



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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Joseph Cimino Elected ASMFC Chair

At their 81st Annual Meeting, member states of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission thanked Spud Woodward of Georgia for an effective two-year term as Chair and elected Joseph Cimino of New Jersey to succeed him.

"I'm honored to be chosen by my fellow Commissioners to lead our efforts for the next two years. One of my priorities will be to work with my colleagues in the states and federal agencies to seek resources to fund fundamental fisheries data collection and science activities to support our management programs. Other topics that will be the focus over the next two years will be our ability to adapt to climate-induced changes in fisheries and how best to respond to the possible recalibration of recreational fishing effort and harvest data from the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey," said Mr. Cimino.

Mr. Cimino continued, "I want to thank outgoing Chair, Spud Woodward for his commitment to updating our foundational guidance documents on our Appeals Process, *De Minimis* Policy, and Conservation Equivalency Guidelines. These clearly articulated guidelines and processes are fundamentally important to ensuring that we treat each other fairly and without undue burden in the management process. Newly elected Vice-Chair Dan McKiernan and I will strive to emulate his success by working with our stakeholders, state, federal, and academic partners, Congress, and especially Bob Beal and the outstanding ASMFC staff to ensure *Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries* is not just a vision statement but a reality."

Under Mr. Woodward's leadership, the Commission made important strides in furthering its strategic goals. Management accomplishments over the past two years include decisive action to initiate rebuilding of Atlantic striped bass; the adoption of a new amendment for summer flounder, scup and black sea bass to address the reallocation of the resource between commercial and recreational sectors; approved changes to the management of recreational fisheries for bluefish, summer flounder, scup and black sea bass through adoption of recreational measures setting process; and the approval of new addenda for American lobster, Atlantic menhaden, and horseshoe crab – all with the shared goal of providing the states and their stakeholders fair access to these resources while ensuring the species' health and long-term sustainability. An outstanding number of benchmark stock assessments and assessment updates were



From left to right: ASMFC Chair Joe Cimino of New Jersey and ASMFC Vice-Chair Dan McKiernan of Massachusetts

Upcoming Meetings

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 the deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous 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

Joseph Cimino (NJ), *Chair*
Dan McKiernan (MA), *Vice-Chair*

Robert E. Beal,
Executive Director

Patrick A. Campfield,
Science Director

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Laura C. Leach,
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Geoff White,
ACCSP Director

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November 13 (begins at 1 p.m.) - 14 (ends at 1 p.m.)

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee & Technical Committee Hybrid Meeting, Loews Philadelphia Hotel, 1200 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/11/2023/summer-flounder-scup-and-black-sea-bass-monitoring-committee|technical-committee/2229> for more information

November 14 (begins at 9 a.m.) - 15 (ends at 1 p.m.)

Atlantic Menhaden Ageing Workshop, Beaufort, NC; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/11/2023/Atlantic-Menhaden-Ageing-Workshop/2124> for more information

November 16 (9 - 10 a.m.)

Recreational Demand Model Decision Support Tool Working Group; visit <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/recreational-demand-model-decision-support-tool-working-group-summer-flounder-black-sea-bass> for more information

November 16 (10 - 11:30 a.m.)

Jonah Crab Technical Committee; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/11/2023/jonah-crab-technical-committee/2231> for more information

November 30 (1 - 4 p.m.)

Northern Shrimp Advisory Panel, Westin Portland Harborview, Portland, ME; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/11/2023/Northern-Shrimp-Advisory-Panel/2221> for more information

December 1 (9 a.m. - Noon)

Northern Shrimp Section, Westin Portland Harborview, Portland, ME; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/12/2023/Northern-Shrimp-Section/2220> for more information

December 4 (3 - 6 p.m.)

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/12/2023/summer-flounder-scup-and-black-sea-bass-advisory-panel/2245> for more information

December 4 - 8

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Beaufort Hotel, 2440 Lennoxville Road, Beaufort NC; visit <https://safmc.net/events/december-2023-council-meeting/> for more information

December 5 - 7

New England Fishery Management Council, Hotel Viking, Newport, RI; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/december-2023-council-meeting> for more information

December 5 - 7

NEFSC Black Sea Bass Research Track Peer Review; visit <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/black-sea-bass-2023-research-track-peer-review> for more information

December 11 - 14

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Notary Hotel, 21 North Juniper Street, Philadelphia, PA; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/december-2023-council-meeting> for more information

January 16 - 18

NEAMAP and SEAMAP Trawl Vessel and Gear Calibration Workshop; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/1/2024/neamap-and-seamap-trawl-vessel-and-gear-calibration-workshop/2214> for more information

In Memoriam Captain Jimmy Ruhle

On September 28, 2023, James A. Ruhle Sr., better known as Jimmy, passed away at the age of 75. A prominent North Carolina captain, Jimmy can best be described as a maverick, innovator, and passionate advocate for the commercial fishing industry. A life-long commercial fisherman, Jimmy recognized early on the importance of resource sustainability to the fishing industry. He served for nine years on the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and six years as a Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Advisor for the Commission and Council. He also participated on numerous research projects with scientists dating back to the 1970s.

Notably, Jimmy and his trawler *F/V Darana R* were instrumental in the creation of the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP), a cooperative state/federal fishery-independent research and data collection program for coastal waters from Maine to North Carolina designed to fill data gaps for state and federal fisheries management. Since 2007, the Mid-Atlantic Nearshore Trawl Survey was conducted aboard the *F/V Darana R*, sampling inshore waters from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina northward to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Data collected by NEAMAP include information on length, sex and maturity,



Jimmy Ruhle, captain of the fishing vessel Darana R (top) and captaining the Mid-Atlantic Nearshore Trawl Survey (bottom). Photo © Twiford Funeral Homes (top) and NEAMAP (bottom).

age, and food habits for dozens of fish and crustacean species, as well as ocean bottom temperatures. Data are used in stock assessments and are vital to improving our ability to track annual changes in population sizes and demographics. In 2004, Jimmy received National Fisherman's Highliner Award in recognition of his long dedication to responsible fisheries management and cooperative research.

