contact to confirm any peer review arrangements.

Contract Deliverables - Independent CIE Peer Review Reports: Each CIE reviewer shall complete an independent peer review report in accordance with the SoW. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review according to required format and content as described in Annex 1. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review addressing each ToR as described in Annex 2.

Specific Tasks for CIE Reviewers: The following chronological list of tasks shall be completed by each CIE reviewer in a timely manner as specified in the **Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables**.

1) Conduct necessary pre-review preparations, including the review of background material and reports provided by the NMFS Project Contact in advance of the peer review.

2) During February 4-7, 2013 as specified herein, conduct an independent desk peer review in accordance with the ToRs (**Annex 2**).

3) No later than February 21, 2013, each CIE reviewer shall submit an independent peer review report addressed to the "Center for Independent Experts," and sent to Mr. Manoj Shivlani, CIE Lead Coordinator, via email to shivlanim@bellsouth.net, and CIE Regional Coordinator, via email to Dr. David Sampson david.sampson@oregonstate.edu. Each CIE report shall be written using the format and content requirements specified in Annex 1, and address each ToR in **Annex 2**.

Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables: CIE shall complete the tasks and deliverables described in this SoW in accordance with the following schedule.

14 January 2013	CIE sends reviewer contact information to the COR, who then sends this to the NMFS Project Contact
18 January 2013	NMFS Project Contact sends the stock assessment report and background documents to the CIE reviewers.
4-13 February 2013	Each reviewer conducts an independent desk peer review
19 February 2013	CIE reviewers submit draft CIE independent peer review reports to the CIE Lead Coordinator and CIE Regional Coordinator
7 March 2013	CIE submits CIE independent peer review reports to the COR
14 March 2013	The COR distributes the final CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and regional Center Director

Modifications to the Statement of Work: This 'Time and Materials' task order may require an update or modification due to possible changes to the terms of reference or schedule of milestones resulting from the fishery management decision process of the NOAA Leadership, Fishery Management Council, and Council's SSC advisory committee. A request to modify this SoW must be approved by the Contracting Officer at least 15 working days prior to making any permanent changes. The Contracting Officer will notify the COR within 10 working days after receipt of all required information of the decision on changes. The COR can approve changes to the milestone dates, list of pre-review documents, and ToRs within the SoW as long as the role and ability of the CIE reviewers to complete the deliverable in accordance with the SoW is not adversely impacted. The SoW and ToRs shall not be changed once the peer review has begun.

Acceptance of Deliverables: Upon review and acceptance of the CIE independent peer review reports by the CIE Lead Coordinator, Regional Coordinator, and Steering Committee, these reports shall be sent to the COR for final approval as contract deliverables based on compliance with the SoW and ToRs. As specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables, the CIE shall send via e-mail the contract deliverables (CIE independent peer review reports) to the COR (William Michaels, via William.Michaels@noaa.gov).

Applicable Performance Standards: The contract is successfully completed when the COR provides final approval of the contract deliverables. The acceptance of the contract deliverables shall be based on three performance standards:
(1) The CIE report shall completed with the format and content in accordance with **Annex 1**,
(2) The CIE report shall address each ToR as specified in **Annex 2**,
(3) The CIE reports shall be delivered in a timely manner as specified in the schedule of milestones and deliverables.

Distribution of Approved Deliverables: Upon acceptance by the COR, the CIE Lead Coordinator shall send via e-mail the final CIE reports in *.PDF format to the COR. The COR will distribute the CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and Center Director.

Support Personnel:

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Annex 1: Format and Contents of CIE Independent Peer Review Report

1. The CIE independent report shall be prefaced with an Executive Summary providing a concise summary of the findings and recommendations, and specify whether the science reviewed is the best scientific information available.

2. The main body of the reviewer report shall consist of a Background, Description of the Individual Reviewer's Role in the Review Activities, Summary of Findings for each ToR in which the weaknesses and strengths are described, and Conclusions and Recommendations in accordance with the ToRs. The CIE independent report shall be a stand-alone document for others to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the science reviewed. The CIE independent report shall be an independent peer review of each ToRs.

3. The reviewer report shall include the following appendices:

   Appendix 1: Bibliography of materials provided for review
   Appendix 2: A copy of the CIE Statement of Work

Annex 2: Terms of Reference for the Peer Review

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:
   a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?
   b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?
   c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?
   d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?
2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.
   a) Are methods scientifically sound and robust?
   b) Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?
   c) Are the methods appropriate for the available data?
3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:
   a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?
   b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?
   c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?
   d) Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?
   e) Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?
4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:
   a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?
   b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?
   c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?
   d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results ?
5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.
   - Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods

- Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.
   - Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
   - Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.
7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.

Attachment B: List of main documents provided as background material

Draft Stock Assessment:
Section1_blue tang_v1.pdf
SectionII_S30_Blue_tang_AW_report_complete_w_watermark.pdf
Section1_queen_triggerfish_v1.pdf
SectionII_S30_Queen_triggerfish_AW_report_w_watermark.pdf

Background Materials:
S30 Doc List.pdf
S30_FTP site instructions.pdf
S30_AW_01_SummaryRecreationalBlueTangQueenTriggerfish.pdf.
S30_AW_02_SummaryTIP.pdf
S30_AW_03_Rios_Life History Review.pdf
S30_AW_04_Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang landings.pdf

CIE Independent Peer Review Report

on

SEDAR 30

Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

Prepared by

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Orono, ME 04469

March 20, 2013

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I. Executive Summary

Queen triggerfish (*Balistes vetula*) and blue tang (*Acanthurus coeruleus*) are reef dwelling and widely distributed in the Atlantic Ocean. They are common in the Caribbean Sea and support two important fisheries in the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. Commercial landing data of the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang were included in snapper/grouper landings in the 1970s -1990s and then in species groups in the 2000s, and species-specific landing data were only available in recent years. Limited life history parameters such as von Bertalanffy growth parameters are available. Length-composition data are also available for all locations except for the Puerto Rico blue tang. No fishery-independent and fishery-dependent abundance index data were available for the assessment. Because limited data are available for their stock assessment, they are considered data-poor fisheries and a formal stock assessment model is not applicable to these two fish stocks.

An estimator, which uses length-frequency data and requires no assumption of equilibrium population, was used in the assessment for estimating total mortality rate. The natural mortality was estimated from various methods. The fishing mortality was then estimated as the difference between the total and natural mortality rates. No biological reference points such as F_{MSY} and B_{MSY} were estimated. The natural mortality was used as a proxy of F_{MSY}. The estimated fishing mortality was compared with the natural mortality to determine if the fishery was in the status of "overfishing". Because no biomass could be estimated, it is impossible to determine if the queen triggerfish and blue tang stocks were "overfished" and no stock projection under different management strategies could be done. A comprehensive sensitivity analysis was conducted to evaluate impacts of uncertainty associated with the key life history parameters. The stock assessment suggests that the choice of growth parameters and estimators of natural mortality influenced the determination of status of the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang. For certain combinations of growth parameters and natural mortality estimators, the fisheries could be defined as experiencing "overfishing", but for the other combinations, the fisheries were considered not in the status of "overfishing". Although large uncertainty existed in the status of the fisheries, it appears that these two fish stocks were *less likely* to be in the status of "overfishing". *Overall, I conclude this assessment is the best the AW panel could do given the restriction of data availability; however I cannot conclude that the assessment is "sound" and "robust" as the assessment quality and results are affected greatly by large uncertainty in the data quality and estimators of natural mortality.*

I have made the following recommendations for improving the assessment: (1) the expert and background knowledge on species of similar life history patterns be used to exclude biologically unrealistic values of K, L_∞, natural mortality, and total mortality; (2) uncertainty associated with K, L_∞, natural mortality, total mortality, and subsequently fishing mortality be quantified using a Monte Carlo simulation; (3) a program be developed to interview fishermen to collect the information on temporal and spatial variability of the fishing grounds, target species and sizes, and fishing efforts; (4) the information on the species composition of current landings be used to decompose the historical landings of species group into the species-specific landings; (5) a fishery-independent survey program be developed for the queen triggerfish, blue tang and other reef-dependent species sharing similar habitat to collect samples for estimating basic life history parameters and for driving reliable abundance indices; (6) a simulation study be conducted to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator and identify factors that are critical in influencing the performance of the estimator; (7) a yield-per-recruit analysis be conducted with the incorporation of uncertainty in life history parameters to estimate biological reference points such as F_{max} and $F_{0.1}$; and (8) a spawning stock biomass-per-recruit analysis be done with the incorporation of uncertainty associated with life history parameters to estimate reference points such as $F_{20\%}$ and $F_{40\%}$.

II. Background

Queen triggerfish (*Balistes vetula*) is a reef dwelling triggerfish mainly distributed in the Atlantic Ocean. In the West Atlantic, they are distributed from Canada to southern Brazil and are common in the US Caribbean. They are reef-dependent and typically occur at coral and rocky reefs in shallow waters. However, they sometimes also can be found in relatively deep water (up to 275 m) and in areas with sand or seagrass. Adult queen triggerfish are opportunistic feeders. The species is subject to diurnal movement and tends to be either solitary or aggregate in small groups (Randall 1968; Aiken 1975). The maximum length was observed at 572 mm fork length in the U.S. Virgin Islands (Randall 1968). The oldest age recorded in the U.S. Caribbean was 7 years old (Manooch and Drennon 1987).

Blue tang (*Acanthurus coeruleus*), also known as the Atlantic blue tang surgeonfish or the Atlantic blue tang, is a surgeonfish in the Atlantic Ocean. Blue tang is common in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. They inhabit shallow-water, coral reefs and rocky habitat (Carpenter 2002). Adult blue tang are herbivorous, feeding on various benthic algae (Carpenter 2002). The maximum length was observed at 457 mm total length in St. Thomas (Olsen 2011), and the oldest age was found to be 20 years of age (Mutz 2006). Growth parameters estimated in different studies tend to differ greatly as a result of differences in sampling locations, sample sizes, and ranges of age/size composition of sampled fish (Choat and Robertson 2002; Mutz 2006).

Both the fisheries are data-poor with a limited amount of information/data available to the stock assessment. The historical landing data were aggregated by snapper/grouper earlier in the 1970s -1990s, by species groups in the 2000s, and were only separated by species in recent years (after 2011). The recreational data tend to have few trips of positive catch. No reliable fishing effort and no fishery-independent data were available. Size composition data of commercial catch derived from relatively large sample sizes were available for all locations except for the blue tang stock in Puerto Rico (SEDAR30 2013).

Size composition data were used in the stock assessment for estimating the total mortality rate using a length-based estimator developed by Gedamke and Hoenig (2006). This method improves the traditional Beverton-Holt mortality estimator (Beverton and Holt 1957) with no requirement for the assumption of an equilibrium population. The natural mortality was estimated from various methods (Pauly 1980; Hoenig 1983; Jensen 1996). The fishing mortality was then estimated as the difference between the total and natural mortality rates. Because this is data-poor fishery, no biological reference points such as F_{MSY} and B_{MSY} were estimated. The natural mortality was used as a proxy of F_{MSY} (King 1995). Thus, the estimated fishing mortality was compared with the natural mortality to determine if the fishery was in the status of "overfishing". Because no biomass could be estimated, it is impossible to determine if the queen triggerfish and blue tang stocks are "overfished" and no stock projection can be done to evaluate impacts of various management strategies on the stocks. A comprehensive sensitivity analysis was conducted to evaluate impacts of uncertainty associated with the estimates of key life history parameters. The stock assessment suggests that the choice of growth parameters and estimators of natural mortality influenced the determination of status of the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang. For certain combinations of growth parameters and natural mortality estimators, the fisheries could be defined as experiencing "overfishing", but for the other combinations, the fisheries were considered not in the status of "overfishing" (SEDAR30 2013).

