



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

Volume 14, Issue 2

March 2005

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission • 1444 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C.

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015.

ASMFC Approves Winter Flounder Amendment 1 Plan Seeks to Rebuild Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stock and Sustain Gulf of Maine Stock

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder. The Amendment revises management goals, objectives, biological reference points, and rebuilding goals for winter flounder populations in the inshore portions of the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) and Gulf of Maine (GOM) stock areas. The Amendment also updates commercial and recreational management measures for both stock components.

Amendment 1 responds to the latest stock assessment information and is the product of extensive preparation, deliberation, and public comment. Scientific advice indicates that the SNE/MA stock of winter flounder is overfished and overfishing is occurring. Further, a reduction in fishing mortality is needed to rebuild the spawning stock biomass to sustainable levels. While the GOM stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, reports of localized depletion in inshore areas north of Massachusetts remain a concern.

Amendment 1 establishes the following biological reference points to restore the SNE/MA stock and maintain the status of the GOM stock:

Reference Points	SNE/MA	GOM
F Target	$F_{msy}=0.24$	$F_{msv}=0.32$
F Threshold	$F_{msv}=0.32$	$F_{msv}=0.43$
SSB Target	$B_{msy}=30,100$ mt	$B_{msy}=4,100$ mt
SSB Threshold	$\frac{1}{2}SSB_{msv}=15,050$ mt	$\frac{1}{2}SSB_{msv}=2,050$ mt

For the SNE/MA stock, recreational measures include a 12-inch minimum size limit, a 10-fish creel limit, and a 60-day open season. Twenty days of March and April must be closed and the 60-day open season cannot be divided into more than two periods. For the GOM stock, recreational measures include a 12-inch minimum size limit, an eight-fish creel limit, and no requirements for closed seasons.

Amendment 1 anticipates a large reduction in fishing mortality for the offshore commercial fishery with implementation of the New England Fishery Management Council's Amendment 13 to Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish. To complement these actions in state waters, Amendment 1 establishes commercial management measures of a 12-inch minimum size limit and a minimum 6.5-inch diamond or square mesh size for the SNE/MA stock. States in the region must also retain their existing commercial season closures. Additionally, states have the option to impose more conservative regulations.

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Upcoming Meetings

3/28 - 4/1:

ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week (Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee, Stock Assessment Committee, and Natural Mortality Workshop), Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore, 20 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

3/29 - 31:

New England Fishery Management Council, Hotel Viking, Newport, Rhode Island.

4/11:

ASMFC Winter Flounder Technical Committee, Radisson Airport Hotel Providence, 2081 Post R, Warwick, Rhode Island.

4/26 & 27:

ASMFC Habitat Committee, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 6 Herndon Avenue, Annapolis, Maryland.

5/3- 5:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Princess Royale Oceanfront Hotel & Conference Center, 9100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, Maryland.

5/9 - 12:

ASMFC Meeting Week, Radisson Hotel Old Town Alexandria, 901 North Fairfax, Alexandria, Virginia.

6/13- 17:

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Radisson Resort at the Port, 8701 Astronaut Blvd., Cape Canaveral, Florida; 800-333-3333.

6/14 - 16:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Wyndham Wilmington Hotel, 700 King Street, Wilmington, Delaware.

6/21 - 23:

New England Fishery Management Council, Radisson Eastland Hotel, Portland, Maine.

6/27 - 7/1:

ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, location to be determined.

8/8-10:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Society Hill Hotel, One Dock Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

8/15 - 18:

ASMFC Meeting Week, Radisson Hotel Old Town Alexandria, 901 North Fairfax, Alexandria, Virginia.

The reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is clearly a priority this year for Senator Stevens and other congressional leaders. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission have both called for changes to improve fisheries management. Their recommendations will help frame the public policy debate in the upcoming months as Congress considers changes to the Act.

The Commission's fishery management process, structured to be effective and responsive, contains important qualities that are worth noting by those promoting change. It is designed to produce results by incorporating three important concepts: balance of power, timeliness of action, and stakeholder buy-in. Here's how...

Balance of Power

Natural resource management seeks to strike a balance between professional management and stakeholder involvement. Decision-making processes heavily grounded in stakeholder input create inherent conflicts of interest, disputes regarding scientific advice, and reluctance to make short-term sacrifices to protect and rebuild the resource. Some, but not all, of the federal fishery councils where stakeholders dominate are perceived to have these characteristics.

In the Commission process, state directors have a strong presence; their actions reflect their professional training as natural resource managers. In addition, Legislative and Governor-appointed Commissioners provide stakeholders with a greater voice than they might have in a system exclusively run by professional managers. The one state-one vote concept drives the delegations to address the stakeholder-resource balance at the state level. While stakeholders participate in and contribute to the process, it is difficult under this structure for them to dominate it.

Timeliness of Action

Intuitively, natural resource management is a balance between time and consequences. An action taken too quickly can lead to unforeseen impacts, while excessive analysis of potential consequences can render a proposed action moot. Under the federal process, multiple layers of review, stemming from different mandates, contribute to a cumbersome and often uncoordinated analysis of impacts. Often these delays are caused by (or result in) outdated scientific information. (Also, litigation can result in changing or evolving policies, adding further delay and uncertainty to the federal management process.)