Next to his family, one of his most prized possessions was the *F/V Darana R*, which he had proudly and successfully captained for almost 50 years! So many times, he'd say with a big smile and heart full of pride, "That ole boat has been good to us," and he was right!

The Commission is deeply indebted to Jimmy for his staunch support of and involvement in our management activities and for his dedication to ensuring that managers and scientists have the best data available to sustainably manage Atlantic coast fisheries. Our heartfelt condolences go to his surviving family, including his four children: Darana, Betsy, Bobby, and Stevie; four grandchildren: Laurin, Ethan, Lexi, and Kate; and his brother Billy.

Species Profile: Atlantic Striped Bass

Fish Availability and Management Considerations in a Stock Rebuilding Period

Introduction

Atlantic striped bass is regularly referred to as America's greatest game fish on the U.S. Atlantic coast. High demand for this species among fishermen and consumers, coupled with the complexity of its seasonal distribution along the coast, makes sustainable management of the Atlantic coast striped bass population complex and challenging. Stakeholders regularly call for the Commission to implement biologically, economically, and socially sound regulations within each jurisdiction and sector. As a result, the dynamic nature of Atlantic striped bass fishery management will likely continue for many years to come, especially as the Commission focuses on rebuilding the stock to its biomass target by 2029.

The 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment indicated the striped bass stock was overfished and experiencing overfishing. By accepting the assessment for management use in 2019, two management triggers were tripped requiring the Board to take action to address both the overfishing and overfished status determinations. Addendum VI to Amendment 6 was implemented in 2020 to address the overfishing status. To address the overfished status, the Board must adjust the management program to rebuild spawning stock biomass to the target level in a time-frame not to exceed 10 years, no later than 2029.

The stock rebuilding process is iterative in nature given the 10-year rebuilding horizon. The first progress update on rebuilding was provided by the 2022 stock assessment update after three years of Addendum VI implementation, which indicated the stock is still overfished but no longer experiencing overfishing. However, the second progress update on rebuilding based on 2022 data indicates recent fishery removals have increased due to a strong year class entering the ocean fishery. If a high fishing mortality rate continues, the chance of rebuilding the stock is low. With these recent fishery removals data, along with concerns about multiple years of low recruitment, the Commission is once again facing difficult decisions in striped bass management.

Life History

Atlantic striped bass are an estuarine species that can be found from Florida to Canada, although the stocks that the Commission manages range from Maine to North Carolina. A long-lived species (at least up to 30 years of age), striped bass typically spend the majority of their adult life in coastal estuaries or the ocean, migrating north and south seasonally and ascending to rivers to spawn in the spring.

Mature females (age six and older) produce large quantities of eggs, which are fertilized by mature males (age two and older) as they are released into riverine spawning areas. While developing, the fertilized eggs drift with the downstream currents and eventually hatch into larvae. After their arrival in the nursery areas, located in river deltas and the inland portions of coastal sounds and estuaries, they mature into juveniles. They remain in coastal sounds and estuaries for two to four years and then join the coastal migratory population in the Atlantic Ocean. In the ocean, fish tend to move north during the summer and south during the winter. Important wintering grounds for the mixed stocks are located offshore from New Jersey to North Carolina. With warming water temperatures in the spring, the mature adult fish migrate to riverine spawning areas to complete their life cycle. The majority of the coastal migratory stock originates in the Chesapeake Bay spawning areas, with significant contributions from the spawning grounds of the Hudson and Delaware Rivers.

Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

In 2022, total Atlantic striped bass removals (commercial and recreational, including harvest, commercial discards and recreational release mortality) was estimated at 6.8 million fish, which is a 32% increase from 2021 total removals. This 2022 increase was driven by an increase in recreational removals, as commercial removals slightly decreased. In 2022, the recreational

Species Snapshot



Atlantic Striped Bass
Morone saxatilis

Species Range: St. Lawrence River in Canada to St. John's River in Florida

Management Unit: Maine through North Carolina

Interesting Facts

- Throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic, striped bass are also known as striper, rockfish, linesider, rollers, squidhound, or simply "bass."
- In 1669, the first public school in North America (MA) was financed with taxes imposed on striped bass harvest.
- Striped bass were introduced to California from New Jersey in 1879. They now are found from Barkley Sound, British Columbia, to far northern Baja California, Mexico. In California, they are common in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, San Francisco Bay, and along the open coast from Tomales Bay to Cayucos.
- Atlantic striped bass is one of the most sought-after sportfish on the Atlantic coast, and is the official state fish of Maryland, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

Largest and Oldest Recorded

- World record was caught in Long Island Sound, CT (2011), weighing 81.88 lbs.
- Historic records confirm a 125 lb female caught off of NC in 1891.

Age at Maturity

- Females - 50% mature at age 6 (average 26"); 100% at age 9 (average 34")
- Males - 100% mature at age 3 (average 17")

Age at Recruitment into Recreational Fishery

- Chesapeake Bay Fishery = age 3-4 (fishery minimum size 18")
- Ocean Fishery = age 7-8 (fishery minimum size 28")

Stock Status

- Overfished and not experiencing overfishing

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sector accounted for about 90% of total removals by number of fish, and the commercial sector accounted for about 10%.