III. Description of the Individual Reviewer's Role in the Review Activities

As the SoW states that "*Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the independent peer review in accordance with the SoW and ToRs*", my role as a CIE independent reviewer is to conduct an impartial and independent peer review of SEDAR 30 "Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment" with respect to the pre-defined Terms of Reference.

This is a desk review. Thus, I have no opportunity for face-to-face discussion and questioning. I read the "SEDAR30-SAR1: Final Stock Assessment Report for Caribbean Blue Tang" and "SEDAR30-SAR2: Final Stock Assessment Report for Caribbean Queen Triggerfish" and all other background documents that were sent to me (see the list in the Appendix I). I also read references relevant to the topics covered in the reports and the SoW. I addressed each topic covered in the ToRs, evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of what was done in this assessment, and provided recommendations to improve future assessment. Based on these evaluations and analyses, I made research recommendations for future assessment of Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish.

IV: Summary of Findings

IV-1. Queen triggerfish

The following summary of my findings is provided with respect to a set of pre-defined TORs for the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish.

<u>IV-1-1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:</u>

Data available to the assessment include commercial landings, recreational intercept data and length frequency data estimated separately for St. Thomas/St. John, St. Croix, and Puerto Rico.

For Puerto Rico, the commercial landing data of queen triggerfish by gear and fishing center were estimated from self-reported fisher logbooks/sale receipts for the time period from 1983 to 2011. Because the report was incomplete, the total landings were adjusted (SEDAR30, 2013). The number of trips with reported queen triggerfish landings was also estimated by gear and year.

For St.Thomas and St. John, although logbook reporting started in 1974, landings were reported by gear and by either snapper/grouper or other finfish prior to 1997. Landings were reported by species group and gear from 1997 to 1999, all commercial landings were reported by species group from 2000 to 2010, and the landing data have been reported by species since 2011. For the years included in this assessment, queen triggerfish-specific landing data are not available prior to 2011, and landing data are only available for the triggerfish species group.

For St. Croix, similar to St. Thomas and St. John, landing data were only available for the triggerfish species group, not for queen triggerfish. Commercial landing data were only available from 1998 to 2011.

Marine Recreational Fisheries Sampling Survey (MRFSS) collects data from Puerto Rico, but not the US Virgin Islands. The sampling design consists of two complementary components, an angler-site intercept survey for estimating catch and length frequency data and a fishing effort telephone survey to estimate fishing effort. However, the positive intercepted trips (i.e., presence of queen triggerfish) were less than 1% in almost all the years. Only 60 queen triggerfish were measured from 2000-2011.

The VBGF parameters were estimated in two studies, but K differs greatly (Manooch and Drennon 1987; de Albuquerque et al. 2011). The maximum age in the sample is 7 (Manooch and Drennon 1987) and 14 years of age (de Albuquerque et al. 2011), and the growth curves in neither study reached the asymptotic lengths. The VBGF parameters estimated in Manooch and Drennon (1987) were used because the samples were taken in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

Length frequency data were estimated from samples taken in pot and trap fisheries in Puerto Rico, St. Thomas and St. John, and St. Croix. However, the temporal changes in length frequency data might be influenced by changes in market demand for large sizes of queen triggerfish and/or possible expansion of the fishery into new areas.

IV-1-1-a. Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?

The AW panel decided to use the von Bertalanffy growth parameters estimated in Manooch and Drennon (1987) because the samples were taken in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. The AW panel also decided to use length-frequency data estimated in the pot and trap fisheries for estimating the total mortality using a length-based mortality estimator. The AW decided not to use the intercepted catch, effort, and length data from MRFSS because of the low proportion of positive trips and sample sizes of length data.

Based on the data available, these decisions are the best the AW panel could make. However, based on the information available I do not have evidence to conclude if the data decisions are "sound and robust".

IV-1-1-b. Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?

The AW panel did acknowledge potential issues which might influence the quality of the data. The MRFSS data were excluded because of small sample sizes, and good discussions were made on potential causes resulting in large shifts in length compositions over time. However, I do not see distributional quantification of uncertainty associated with the estimates of the von Bertalanffy growth parameters. I think the estimation of these parameters should come with estimates of uncertainty (e.g., bootstrap-estimated confidence intervals). Given there are only 7 age groups available in Manooch and Drennon (1987), the uncertainty associated with the estimated L_∞ and K could be large. It is also unclear if the variation in size within an age group was considered and if the fitting of the VBGF was weighted by the sample sizes of the different age groups.

IV-1-1-c.Are data applied properly within the assessment model?

This is a data-poor fishery, and there is no enough information for a formal stock assessment. Given the data available, I consider the data are properly applied in the estimation of total, natural and fishing mortality rates in the assessment.

However, I believe the sensitivity analysis could be better designed and justified if the uncertainty associated with K and L_∞ could be better quantified and if expert and background knowledge could be used to exclude biologically unrealistic combinations of values for the growth parameters and natural mortality.

IV-1-1-d.Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?

Estimation of the length-frequency data might be influenced by temporal variability in the shifted preference of market demand for large queen triggerfish, which might change the selectivity of the fishery over the time. Thus, the temporal variability in length composition might not reflect changes in fish mortality; rather reflect changes in selectivity. Although potential changes in the total mortality could be incorporated in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006), I did not see how possible changes in selectivity could be incorporated. This may yield biases in the assessment results.

IV-1-2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.

Given the limitation of data availability, the Beverton-Holt length-based mortality estimator (Beverton and Holt 1957) is a good option for the assessment of this fishery. However, as the AW panel explicitly described in the assessment report, this method, explicitly and implicitly, requires six assumptions: (1) growth is constant over time and space; (2) there is no variability in growth among individuals; (3) there is constant and continuous recruitment over time; (4) the mortality rate is the same for fish older than the age at recruitment; (5) the mortality rate is constant over time and space; and (6) the population is in equilibrium. Apparently none of these assumptions can be satisfied in the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish fishery. Instead of using this traditional approach, the AW panel used a modified Beverton-Holt length-based mortality estimator which requires no assumption of an equilibrium population. However, the other assumptions are still required. There were a number of years when mortality rate changes were identified using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) as the model selection measure. A systematic sensitivity analysis was done to evaluate impacts of uncertainty in the growth parameters on the estimation of fish mortality rates.

IV-1-2-a. Are methods scientifically sound and robust?

Given the limitation of data availability, this approach may be the best choice the AW panel can have for the assessment of the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish. However, based on what has been reported in the AW report, I cannot conclude that this is scientifically sound and robust because it is difficult to evaluate whether this approach can capture the real fishing mortality rate without knowing the true value. A simulation study, similar to the one in

Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) but based on the queen triggerfish data, should be conducted to evaluate the performance and robustness of this mortality estimator for the queen triggerfish with respect to different assumptions associated with the fishery.

IV-1-2-b. Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?

Given what is available, I believe that the configuration of the assessment models is consistent with standard practices. However, the uncertainty in growth parameters was not estimated and the sensitivity analysis could be better designed if the uncertainty associated with K and L_∞ was explicitly estimated. The values of K and L_∞ are usually strongly and negatively correlated, and such negative correlations should be considered in the sensitivity analysis. The sensitivity analysis should focus on one parameter (either K or L_∞) with the value of the other parameter drawn from a joint probability distribution with a defined covariance structure for K and L_∞. A bootstrap approach can be used to define the joint probability distribution of K and L_∞.

The AW panel considered different approaches for estimating natural mortality, and recommended that the M estimated using the Pauly's equation (Pauly 1980) be used because the growth parameters were also used in the estimation. I agree with the AW panel and believe this perhaps is the most robust approach to reduce potential biases in the estimated fishing mortality rate (because F = Z-M). However, I think a more appropriate approach for estimating M may be the use of a subset of fish species with similar habitat and life history characteristics (e.g., reef-associated species) to modify Pauly's equation to make the estimation of M more consistent with the life history and habitat characteristics of the Caribbean queen triggerfish.

The use of M as a proxy for F_{MSY} is a common practice for a data-poor fishery (King 1995). This *ad hoc* limit reference point appears to be the best choice given the available data.

IV-1-2-c. Are the methods appropriate for the available data?

Overall, I believe that the method is appropriate for the available data. However, I believe a simulation study should be conducted to evaluate the performance of the method.

IV-1-3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:

IV-1-3-a. Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?

Because of data limitations, neither abundance nor biomass was estimated. Fishing mortality was derived from the difference between the total mortality estimated from length-composition data and natural mortality estimated from Pauly's model (Pauly 1980). Uncertainty associated with the fishing mortality was evaluated by considering possible ranges of the total mortality estimated using different growth parameters and natural mortality estimated using different estimators.

I believe that the lack of abundance/biomass estimates is consistent with the limitation of data availability. Large uncertainty associated with fishing mortality estimates is consistent with possible issues related to the estimates of life history parameters used in estimating the total and natural mortality rates.

IV-1-3-b. Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

The stock biomass/abundance and biomass-based limit reference points cannot be estimated reliably in this assessment based on the data available. The AW panel concluded that this assessment did not have enough information to determine if the stock was overfished. Given the available data, I agree with the AW panel.

IV-1-3-c. Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

Puerto Rico

Large uncertainty is associated with the estimation of fishing mortality as a result of the varying choices of estimators for estimating natural mortality and different growth parameters used in estimating the total mortality. However, for most scenarios tested, the estimated fishing mortality tended to be much lower than natural mortality, suggesting that the queen triggerfish experienced low fishing mortality. If the natural mortality is used as a limit reference point in determining if the fishery is in the status of overfishing, we may conclude that the Puerto Rico queen triggerfish fishery is not in the status of overfishing. The analysis of length composition data from the pot and trap fishery shows that fishing mortality has a declining trend in the late 1990s; however large uncertainty as a result of lack of understanding of possible temporal changes in selectivity and fishing grounds complicates the interpretation of this result.

St. Thomas and St. John

The results of comparing fishing mortality and natural mortality depend on the choices of (1) growth parameters used in the estimation of the total mortality; (2) estimators of natural mortality; and (3) maximum age (i.e., 7 in Manooch and Drennon (1987) or 14 in de Albuquerque et al. 2011). Given such large uncertainty and lack of strong evidence to justify the use of one set of life history parameters over the other, it is difficult to conclude if the fishery is in the status of overfishing.

St. Croix

The results of comparing fishing mortality and natural mortality depend on the choice of growth parameters, which determine the estimates of the total mortality. For the set of life history parameters resulting in a high level for the total mortality estimate, the fishing mortality is higher than natural mortality, suggesting that fishing mortality may be too high. However, for the set of life history parameters resulting in a low level for the total mortality estimate, the estimated fishing mortality is lower than natural mortality, suggesting that the fishing mortality is not too high. We do not have strong evidence favoring one set of the life history parameters over the other, and hence it is difficult to decide if the fishery is in the status of overfishing.

IV-1-3-d. Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?

No stock-recruitment relationship can be developed based on the available data.

IV-1-3-e. Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?

