

Project Title:	Puerto Rico For-Hire Vessel Pilot Project
Duration:	May 1, 2008 – April 30, 2009
Objectives:	To collect catch and effort data from for-hire vessels in Puerto Rico. This task will include establishment of a mandatory census reporting program, development and implementation of an electronic logbook reporting system, and validation of self-reported catch and effort data. Data collected through the census program will be compared to catch and effort estimates produced by the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) in an effort to develop an improved data collection program for for-hire vessels in Puerto Rico.
Methods:	<p>Currently, there are 15 active charter businesses operating in Puerto Rico. Some operate more than 1 vessel. Prior to this pilot project, standard MRFSS methodology was used to obtain catch and effort data on this industry, which resulted in inaccurate data estimates.</p> <p>Blue Fin Data was contracted to develop an electronic reporting system for Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. Two internal meetings were held between DNER personnel and Blue Fin Data to develop and discuss the electronic logbook software design. Once agreement was reached on a draft software design, 3 meetings were held at DNER to present the draft design to charter boat operators. All 15 charter boat operators were invited; only 2 attended the meetings. One of the recommendations that came out of these meetings was that a manual logbook would be kept in each charter boat for the captain to fill out at the end of each trip, but that only the charter owner would fill out the electronic logbook, based on the manual logbook data provided to him.</p> <p>Electronic reporting commenced in February, 2009. However, only 1 charter owner agreed to fill out the electronic logbook. Personal meetings between charter owners and DNER personnel were arranged outside the DNER to present and discuss the pilot project, due to the difficulties in arranging for them to meet at the DNER. At these meetings, the charter owners expressed the following opinions for refusing to cooperate with the pilot project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were concerned that if the PR Treasury Department were to gain access to the electronic logbook information, they would easily be able to calculate their true earnings.</li> </ul>

- They do not trust DNER.
- They have objections regarding the new DNER charter licensing program.
- They do not wish to give personal information, including owner's and captain's telephone number, USCG Captain number and postal address.
- They do not wish to inform DNER of every trip and all catch.

Following these personal meetings, 4 charter owners agreed to fill out the manual logbook, but not to share important information such as vessel id numbers, captain's numbers, DNER charter license number, etc. The manual logbook data started in May, 2009.

Daily validations of the only charter owner reporting via the electronic logbook were attempted. Lack of personnel (due to government layoffs) and the increased quota assigned by MRFSS made this very difficult to achieve. Random weekly validations were made starting in March, 2009. Five random weekly validations were completed; none of the validations coincided with fishing trips of the charter operation.

A meeting was held among the DNER Director of Marine Resources, the For-Hire project leader, the Director of the Hunting and Fishing License and Permit office, and the Commissioner of the DNER Ranger Corps. The issue of non-compliance with the Pilot Project was discussed, and the recommendation was made that the Ranger Corps assist with achieving greater compliance. However, when the Fishing Regulations were evaluated, the reporting requirement for charter boat operations was not sufficiently clear to the Ranger Corps Commissioner for him to agree to assign Rangers to this task. The Fishing Regulations clearly state that in order for a charter boat owner to renew their DNER license, they must demonstrate that they have provided DNER with required data on their fishing activity. However, the License and Permit office noted that only a fraction of the charter boat owners have applied for this license.

#### Conclusions/Recommendations:

- DNER Fishing Regulations need to be amended as soon as possible to remove all doubt that charter boat operations need a DNER license, which covers the recreational fishing activity of their clients and requires mandatory reporting via the system that DNER provides.

- DNER needs to resolve the disputes with charter operators and increase personnel to cover MRFSS and for-hire data collection.
- DNER should consider training FURA marine police as fisheries enforcement agents to augment enforcement provided by DNER Rangers.
- DNER Fishing and Hunting Licenses and Permits office must increase compliance with charter boat owners license requirements.
- DNER should continue to promote use of the electronic for-hire reporting system due to its many advantages to both the agency and the charter boat owners.

## Puerto Rico For-hire System

Developed by Bluefin Data LLC

This program allows Puerto Rico For-hire boat captains to report their landings to the Puerto Rico Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales.

It is a Windows-based electronic reporting system designed to collect catch and effort data from For-hire vessel operators in Puerto Rico. The catch and effort fields and program logic were modeled after the 2007 MRFSS Intercept survey – Region 11, Puerto Rico. The program uses the Internet to send data via the SFTP protocol.

Bluefin Data LLC provides the program to any Puerto Rico For-hire captain at no cost to the captain. Free telephone support is also provided by Bluefin Data LLC.