The Commission's process can bring fishery management plans and amendments on line significantly faster than the federal system. Through the adaptive management process, addenda to fishery management plans can be developed and implemented within about six months. Thus, Commission action can be based on current information making it highly responsive to detected problems (provided the political will exists to act).

Stakeholder Buy-in

Stakeholders enhance natural resource management processes through their active participation and input. The Commission holds public hearings in states affected by a proposed action. Such hearings promote two-way communication by providing a forum to explain the proposed action as well as to collect public comment. The Commission also solicits advice from Advisory Panels, who represent diverse stakeholder groups coastwide.

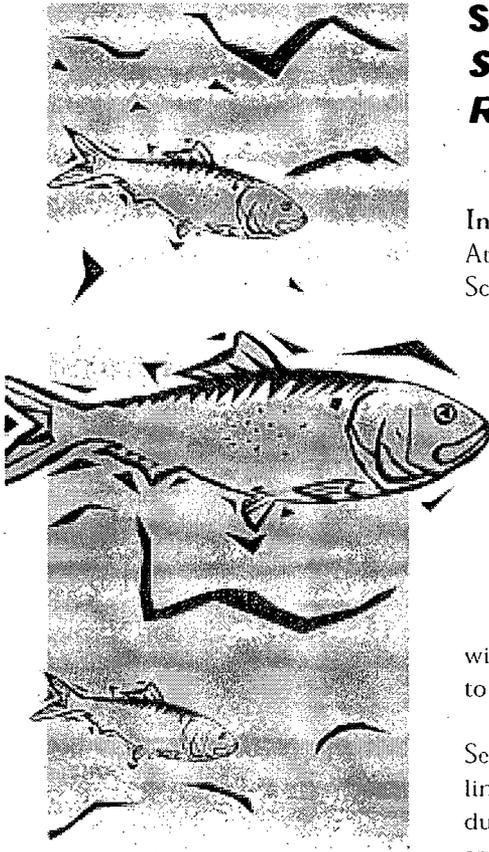
In taking action, the Commission typically establishes broad management policies, allowing states the flexibility to accommodate regional differences in the fishery and stakeholder needs. These approaches promote greater regional understanding and acceptance of both management actions and the science supporting these actions.

Overarching these principles is the concept of state-federal cooperation, an essential element for successful fisheries management. The federal government provides resources and guidelines through the Congress. States have sovereignty over coastal habitat including important spawning and nursery estuarine areas. Harvesters are also state citizens subject to state jurisdiction. The following are essential to a strong state-federal partnership:

- Avoid conflicting processes (e.g., federal process undermining ASMFC process and vice versa)
- Avoid duplication of effort
- Divide responsibilities based on effectiveness and efficiency
- Operate in a climate of mutual understanding and trust, working toward the common goal of responsible resource stewardship

These principles have enabled the Commission to succeed as a steward of marine resources. Depleted stocks are steadily rebuilding and in some cases (e.g., striped bass) have been completely restored. Putting more fish in the water for everyone to catch, eat, and enjoy on a sustainable basis is what the Commission is all about. I am confident Congress will be working to strengthen our ability to do that. Hopefully, that is something we can all agree to.

Species Profile: Atlantic Menhaden Stock Healthy Coastwide, But Questions Remain Regarding Localized Stock Conditions



Atlantic menhaden *Brevoortia tyrannus*

Common Names: menhaden, bunker, mossbunker, pogy, fatback, bugfish, skipjack

Family: Clupeidae
(includes herring, sardine and shad species)

Interesting Fact: Menhaden travel in large schools, which may number in the millions.

Special Uses: Fish meal, fish oil (high in omega-3 type fatty acids), fish solubles

Age at Recruitment: Fully recruited at age 2 (9 - 10", 1/2 lb.); 50% recruited at age 1 (6", 2 - 3 oz.)

Life Span: 10 - 12 years, with maximum length/weight of 20"/3 lbs.

Stock Status: Not overfished & overfishing is not occurring

Introduction

Atlantic menhaden are small, oily, schooling fish found from northern Florida to Nova Scotia. They serve a major ecological role as both a forage fish to larger predators and as a filter feeder. Atlantic menhaden have supported one of the United States' largest fisheries since colonial times.

Life History

Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) are found in estuarine and coastal waters from northern Florida to Nova Scotia and serve as prey (food) for many fish, sea birds and marine mammals. Adult and juvenile menhaden form large, near-surface schools, primarily in estuaries and nearshore ocean waters from early spring through early winter. By summer, menhaden schools stratify by size and age along the coast, with older and larger menhaden found farther north. During fall-early winter, menhaden of all sizes and ages migrate south around the North Carolina capes to spawn.