Like many data-poor fisheries, natural mortality was used as a proxy for F_{MSY} in the assessment (King 1995). This effectively treats natural mortality as a limit biological reference point to determine if the fishery is in the status of overfishing. The AW panel explored and evaluated different methods in quantifying the natural mortality and found large uncertainty associated with the natural mortality estimates. Given the information available, I believe that yield-per-recruit (and maybe egg-per-recruit) analysis can be conducted, which can produce estimates of F0.1 and Fmax. The AW panel did mention that they did not do per-recruit analysis because of concerns on the quality of life history parameters. However, given the same life history parameters used in estimating the total fishing mortality and natural mortality (for some methods), I do not see the logic here for not doing a per-recruit analysis. I think the uncertainty associated with life history parameters can be readily incorporated in a per-recruit analysis using a Monte Carlo approach (e.g., Chen and Wilson 2002; Chang et al. 2009).

IV-1-4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:

No formal stock projection was done in the assessment because of data limitations.

IV-1-4-a. Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of the information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-1-4-b. Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-1-4-c. Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-1-4-d. Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-1-5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.

- Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods
- Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

The AW panel outlined several sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The uncertainty associated with the quality and quantity of fisheries data (e.g., commercial and recreational catch and size composition data, fishing efforts, and sample sizes) is well discussed to determine which data sets should be used in the assessment. Large variabilities on growth parameters among different studies were identified and their impacts on the estimation of total mortality and fishing mortality were evaluated in a sensitivity analysis. Uncertainty resulting from choices of estimators for natural mortality also was discussed.

Although the AW panel discussed the uncertainty of different sources rather thoroughly and developed sensitivity analyses to evaluate impacts of the uncertainty on the estimation of the total, natural and fishing mortality rates, I believe the uncertainty should be incorporated in the assessment in a more systematic way. I suggest using a Monte Carlo simulation approach to systematically incorporate the uncertainty in life history parameters into the estimation of the fishing mortality rate. For each parameter, a distribution (uniform, multinomial, normal, or log-normal) can be defined based on the type of the data and possible ranges of the values. For each run, the value of a given parameter can be randomly drawn from such a distribution. The correlations between L_∞ and K should be considered and their values should be drawn from a joint distribution of these two values. One hundred or more runs of Monte Carlo simulation can yield a distribution for the total, natural and fishing mortality rates. Such an approach can better capture and quantify the uncertainty, which can be used directly in comparing probability distributions of natural mortality and fishing mortality to determine the likelihood of overfishing. Before this can be done, however, the range of the growth parameters and natural mortality should be narrowed down based on the expert knowledge and background information on fish species of similar life history and habitat needs.

IV-1- 6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.

- Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
- Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.

The AW panel recommends improving the quality of life history parameter estimates; developing a fishery-independent monitoring program; continuing the efforts to improve the collection of species-specific catch and effort data; and modifying the length-based total mortality estimator to account for potential changes in selectivity. I consider these research areas are important for reducing the uncertainty and improving the quality of the assessment. The AW panel probably needs to prioritize the research recommendations and separate the short-term research plan from the long-term plan.

Given the problems associated with the data, an important research goal should be to improve the data quality and quantity. Short-term and long-term plans should be developed to achieve the goal. Short term research priority may include (1) improvement of life history data estimates and the quantification of their uncertainty in the form of probably distributions; (2) identification of major fishing areas and their spatio-temporal variability via conducting interviews with fishermen involved in the fishery; and (3) identification of potential approaches that can be used to estimate species-specific landing data (e.g., based on species composition of landings that become available in recent years). The long-term research plan should include the development of a fishery-independent monitoring program and continued improvement of the sampling protocol for the collection of fishery-dependent data (catch and effort).

Given the data limitations, I believe another research priority that should be addressed soon is to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator (Gedamke and Hoenig 2006) for the total mortality. Based on the information available and with some assumptions, a queen triggerfish fishery can be simulated, following the approach used in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006). A simulation study can be conducted with this simulated fishery to evaluate the performance of this length-based estimator for estimating the total mortality. Different scenarios can be developed to identify key factors that may have significant impacts on the performance of the estimator. This can guide the future model development and data collection.

<u>IV-1-7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.</u>

I recommend the following key areas for the improvement when scheduling the next assessment:

- Growth parameters K and L_∞ should be estimated with uncertainty. A bootstrap approach can be used with the von Bertalanffy growth model to quantify the joint probability distribution of K and L_∞, which can be used for quantifying probability distributions for the total, natural and fishing mortality rates;

- More basic biological studies need to be conducted to improve our understanding of key life history processes and estimate key life history parameters such as growth parameters, length/age at maturity, fecundity, and their spatial variability;

- An interviewing-fishermen program should be done to identify major fishing grounds and main size classes of landed catch, and possible changes over time;

- Use the proportion of queen triggerfish in the total catch of all triggerfish species estimated in recent years to estimate the queen triggerfish catch in the past (assuming that the proportion is the same over time);

- A simulation study needs to be conducted to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator of the total mortality rate and identify assumptions/parameters that can influence greatly the performance of the estimator, which will help us understand the quality of the estimates of the total mortality;

- Uncertainty associated with the natural mortality rate should be quantified in the form of a probability distribution, which can be done with a Monte Carlo simulation approach;

- The Pauly natural mortality estimator was derived from many species with very different life history and habitat needs (Pauly 1983), and a subset of fish species that have life history and habitat needs similar to the focal species may yield a more appropriate natural mortality estimator;

- A yield-per-recruit analysis with the consideration of uncertainty associated with life history parameters (e.g., Chen 1996; Chang et al. 2009) can be done to estimate theoretical biological reference points such as F_{max} and $F_{0.1}$; and

- A spawning stock biomass-per-recruit analysis with the incorporation of uncertainty associated with life history parameters can also be done to estimate reference points such as $F_{20\%}$ and $F_{40\%}$.

IV-2. Blue tang

The following summary of my findings is provided with respect to the set of pre-defined TORs for blue tang.

IV-2-1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:

Data available to the assessment included commercial landings, recreational intercept data and length-frequency data estimated separately for St. Thomas/St. John, St. Croix, and Puerto Rico. Life history data obtained from published studies were also used in the assessment.

For Puerto Rico, the commercial landing data of blue tang were included in the reported catch of the species group surgeonfishes by gear and fishing center, and the proportion of blue tang within the surgeonfishes species group was unknown. Hence, no separate landing data are available for blue tang. The landing data were reported by gear and fishing center and estimated from self-reported fisher logbooks/sale receipts for the time period from 1983 to 2011. Because the report was incomplete, the total landings were adjusted (Caribbean Fisheries Data Evaluation Final Report, 2009). Length composition data were derived from small sample sizes.

For St.Thomas and St. John, although logbook reporting started in 1974, landings were reported by gear and by either snapper/grouper or other finfish prior to 1997. Some landings were reported by species group and gear from 1997 to 1999, and all reported commercial landings was reported by species group from 2000 to 2010, and the landing data have been reported by species since 2011. For the years included in this assessment, landing data were provided as surgeonfishes with all the species combined, and blue tang-specific landing data are not available.

For St. Croix, similar to St. Thomas and St. John, landing data were only available for surgeonfishes, and no blue tang-specific landing data were available. Commercial landing data were only available from 1998 to 2011.

Marine Recreational Fisheries Sampling Survey (MRFSS) collects data from Puerto Rico, but not the US Virgin Islands. The sampling design consists of two complementary components, an angler-site intercept survey for estimating catch and length frequency data and a fishing effort telephone survey to estimate fishing effort. However, the positive intercepted trips (i.e., presence of blue tang) are too small. The AW panel concluded that this data set was not useful for the blue tang assessment.

The VBGF parameters were estimated for different locations in the U.S. Caribbean in two studies (Choat and Robertson 2002; Mutz 2006). Large differences were found in the estimates between the studies. A sensitivity analysis was done to evaluate the range of possible values for K and L_∞.

Length frequency data were estimated from samples taken in the NMFS Trip Interview program for the pot and trap fisheries in Puerto Rico, St. Thomas and St. John, and St. Croix. The number of blue tang measured in Puerto Rico was small compared to St. Thomas/St John or St. Croix.

IV-2-1-a. Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?

The AW panel concluded that the sample sizes for the length-frequency data in the pot and trap fisheries in the US Virgin Islands were sufficient for length-based mortality estimation. The growth parameters used in the initial analysis were from Mutz (2006). A sensitivity analysis was conducted to evaluate alternative values and their impacts on the estimation of the total fish mortality. The AW panel decided not to use the intercepted catch, effort, and length data from MRFSS because of the low proportion of positive trips and sample sizes of length data.

The AW panel considered that the sample size for estimating length-composition data was not sufficient in Puerto Rico, and derived length-composition data were not appropriate for length-based mortality estimator.

Based on the data available and limited choices the AW panel had, these decisions were the best one could make. However, because there is no scientific evidence showing the results are robust regarding these decisions, I cannot conclude that the data decisions are "sound and robust".

IV-2-1-b. Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?

The AW did acknowledge potential issues which might influence the quality and quantity of the data. The MRFSS data were excluded because of small sample sizes, and good discussions were made on potential causes resulting in changes in length compositions over time. However, I do not see quantification of uncertainty associated with the estimates of von Bertalanffy growth parameters (although the differences in the parameters estimated in different studies were shown). I think the estimation of these parameters should come with estimates of uncertainty, which could be derived using an approach such as a bootstrap method.

IV-2-1-c.Are data applied properly within the assessment model?

This is a data-poor fishery, and there is not enough information for a formal stock assessment. Given the data available and limitation of stock assessment model choices, I consider the data are properly applied in the estimation of the fish mortality in this stock assessment.

However, I believe the sensitivity analysis could be better designed and justified if the uncertainty associated with K and L_∞ could be estimated and quantified. The values of K and L_∞ in the sensitivity analysis should be drawn from their joint distribution (Chen 1996; Chang et al. 2009) rather than varied independently. The correlation between K and L_∞ and standard errors associated with L and L_∞ can be estimated in the Nonlinear Least Squares or their joint probability distribution could be derived using the bootstrap approach.

IV-2-1-d.Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?

Estimation of the length-frequency data may be influenced by spatio-temporal variability in fishing selectivity. Thus, the temporal variability in length composition may not reflect changes in fish mortality; but rather reflect changes in selectivity and fishing locations. Although potential changes in the total mortality rate can be incorporated in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006), I do not see how changes in selectivity can be incorporated. This may yield biases in the assessment.

IV-2-2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.

Given the limitations of data availability, the Beverton-Holt length-based mortality estimator (Beverton and Holt 1957) is a good option for the assessment of this fishery. However, as the AW panel explicitly described in the assessment report, this method, explicitly and implicitly, has six assumptions: (1) growth is constant over time and space; (2) there is no variability in growth among individuals; (3) there is constant and continuous recruitment over time; (4) the mortality rate is the same for fish older than the age at recruitment; (5) the mortality rate is constant over time and space; and (6) the population is in equilibrium. Apparently none of these assumptions can be satisfied in the US Caribbean queen triggerfish fishery. Instead of using this traditional approach, the AW panel used a modified length-based mortality estimator. This method does not need to make the equilibrium assumption, but still needs the other five assumptions. The number of years when mortality rate changes was estimated using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) as the performance measure. A systematic sensitivity analysis was done to evaluate impacts of uncertainty in growth parameters on the estimation of fish mortality rates.

IV-2-2-a. Are methods scientifically sound and robust?

