



NOAA
FISHERIES

Northeast
Fisheries
Science Center

Commercial Fishing Business Cost Data Collection in the Northeast United States

Changes and Challenges

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Commercial Fishing in the Northeast Region

- Greater Atlantic/Northeast Region: Maine to North Carolina
- Management:
 - 2 Councils (NEFMC, MAFMC)
 - 12 Fishery Management Plans
 - 4 FMPs with aspect of catch share management
 - GF Sectors, IFQ Sea Scallop, SC/OQ, Tilefish



New England
Fishery Management
Council



Commercial Fishing in the Northeast Region

- No mechanism to collect fixed costs (non-trip costs) and crew costs, other than cost survey.
- Survey is NOT mandatory.
- Trip costs collected on observed trips are only routinely collected costs.
 - Food, Water, Oil, Bait, Gear Damage, Supplies
- NEFSC social scientists do not determine the methodology for selecting trips to be observed – this is determined by biological data needs.

Fixed Costs and Crew Payments: Why?

- What do we want?
 - To calculate net return and profitability metrics, examine distributional impacts for segments of the fleet.
 - Ideally, the ability to compare financial viability metrics across fisheries, management regimes and regions.



Fixed Costs and Crew Payments: Why?

- To communicate to decision makers the total costs fishermen face, and how proposed regulations may affect those costs.
- A better understanding of crew payment systems & costs
 - ex: to what extent are leasing costs being passed onto crew?
- To develop tools that are accessible to and useful for commercial fishermen.

What Does the NEFSC Cost Survey Collect?

- Vessel Information
- **Repair/Maintenance & Upgrade/Improvement Costs**
- **Fishing Business Costs**
- Operating Costs
- **Crew Payment/Lay Systems**



Overview of NEFSC Data Collection Efforts for the Total Costs of Commercial Fishing