Sexual maturity begins just before age three, with major spawning areas from the Carolinas to New Jersey. The majority of spawning occurs primarily offshore (20-30 miles) during winter. Buoyant eggs hatch at sea and larvae are carried into estuarine nursery areas by ocean currents. Juveniles spend most of their first year of life in estuaries, migrating to the ocean in late fall. Adult and juvenile menhaden migrate south in fall-winter, and adult menhaden migrate north in spring.

Menhaden feed by straining plankton from the water, their gill rakers forming a specialized basket to efficiently capture tiny food. Menhaden provide a link between primary production and higher organisms by consuming plankton and providing forage (food) for species such as striped bass, bluefish and weakfish, to name just a few.

Commercial Fishery

The Atlantic menhaden commercial fishery consists of both a reduction fishery and a bait fishery. The reduction fishery first began in New England during the early 1800s and spread south after the Civil War. The purse seine was introduced after the Civil War allowing the fishery to expand. Major technological innovations led to further expansion of the fishery coastwide. As a result, landings and fishing effort increased from 1940 through the late 1950s, declined precipitously during the 1960s when the population was overfished, and then increased significantly during the late 1970s

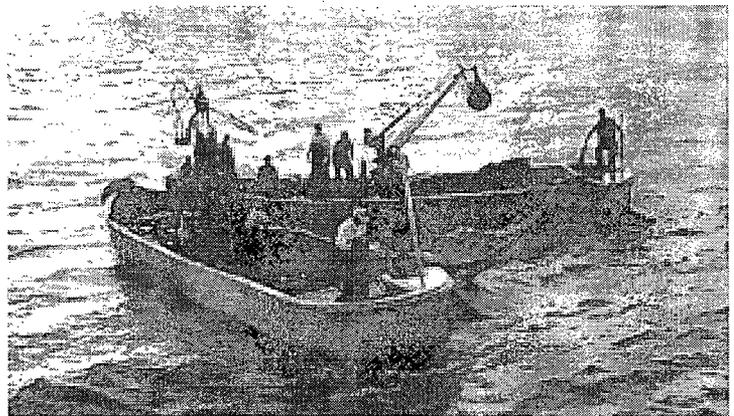


Photo courtesy of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Dept. of Commerce

and early 1980s. Currently, there are two reduction plants on the Atlantic coast processing menhaden into fish meal and oil. The fish meal is used as fertilizer and animal feed. The fish oil is used in many commercial products and in omega-3 supplements for human health. The coastwide bait fishery supplies fishermen with bait for popular commercial and sport fish.

The 2004 harvest of Atlantic menhaden for reduction was 184,450 metric tons, which was an increase from the 2003 season (166,097 mt), and 1.1 percent above average landings for the previous five years (182,475 mt).

A slight increase from recent years, 13 reduction purse-seine vessels landed Atlantic menhaden during the 2004 season. Two reduction plants operated in 2004 -- one in Reedville, Virginia with ten vessels, and one in Beaufort, North Carolina with three vessels. The bait fishery for menhaden has become increasingly more important from North Carolina to New England. The major portion of bait landings in recent years has been harvested from New Jersey and Virginia waters, followed by Maryland, North Carolina, Florida and the Potomac River.

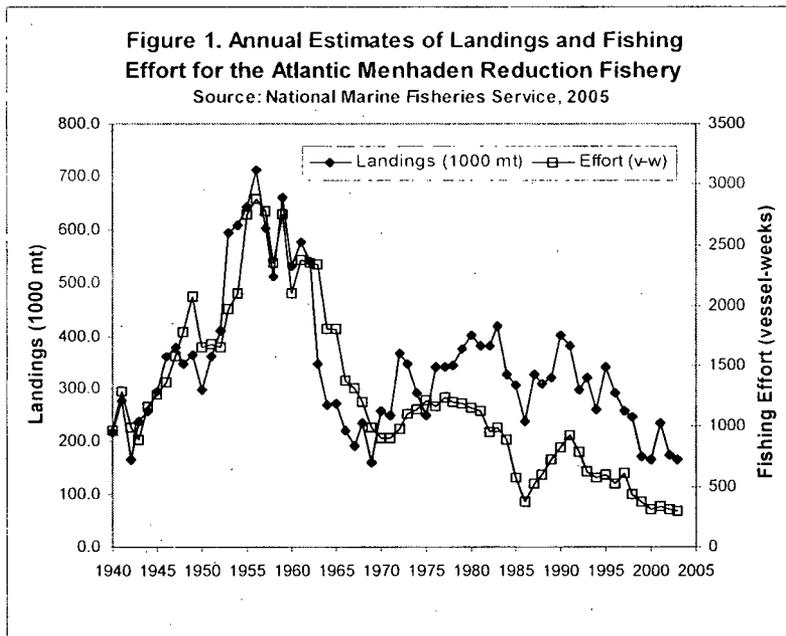
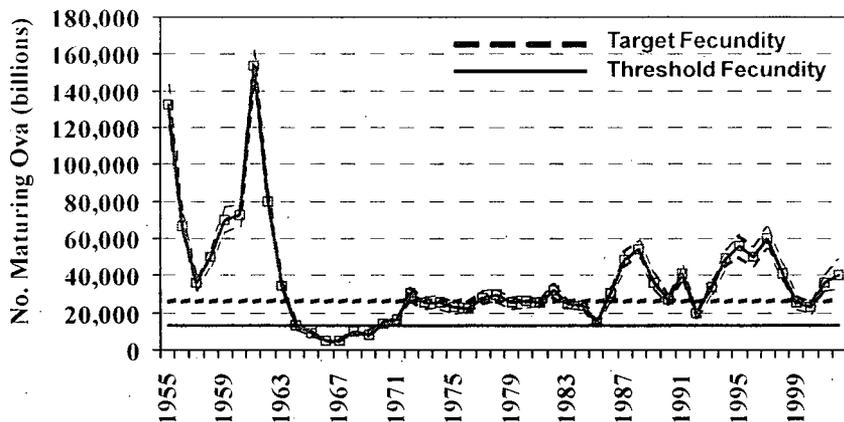