Given the limitation of data availability, this approach may be the best the AW panel can have for the assessment of the US Caribbean blue tang. However, based on what has been reported in the AW report, I cannot conclude that this is scientifically sound and robust because there is no evidence showing that this approach can capture the real rate of fishing mortality. A simulation study, similar to the one in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) but based on the blue tang data, should be conducted to evaluate the performance and robustness of this mortality estimator for blue tang with respect to different assumptions associated with the fishery.

IV-2-2-b. Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?

Given what is available, I believe that the configuration of the assessment models is consistent with standard practices to estimate mortality rates and to evaluate impacts of uncertainty in growth parameters on the mortality estimation. However, the uncertainty in the growth parameters was not estimated and the sensitivity analysis could be better designed. The values of K and L_∞ are usually strongly and negatively correlated, and such negative correlations should be considered in the sensitivity analysis. The sensitivity analysis should focus one parameter (either K or L_∞) with the value of the other parameter drawn from a joint probability distribution with defined correlations of K and L_∞. Alternatively, a bootstrap approach can be used to estimate a joint distribution of K and L_∞, which can be used to quantify the uncertainty associated with the estimates of the total and natural mortality rates.

The AW panel considered different approaches for estimating natural mortality, and recommended that the M estimated from Pauly equation (Pauly 1980) be used because the growth parameters were also used in the estimation. I agree with the AW panel and believe this perhaps is the most robust approach to reduce potential biases in estimating fishing mortality (because F = Z-M). However, I think a more appropriate approach for estimating M may be the use of a subset of fish species with similar habitat and life history (e.g., reef-associated species) to modify the Pauly equation, which can make the estimation of M more consistent with the life history and habitat of the Caribbean blue tang. Biologically unrealistic estimates of natural mortality, judged based on life history theory and knowledge on species of similar life history and habitat need, should be excluded from further consideration in the estimation of fishing mortality.

The use of M as a proxy for F_{MSY} is a common practice for a data-poor fishery (King 1995). This *ad hoc* limit reference point appears to be the best choice given the available data.

IV-2-2-c. Are the methods appropriate for the available data?

Overall, I believe the method is appropriate for the available data. However, I believe a simulation study should be conducted to evaluate the performance of the method.

IV-2-3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:

IV-2-3-a. Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?

Because of data limitations, neither abundance nor biomass was estimated. Fishing mortality was derived from the difference between the total mortality rate estimated from length-composition data and natural mortality rate estimated from Pauly's model (Pauly 1980). Uncertainty associated with the fishing mortality rate was evaluated by evaluating possible ranges of the total mortality rate estimated using different growth parameters and natural mortality estimated using different estimators.

I consider the lack of abundance/biomass estimates is consistent with the limitations of data availability. Large uncertainty associated with the fishing mortality estimates is consistent with possible issues related to the estimates of life history parameters used in the estimation of the total and natural mortality rates.

The AW panel did not estimate the total mortality rate for the Puerto Rico blue tang from the length-frequency data because they believed that the sample size was too small. I agree with the AW panel and consider this is consistent with the data available.

IV-2-3-b. Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

The stock biomass/abundance and biomass-based limit reference points cannot be estimated reliably in this assessment based on the data available. The AW panel concluded that this assessment did not have enough information to determine if the stock is overfished. Given the available data, I agree with the AW panel.

IV-2-3-c. Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

Puerto Rico

No length-based analysis was done because the AW panel concluded that the sample size used to derive the length-composition data was too small. Thus, there were no estimates of the total, natural and fishing mortality rates for the Puerto Rico blue tang.

St. Thomas and St. John

The results of comparing the fishing mortality and natural mortality rates depend on the choices of (1) growth parameters used in the estimation of the total mortality; and (2) estimators of natural mortality. The AP panel suggested that Pauly's natural mortality estimator be used because both K and L_∞ were used, which is consistent with what is used in estimating the total mortality. Based on this approach, the fishing mortality rate, estimated as the difference between the total mortality rate estimated from the length-based estimator (Gedamke and Hoenig 2006) and natural mortality rate estimated using Pauly's equation (Pauly 1980), was much smaller than the natural mortality rate, which is commonly used as limit reference point to determining if a data-poor fishery is in the status of overfishing. This suggests that the fishery was not in the status of overfishing. However, if natural mortality was estimated from age-based data, the results would depend on the choice of growth parameters in estimating the total mortality. For the most scenarios tested in the sensitivity analysis, it appears that the fishing mortality rate was lower than the natural mortality rate, suggesting that the St. Thomas and St. John blue tang were likely not in the status of overfishing. However, given such large uncertainty and the lack of strong evidence to justify the use of one set of life history parameters over the other, it is difficult to yield a conclusive result regarding the status of the fishery.

St. Croix

Like the assessment for the St. Thomas and St. John blue tang, the results of comparing fishing mortality and natural mortality depend on the choice of growth parameters, which determine the estimates of the total and natural mortality rates. For the set of life history parameters resulting in a high level for the total mortality rate, the fishing mortality rate is higher than the natural mortality rate, suggesting that fishing mortality may be too high. However, for the set of life history parameters resulting in a low level for the total mortality rate, the estimated fishing mortality was lower than natural mortality, suggesting that the fishing mortality was not too high. We do not have strong evidence favoring one set of the life history parameters over the other, and hence it is difficult to decide if the fishery is in the status of overfishing.

IV-2-3-d. Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?

No stock-recruitment relationship can be developed based on the available data.

IV-2-3-e. Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?

Like many data-poor fisheries, natural mortality is used as a proxy for F_{MSY} in the assessment (King 1995). This effectively treats the natural mortality rate as a limit biological reference point to determine if the fishery is in the status of overfishing. The AW panel explored and evaluated different methods for quantifying the natural mortality rate and found large uncertainty associated with the natural mortality rate estimates. Given the information available, I believe that a yield-per-recruit (and maybe egg-per-recruit) analysis can be conducted, which can yield estimates for $F_{0.1}$ and F_{max}. The AW panel did mention that they did not do a per-recruit analysis because of concerns on the quality of life history parameters. However, given the same life history parameters used in estimating the total fishing mortality and natural mortality (for some methods), I do not see the logic for not doing a per-recruit analysis. I think the uncertainty associated with the life history parameters can be readily incorporated in a per-recruit analysis using a Monte Carlo approach (e.g., Chen and Wilson 2002; Chang et al. 2009).

IV-2-4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:

No formal stock projection was done in the assessment because of data limitations.

IV-2-4-a. Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-2-4-b. Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-2-4-c. Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-2-4-d. Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results?

Stock projections were not done in the assessment because of lack of information on the dynamics of the fish population.

IV-2-5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.

- Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods
- Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

The AW panel outlined several sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The uncertainty associated with the quality and quantity of fisheries data (e.g., commercial and recreational catch and size composition data, fishing efforts, and sample sizes) is well discussed to determine which data set should be used in the assessment. Large variability in growth parameters among different studies was identified and their impact on the estimation of the total mortality rate and fishing mortality rate were evaluated in a sensitivity analysis. Uncertainty resulting from choices of estimators for the natural mortality rate also was discussed.

Although the AW panel discussed the uncertainty of different sources rather thoroughly and developed sensitivity analyses to evaluate impacts of the uncertainty on the estimation of the total, natural and fishing mortality rates, I believe the uncertainty should be incorporated in the assessment in a more systematic way. I suggest using a Monte Carlo simulation approach to systematically incorporate the uncertainty in life history parameters into the estimation of the fishing mortality rate. For each parameter, a distribution (uniform, multinomial, normal, or log-normal) can be defined based on the type of the data and possible ranges of the values. For each run, the value of a given parameter can be randomly drawn from such a distribution. The correlations between L_∞ and K should be considered and their values should be drawn from a joint distribution of these two values. One hundred or more runs of Monte Carlo simulation can yield a distribution for the total, natural and fishing mortality rates. Such an approach can better capture and quantify the uncertainty, which can be used directly in comparing probability distributions of the natural mortality rate and fishing mortality rate to determine the likelihood of overfishing. Before this can be done, however, the range of the growth parameters and natural mortality rate should be narrowed down based on expert knowledge and background information on fish species of similar life history and habitat needs.

IV-2- 6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.

- Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
- Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.

The AW panel recommended improving the quality of life history parameter estimates; developing a fishery-independent monitoring program; continuing efforts to improve the collection of species-specific catch and effort data; and modifying the length-based total mortality rate estimator to account for potential changes in selectivity. I consider these research areas are important for reducing the uncertainty and improving the quality of the assessment. The AW panel probably needs to prioritize the research recommendations and separate the short-term research plan from the long-term plan.

Given the problems associated with the data, an important goal should be to improve the data quality and quantity. Short-term and long-term plans should be developed to achieve the goal. The short term research priority may include (1) improving life history data estimates and the quantification of their uncertainty in the form of probably distributions; (2) identifying major fishing areas and how the fishing areas vary with time via conducting interviews with fishermen involved in the fishery; and (3) identifying potential approaches that can be used to estimate species-specific landing data (e.g., based on species composition of landings that become available in recent years). The long-term research plan should include the development of fishery-independent monitoring program and continue improving the sampling protocol in the collection of fishery-dependent data (catch and effort).

Given the data limitations, I believe another research priority is to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator (Gedamke and Hoenig 2006) for the total mortality. Based on the information available and with some assumptions, a queen triggerfish fishery can be simulated, following the approach used in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006). A simulation can be conducted with this simulated fishery to evaluate the performance of this length-based estimator in estimating the total mortality rate. Different scenarios can be developed to identify key factors that may have significant impacts on the performance of the estimator. This can guide the future model development and data collection.

IV-2-7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.

I recommend the following key areas for the improvement when scheduling the next assessment:

- Growth parameters K and L_∞ should be estimated with uncertainty. A bootstrap approach can be used with the von Bertalanffy growth model to quantify the joint probability distribution of K and L_∞, which can be used for quantifying probability distributions for the total, natural and fishing mortality rates;

- More basic biological studies need to be conducted to improve our understanding of key life history processes and estimate key life history parameters such as growth parameters, length/age at maturity, fecundity, and their spatial variability;

- An interviewing-fishermen program should be done to identify major fishing grounds and main size classes of landed catch, and possible changes over time;

- Use the proportion of blue tang in the total catch of all surgeonfish species estimated in recent years to estimate the queen triggerfish catch in the past (assuming that the proportion is the same over time);

- A simulation study needs to be conducted to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator of the total mortality rte and identify assumptions/parameters that can influence greatly the performance of the estimator, which will help us understand the quality of the estimates of the total mortality rate;

- Uncertainty associated with the natural mortality rate should be quantified in the form of a probability distribution, which can be done with a Monte Carlo simulation approach;

- The Pauly natural mortality rate estimator was derived from many species with very different life history and habitat needs (Pauly 1980), and a subset of fish species that have life history and habitat needs similar to the focal species may yield a more appropriate natural mortality rate estimator;

- A yield-per-recruit analysis with the consideration of uncertainty associated with life history parameters (e.g., Chen 1996; Chang et al. 2009) can be done to estimate theoretical biological reference points such as F_{max} and $F_{0.1}$; and

- A spawning stock biomass-per-recruit analysis with the incorporation of uncertainty associated with life history parameters can also be done to estimate reference points such as $F_{20\%}$ and $F_{40\%}$.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the data limitations, the assessment appears to be well-planned and structured. Uncertainties in the quality and quantity of data, fisheries (e.g., selectivity) and life history parameters (e.g., von Bertalanffy growth parameters and natural mortality rate), and model structure (different estimators used to estimate the total and natural mortality rates) were carefully evaluated. I would like to commend the efforts of the AW panel in addressing data quality and quantity issues, identifying and evaluating implicit and explicit assumptions associated with methods and data, designing and conducting a rather systematic sensitivity analysis, exploring alternative model configurations and parameterization. However, based on the information I have reviewed, I cannot conclude that this assessment is scientifically sound, and adequately addresses needs for management advice. This mainly results from the data limitations.