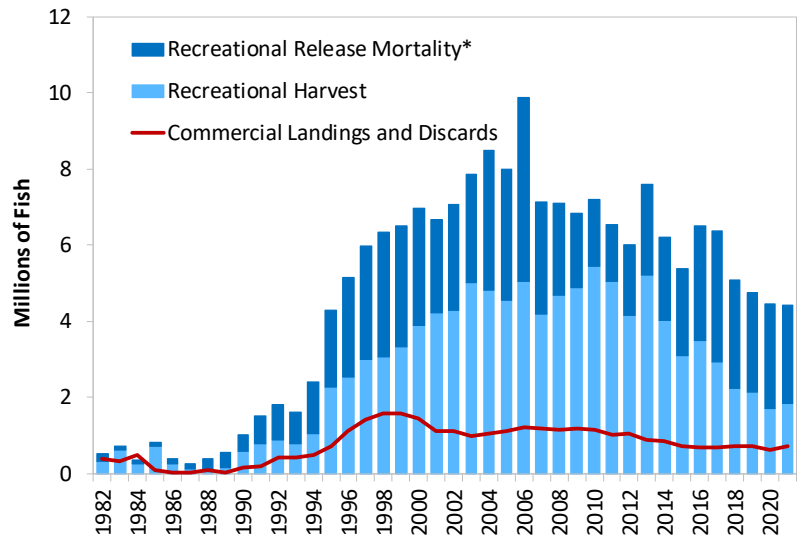
The commercial fishery is managed by a quota system resulting in relatively stable landings since 2004. There are two regional quotas; one for Chesapeake Bay and one for the ocean, which includes bays, inland rivers, and estuaries. The ocean quota is based on average landings during the 1970s and the Chesapeake Bay quota changed annually under a harvest control rule until implementation of a static quota in 2015 through Addendum IV. From 2004 to 2014, commercial landings averaged 6.8 million pounds (about 943,000 fish) per year. From 2015-2019, commercial landings decreased to an average of 4.7 million pounds (about 619,000 fish) due to implementation of Addendum IV. From 2020-2022, coastwide commercial landing decreased again to an average 4.1 million pounds (about 609,000 fish) due to further reduced quotas through Addendum VI. Commercial landings are consistently dominated by Chesapeake Bay fisheries, accounting for approximately 60% of total commercial landings by weight since 1990 (80% in terms of numbers of fish).

The recreational fishery is managed by bag limits, minimum size or slot size limits, and closed seasons (in some states) to restrict harvest. From 2004 to 2014, recreational harvest averaged 4.6 million fish per year. From 2015-2019, annual harvest decreased to an estimated 2.8 million fish due to the implementation of more restrictive regulations via Addendum IV, as well as changes in effort, size, and distribution of the population through time. Total recreational harvest decreased to 1.71 million fish in 2020 and 1.82 million fish in 2021, likely due to a combination of factors including more restrictive regulations via Addendum VI, fish availability, and impacts of COVID-19. Under the same management measures as 2020-2021, total recreational harvest in 2022 increased to 3.4 million fish, which is an 88% increase by number relative to 2021. This increase was likely due to the increased availability of the strong 2015-year class in the ocean slot in 2022. New Jersey landed the largest proportion of recreational harvest in 2022 in number of fish (33%), followed by New York (26%), Maryland (19%), and Massachusetts (14%). However, the recreational fishery is predominantly catch and release, meaning the majority of striped bass caught are released alive either due to angler preference or regulation (e.g., undersized, or the angler already harvested the daily bag limit). Since 1990, roughly 90% of total annual striped bass catch is released alive of which 9% are estimated to die as result of the fishing interaction (referred to as “release mortality” or “discard mortality”). In 2022, recreational anglers released alive an estimated 29.6 million fish, of which 2.7 million are assumed to have died.

Stock Status

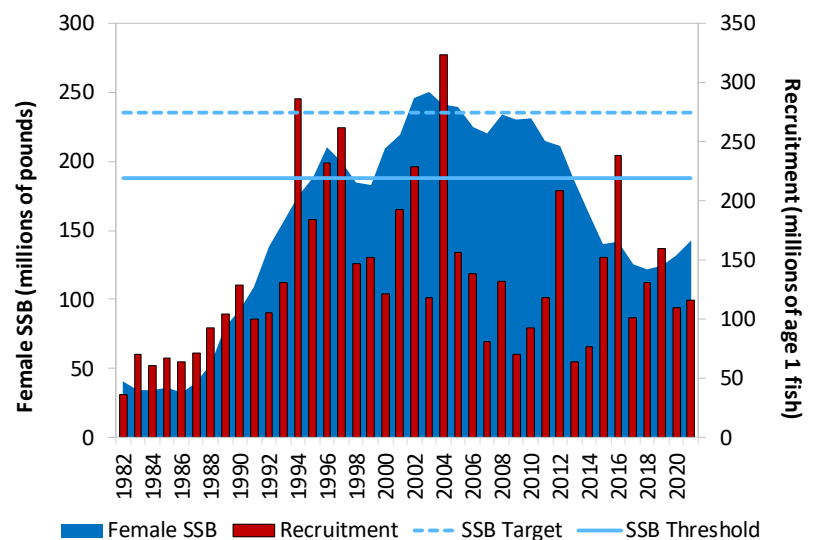
On a regular basis, female spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality rate (F) are estimated and compared to target and threshold levels (i.e., biological reference points) in order to assess the status of the stock. The 1995 estimate of female SSB is currently used as the SSB threshold because many stock characteristics, such as an expanded age structure, were reached by this year. This is also the year the stock was declared recovered. The female SSB target is equal to 125% female SSB threshold. The associated F threshold and target are calculated

Atlantic Striped Bass Commercial Landings and Discards & Recreational Landings and Release Mortality
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, 2022



* 9% of fish released alive are assumed to die because of being caught.

Atlantic Striped Bass Female Spawning Stock Biomass and Recruitment
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, 2022



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to achieve the respective SSB reference points in the long-term.

In November 2022, the Board reviewed the results of the 2022 Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, which uses the same model from the approved, peer-reviewed 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment. The accepted model is a forward projecting statistical catch-at-age model, which uses catch-at-age data and fishery-dependent data and fishery-independent survey indices to estimate annual population size, fishing mortality, and recruitment. The 2022 assessment indicated the resource is still overfished but no longer experiencing overfishing relative to the updated reference points. Female SSB in the terminal year (2021) was estimated at 143 million pounds, which is below the SSB threshold of 188 million pounds and below the SSB target of 235 million pounds. F in 2021 was estimated at 0.14, which is below the F threshold of 0.20 and below the F target of 0.17. The updated fishing mortality reference points took into account the period of low recruitment the stock has experienced in recent years.