Figure 2. Atlantic Menhaden Population Fecundity (no. of maturing ova)
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee, 2003



Status of the Stock

The 2003 peer-reviewed stock assessment found that on a coastwide basis Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

In 2004, The Technical Committee reviewed Addendum 1 triggers (i.e., catch-per-unit-effort index and ratio of ages 2-4 to the total catch of all ages) to evaluate whether a stock assessment needed to be conducted before 2006. It concluded that neither trigger had been met. The Technical Committee will meet again in 2005 to reexamine the triggers and other relevant indices and make an assessment recommendation based on the available data.

Currently, the stock assessment can only evaluate the status of menhaden on a coastwide basis. The Technical Committee has developed a list of research priorities to examine the possibility of localized depletion in the Chesapeake Bay.

Atlantic Coastal Management Considerations

The Commission approved Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Menhaden in 200. Management authority is vested in the states because the vast majority of landings come from state waters. The goal of Amendment 1 is "to manage the Atlantic menhaden fishery in a manner that is biologically, economically, socially and ecologically sound while protecting the resource and those who benefit from it." Amendment 1 established new overfishing/overfished definitions based on fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass.

Addendum 1 to Amendment 1, approved in August 2004, revised the biological reference points, changed the frequency of stock assessments, and updated the habitat section. The new biomass target and threshold are based on fecundity (or the

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Species Profile: Atlantic Menhaden (continued from page 5)

number of mature or ripe eggs/ova) instead of spawning stock biomass. A new fishing mortality target and threshold were also adopted. Stock assessments will now take place every third year instead of annually. However, the Technical Committee is required to meet annually to review the previous year's landings and indices.

Recent Activities

In October 2004, the Commission held a workshop to examine the status of Atlantic menhaden with respect to its ecological role. This workshop was convened in response to a motion made by the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board in May 2004. Representatives from the environmental, recreational fishery, and the commercial fishery communities helped plan the details of the workshop. State, federal, and university scientists were invited to participate in the workshop. A summary of the workshop presentations, discussions, and findings is available on the Commission website at <http://www.asmfc.org/atlanticMenhaden.htm>.

In February 2005, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board initiated the

preparation of Addendum II to Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Menhaden FMP. The Draft Addendum will propose options to limit the catch of menhaden, including restricting the Chesapeake Bay purse seine harvest to no more than 110,400 mt annually in 2006 and 2007. The Board directed staff to identify a suite of management options for consideration by the public, including various cap limits and timeframes, and gears to be addressed. The Draft Addendum will also propose initiating a research program immediately to determine the status of menhaden populations in the Chesapeake Bay and assess whether localized depletion is occurring in the Bay. In addition, the Addendum will include a review of current state rules and regulations for Atlantic menhaden and the roles these measures have played in localizing menhaden harvest to the Ches-



apeake Bay, and coastal waters of Virginia and North Carolina. The Board will meet in May to review the Draft Addendum. Upon its approval, the Addendum will be released for public review and comment. It is anticipated that many states will be conducting public hearings on the Addendum.

Please check the ASMFC website (www.asmfc.org) and future issues of *Fisheries Focus* to stay abreast of upcoming menhaden activities. For more information, please contact Nancy Wallace, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400 or nwallace@asmfc.org.

ASMFC Approves Winter Flounder Amendment 1 (continued from page 1)



Photo courtesy of Don McCusker.

For the GOM stock, the Amendment establishes a 12-inch minimum size limit, a mesh size consistent with that in the EEZ adjacent to state waters (currently 6.5-inch diamond or square mesh), and maintenance of existing commercial season closures.

States have until March 15, 2005 to submit their proposals for plan implementation. The Board will meet in May 2005 to review Technical Committee comments on the proposals and discuss their approval. Implementation of the provisions of Amendment 1 will be required by July 31, 2005. Annual compliance reports will be due on November 1 of each year, beginning in 2006. Copies of Amendment 1 are available via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org or by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400. For more information, please contact Lydia Munger, FMP Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400 or lmunger@asmfc.org.