I do have concerns for both the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang that I hope the AW panel could address to improve the assessment of the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang. I made the following general comments and specific recommendations.

General comments

The Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang are typical data-poor fisheries with no fishery-independent data and limited fishery-dependent data of questionable quality. Their life history processes are not well understood and key life history parameters are not well quantified. The low quality and quantity of the information available makes it extremely difficult to assess the status of the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang stocks. The top priority should be to develop a fishery-independent monitoring program for the reef-dependent species such as queen triggerfish and blue tang in the U.S. Caribbean. Such a program can yield a reliable abundance index and provide samples for basic biological studies to estimate key life history parameters such as von Bertalanffy growth parameters, fecundity, and length/age at maturity and their spatial variability, not only for the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang; but also for other reef-dependent fish species inhabiting the same area.

The quality and quantity of fishery-dependent data should also be improved. This can be done by developing a port or sea sampling program or further improve current reporting system by including the information on spatial locations of catch and conducting some cross-validation studies of fishermen's reported data. The report of species-specific landings in recent years is certainly a good way to improve the data quality and quantity, making the landing data useful in the species-specific stock assessment. The information may be useful to decompose the historical landings of species group into species-specific landings. A program should be developed to interview fishermen on their historical and current fishing areas and the changes in their attitude towards the targeted species and size composition in the fishery (Ames 2004). I believe such an interview program is cost effective to collect some valuable historical information regarding fishing grounds and fishermen's preferences for species and size. Such information will be valuable to improve the quality of the historical data and improve the understanding of possible temporal changes in fishing effort distribution and selectivity.

Given the data limitations, the choice of stock assessment models is rather limited for the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang stock assessment. Instead of using a traditional Beverton-Holt method to estimate the total mortality from length-composition data, the AW panel listed six assumptions explicitly and explicitly associated with the method and decided to use the method by Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) which does not require the assumption of an equilibrium population. Given the available data, this may be the best approach available. However, this approach also requires some assumptions in temporal variability in selectivity. Although Gedamke and Hoenig (2006) conducted a simulation study to evaluate the performance of the estimator, their simulation was based on a single species with different biology and fishing intensity. I suggest that the AW panel uses the Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang data to design a similar simulation study. The AW panel can design a few scenarios to evaluate the performance of the estimator in retrieving the "true" built in the simulation study and identify key factors that may greatly influence the performance of the estimator for the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish and blue tang fisheries.

A rather comprehensive sensitivity analysis was conducted to evaluate possible impacts of uncertainty associated with the growth parameters for the estimation of the total mortality rate in the assessment of the queen triggerfish and blue tang. Although I appreciate the AW panel's efforts, I believe a better structured Monte Carlo simulation approach may be better in quantifying the uncertainty associated with the estimation of the total mortality rate and natural mortality rate. The AW panel can use the sensitivity analysis to identify the most plausible parameterization of the Gedamke-Hoenig model (Gedamke and Hoenig 2006) and then conduct a Monte Carlo simulation approach with parameters K and L_∞ randomly drawn from their joint distribution which can be derived from bootstrapped nonlinear least squares in fitting the von Bertalanffy growth model to length-at-age data. similar approach can be used for estimating the natural mortality rate.

I also believe expert and background knowledge about the queen triggerfish and blue tang should be used to reduce the magnitude of the uncertainty on the growth parameters and natural mortality rate. Some values for M, K, and L_∞ appear to be not biologically realistic for a fish species with a life history process similar to the queen triggerfish and blue tang, and should be excluded in the assessment. Maybe a literature search for fish species of similar life history and habitat should be done to derive a range of values that are biologically realistic for the key life history parameters.

The AW panel did not do a yield-per-recruit analysis and SSB-per-recruit (or egg-per-recruit) analysis because of uncertainty associated with the growth parameters and natural mortality rate. However, these values were used in the estimation of the total mortality rate and natural mortality rate. This is a rather inconsistent argument. I would like to suggest that at least a yield-per-recruit analysis can be done to estimate F_{MAX} and $F_{0.1}$ for possible reference points. The fact that both growth parameters and natural mortality rate are used in a yield-per-recruit analysis and estimation of the current fishing mortality rate using the approach described in the assessment may reduce the impact of uncertainty associated with the growth parameters and natural mortality rate on the determination of the fishery status.

Specific recommendations

Although I have provided comments and recommendations under each TOR, I would like to re-iterate the following recommendations.

- I recommend that expert and background knowledge/information on species of similar life history patterns and habitat needs be used to exclude biologically unrealistic values of K, L_∞, natural mortality rate, and total mortality rate;

- I recommend that uncertainty associated with K, L_∞, natural mortality rate, total mortality rate, and subsequently fishing mortality rate be quantified using a Monte Carlo simulation;

- I suggest that a program be developed for interviewing fishermen to have a better understanding of temporal and spatial variability of the fishing ground, target fish species and size (i.e. selectivity), and fishing efforts;

- I recommend that information on the fish species composition of current landings be used to decompose the historical landings of species group into the species-specific landings;

- I recommend that a fishery-independent survey program be developed for the U.S. Caribbean queen triggerfish, blue tang and other reef-dependent species sharing similar habitat to collect samples for estimating basic life history parameters and for driving reliable abundance indices;

- I recommend that a simulation study be conducted to evaluate the performance of the length-based estimator of the total mortality rate and identify assumptions/parameters that can influence greatly the performance of the estimator;

- I suggest that a yield-per-recruit analysis be conducted with the incorporation of uncertainty associated with life history parameters to estimate theoretical biological reference points such as F_{max} and $F_{0.1}$; and

- I recommend that a spawning stock biomass-per-recruit analysis be done with the incorporation of uncertainty associated with life history parameters to estimate reference points such as $F_{20\%}$ and $F_{40\%}$.

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SEDAR 30. 2013. Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment. SEDAR, 4055Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

Appendix 1: Bibliography of materials provided for review for SEDAR 30 Caribbean Blue Tang and Queen Triggerfish

Documents Prepared for the Assessment Workshop

- Bryan, M. 2012. Summary of recreational catch and effort for blue tang and queen triggerfish caught in Puerto Rico since 2000. SEDAR30-AW-01.

- Bryan, M. 2012. Evaluation of the available length-frequency information in the US Caribbean Trip Interview Program (TIP) data. SEDAR30-AW-02

- Rios, A. B. 2012. A review of the life history characteristics of blue tang and queen triggerfish. SEDAR30-AW-03

- McCarthy, K. J. 2012. Commercial fishery landings of queen triggerfish and blue tang in the United States Caribbean, 1983-201. SEDAR30-AW-04

Final Stock Assessment Reports

- SEDAR30-SAR1: Blue Tang Assessment Report

- SEDAR30-SAR2: Queen Triggerfish Assessment Report

Reference Documents

- SEDAR30-RD01: A pilot program to assess methods of collecting bycatch, discard, and biological data in the commercial fisheries of St. Thomas, U.S. Caribbean

- SEDAR30-RD02: A pilot program to assess methods of collecting bycatch, discard, and biological data in the commercial fisheries of U.S. Caribbean (Saint Croix)

Appendix 2: A copy of the CIE Statement of Work

Attachment A: Statement of Work for Dr. Yong Chen

External Independent Peer Review by the Center for Independent Experts

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

Scope of Work and CIE Process: The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Office of Science and Technology coordinates and manages a contract providing external expertise through the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) to conduct independent peer reviews of NMFS scientific projects. The Statement of Work (SoW) described herein was established by the NMFS Project Contact and Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), and reviewed by CIE for compliance with their policy for providing independent expertise that can provide impartial and independent peer review without conflicts of interest. CIE reviewers are selected by the CIE Steering Committee and CIE Coordination Team to conduct the independent peer review of NMFS science in compliance the predetermined Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review. Each CIE reviewer is contracted to deliver an independent peer review report to be approved by the CIE Steering Committee and the report is to be formatted with content requirements as specified in **Annex 1**. This SoW describes the work tasks and deliverables of the CIE reviewer for conducting an independent peer review of the following NMFS project. Further information on the CIE process can be obtained from www.ciereviews.org.

Project Description SEDAR 30 will be a compilation of data, an assessment of the stock, and an assessment review conducted for Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish. The CIE peer review is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the best possible assessment has been provided through the SEDAR process. The stocks assessed through SEDAR 30 are within the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council and the territorial waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review are attached in **Annex 2**.

Requirements for CIE Reviewers: Three CIE reviewers shall have the necessary qualifications to complete an impartial and independent peer review in accordance with the tasks and ToRs described in the SoW herein. The CIE reviewers shall have expertise in stock assessment, statistics, fisheries science, and marine biology sufficient to complete the tasks of the scientific peer-review described herein. Each CIE reviewer's duties shall not exceed a maximum of 10 days to complete all work tasks of the peer review described herein.

Location of Peer Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the desk review during 4-7 February 2013, therefore no travel will be required.

Statement of Tasks: Each CIE reviewer shall complete the following tasks in accordance with the SoW and Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables herein.

Prior to the Peer Review: Upon completion of the CIE reviewer selection by the CIE Steering Committee, the CIE shall provide the CIE reviewer information (full name, title, affiliation, country, address, email) to the COR, who forwards this information to the NMFS Project

Contact no later the date specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables. The CIE is responsible for providing the SoW and ToRs to the CIE reviewers. The NMFS Project Contact is responsible for providing the CIE reviewers with the background documents, reports, and other information pertinent to the desk review arrangements. Any changes to the SoW or ToRs must be made through the COR prior to the commencement of the peer review.

Pre-review Background Documents: Two weeks before the peer review, the NMFS Project Contact will send (by electronic mail or make available at an FTP site) to the CIE reviewers the necessary background information and reports for the peer review. In the case where the documents need to be mailed, the NMFS Project Contact will consult with the CIE Lead Coordinator on where to send documents. CIE reviewers are responsible only for the pre-review documents that are delivered to the reviewer in accordance to the SoW scheduled deadlines specified herein. The CIE reviewers shall read all documents in preparation for the peer review.

Desk Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the independent peer review in accordance with the SoW and ToRs, and shall not serve in any other role unless specified herein. **Modifications to the SoW and ToRs shall not be made during the peer review, and any SoW or ToRs modifications prior to the peer review shall be approved by the COR and CIE Lead Coordinator.** The CIE Lead Coordinator can contact the Project Contact to confirm any peer review arrangements.

Contract Deliverables - Independent CIE Peer Review Reports: Each CIE reviewer shall complete an independent peer review report in accordance with the SoW. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review according to required format and content as described in Annex 1. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review addressing each ToR as described in Annex 2.

Specific Tasks for CIE Reviewers: The following chronological list of tasks shall be completed by each CIE reviewer in a timely manner as specified in the **Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables**.

1) Conduct necessary pre-review preparations, including the review of background material and reports provided by the NMFS Project Contact in advance of the peer review.

2) During February 4-7, 2013 as specified herein, conduct an independent desk peer review in accordance with the ToRs (**Annex 2**).