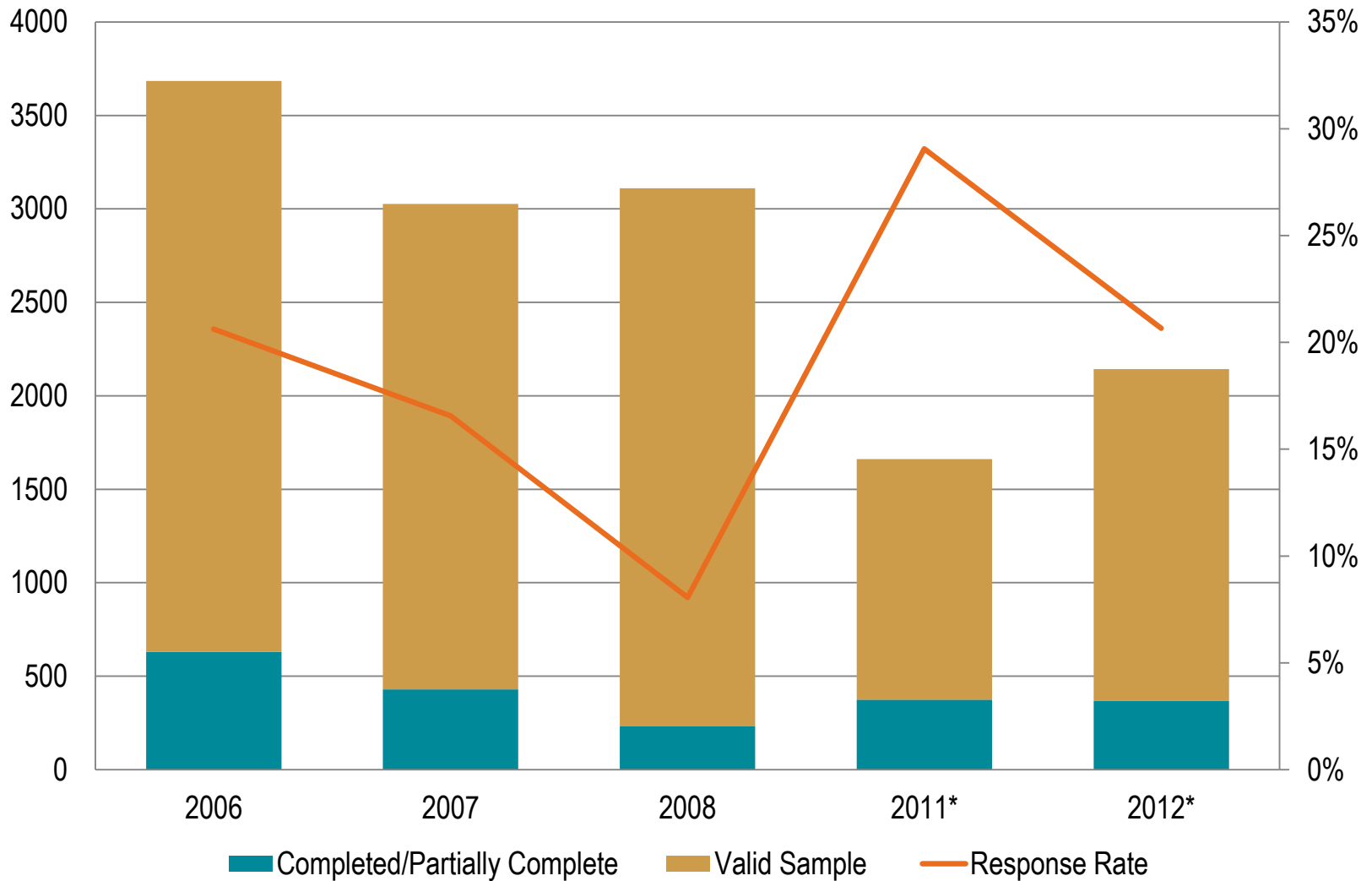
■ 2006–2008

- Sent each year to the entire population of fishing vessel owners with permit applications

■ 2011-2012

- Sent to a stratified random sample of commercial fishing vessels (1/2 the population each year)
 - Strata defined by gear type and vessel size
 - Response rate between 20%-30%

Survey Response Rates



The 2015 Cost Survey: Changes

- Move to 3 year cycle
 - Avoid survey fatigue, esp. sampling multiple vessel owners in two consecutive years
- Altered sampling strategy
 - Sampling unit now the business affiliate (~2,425 affiliates)
 - Detailed questions about one selected vessel per affiliate
 - Divided instrument into “vessel” and “overall business” sections

The 2015 Cost Survey: Changes

- Simplified Format (?)
 - Added 3 pages, but more check-off boxes, white space
 - Less breakdown of repair/maintenance, upgrade/improvement costs, operating costs
 - Attempt to address problems with missing values for composite/aggregate variables
- Section about top fisheries by value and time spent
 - Address cost allocation issues

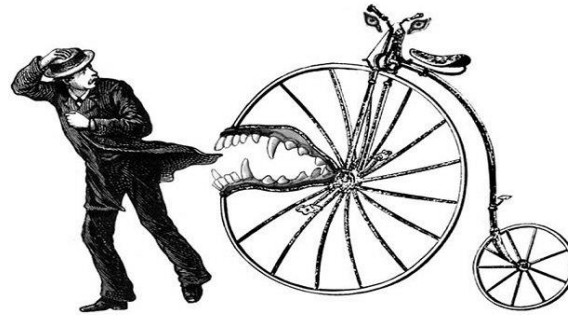
The 2015 Cost Survey: Challenges

- Low Response (~139 usable surveys to date; response rate is just under 6%)
 - Mail Merge Disaster
 - Opposition to new format or sampling strategy?
 - Difficult to identify best person to complete the survey when there are multiple business owners
 - Aging population
 - Increasing limits to usefulness of follow-up phone calls
 - General anti-NMFS sentiment? Is this year different?

Moving Forward

- In person interviews/assistance?
 - If used, needs to be available at start of data collection period.
 - Possibility of using port agents to help.
- Focus groups to address non-response.
 - Is the problem primarily this survey instrument or a more general problem with how NOAA Fisheries is perceived by commercial fishermen?

Moving Forward



A VICIOUS CYCLE

- Catch 22 nature of the quality/quantity of the data collected and how the data get used in analyses.
- Strive for better answers to:
 - “How does this benefit me?”
 - “How is NMFS going to use this against me?”
 - “NMFS will never do anything with this”.
 - “Council members have already made up their minds”.

Thank you!

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