ASMFC Lobster Board Approves Addendum VI

The Commission's American Lobster Management Board has approved Addendum VI to the American Lobster Plan. The Addendum directs Area 2 jurisdictions to work with their Lobster Conservation Management Team (LCMT) to modify the effort control plan as specified under Addendum IV. The effort control plan must be designed so that all jurisdictions are capable of implementation and effort will not increase if and when the resource recovers in Area 2.

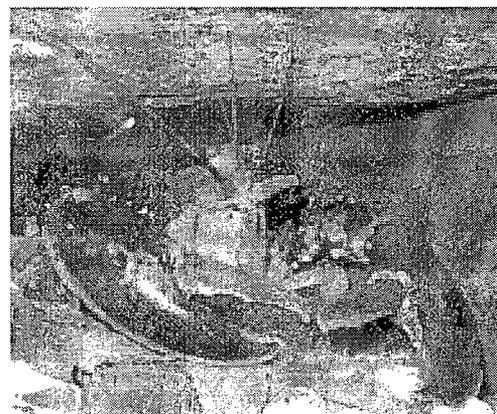
In December 2003, the Commission's American Lobster Board passed Addendum IV, establishing an effort control plan for Area 2 (inshore southern New England). The Addendum was initiated to address significant stock declines in lobsters of all sizes in Area 2. Since passage of the Addendum, the Board has outlined several concerns with the plan, including the inability of several jurisdictions to implement portions of

the plan and the initial trap allocation scheme. An analysis of the impacts of the trap allocation scheme in Addendum IV indicates it is ineffective at controlling trap growth over current levels. Also, the number of traps allocated to qualified applicants substantially increases compared to the number of traps currently issued under Addendum IV effort control plan.

Addendum VI withdraws the Addendum IV effort control plan except for two points – a prohibition on issuance of any new permits for Area 2 and the eligibility period for participation in the fishery. It also directs all jurisdictions with Area 2 permit holders and the Area 2 LCMT to develop a new effort control plan, capping effort at or near current levels with the potential to adjust the levels based on the outcome of the upcoming stock assessment. The new effort control plan

is to be developed for review and approval by the American Lobster Management Board by August 2005.

Copies of Addendum VI are available via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News or by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400 or tkerns@asmfc.org.



ASMFC Comings & Goings

Commissioners:

Ralph Balkcom -- In January, Ralph Balkcom stepped down as Georgia's Governor's Appointee to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Mr. Balkcom participated in the Commission's programs in numerous capacities over the last 15 years. He first became involved in the Commission in 1989 as Georgia's Legislative representative. From 1989 - 1992, as Chair of the state's House Game, Fish and Parks Commission, Mr. Balkcom brought his knowledge of fisheries legislation and management to the Commission's processes. In 1994, Mr. Balkcom became Georgia's Governor's Appointee to the Commission. We wish Mr. Balkcom and his lovely wife Evelyn a healthy and happy retirement.



John Duren -- This January, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue selected John W. Duren to

serve as the state's Governor's Appointee to the Commission. An active participant in the Commission's fisheries management process since December 2003, Mr. Duren brings to the table substantial personal and professional experience in marine conservation and environmental management. He is an avid recreational fisherman and boater, both inshore and offshore. His public service includes participation in several marine conservation panels. Professionally, he is a business executive with experience in developing products and processes for water and wastewater treatment; he is also founder and chair of a successful environmental site remediation company. Mr. Duren's diverse background and commitment to marine fisheries conservation will be a great asset to the Commission. Welcome aboard, Mr. Duren!

Staff:

Ruth Christiansen -- This March, Ruth Christiansen joined the Commission staff as a Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator. Ruth will be assuming coordination responsibilities for Atlantic herring, spiny dogfish and coastal sharks, and

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ASMFC Revises Benchmark Stock Assessment & Peer Review Processes

Fisheries stock assessments form the basis of the majority of the Commission's 22 fisheries management programs. They provide scientific advice to fisheries managers regarding the health and status of fish stocks. It is crucial that these stock assessments are credible and of high quality in order to provide confidence in the fisheries management process. The Commission ensures the soundness of its stock assessments through a formal process for benchmark stock assessments and by participation in external peer reviews.

Recently, the Commission reviewed and adjusted its Benchmark Stock Assessment and External Peer Review Processes. These actions were taken in light of the recent developments with two of the primary stock assessment peer review processes on the East Coast (see side-bars on SAW/SARC and SEDAR). The Commission considered two major proposals: (1) the inclusion of stakeholders in Commission benchmark stock assessments and external peer reviews, and (2) the implementation of the Data and Assessment Workshop process for conducting stock assessments for peer review.

Benchmark Stock Assessments

Benchmark stock assessments require compiling and analyzing large quantities of data from several sources into a report detailing the status of a fishery. To achieve this, the Commission developed a framework for conducting Data and Assessment Workshops based upon the SEDAR model. The goals of the Data Workshop are to: (1) compile relevant species life history information, (2) develop a database of all available fisheries dependent and independent data, (3) conduct preliminary analyses of the available data, (4) draft introductory sections of the stock assessment report, and (5) present initial ideas on applicable modeling methods. The goals of the

Assessment Workshop are to: (1) conduct and thoroughly evaluate assessment model runs, and (2) produce the completed Stock Assessment Report for Peer Review.