3) No later than February 21, 2013, each CIE reviewer shall submit an independent peer review report addressed to the "Center for Independent Experts," and sent to Mr. Manoj Shivlani, CIE Lead Coordinator, via email to shivlanim@bellsouth.net, and CIE Regional Coordinator, via email to Dr. David Sampson david.sampson@oregonstate.edu. Each CIE report shall be written using the format and content requirements specified in Annex 1, and address each ToR in **Annex 2**.

Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables: CIE shall complete the tasks and deliverables described in this SoW in accordance with the following schedule.

14 January 2013	CIE sends reviewer contact information to the COR, who then sends this to the NMFS Project Contact
18 January 2013	NMFS Project Contact sends the stock assessment report and background documents to the CIE reviewers.
4-13 February 2013	Each reviewer conducts an independent desk peer review
19 February 2013	CIE reviewers submit draft CIE independent peer review reports to the CIE Lead Coordinator and CIE Regional Coordinator
7 March 2013	CIE submits CIE independent peer review reports to the COR
14 March 2013	The COR distributes the final CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and regional Center Director

Modifications to the Statement of Work: This 'Time and Materials' task order may require an update or modification due to possible changes to the terms of reference or schedule of milestones resulting from the fishery management decision process of the NOAA Leadership, Fishery Management Council, and Council's SSC advisory committee. A request to modify this SoW must be approved by the Contracting Officer at least 15 working days prior to making any permanent changes. The Contracting Officer will notify the COR within 10 working days after receipt of all required information of the decision on changes. The COR can approve changes to the milestone dates, list of pre-review documents, and ToRs within the SoW as long as the role and ability of the CIE reviewers to complete the deliverable in accordance with the SoW is not adversely impacted. The SoW and ToRs shall not be changed once the peer review has begun.

Acceptance of Deliverables: Upon review and acceptance of the CIE independent peer review reports by the CIE Lead Coordinator, Regional Coordinator, and Steering Committee, these reports shall be sent to the COR for final approval as contract deliverables based on compliance with the SoW and ToRs. As specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables, the CIE shall send via e-mail the contract deliverables (CIE independent peer review reports) to the COR (William Michaels, via William.Michaels@noaa.gov).

Applicable Performance Standards: The contract is successfully completed when the COR provides final approval of the contract deliverables. The acceptance of the contract deliverables shall be based on three performance standards:
(1) The CIE report shall completed with the format and content in accordance with **Annex 1**,
(2) The CIE report shall address each ToR as specified in **Annex 2**,
(3) The CIE reports shall be delivered in a timely manner as specified in the schedule of milestones and deliverables.

Distribution of Approved Deliverables: Upon acceptance by the COR, the CIE Lead Coordinator shall send via e-mail the final CIE reports in *.PDF format to the COR. The COR will distribute the CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and Center Director.

Support Personnel:

William Michaels, Program Manager, COR
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Key Personnel:

NMFS Project Contact:

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North Charleston, SC 29405
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Annex 1: Format and Contents of CIE Independent Peer Review Report

1. The CIE independent report shall be prefaced with an Executive Summary providing a concise summary of the findings and recommendations, and specify whether the science reviewed is the best scientific information available.

2. The main body of the reviewer report shall consist of a Background, Description of the Individual Reviewer's Role in the Review Activities, Summary of Findings for each ToR in which the weaknesses and strengths are described, and Conclusions and Recommendations in accordance with the ToRs. The CIE independent report shall be a stand-alone document for others to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the science reviewed. The CIE independent report shall be an independent peer review of each ToRs.

3. The reviewer report shall include the following appendices:

   Appendix 1: Bibliography of materials provided for review
   Appendix 2: A copy of the CIE Statement of Work

Annex 2: Terms of Reference for the Peer Review

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:
   a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?
   b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?
   c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?
   d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?
2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.
   a) Are methods scientifically sound and robust?
   b) Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?
   c) Are the methods appropriate for the available data?
3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:
   a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?
   b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?
   c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?
   d) Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?
   e) Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?
4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:
   a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?
   b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?
   c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?
   d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results ?
5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.

- Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods
- Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.
   - Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.
   - Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.
7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.

30th Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR 30)

Reviewer Report to the Center for Independent Experts on the U.S. Caribbean Blue Tang and Queen Triggerfish (SEDAR 30)

March 20, 2013

Prepared for:
Center for Independent Experts

By:
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5 1/2 A Quarry Rd
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
B3N 1X1

Executive Summary

This document is an independent review of the activities and findings of the 30th Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR 30). The review was a desktop review, that is, assessment documents and supporting material were sent out for review, but there was not a meeting or an opportunity for dialogue regarding the assessment. Two stocks were reviewed: the U.S. Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish. While I acknowledge that the science reviewed is the best scientific information available and that considerable effort was made to make the best use of the data available, I do not find that either assessment provides a sound basis for management advice. Several of the ToRs were met, but the most important ones regarding stock status, trends and the impact of fishing were not (ToRs 3 and 4). The failure to meet these ToRs are through no fault of the assessment team, but rather, are due to the lack of data and often the poor quality of the data they do have.

The approach to each assessment was similar. It was in fact so similar, I had trouble seeing the differences and I wonder what differences in methods, if any, are warranted given the life history of each species and any differences in the fishery. Consequently, my comments typically apply to both assessments and I only make distinctions where necessary.

My overall conclusions are that we don't know much about the status of these fish or whether overfishing has occurred. A noble effort has been made, but alas, we have tremendous uncertainty and little basis for management advice. Rather than focusing on the particulars of these assessments, which I do below, I encourage the assessment team to take a strategic approach to the problem. In particular, to formulate a medium to long-term plan to, 1) engage external scientists in a program review where an assessment framework (benchmark) can be agreed upon, and 2) make plans to collect the data to support it.

1.0 Background

This document is an independent review of the findings of the 30th Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR 30). The review was a desktop review, that is, assessment documents and supporting material were sent out for review, but there was not a meeting or an opportunity for dialogue regarding the assessment. Two stocks were reviewed: the U.S. Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish. Assessment documents (Appendix 1) and background materials were provided via a website two weeks before the review. I was also provided with a Statement of Work (Appendix 2), including the Terms of Reference (ToR).

2.0 Individual Reviewer Activities

I reviewed the assessment and background documents provided for the review. This was a desktop review so there was no dialogue between the assessment team and me and all my comments only pertain to documents provided to me. As outlined in Statement of Work (Appendix 2), these reports should state in the reviewer's own words whether each ToR of the Stock Assessment Workshop was completed successfully, should state whether they accepted or rejected the work that they reviewed, and should include an explanation of their decisions (strengths, weaknesses of the analyses, etc.) and recommendations for each ToR. A key determinant of whether a ToR had been met was the extent to which it provided a scientifically credible basis for developing fishery management advice. The following section contains my review for both assessments.

3.0 Review of U.S. Caribbean Blue Tang and Queen Triggerfish

U.S. Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish were assessed using a length-based estimate of total mortality (Beverton and Holt 1957, Gedamke and Hoenig 2006). I presume that this is the first time these stocks have been assessed as there were no citations to previous assessments. If these are the first assessments of these stocks, I think it is important to put in the assessment report as context (as it stands now, the information is presented in section 3 of Section I; I suggest making that more prominent in the introductions to Sections I and II). I felt like a lot of the structure of the report and writing was 'cookie cutter', that is, following a particular formulae. This seems counter productive to me. In my view, what is needed in a first assessment is a review of past work and some soul searching for ways forward. This is better done in a free format. Furthermore, the assessments are chopped up into little pieces (six supporting documents). While the details should remain in the supporting documents, I think a synthesis of these documents is needed in the Assessment Process Report. Maybe that is what is lacking the most: a cohesive synthesis and vision. Blue tang and queen triggerfish have similar data and assessment problems, how can we solve them together? Or for perhaps a larger species group? Step back and take stock of the situation, so to speak. I am having trouble getting the sense of whether people care and if so exactly what they care about. Compared to some of the world's fisheries the landings of surgeonfish and triggerfish are small (~35, ~80 metric tons / year respectively) although this is a relatively small area as well. Maybe more data and analysis to support management is not needed. If it is, then a stronger case should be made for it. Similarly, if one is going to choose an assessment method, it should be defended and not simply stated that the 'AW panel decided'.

The assessment of blue tag and queen triggerfish is difficult given the quality and limited amount of data. Overall, the data have been assembled with considerable care and diligence. Some issues remain, but it is a good point in the history of these fisheries to step back and evaluate the quality of the data and the most effective means of assessing stock status and the impact of fishing. The assessment team makes good use of the data, given what they have and it is clear that progress has been made and that higher quality data are being collected. Stock status, in terms of a biomass based reference, cannot be determined given the approach used and the impact of fishing can only be estimated using strong and weakly supported assumptions about fishing and natural mortality. In my view, the current monitoring and assessment approach is inadequate and what is needed is an overall program review. I am not a manager, but if I were, I would be uncomfortable managing this fishery with such limited tools to assess stock status and the impact of fishing. So that causes me, as a reviewer, to look to the future. What is the framework or benchmark which will be used to assess these populations? Has there been adequate discussion and review of a proposed framework? Once the framework is decided upon, then the focus can be put on the most important and useful information to collect. The discussion of the assessment approach and data collection needs to proceed hand in hand. I will go so far as to suggest that this assessment team formulate a proposal for a new assessment approach along with a plan to collect the necessary data and submit that for review.

I did find the management history and context presented in Section I: Introduction useful, complicated, but important to be aware of. Actually, I would like to be slightly more complimentary of this work, as I don't see it enough and appreciate the work it takes. What I would like is for the managers and biologists to make stronger statements about if and when these management measures would be expected to affect the data used in the assessment. If a management measure was put in place and it was expected to affect mean length in the catch, did we see it? Did we even have the data to see it? Which of these management measures can be ignored, in terms of the assessment, and which should be explicitly accounted for. If you find a change in total morality, can it be attributed to a management measure and / or a change in fishing practices? This is good work, but it should be pushed to the next level, if possible (I acknowledge the difficulties, but encourage those involved to try).

I find the explanation of methods in the Section II: Assessment Process Report thin, but what is needed even more is better motivation of the general approach and methods used. The motivation is even more important because this is a desktop review. It is much easier to get a sense of why decisions about the data or methods were made when there is a presentation and reviewers are afforded the opportunity to ask questions. In the situation of a desktop review, we are left with sentences like 'The AW [assessment workshop] panel determined..., The AW panel agreed...', but I need more written explanation supporting the decision or conclusion in order to decide whether I reach the same conclusion or not.

I see at least four major data categories where you might concentrate your efforts: 1) landings data, 2) fisheries independent survey, 3) life history data, and 4) tagging. As I noted, the priority and amount of effort given to each depends on the assessment framework you plan to use. Obviously, if one wishes to assess the stock with fisheries based catch per unit effort (cpue) data, then emphasis would be placed on collecting high quality effort and landings data. If on the other hand, one wishes to assess the stock using a fisheries independent survey, or calculate yield per recruit then the priorities shift and a different investment is required. I fear I state the obvious to my fellow stock assessment scientists, but in an effort to be as helpful and constructive as possible, I elaborate on these issues below (ToR 7).

ToRs 1,2,5 and 6 were met, but ToRs 3 and 4 were not in both assessments. I provide comments on all the ToRs below.

ToR 1

1. *Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:*

    a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?

    b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?

    c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?

    d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?