The assessment also indicated a period of strong recruitment (numbers of age-1 fish entering the population) from 1994-2004, followed by a period of lower recruitment from 2005-2011, although not as low as the early 1980s, which likely contributed to the decline in SSB in recent years. Recruitment of age-1 fish was high in 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2019 (corresponding to strong 2011, 2014, 2015, and 2018 year classes), but estimates of age-1 striped bass were below the long-term average in 2018, 2020, and 2021. Recruitment in 2021 was estimated at 116 million age-1 fish, below the time series average of 135.7 million fish.

Atlantic Coastal Management Emergency Action for 2023

In May 2023, the Board approved an emergency action to change the



FMP Coordinator Emilie Franke with a tagged striped bass from the 2022 Hook and Line Tagging Survey

recreational size limit, effective initially for 180 days from May 2, 2023, through October 28, 2023. This action responds to the unprecedented magnitude of 2022 recreational harvest, which was nearly double that of 2021, and new stock rebuilding projections, which estimate the probability of the spawning stock rebuilding to its biomass target by 2029 drops from 97% under the lower 2021 fishing mortality rate to less than 15% if the higher 2022 fishing mortality rate continues each year. The Board implemented the emergency 31-inch maximum size limit to reduce harvest of the strong 2015-year class. The 31-inch maximum size limit applies to all existing recreational fishery regulations where a higher (or no) maximum size applies, excluding the May Chesapeake Bay trophy fisheries which already prohibits harvest of fish less than 35 inches. All bag limits, seasons, and gear restrictions remain the same. As of the implementation deadline of July 2, 2023, all jurisdictions have implemented regulations consistent with the required 31-inch maximum size limit.

In August 2023, the Board extended the emergency action through October 28, 2024 or until the implementation of Addendum II to Amendment 7 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan, whichever comes first. The extension of the emergency action provides the Board time to develop and finalize Draft Addendum II, which will consider 2024 management measures designed to reduce

fishing mortality to the target.

Amendment 7

Currently, Atlantic striped bass is managed under Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which consolidates Amendment 6 and its associated addenda into a single document. Amendment 7 establishes new requirements for the following components of the FMP: management

triggers, conservation equivalency, additional measures to address recreational release mortality, and the stock rebuilding plan. This Amendment builds upon the Addendum VI to Amendment 6 action to address overfishing and initiate rebuilding in response to the overfished finding from the last stock assessment, requiring the Board to rebuild the stock by 2029. Amendment 7 strengthens the Commission's ability to reach the rebuilding goal by implementing a more conservative recruitment trigger, providing more formal guidance around uncertainty in the conservation equivalency process, and implementing measures intended to increase the chance of survival after a striped bass is released alive in the recreational fishery. All provisions of Amendment 7 have been in effect since May 5, 2022, except for gear restrictions. States were required to implement new gear restrictions by January 1, 2023.

Amendment 7 also maintains the same recreational and commercial measures specified in Addendum VI to Amendment 6, which were implemented in 2020. As such, all approved Addendum VI conservation equivalency programs and state implementation plans are maintained until such measures are changed in the future. Addendum I to Amendment 7 was approved in May 2023 to allow for voluntary ocean commercial quota transfers contingent on stock status. When the stock is overfished, no quota transfers will be allowed. When the

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stock is not overfished, the Board can decide every one to two years whether it will allow voluntary transfers of ocean commercial quota. The Board can also set criteria for allowable transfers, including a limit on how much and when quota can be transferred in a given year, and the eligibility of state to request a transfer based on its landings.

Pending Action

In October 2023, the Board approved for public comment Draft Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the FMP. The Board initiated the Draft Addendum in response to the low probability of meeting the 2029 stock rebuilding deadline if the unexpectedly high 2022 fishing mortality rate continues. The Draft Addendum builds upon the 2023 emergency action by considering 2024 management measures designed to reduce fishing mortality to the target level. For the recreational fishery, the Draft Addendum

proposes recreational bag and size limit options for the ocean and Chesapeake Bay regions, including options with different limits for the for-hire modes. To address concerns about recreational filleting allowances and compliance with recreational size limits, the Draft Addendum includes an option that would establish minimum requirements for states that authorize at-sea/shore-side filleting of striped bass (e.g., racks must be retained). For the commercial fishery, the Draft Addendum proposes a quota reduction option that would reduce commercial quotas by up to 14.5%, with the final percent reduction to be determined by the Board.

For measures beyond 2024, the Board intends to consider the results of the upcoming 2024 stock assessment update to inform subsequent management action. To enable an expedited management response

to the 2024 stock assessment update, the Draft Addendum proposes an option that would enable the Board to respond to the results of the stock assessment updates more quickly, via Board action, if the stock is not projected to rebuild by 2029.

Maine through Virginia have scheduled public hearings throughout November and December to gather public input on Draft Addendum II; go [here](#) for more details about the public hearings. Written comments are also being accepted through **December 22, 2023**. The Board will meet to review submitted public comments and consider final action on the addendum in January 2024 at the Commission's Winter Meeting. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, FMP Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

ASMFC LEADERSHIP, continued from page 1

completed, including American eel, Atlantic menhaden, Atlantic striped bass, black drum, bluefish, Jonah crab, winter flounder, and revision to the Adaptive Resource Management Framework.

Working with the three East Coast Regional Fishery Management Councils and NOAA Fisheries, significant progress was also made on how fisheries managers can best address changing fish stock availability or distribution caused by climate change with the development of potential governance and management actions that could help prepare fishery management organizations for future challenges related to climate change.

Further, advances in habitat conservation were made by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) through its funding of seven on-the-ground projects, which will open over 40 river miles and conserve over 300 acres of fish habitat. These include dam removal and fishway projects in New Jersey and Massachusetts, as well as salt marsh and seagrass restoration projects in North Carolina and Florida. ACFHP also partnered with the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

and The Nature Conservancy to spatially prioritize fish habitat conservation sites through GIS mapping and analyses for the Atlantic region of the U.S. from Maine to Florida.