The ASMFC species technical committee will comprise the base of the Data Workshop participants, and the species stock assessment subcommittee will be the base for Assessment Workshop participants. Previously, much of the work on a stock assessment has been performed by a few people. By including the entire technical committee and stock assessment subcommittee, the collective knowledge of the assessment group will be enhanced and workload will be more evenly distributed among the workshop participants.

With regards to stakeholder participation, the Commission approved inviting one to three stakeholders to fully participate in the Data Workshops. This will provide a valuable mechanism for stakeholder input early in the assessment process. Stakeholders will not be allowed to participate at Assessment Workshops, since these meetings require advanced stock assessment training. However, the public is welcome to attend the workshops, as all Commission meetings are open to the public. By adopting an inclusive process, providing a framework, and clearly defining goals, Data and Assessment Workshops should improve the quality, credibility and public understanding of ASMFC technical processes in peer reviewed assessments.

External Peer Review Process

The Commission evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of including stakeholders in its External Peer Review Process. The Commission's existing criteria for selecting external peer review panel members are based on expertise of fisheries stock assessment methods, species life history, fisheries science, and

SAW/SARC Explores Ways to Strengthen Separation of Science & Management

SAW/SARC is the federally-conducted fisheries stock assessment & peer review process for the Northeast. Formally referred to as the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee, SAW/SARC reviews assessments for species found in the US Northwest Atlantic, with assessments generally prepared by federal or state scientists. The Commission's external peer review process serves as an additional venue for peer review of stock assessments for Commission managed species.

In 2004, SARC initiated a pilot program for conducting stock assessment peer reviews. The pilot process was designed to strengthen the separation of science and management and to increase the objectivity of the peer review process. The SARC review is now performed by a panel of three to four independent stock assessment modeling experts. These experts have no involvement in either the development of the stock assessment or management of the species being reviewed. The panel is charged with reviewing the assessment model and either approving or rejecting the assessment. SARC provides advice on stock status and improvements to the assessment, but no longer provides management advice. This model differs from the previous SARC in the following aspects: 1) panel membership does not include federal, state, university or industry representatives, and 2) no management advice will be provided.

SEDAR Process Includes Stakeholder Participation

The Southeast Data and Assessment Review (SEDAR) is managed by the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils, in coordination with NOAA Fisheries and the Interstate Fisheries Commissions of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. In the Southeast, all SEDAR peer reviewed assessments (both state and federally led) are prepared through Data and Assessment Workshops, with Review Workshops serving as the peer review venue for the assessments.

SEDAR draws upon its Advisory Panel for participants to its Data and As-

essment Workshops. These include data managers, specialists, data collectors and stock assessment scientists from the states, NOAA Fisheries, Interstate Commissions, universities, independent laboratories and institutions, and Council members.

The primary goal of the Data Workshop is to assemble all available fisheries dependent and independent data and life history information for use in the stock assessment. At the Assessment Workshop, participants conduct the species population assessment and determine the status of the stock or stocks in question. The Re-

view Workshop, composed of scientists, industry representatives and environmental representatives, critically reviews the stock assessment.

The SEDAR process emphasizes stakeholder participation in assessment development, with stakeholders included in both Data Workshops and Assessment Workshops. Data and Assessment Workshops require extensive effort from several individuals, but the formal assessment process for data collection and analysis, with its broadened scope of scientific experience, is designed to produce better stock assessments.

professional objectivity. Panel members must not be involved in the stock assessment or the management process for the species in question.

The Commission recognized that including stakeholders on the peer review panel would improve transparency of the peer review process (as in the SEDAR), but concluded that the need for independent, expert advice on the science used to assess the stock was best addressed by selecting panelists using the Commission's current criteria (as in the pilot SARC). Stakeholders will be invited to attend ASMFC External Peer Reviews, but not as panel members. The Commission values the perspective of stakeholders at the peer review and recommends that the Chair of the peer review encourage public comment throughout the process.

All of the approved changes to the Commission's Benchmark Assessment and External Peer Review processes will be incorporated into the Commission's Stock Assessment Peer Review Process document. To obtain a copy of the final document or for more information, please contact Patrick Kilduff, Fisheries Research Specialist, at (202)289-6400 or <pkilduff@asmfc.org>.