This ToR was met. There are limited data for this fishery. The landings are unknown for the species blue tang or queen triggerfish, but are recorded collectively as surgeonfish and triggerfish. There has been some length sampling, but they appear to be uninformative for a length-based cohort analysis as one cannot see cohorts in the length frequency plots (both species). Life history data (growth, age at maturity) for blue tang from the management unit is lacking and data are taken from other areas. The life history data for queen triggerfish is taken from Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands but the authors suggest that it needs to be verified by another study using otoliths rather than dorsal spines. Plots of the frequency at length by age and examining the modes and overlap among ages would be useful, to help determine if a length or age based model might be effective. Neither species has a fisheries independent survey. Overall, there is very little to go on. So, the greatest advancements in understanding the dynamics in these stocks will occur by collecting better data.

One big difficulty is not knowing the landings. The landings are aggregated into large species groups and until there is a method to estimate landings at a species level it will be hard to answer the question 'should we care'. I would like to say we should care about every fish we remove from the ocean, but the fact is that we must prioritize our efforts. Certainly some surgeonfish and triggerfish are being removed, but even a rough estimate of proportion by species would be useful. It appears that the reporting regulations have changed and that this will no longer be a problem, but I suggest you take the time to demonstrate that it is not a problem in the future with some biological sampling of the catch. It is stated that species-specific data were reported in the US Virgin Islands during the 2011 - 2012 fishing year. I think it would have been very useful to report the proportion of blue tang and queen triggerfish in your assessment. If there have not been a lot of gear changes or changes in fishing practices, these proportions can be applied with some caution to the older landings data. Do we have enough information to partition the landings in the other areas? If not, what additional data would be needed?

I am not entirely sure if blue tang and queen triggerfish are targeted in the fishery or if they are principally bycatch species. If they are only a small proportion of the surgeonfish and triggerfish maybe this assessment approach is adequate. My confusion, of course, would have been cleared up immediately if this review was done at a meeting. This small example shows how extra effort is required by the assessment team to explain the context of the situation.

In general, I would have appreciated more background on the natural history of these fish and the community and ecosystem in general. This context is important in evaluating the appropriateness of this assessment and avenues for its improvement. I would integrate all the information in SEDAR30-AW-03 'A review of the life history characteristics...' into the Assessment Process Report. One notable gap in your knowledge is the length or age at maturity.

I can appreciate the fact that improved sampling of the catch will be difficult, and I found the pilot studies examining these issues useful (SEDAR30-RD-01,SEDAR30-RD-02). Some sort of improved sampling will need to occur, but the level of investment is proportional to the assessment method. If you want to use a length-based or age-based model then this data stream will be very important and will require further study and planning. If you instead choose to use tagging as an assessment method, sampling the catch is less of a priority.

a) The decisions about how to use the data appear to be robust and sound.

b) Data uncertainties are acknowledged and reported. I find the uncertainties larger than 'normal' and these uncertainties severely limit the ability to track the population and to estimate the impact of fishing. Only the most general of statements about total mortality and whether it has changed can be made and given the uncertainties we cannot be confident in these conclusions.

c) The data appear to be applied properly within the model: the length based mortality estimator by Gedamke and Hoenig (2006).

d) This depends on what the goals are. I think the goals should be on how to move to a better assessment framework. The input data series are not reliable and sufficient to support the assessment of stock status and the impact of fishing, the typical goals of an assessment. If the goal is to estimate whether there has been a change (increase?) in the total mortality rate, then this work makes a contribution, but the conclusions must be very tentative given the quality of the data.

ToR 2

2. *Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.*

    a) Are methods scientifically sound and robust?

    b) Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?

    c) Are the methods appropriate for the available data?

This ToR was met. The methods used for a length-based estimate of the total mortality rate look sound, but maybe not very robust. The methods are appropriate for the data available. As noble as these efforts are, I have trouble viewing these methods as an 'assessment'. With better life history and selectivity data we may have more confidence in an estimate of the total mortality rate and any conclusion about whether the total mortality rate has changed. The signal in any changes in length does not appear to be as strong as in the examples in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006). There is some evidence that the total mortality rate has increased for blue tang and possibly decreased for queen triggerfish, but changes in fishing practices may (probably?) make it difficult to interpret these data. In the AIC results, it is essentially profiling over different life history input parameters *and* changes in Z. The interpretation focuses on the best model for Z within a combination of life history parameters, but do these results also indicate the most likely combination of life history parameters? Can one actually put forth one or two models from Table 18 blue tang and Table 13 queen triggerfish as the best model?

a) The methods are scientifically sound and robust, but they cannot estimate stock status and the impact of fishing. I would like to have seen the profile likelihoods or the Bayesian posteriors for the estimates of total mortality and change year, similar to Figure 3 in Gedamke and Hoenig (2006), but more. These kinds of diagnostics are typically important to present.

b) The model is configured properly.

c) The methods are appropriate for the available data but do not form the basis for strong management advice (objectives 3 and 4 below). I have some trouble with the sensitivity analysis. It seems like a very wide range was chosen and that just has the effect of demonstrating that the estimates of the total mortality rate could be just about anything. How were the ranges of the life history parameters chosen? Were they the 95% credible interval (CI) from a growth study? I also have difficulty tracing back the range of total mortality rates used in the tables estimating F and M (blue tang: Tables 16 and 24, queen triggerfish: Tables 19, 21, 25). Couldn't that range be taken from the CI of Z estimated from your analysis of mean length?

ToR 3

3. *Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:*

   a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?

   b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

   c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

   d) Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?

   e) *Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?*

This ToR was not met. By and large it is not possible to reach these objectives given the lack of suitable data. The assessment does not provide abundance or biomass estimates and given the data, it currently is not possible. It does provide an estimate of total mortality (Z) from which fishing mortality (F) can be inferred. However, there are large uncertainties in both total mortality and natural mortality making it exceedingly difficult to estimate fishing mortality (Z-M=F). They did not provide a convincing argument that their estimate(s) of mortality are useful to support status inferences. The do a good job of showing the uncertainty, but could do a better job arguing which estimate has the most support. A preferred model or estimate brings focus to the discussion about whether the estimate or model is 'useful to support status inferences'. As noted by the authors in the general discussion of the blue tang assessment:

'*The disparate estimates of growth led to considerable uncertainty in the mortality estimates. They also made it difficult to meaningfully interpret stock status in terms of fishing mortality, in the absence of a weighting system giving credence to one life-history strategy over another.*'

So given these data, the status of the blue tang fishery cannot be well determined. I agree entirely with this statement. Although, I think sometime we need to stick our neck out and rely on 'expert knowledge', if for nothing else than to push things forward (I guess that is what I am doing with all these comments!).

Similarly for queen triggerfish in the section on stock status and general conclusions the authors state:

'...*it is difficult to interpret the sustainability of the estimated, current exploitation rates and that the absolute estimates of mortality should be interpreted with caution.*'

I also agree entirely with this statement. So given the data, and a good analysis of what data is available, I conclude that we can not determine if the stock is overfished or if overfishing is occurring. The current data and modeling is light-years away from estimating a stock recruitment relationship, and I don't think this should be a short or medium term goal. Stock status cannot be determined with the current data and there are very few other data, if any, that can be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions. If there were better life history data from the management unit and better length sampling of the catch then statements about overfishing based on F relative to M potentially could be better substantiated, but it will not solve all your problems and I would not rush to this without a more thorough program review.

ToR 4

4. *Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:*

   a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?

   b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?

   c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?

   d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results?

This ToR was not met. No projections were done.

ToR 5

5. *Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.*

   - *Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods.*
   - *Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.*

The uncertainties are well addressed, there are just so many! Most of the uncertainties are either due to the lack of data or to data of poor quality / resolution. The AIC analysis and sensitivity analyses are useful and demonstrate the need for better data, but I think that one could and should put forth (tentatively) the best model. You could work on how to better visualize the output from multiple models. The assessment team points out that the estimates from the length based total mortality estimator 'should be considered with caution', which is clearly and appropriately stated.

ToR 6

6. *Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.*

   - *Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.*

   - *Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.*

I set this out more generally below. I cannot prioritize these well because I do not know 1) the species biology, ecosystem and fishery well, 2) the long-term assessment goals or 3) the financial constraints. I think the assessment team would benefit from a meeting to discuss these issues and help set out the overall assessment framework. But if prioritizing is at all useful given my limited knowledge, I would work on getting a fisheries independent survey together, I might even do this over the life history work although that should be done as well.

Presumably some discussion occurred about whether the method used was the best given the available data. I think it is important to review and recapitulate that argument in the introduction to the assessment report.

ToR 7

7. *Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.*

I wouldn't schedule another assessment until an assessment framework is chosen and the appropriate data collected to support it. Below I briefly review the potential value of collecting better data in four areas.

Landings

I encourage to continue to try and improve sampling of the landings. Some changes have already been made. Check to see they accomplish your goals. Stratification and expansion factors will be important issues if you decide to go to a length based or age based model.

Fisheries independent survey

A fisheries independent survey can be the most useful and important piece of data indicating stock status and the impact of fishing. I am showing some of my bias, but I think many fisheries scientists believe this as well. The effectiveness of a survey, however, depends on many things including, the natural variability in the distribution and abundance of the species or community of interest, the survey design, the gear, the catchability, etc.. Designing a good survey is a big task and unless the species is extremely valuable, most surveys are used for an array of species. In your research recommendations you identify a fisheries independent survey as a 'top research priority'. If so, then this is quite an undertaking and probably deserves a suite of studies examining

1) the species which the survey would focus on monitoring, 2) the gear and fishing method, and 3) statistical design including stratification, sample size and power analysis. I would like to encourage this work, but it should be acknowledged that commitment to a survey is a high level decision and that a new survey will take a lot of work and will require some long-term planning.

Life history data

There is quite a bit of uncertainty in the basic biology of this species. In particular, there has not been a growth study done in this area for blue tang, and there is quite a bit of variability in growth when looking across other regions. The authors suggest that the growth study for queen triggerfish be redone. Natural mortality is estimated from these growth studies, but you seem to show with the different methods and your sensitivity analysis that it could be just about anything. Which estimate should go forward and why? The authors argue that the Pauly (1980) method is better because it includes the growth coefficient and asymptotic length and then state that it 'may be robust to their negative correlation', but the real question is whether the extra parameter contains new or different information. No information was presented on the length or age at maturity which I believe is used in Roff's method (1984). It is stated that beyond the age of five, length is not informative about blue tang age. While this may be true, it would be better to support it with plots of the frequency at length for each age group, so we can see how much overlap there is. If the first 4 or 5 ages show distinct modes then a length-based model may still be a good way forward.

Although it appears that the authors have some data to estimate the selectivity of the gear, this has not been done. In the analysis of the total mortality rate, the parameter measuring the length of first capture (L_c) was allowed to vary. I would think about how to better estimate the selectivity of the gear. Tagging? If one ever wanted to do a yield per recruit analysis, this parameter along with natural mortality, and maturity would have to be better estimated.

Tagging

A tagging program can be used to address many questions, as I am sure most of those involved are aware. I just think it is important to bring up because it may be useful in designing a program for assessing these fish. Conventional tags can be used to estimate movement and help determine the appropriateness of the management unit, the selectivity of the gear and fish growth. Tagging can be used to get an estimate of the fishing and natural mortality rates, and an estimate of population size, however population size is more difficult and requires more tags. In my view, an overall assessment and research program benefits from a tagging program. It has the potential to reduce the number of assumptions in an assessment and the uncertainty in some parameters. In some cases it is the best method for an assessment given the natural history of the fish and the nature of the fishery.