From a data collection and management perspective, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) also made progress under Mr. Woodward's leadership. ACCSP supported 27 partner agency data collection projects, and expanded the scope and security of the ACCSP Data Warehouse. ACCSP established citizen science policies and data collection systems including SciFish; supported implementation of the SouthEast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting system; completed the Atlantic Regional Recreational Data Needs Implementation plan; and made progress on a methodology to more fully use for-hire logbooks in Marine Recreational Information Program's catch statistics.

Mr. Cimino directs the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) Marine Resources Administration, which includes the bureaus of marine fisheries and marine habitat and shellfisheries. He represents the NJDEP

at various inter- and intra-state meetings, including the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council and the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Shellfisheries Councils, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, where he has represented the State of New Jersey since 2019 and prior to that the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2015-2018. Mr. Cimino directs the research and monitoring programs of the Administration to ensure they provide the information necessary for sound management of marine and shellfish resources. He started his marine fisheries career as a seasonal technician for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Fisheries Unit, he then spent two years with North Carolina's Division of Marine Fisheries. During his 14 years with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, he held various roles, ultimately finishing his time there as the Deputy Chief of Fisheries. Mr. Cimino has degrees from SUNY Cobleskill and Plattsburgh in Fisheries and Wildlife Technology and Environmental Science, respectively.

The Commission also elected Dan McKiernan, Director of Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, as its Vice-Chair.

Robert H. Boyles, Jr., Named 2023 Captain David H. Hart Award Recipient

At its 81st Annual Meeting in Beaufort, North Carolina, the Commission presented Robert H. Boyles, Jr., Director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the Captain David H. Hart Award for 2023 for his longstanding contributions to and exceptional leadership towards the sustainable management of marine resources along the Eastern seaboard. The Commission instituted the Hart Award in 1991 to recognize individuals who have made outstanding efforts to improve Atlantic coast marine fisheries. The Hart Award is named for one of the Commission's longest serving members, who dedicated himself to the advancement and protection of marine fishery resources, Captain David H. Hart, from the State of New Jersey.



understand and facilitate the cooperative nature of the Commission's Compact. He quickly became and will always be considered the senior statesman of the Commission, with a knack for poignantly quoting one of the nation's founding members to refocus commissioners on addressing the fundamental question at hand. Mr. Boyles was an advocate for transparent decision making; a great supporter of the Commission, respecting the opinions of both senior veterans and new commissioners alike; and a promoter of unity among states, especially during difficult and contentious deliberations. Mr. Boyles' notable accomplishments include greater protection of shad and river herring, with the closure of state waters in the absence of approved sustainability management plans.

He also advanced the Commission's

For nearly three decades, Mr. Boyles has dedicated his career to the conservation and management of marine resources within his home state of South Carolina, within the South Atlantic region through his longstanding participation on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and along the entire Atlantic coast as Commissioner and past Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission. Robert was an Commissioner from 2004 – 2020. Over that time, he was a thoughtful contributor to our process; chairing management boards for Atlantic menhaden, horseshoe crab, and South Atlantic species, as well as the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Coordinating Council.

Over the five years that he served as Commission Chair and Vice-Chair, he exemplified leadership through his innate ability to

first multispecies approaches to management through the development of the horseshoe crab Adaptive Resource Management Framework and the inclusion of data on predator demands in the Atlantic menhaden stock assessment, setting us on the course for the current management of Atlantic menhaden through the use of ecological reference points.

Although his appointment as Director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources precluded his continued service to the Commission, Mr. Boyles continues to advocate for the protection of South Carolina's Marine Resources through his directorship of the Department as well as serving on multiple national boards, including Chair of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Vice-Chair of the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, and Chair of the National Fish Habitat Board.

Andrew Button Receives ACFHP's Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award

Andrew Button, the Shellfish Management Division Head of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), was presented the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership's (ACFHP) Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award on October 16, 2023 at the Commission's 81st Annual Meeting in Beaufort, North Carolina.

Andrew Button is a consummate professional held in the highest regard by partners in the oyster restoration field in Virginia, Maryland, and globally. Over the past decade, Andrew has led the largest oyster reef construction project in the world in the Piankatank River, Virginia and has been key to the successful

implementation of oyster restoration, fishery management, and aquaculture initiatives. His successes in the Piankatank include construction of over 100 acres of reefs funded through federal, state, and non-profit organizations. Visitors to the newly constructed reefs include several recreationally and commercially important fish species such as Gray Snapper, Sandbar sharks, Striped Bass, Cobia, Bluefish, and Summer Flounder. He has also helped restore an additional 24 acres of reefs in the Great Wicomico River. Andrew, through the habitat restoration work led by VMRC, has partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC),

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The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), local watermen, and the oyster industry to successfully establish more than 400 acres of new oyster habitat in Virginia's waters. Reefs constructed by VMRC under Andrew's leadership are managed as sanctuaries with some constructed for managed harvests. Enhancement efforts of this scale will benefit the entire ecosystem of the lower Piankatank River and into the Chesapeake Bay. Andrew Button is far and away the most positive, collaborative, and dedicated practitioner, pursuing his passion and love for oyster restoration and management with a smile and an encouraging spirit of cooperation toward large-scale system-level success.

The Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award is bestowed upon individuals who have furthered the conservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes in a unique or extraordinary manner. For more information on the Melissa Laser Award, please visit: <https://www.atlanticfishhabitat.org/>

Andrew Button with his 2023 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award.

From left to right: Chris Moore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation;

Andrew Button, Virginia Marine Resources Commission; Kent Smith, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; and Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP Director



Chelsea Tuohy Named Employee of the Quarter

Chelsea Tuohy, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, was named the Commission's Employee of the Quarter for the third quarter of 2023. As one of the newest employees, with just eight months under her belt, Chelsea has earned the respect of Commissioners and coworkers alike for her ability to quickly come up to speed on her lead species (bluefish, northern shrimp, scup, summer flounder) and her willingness to temporarily assume the lead for cobia and Spanish mackerel management activities.

In just a short period of time, Chelsea gained an understanding of the issues facing both cobia and Spanish mackerel, including difficult allocation questions for the recreational cobia fishery. As part of the learning process, Chelsea fostered relationships with staff at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to more fully understand the complex issues surrounding these fisheries. This knowledge enabled her to concisely present that information to the Coastal Pelagics Management Board at the Annual Meeting. At the same time, she continues to provide critical support to her species committees and boards. Chelsea's close and effective collaborations with staff from the Commission, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office on summer flounder, scup, black sea bass and bluefish exemplify teamwork at its very best.

