

## Increasing Twine Thickness and Mesh Size to Reduce Skate Bycatch in Monkfish Sink Gillnets

Grant: # NA18NMF4540332

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Company: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County

Representatives: Emerson Hasbrouck/John Scotti/Scott Curatolo-Wagemann

Telephone # (631) 727-7850

Email: ech12@cornell.edu

Address: 423 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, NY 11901

Progress Report: 1

Title of Project: Increasing Twine Thickness and Mesh Size to Reduce Skate Bycatch in Monkfish Sink Gillnets

#### Project Summary:

Using the knowledge of experienced monkfish fishermen, CCE will implement a coordinated effort that will focus on the development and evaluation of modified gillnets that will reduce adverse interactions with skate, and improve the understanding of how these interactions occur. CCE will collect and analyze specific data elements that will provide insight to managers and industry of specific gear interactions between both non-target and target species. Through an extensive outreach program, CCE will disseminate project results to better inform the fishing industry for better fishing practices.

CCE will perform an evaluation of two modified gillnet designs against a standard gillnet used in the monkfish fishery. This project will work cooperatively with an active gillnet fishermen from Pt. Judith, Rhode Island. We propose to qualify and quantify the skate bycatch reduction and target species retention of the experimental gillnet design described below.

Experimental Gillnet #1- 10 meshes high of 13" stretched mesh with a twine diameter of 1.1mm with 42" tie downs.

Experimental Gillnet #2- 10 meshes high of 13" stretched mesh with a twine diameter of 1.1mm with no tie downs.

#### Goal and Objectives:

The two main goals of the project are: 1) Help resource managers and fishermen work together to sustainably use, protect, maintain, and rebuild marine fisheries. 2) Develop and implement a conservation gear technology approach to address the issue of skate bycatch in the monkfish gillnet fishery.

The goals will be accomplished by the following objectives:

- Compare the bycatch rates of skate for each net (experimental and control)
- Compare the catch rates of the target species (monkfish) for each net
- Form a collaborative network of researchers and industry to fulfill multiple conservation needs for skate and monkfish
- Promote better fishing practices and use of gear modifications to reduce bycatch

#### Activities:

The following project activities were performed for this reporting period 06/01/2018 – 11/30/18.

## Budget

Revision: In early June, CCE was contacted by Cheryl Corbet in reference to adjusting the Monkfish RSA proposal budget to a lower amount. CCE took into consideration options to reduce the budget amount to achieve project goals. The proposal budget was revised downward and resubmitted. CCE received a Favorable Letter from NOAA on June 26, 2018. Upon accepting the project terms, additional budget forms needed revision, signature and resubmission to the NOAA Grants Specialist, Halima Turner. This was completed July 19, 2016.

## Permits:

CCE staff drafted a project EFP request letter which was submitted to GARFO in early August. CCE was issued a project EFP #18020 from GARFO on September 14, 2018.

CCE Principal Investigator, Emerson Hasbrouck and CCE staff participated in a project conference call with representatives from NOAA's GARFO and NEFSC in early August. Discussion topics included new PI responsibilities as follows:

- Understand compensation fishing and exempted fishing trip reporting requirements and permit terms and conditions.
- Ensure vessel operators have and understand compensation fishing and exempted fishing trip reporting requirements and permit terms and conditions.
- Maintain copies of all signed RSA compensation fishing permits, and ensure vessels have the most up to date permit.
- Secure confidentiality waivers from vessel owners for release of compensation fishing data.
- Respond to vessel compliance issues in a timely manner.
- Notify GARFO if issues are encountered.
- Maintain oversight of compensation fishing activity and ensure RSA awards are not exceeded.
- Submit a summary report of all compensation fishing activity in accordance with the grant progress and final report requirements.

## Project

Partners: During this reporting period, CCE staff contacted program partners and also attempted to convene a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting to review gear design and scientific method. Unfortunately, all members invited were unable to coordinate schedules. Participants invited include: Henry Milliken and Eric Matzen from NEFSC; Eric Reid from NEFMC- Chairman of the Monkfish Committee; John Reardon from IMP Fishing Gear Inc; Fiona Hogan from NEFMC; Patrick Duckworth of the F/V Reaper.

In September of this reporting period CCE staff drafted a letter to recruit fishermen to participate in purchasing Monkfish RSA DAS for compensation harvest. The request letter was sent to 150 federal monkfish license holders. We have received very little response to this letter.

CCE staff was able to secure a gillnet gear donation for this project from a previous experiment conducted by NEFSC. During this reporting period CCE staff coordinated with Henry Milliken and Eric Matzen of NEFSC to drop off the remaining experimental gillnets from their previous project at IMP Fishing Gear Inc. in New Bedford. John Reardon from IMP Fishing Gear Inc, an

industry collaborator on this project will assess the gillnet donation to see how it can be re-fitted for use for this project.

**RSA Days at Sea And Compensation Harvest:**

CCE was awarded 150 RSA DAS for 2018 and 147 RSA DAS for 2019. To date, CCE has not sold any Monkfish RSA DAS for this project. Please see Problems Encountered Section for further details

**Problems Encountered:**

Generating funds from the sale of RSA DAS has been a challenge for this project. CCE currently has RSA DAS from our previous monkfish RSA project and our network of industry partners in compensation fishing are currently fishing the old project RSA DAS first. During this reporting period CCE staff made attempts to recruit new monkfish industry members to participate in compensation harvest by sending a project letter to 150 monkfish license holders. Only one fisherman responded and agreed to participate. This fisherman will not be using any RSA DAS until February so unfortunately he could not commit any funds to the project. Due to an absence of funds from zero sales of RSA DAS, CCE has not been able to coordinate experimental gear purchase.

**Future Activities:**

Once our industry partners start to generate compensation harvest income, we can resume more activity on this project. CCE will coordinate a PAC meeting to finalize gear design and scientific method. CCE will work with our project gill net gear provider to re-fit the gillnet donation and purchase experimental gear needed. CCE will continue to market RSA DAS sales to fully utilize the award allocation and generate the appropriate funds to conduct the research. CCE staff continue the open conversation with NEFSC staff about RSA DAS issues. We will remain in contact with NMFS to track monkfish RSA DAS usage. CCE will continue to work with NMFS/GARFO with any vessel additions or subtractions on the EFP for this project. CCE will continue to communicate with project partners through email and conference calls. CCE staff will coordinate at-sea research.