4.0 References

Beverton, R. J., & Holt, S. J. (1957). *On the dynamics of exploited fish populations*. Springer.

Pauly, D. (1980). A new methodology for rapidly acquiring basic information on tropical fish stocks: growth, mortality and stock-recruitment relationships. *Stock assessment for tropical small-scale fisheries*, 154-172.

Roff, D. A. (1984). The evolution of life history parameters in teleosts. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, *41*(6), 989-1000.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Bibliography of Materials Provided for Review

Appendix 2: CIE Statement of Work

Appendix 1: Bibliography of Materials Provided for Review

Documents Prepared for the Assessment Workshop

SEDAR30-AW-01. Summary of recreational catch and effort for blue tang and queen triggerfish caught in Puerto Rico since 2000. Meaghan Bryan

SEDAR30-AW-02. Evaluation of the available length-frequency information in the US Caribbean Trip Interview Program (TIP) data. Meaghan Bryan

SEDAR30-AW-03. A review of the life history characteristics of blue tang and queen triggerfish. Adyan B. Rios

SEDAR30-AW-04. Commercial fishery landings of queen triggerfish and blue tang in the United States Caribbean, 1983- 2011. Kevin J. McCarthy

Final Stock Assessment Reports

SEDAR30-SAR1. Blue tang

SEDAR30-SAR2. Queen triggerfish

Reference Documents

SEDAR30-RD01. A pilot program to assess methods of collecting bycatch, discard, and biological data in the commercial fisheries of St. Thomas, U.S. Caribbean. MRAG Americas

SEDAR30-RD02. A pilot program to assess methods of collecting bycatch, discard, and biological data in the commercial fisheries of U.S. Caribbean (Saint Croix). MRAG Americas

Appendix 1: CIE Statement of Work.

Attachment A: Statement of Work for Dr. Kurtis Trzcinski

External Independent Peer Review by the Center for Independent Experts

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

Scope of Work and CIE Process: The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Office of Science and Technology coordinates and manages a contract providing external expertise through the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) to conduct independent peer reviews of NMFS scientific projects. The Statement of Work (SoW) described herein was established by the NMFS Project Contact and Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), and reviewed by CIE for compliance with their policy for providing independent expertise that can provide impartial and independent peer review without conflicts of interest. CIE reviewers are selected by the CIE Steering Committee and CIE Coordination Team to conduct the independent peer review of NMFS science in compliance the predetermined Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review. Each CIE reviewer is contracted to deliver an independent peer review report to be approved by the CIE Steering Committee and the report is to be formatted with content requirements as specified in **Annex 1**. This SoW describes the work tasks and deliverables of the CIE reviewer for conducting an independent peer review of the following NMFS project. Further information on the CIE process can be obtained from www.ciereviews.org.

Project Description SEDAR 30 will be a compilation of data, an assessment of the stock, and an assessment review conducted for Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish. The CIE peer review is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the best possible assessment has been provided through the SEDAR process. The stocks assessed through SEDAR 30 are within the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council and the territorial waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the peer review are attached in **Annex 2**.

Requirements for CIE Reviewers: Three CIE reviewers shall have the necessary qualifications to complete an impartial and independent peer review in accordance with the tasks and ToRs described in the SoW herein. The CIE reviewers shall have expertise in stock assessment, statistics, fisheries science, and marine biology sufficient to complete the tasks of the scientific peer-review described herein. Each CIE reviewer's duties shall not exceed a maximum of 10 days to complete all work tasks of the peer review described herein.

Location of Peer Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the desk review during 4-7 February 2013, therefore no travel will be required.

Statement of Tasks: Each CIE reviewer shall complete the following tasks in accordance with the SoW and Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables herein.

Prior to the Peer Review: Upon completion of the CIE reviewer selection by the CIE Steering Committee, the CIE shall provide the CIE reviewer information (full name, title, affiliation, country, address, email) to the COR, who forwards this information to the NMFS Project Contact no later the date specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables. The CIE is responsible for providing the SoW and ToRs to the CIE reviewers. The NMFS Project Contact is responsible for providing the CIE reviewers with the background documents, reports, and other information pertinent to the desk review arrangements. Any changes to the SoW or ToRs must be made through the COR prior to the commencement of the peer review.

Pre-review Background Documents: Two weeks before the peer review, the NMFS Project Contact will send (by electronic mail or make available at an FTP site) to the CIE reviewers the necessary background information and reports for the peer review. In the case where the documents need to be mailed, the NMFS Project Contact will consult with the CIE Lead Coordinator on where to send documents. CIE reviewers are responsible only for the pre-review documents that are delivered to the reviewer in accordance to the SoW scheduled deadlines specified herein. The CIE reviewers shall read all documents in preparation for the peer review.

Desk Review: Each CIE reviewer shall conduct the independent peer review in accordance with the SoW and ToRs, and shall not serve in any other role unless specified herein. **Modifications to the SoW and ToRs shall not be made during the peer review, and any SoW or ToRs modifications prior to the peer review shall be approved by the COR and CIE Lead Coordinator.** The CIE Lead Coordinator can contact the Project Contact to confirm any peer review arrangements.

Contract Deliverables - Independent CIE Peer Review Reports: Each CIE reviewer shall complete an independent peer review report in accordance with the SoW. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review according to required format and content as described in Annex 1. Each CIE reviewer shall complete the independent peer review addressing each ToR as described in Annex 2.

Specific Tasks for CIE Reviewers: The following chronological list of tasks shall be completed by each CIE reviewer in a timely manner as specified in the **Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables**.

(1) Conduct necessary pre-review preparations, including the review of background material and reports provided by the NMFS Project Contact in advance of the peer review.

(2) During February 4-7, 2013 as specified herein, conduct an independent desk peer review in accordance with the ToRs (**Annex 2**).

(3) No later than February 21, 2013, each CIE reviewer shall submit an independent peer review report addressed to the "Center for Independent Experts," and sent to Mr.

Manoj Shivlani, CIE Lead Coordinator, via email to shivlanim@bellsouth.net, and CIE Regional Coordinator, via email to Dr. David Sampson david.sampson@oregonstate.edu. Each CIE report shall be written using the format and content requirements specified in Annex 1, and address each ToR in **Annex 2**.

Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables: CIE shall complete the tasks and deliverables described in this SoW in accordance with the following schedule.

14 January 2013	CIE sends reviewer contact information to the COR, who then sends this to the NMFS Project Contact
18 January 2013	NMFS Project Contact sends the stock assessment report and background documents to the CIE reviewers.
4-13 February 2013	Each reviewer conducts an independent desk peer review
19 February 2013	CIE reviewers submit draft CIE independent peer review reports to the CIE Lead Coordinator and CIE Regional Coordinator
7 March 2013	CIE submits CIE independent peer review reports to the COR
14 March 2013	The COR distributes the final CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and regional Center Director

Modifications to the Statement of Work: This 'Time and Materials' task order may require an update or modification due to possible changes to the terms of reference or schedule of milestones resulting from the fishery management decision process of the NOAA Leadership, Fishery Management Council, and Council's SSC advisory committee. A request to modify this SoW must be approved by the Contracting Officer at least 15 working days prior to making any permanent changes. The Contracting Officer will notify the COR within 10 working days after receipt of all required information of the decision on changes. The COR can approve changes to the milestone dates, list of pre-review documents, and ToRs within the SoW as long as the role and ability of the CIE reviewers to complete the deliverable in accordance with the SoW is not adversely impacted. The SoW and ToRs shall not be changed once the peer review has begun.

Acceptance of Deliverables: Upon review and acceptance of the CIE independent peer review reports by the CIE Lead Coordinator, Regional Coordinator, and Steering Committee, these reports shall be sent to the COR for final approval as contract deliverables based on compliance with the SoW and ToRs. As specified in the Schedule of Milestones and Deliverables, the CIE shall send via e-mail the contract deliverables (CIE independent peer review reports) to the COR (William Michaels, via William.Michaels@noaa.gov).

Applicable Performance Standards: The contract is successfully completed when the COR provides final approval of the contract deliverables. The acceptance of the contract deliverables shall be based on three performance standards:
(1) The CIE report shall completed with the format and content in accordance with **Annex 1**,
(2) The CIE report shall address each ToR as specified in **Annex 2**,

(3) The CIE reports shall be delivered in a timely manner as specified in the schedule of milestones and deliverables.

Distribution of Approved Deliverables: Upon acceptance by the COR, the CIE Lead Coordinator shall send via e-mail the final CIE reports in *.PDF format to the COR. The COR will distribute the CIE reports to the NMFS Project Contact and Center Director.

Support Personnel:

William Michaels, Program Manager, COR
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Key Personnel:

NMFS Project Contact:

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North Charleston, SC 29405
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Annex 1: Format and Contents of CIE Independent Peer Review Report

1. The CIE independent report shall be prefaced with an Executive Summary providing a concise summary of the findings and recommendations, and specify whether the science reviewed is the best scientific information available.

2. The main body of the reviewer report shall consist of a Background, Description of the Individual Reviewer's Role in the Review Activities, Summary of Findings for each ToR in which the weaknesses and strengths are described, and Conclusions and Recommendations in accordance with the ToRs. The CIE independent report shall be a stand-alone document for others to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the science reviewed. The CIE independent report shall be an independent peer review of each ToRs.

3. The reviewer report shall include the following appendices:

   Appendix 1: Bibliography of materials provided for review
   Appendix 2: A copy of the CIE Statement of Work

Annex 2: Terms of Reference for the Peer Review

SEDAR 30 Caribbean blue tang and queen triggerfish assessment review

1. Evaluate the data used in the assessment, addressing the following:

   a) Are data decisions made by the Assessment Workshop sound and robust?

   b) Are data uncertainties acknowledged, reported, and within normal or expected levels?

   c) Are data applied properly within the assessment model?

   d) Are input data series reliable and sufficient to support the assessment approach and findings?

2. Evaluate the methods used to assess the stock, taking into account the available data.

   1. Are methods scientifically sound and robust?

   2. Are assessment models configured properly and used consistent with standard practices?

   3. Are the methods appropriate for the available data?

3. Evaluate the assessment findings with respect to the following:

   a) Are abundance, exploitation, and biomass estimates reliable, consistent with input data and population biological characteristics, and useful to support status inferences?

   b) Is the stock overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

   c) Is the stock undergoing overfishing? What information helps you reach this conclusion?

   d) Is there an informative stock recruitment relationship? Is the stock recruitment curve reliable and useful for evaluation of productivity and future stock conditions?

   e) Are the quantitative estimates of the status determination criteria for this stock reliable? If not, are there other indicators that may be used to inform managers about stock trends and conditions?

4. Evaluate the stock projections, addressing the following:

   a) Are the methods consistent with accepted practices and available data?

   b) Are the methods appropriate for the assessment model and outputs?

   c) Are the results informative and robust, and useful to support inferences of probable future conditions?

d) Are key uncertainties acknowledged, discussed, and reflected in the projection results ?

5. Consider how uncertainties in the assessment, and their potential consequences, are addressed.

   - Comment on the degree to which methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data sources, and assessment methods

   1. Ensure that the implications of uncertainty in technical conclusions are clearly stated.

6. Consider the research recommendations provided by the Assessment workshop and make any additional recommendations or prioritizations warranted.

   - Clearly denote research and monitoring that could improve the reliability of, and information provided by, future assessments.

   - Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the SEDAR process.

7. Provide guidance on key improvements in data or modeling approaches which should be considered when scheduling the next assessment.