Chelsea's enthusiasm, diligence, and keen mind make her someone who is not only easy to work with but also someone who people can count on to capably and efficiently handle any task given to her. These accomplishments clearly reflect pride in her work and a strong dedication to the Commission. As a result of her efforts, Chelsea has significantly contributed to the Commission's fisheries management program and, in turn, to the Commission's vision of *Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*.

As EOQ recipient, Chelsea received a cash award and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personal record. In addition, her name is on the EOQ plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Chelsea!



Fishery Management Actions

American Lobster

In October, the Commission’s American Lobster Management Board modified the implementation date for measures under Addendum XXVII to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster to January 1, 2025 (see table for specific dates). Addendum XXVII was adopted in May 2023, and established a trigger mechanism to automatically implement management measures to provide additional protection of the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) spawning stock biomass.

Under Addendum XXVII, changes to gauge and escape vent sizes in Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) 1 (Gulf of Maine), 3 (offshore federal waters) and Outer Cape Cod (OCC) would be initiated based on an observed decline in recruit abundance indices of 35% from the reference level (equal to the three-year average from 2016-2018). With the inclusion of recently released 2022 data in the time series, the trigger index has declined by 39%, surpassing the trigger point of a 35% decline. The measures triggered include two increases to the minimum gauge size in LCMA 1, a corresponding change in the LCMA 1 escape vent size, and a single decrease to the maximum gauge size in LCMA 3 and OCC.

“Because the trigger was tripped much more quickly than we anticipated, the delay in implementing the gauge size increase will provide the Gulf of Maine states the opportunity to coordinate with Canada regarding possible trade implications, and give the industry and gauge makers additional time to prepare for these changes,” stated Pat Keliher from Maine.

Addendum XXVII also implements a standard v-notch definition of 1/8” with or without setal hairs in LCMA 3 and OCC, and a standard maximum gauge size of 6 3/4” for state and federal permit holders in LCMA 3 and OCC. Additionally, for LCMA 1 and 3 permit holders, states must limit the issuance of trap tags to equal the harvester trap tag allocations unless trap losses are documented. The implementation date for these measures is now January 1, 2025.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Horseshoe Crab

In October, the Commission’s Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved harvest specifications for Delaware Bay-origin horseshoe crabs. Taking into consideration the output of the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework Revision, the Board set a harvest limit of 500,000 male and zero female Delaware Bay-origin horseshoe crabs for the 2024 season.

Timing of Management Changes for LCMAs 1 and 2, and Outer Cape Cod under Addendum XXVII as Modified

When change(s) will be implemented	What change will be implemented		
	LCMA 1	LCMA 3	Outer Cape Cod
January 1, 2025	Trap tags issuance limited to harvester allocation		v-notch definition: 1/8” with or without setal hairs; Maximum gauge size: 6 3/4”
January 1, 2025	Minimum gauge size: 3 5/16”		
January 1, 2027	Minimum gauge size: 3 3/8”		
January 1, 2028	Escape vent size: 2 x 5 3/4” rectangular; 2 5/8” circular		
January 1, 2029		Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2”	Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2”

“The Board stands behind the ARM Framework Revision as the best available tool to set harvest limits for horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay-origin. As a result of its use, the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population has been increasing, with abundance of both female and male horseshoe crabs in the Delaware region at an all-time high since 2003. Despite this positive finding, the Board elected to implement zero female horseshoe crab harvest for the 2024 season as a conservative measure, considering continued public concern about the status of the red knot population in the Delaware Bay,” stated Board Chair John Clark of Delaware.

To make up for the lost harvest of larger female crabs, the Board agreed to increase Maryland and Virginia’s male harvest quotas with an offset ratio of 2:1 males to females. Using the allocation methodology established in Addendum VIII, the following quotas

State	Delaware Bay-Origin Horseshoe Crab Quota (no. of crabs)	Total Quota**
	Male Only	Male Only
Delaware	173,014	173,014
New Jersey	173,014	173,014
Maryland	132,865	255,980
Virginia*	21,107	81,331

*Virginia harvest refers to harvest east of the COLREGS line only

**Total harvest quotas for Maryland and Virginia include crabs which are not of Delaware Bay-origin.

were set for New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia: For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Jonah Crab

The 2023 Jonah Crab Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report indicates the range-wide population of Jonah crab remains above historic lows of the 1980s and 1990s. However, evidence of declining catch per unit effort (CPUE) in the fishery presents substantial concern and uncertainty for the status of the stock.

Based on life history and fishery characteristics, the assessment divided the population into four stocks: offshore Gulf of Maine (OGOM), inshore GOM (IGOM); offshore Southern New England

continued on next page

(OSNE) and inshore SNE (ISNE). According to the stock indicators, IGOM, OGOM, and OSNE recruit, exploitable, and spawning abundance conditions from 2019-2021 were neutral or positive relative to historical periods. Indicators generally agree across these stocks that abundance has not been depleted compared to the historic low abundance observed in the 1980s and 1990s. There are no reliable abundance indicators for the ISNE stock so no determination about the condition of this stock's abundance could be made at this time. Young-of-the-year settlement indicators generally show neutral conditions and do not indicate that recruitment in the GOM stocks will decline to historical lows in the near future. Settlement conditions are unknown for SNE stocks.

“As the first range-wide assessment of Jonah crab along the Atlantic coast, this assessment represents a significant advancement in our understanding of the species, its life history characteristics, and distinct fisheries by stock unit,” stated Board Chair Jason McNamee of Rhode Island. “I commend the members of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee and Technical Committee for their successful completion of a challenging, data poor assessment.”