Scheduled 2005 Peer Review

ASMFC External Peer Review

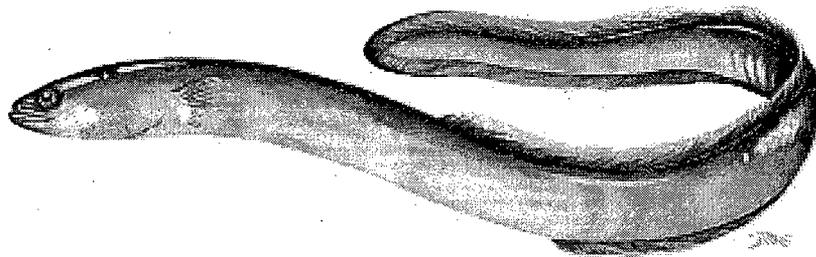
- > American eel
- > American shad
- > Tautog

SAW/SARC No. 41 - June

- > American lobster
- > Bluefish
- > Summer Flounder

SARC No. 42 - November/December

- > Multispecies VPA





ACCSP Explores Cost-effective Sampling of Recreational Fishing Effort

Conducting a survey to account for the fishing effort of tens of millions of anglers is an ambitious undertaking, and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) is exploring options for making that task more cost-effective.

The state and federal partners of the ACCSP and the fishing constituents of the Atlantic coast have long recognized the need for cost-effective data collection for recreational fisheries. In 1998, the ACCSP Coordinating Council agreed that the long-term goal of the program would be to conduct fishing effort interviews from "a universal sampling frame" rather than random-digit dialing of coastal county households.

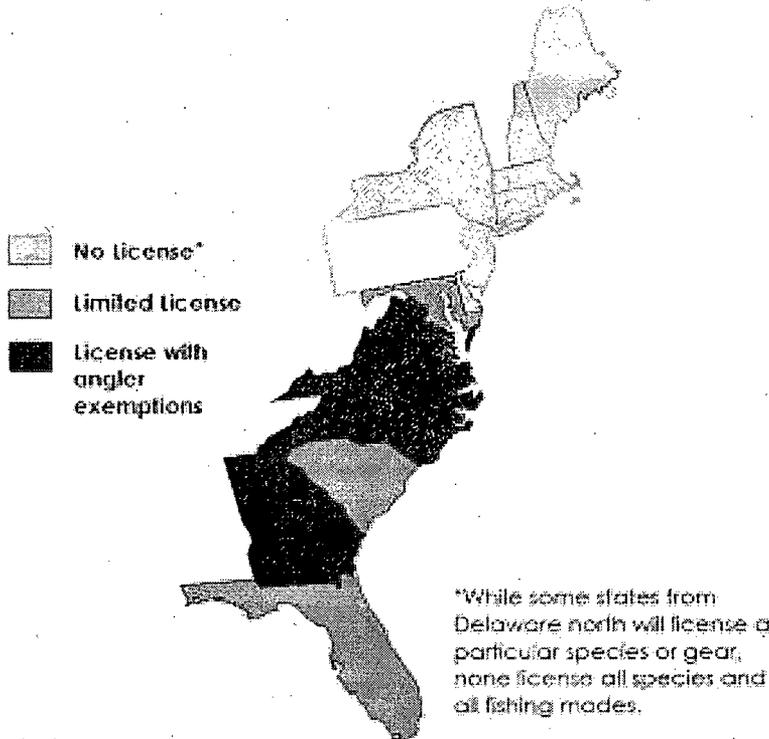
However, a scientific sampling frame that includes all saltwater anglers on the Atlantic coast is not easily constructed. The most likely option would be to get angler contact information from state license records. This information could be used to conduct telephone interviews with anglers on their recent fishing activity. Some state license frames could accommodate such sampling with some adjustments for spe-

cial angler exemptions (senior citizens, children, disabled, etc.), but most Northeast states have no licensing of saltwater fishing, which leaves no immediate alternative to random-digit dialing. Additionally, Florida, South Carolina, and Maryland exempt anglers fishing from shore and pier, which are critical modes for valid effort estimates.

For a state to implement new licensing regulations, it would almost always require legislative action. In recent years, some lawmakers have met resistance on such bills, but there are fishing organizations that support licensing. They include the American Sportfishing Association, the Coastal Conservation Association, the International Game Fish Association, and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation.

Walter W. Fondren, III the Chairman of the Coastal Conservation Association said "...The real value of a license is in the data. Regardless of how much money is generated or where it goes in a state budget, the most important function of a license is to provide a simple count of recreational saltwater anglers in a given state..."

Recreational fishing license frames that could be used for cost-effective effort sampling...



The ACCSP staff will work with state partners to communicate the benefits of a universal sampling frame to constituents. More information on the status of each state is available at www.accsp.org/rpstatus.htm.

For more information, please visit www.accsp.org or call Abbey Compton at (202) 216-5690.

Upcoming Meetings

- 4/5 & 6:
Recreational Technical Committee
- 4/6 & 7:
Committee on Economics and Social Sciences Recreational Subcommittee
- Meetings to be held in DC/Annapolis area

Toni Kerns Awarded ASMFC Employee of the Quarter

In a little over a year and a half, Toni Kerns has become an invaluable addition to the Commission staff, significantly contributing to the Commission's vision of "healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015." In recognition of her efforts, Toni was awarded Employee of the Quarter (January - March 2005). The award is intended to recognize special contributions and qualities in the areas of teamwork, initiative, responsibility, quality of work, positive attitude, and results.