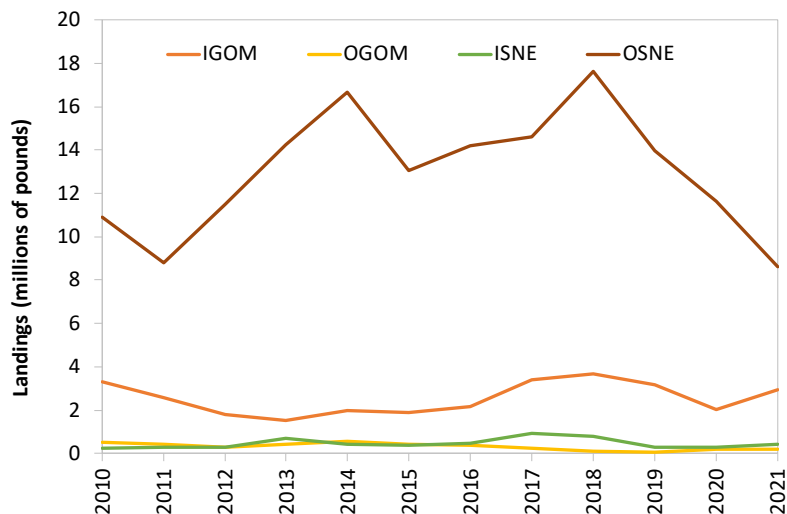
According to the Peer Review Panel, “Despite the limited availability of current data, there is considerable urgency for the assessment due to a very steep, three-year decline in landings. Commercial landings have declined 51% in three years, after an unprecedented 30-fold rise in landings. Although the recent decline is not well-detected in fishery-independent stock indicators, there is some evidence of declining CPUE in the fishery, creating substantial concern and uncertainty for the status of the stock. Given the mixed signals, the status of the Jonah crab stock is highly uncertain.

Current conditions closely resemble early stages of the collapse of the Canada Jonah crab fishery in the early 2000s. In the first three years of the crash, Canada landings dropped 58%. Within five years, landings fell 97%, and stock biomass could no longer support a fishery. Fishery-independent trawl indicators had not fully captured the signals of a rapidly declining stock. However, declining fishery CPUE was observable preceding and during the landings crash.

Given the high level of uncertainty in the status of the Jonah crab stock, the Panel strongly recommends close monitoring of annual stock indicators in the next few years. Annual indicators can determine whether sharply declining recent landings are signaling the start of a ‘bust’ phase of a boom-and-bust arc, or are due to fishery and market-related factors uncoupled with Jonah crab abundance.”

There are notable differences between the fisheries that operate in each of the stock areas. The vast majority of coastwide landings have come from the OSNE stock, accounting for 70-85% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021. The IGOM stock has supported the second largest fishery, accounting for 9-24% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021. Both the ISNE and OGOM have supported smaller fisheries, never accounting for more than 5% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021.

Jonah Crab Commercial Landings by Stock Area



The high proportion of participants contributing to Jonah crab landings indicates a directed fishery in the OSNE stock that targets Jonah crab, yet only a small number of participants account for the large magnitude of landings from this stock. The other three stocks have fisheries that are characteristic of bycatch fisheries that are targeting American lobster. These fisheries have low proportions of participants that land Jonah crabs from pot/trap gears. In the case of the IGOM stock, there is a relatively high number of participants targeting lobsters and not landing Jonah crabs. This represents considerable capacity for growth in a Jonah crab fishery if these participants were to switch to targeting Jonah crab.

Landings have shown different trends across stocks, but the landings from OSNE declined steadily from the time series high in 2018 (17.6 million pounds) in the last three years of the time series (2019-2021). This trend is believed to be influenced by factors other than available abundance but should continue to be monitored closely. There was insufficient information to describe fishing mortality or exploitation with confidence and these population parameters remain major uncertainties.

In response to the assessment findings and peer review panel recommendations, the American Lobster Management Board accepted the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use and tasked the Technical Committee with recommending possible measures or actions to address the concerns about stock status and recent fishery trends.

A stock assessment overview, which provides a more detailed description of assessment results, as well as the stock assessment and peer review report are available on the Commission's website at <https://asmfc.org/species/jonah-crab> under Stock Assessment Reports. For more information on the stock assessment, please contact Jeff Kipp, Senior Stock Assessment Scientist, at jkipp@asmfc.org; and for more information on Jonah crab management, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

ACCSP Launches On-line Biological and Bycatch Metadata Inventories

Have you ever wondered what biological data sets are available or whom to contact for information on your species of interest? To facilitate those questions, the ACCSP has developed a new section in the ACCSP Data Warehouse to inventory the state and federal biological sampling and bycatch programs on the Atlantic coast. The inventories are the online metadata repositories for biological and bycatch data collected on the Atlantic coast and potentially contained within the ACCSP Data Warehouse. The new system allows state and federal agency staff to catalog metadata (data about the data), on Atlantic coast programs directly in the Data Warehouse. The system can provide information such as survey design, fishery-dependent criteria, contact information, and so on (Figure 1).

The biological and bycatch inventories inform the ACCSP committee process with respect to priority matrices and funding, are a resource for stock assessments and other science that forms the basis of fisheries management. They are centralized and accessible to all ACCSP partners and the public. Additionally, the new system allows the ability to integrate with biological data sets in the ACCSP Data Warehouse, with future potential to do the same with the bycatch module.

The Biological Review Panel and Bycatch Prioritization Committee have long maintained this information. However, it was previously stored in spreadsheets updated annually. This made the resource less available to those outside the committees and lacked the ability to integrate with the data sets.

The new online inventories in the ACCSP Data Warehouse provide a readily accessible, publicly available, and searchable resource. The inventories are maintained in real-time by ACCSP partner agency staff when programs change. Additionally, this system allows for documents on sampling methodologies, program procedures, and/or manuals to be linked to a program and available for user download.

A current ACCSP focus is populating the biological inventory on data collection programs, and developing regular biological data feeds to the ACCSP Data Warehouse from the partners. Committee members have entered information for biological and bycatch programs managed by 12 different agencies (Figure 2). Looking forward to 2024, ACCSP will continue to develop partner biological data feeds while also working on the development of biological queries in the ACCSP Data Warehouse.

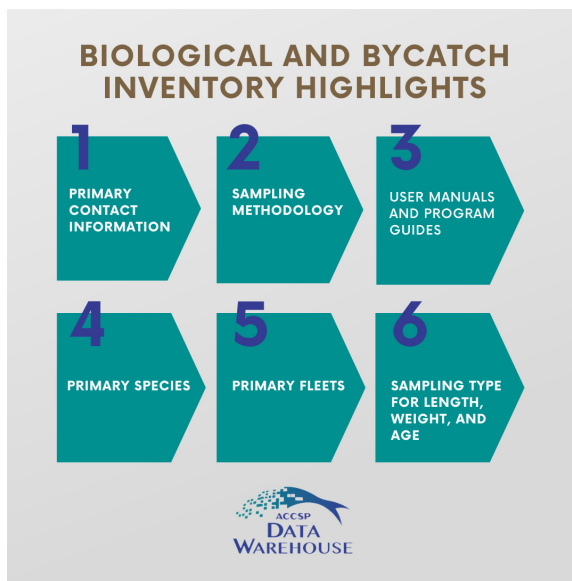


Figure 1

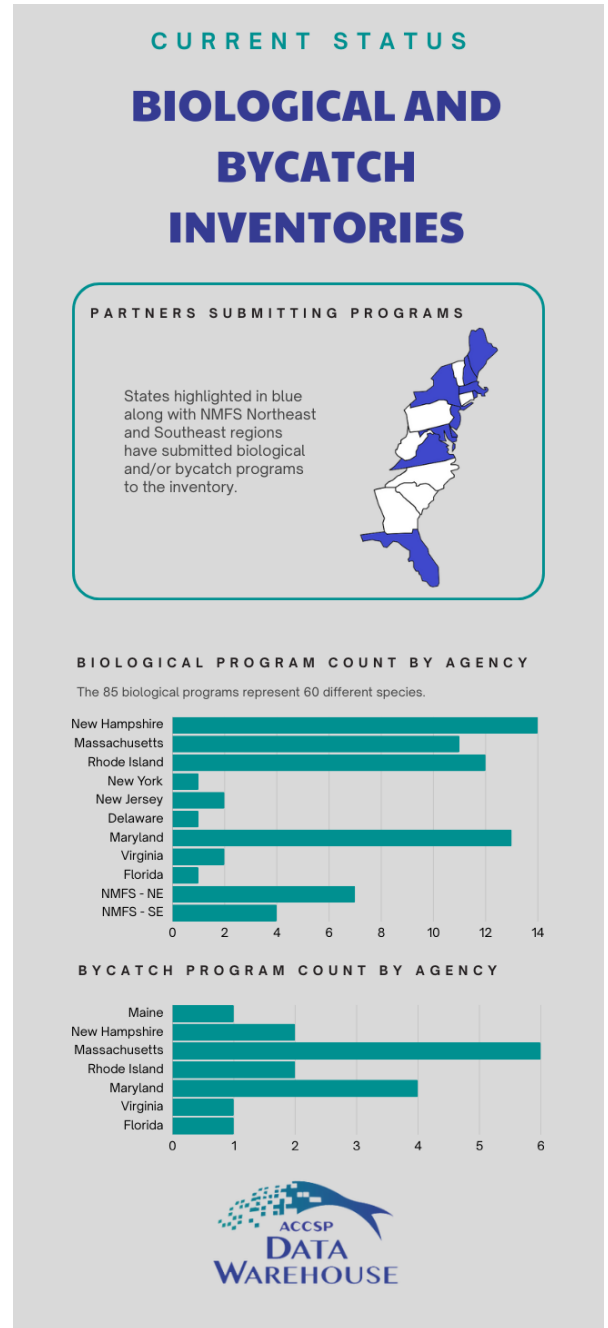


Figure 2



ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program focused on the design, implementation, and conduct of marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and the integration of those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. For further information please visit www.accsp.org.

NEFSC 2023 Pilot Hook and Line Survey Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Series

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Cooperative Research Branch seeks commercial hook and line fishermen and for-hire charter fishermen to attend a series of workshops throughout November 2023. The goal is to gather stakeholder input on best fishing practices for a Hook and Line Survey to be piloted in spring 2024.



Areas developed for offshore wind farms will be difficult or impossible to access using traditional mobile-gear surveys. That means we need to find alternatives to survey fish populations and provide data for stock assessments. A hook and line survey could be one alternative. To test this alternative, we are conducting a pilot hook and line survey to develop and test a methodology for deploying jigging machines in any habitat type and in close proximity to wind turbines. We need the expertise of for-hire and commercial rod and reel fishermen to make this pilot survey a success.

NEFSC is hosting the workshops in northern New England, southern New England, and the Mid-Atlantic, where the pilot survey will be conducted. The tentative schedule for the workshop series is:



A jigging machine similar to this one is being considered for the Pilot Hook and Line Survey.

November 6:

Superior Trawl, Narragansett, Rhode Island

November 8:

UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology, New Bedford, MA

November 9:

Online session for Southern New England region

November 13:

Chesapeake Bay Foundation Building, Virginia Beach, VA

November 15:

Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station Cooperative Extension, Toms River, NJ

November 20:

Online session for Mid-Atlantic Region

November 28:

Urban Forestry Center, Portsmouth, NH

November 29:

Chesapeake Bay Foundation Building, Virginia Beach, VA

November 30:

Online session for Gulf of Maine Region

The kinds of discussions and input we are interested in includes:

- Vessel specifications
- Tackle selection and leader designs
- Fishing Tactics
- Possible industry vessels to utilize as survey platforms
- Survey timing and sampling regions

The workshops are free and open to all interested stakeholders with expertise in hook and line gear. To register, please visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/science-data/cooperative-research-northeast>.

The workshops are an important opportunity for stakeholders to provide input on the design of the Hook and Line Survey. The NEFSC is committed to working with stakeholders to ensure that the survey is effective and can provide the best available science. For more information, please visit <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/pilot-hook-and-line-survey-workshop-series> or contact Katie Viducic at Katherine.viducic@noaa.gov.