Since her arrival at the Commission, Toni has made major contributions to the management of bluefish, summer flounder, scup and black sea bass -- the Commission's most complex suite of species. She developed six addenda while effectively coordinating the annual specification process for these species with the

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Her accomplishments are the result of hard work as well as long hours in the office and on the road. Her outstanding efforts have enabled Commissioners to make many difficult decisions. In turn, these decisions have resulted in the rebuilding of summer flounder and black sea bass stocks.

Recently, Toni volunteered for her newest challenge -- taking over the coordination of American lobster. Her ability to consistently anticipate problems before they arise, creatively seek solutions, and enthusiastically approach complex issues will serve her well as she coordinates management activities for the Commission's most valuable species.

Toni has Bachelor of Arts from Colgate University and a Master in Coastal Environmental Management from Duke



University. As an Employee of the Quarter, she received a \$500 cash award, an engraved pewter pencil cup, and a letter of appreciation for her personnel record. In addition, her name will be engraved on the Employee of Quarter Plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Toni!

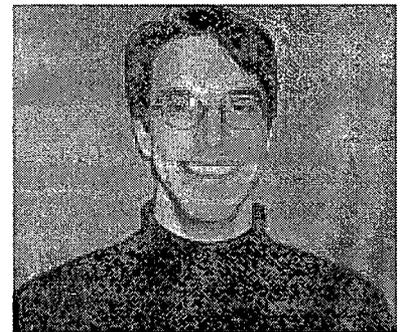
ASMFC Comings & Goings (continued from page 7)



Ruth Christiansen

winter flounder. Ruth recently received a Master of Marine Affairs from University of Washington, School of Marine Affairs, with a special focus in marine policy analysis and public education. She also has a Bachelor of Science in marine biology from Southampton College, Long Island University. Ruth's previous work experience is diverse. While in Seattle, she worked for a nonprofit organization, assisting in the restoration of critical river and estuarine habitat areas in Puget Sound. Prior to that, she conducted population studies on critical prey species for the endangered Steller sea lion as part of the Fisheries Interaction Division of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. She has also been a fisheries observer aboard tuna longline vessels in Hawaii.

Peter Mooreside -- In March, Peter Mooreside joined the Commission staff as a Fisheries Research Specialist. Peter will be working on the American lobster database, as well as taking over coordination responsibilities for the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP). Peter has a Master's in Environmental Management from Duke University, and a Bachelor of Science from Emory University. During graduate school, he studied the influence of nearshore ocean currents on sea turtle stranding patterns. Other professional research experience includes work for the biology department of Emory University (forest ecology) and The Nature Conservancy (invertebrate population biology). Most recently, Peter served as an editor for the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, where the majority of his time was devoted to the newly adopted Coastal Habitat Protection Plan.



Please join us in welcoming Ruth and Peter to the Commission!

Bottlenose Dolphin TRT Convenes to Review Proposed Plan

The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team (BDTRT) was convened in 2001 to reduce the incidental mortality and serious injury (bycatch) of the western North Atlantic coastal bottlenose dolphin stock (*Tursiops truncatus*) in nine coastal fisheries operating within the dolphin's distributional range. After a lengthy process, NMFS is proposing to implement management measures based on the BDTRT's consensus recommendations, as well seasonal restrictions on large mesh gillnet fisheries operating in the Mid-Atlantic region to reduce the incidental take of sea turtles in North Carolina and Virginia state waters.

The nine fisheries affected by the dolphin portions of the rule are the Mid-Atlantic coastal gillnet fishery, Virginia pound net fishery, Mid-Atlantic haul/beach seine fishery, Atlantic blue crab trap/pot fishery, North Carolina inshore gillnet fishery, North Carolina roe mul-

let stop net fishery, North Carolina long haul seine fishery, Southeast Atlantic gillnet fishery, and the Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark gillnet fishery. The rule proposes to use effort reduction measures, gear proximity rules, gear or gear deployment modifications, fishermen training, and outreach and education measures to reduce dolphin bycatch below the stock's potential biological removal level (PBR). Additionally, the rule proposes time/area closures and size restrictions on large mesh fisheries to reduce incidental takes of endangered and threatened sea turtles, as well as to reduce dolphin bycatch below the stock's PBR.

The seventh meeting of the BDTRT was held in Virginia Beach, Virginia on January 13 & 14, 2005. The primary purpose of this meeting was to provide a forum for the BDTRT to discuss the proposed rule and provide comments to NMFS. NMFS also provided updates on implementation of the non-regula-

tory elements of the BDTRP.

Two public hearings were held after the publication of the proposed rule, the first on January 5th in New Bern, North Carolina and the second in Virginia Beach on January 13th in conjunction with the TRT meeting. Written comments closed on February 8th, with a submitted 4,140 comments in response to this proposed rule. As mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the final rule is issued 60 days after the comment period closes with the rule going into effect 30 days after the final rule is published. This means that the rule will likely go into effect in early May. It is possible that implementation may be delayed for specific portions of the rule to allow fishermen additional time to obtaining new gear such as netting. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Griffin, Fisheries Research Specialist, at (202)289-6400 or <egriffin@asmfc.org>

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