



ASMFC

# FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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## Patrick C. Keliher Elected ASMFC Chair

On October 29<sup>th</sup> at the Commission's 78<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in New Castle, New Hampshire, the member states of the Commission thanked James Gilmore of New York for an effective two-year term as Chair and elected Commissioner Patrick C. Keliher of Maine to succeed him.

"It is both a great honor and huge responsibility to be trusted to lead the Commission for the next two years. I am humbled by my fellow Commissioners' confidence in me," said Mr. Keliher. "While my obligation to the great State of Maine will always come first and foremost, I also recognize that Maine sits on boards for just 10 of the 27 species managed by the Commission. As Chair, I will be working with ASMFC leadership to shape the course of interstate fisheries management for more than just the Pine Tree State and will ensure substantial resources are devoted to issues of equal importance in the fisheries of the Mid- and South Atlantic states. I look forward to bolstering the Commission's relationship with NOAA Fisheries and Congress to ensure mutual cooperation. I'd like to thank Jim Gilmore for his superb leadership over the past two years. I learned a great deal from him and will use the knowledge gained to work with newly elected Vice-chair Spud Woodward to advance the Commission's vision of *Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*."

Under Mr. Gilmore's chairmanship, the Commission made important strides in furthering its strategic goals. Management accomplishment's during the past two years include approval of plan amendments for Atlantic cobia and summer flounder, protections for spawning Atlantic herring, and approval of an addendum to end overfishing of Atlantic striped bass. The Commission's Science Program completed benchmark assessments and peer reviews for horseshoe crab, Atlantic striped bass, and northern shrimp, and made significant progress on the benchmark assessments for American lobster, American shad, and Atlantic menhaden (including the establishment of ecological reference points).

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) continued to successfully implement state conduct of the Marine Recreational Information Program's Access-Point Angler Intercept Survey. ACCSP also made significant advancements in technological innovations, including tablet and mobile data entry apps for dealers, commercial fishermen, and the for-hire industry. During his chairmanship, Mr. Gilmore oversaw the selection of a new ACCSP Program Director, Geoff White.

*continued, see ASMFC LEADERSHIP on page 14*



## 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

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#### **December 2 - 6**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Wilmington Riverside, 301 North Water Street, Wilmington, NC

#### **December 3 - 5**

New England Fishery Management Council, Hotel Viking, Newport, RI

#### **December 6 (1 - 3 PM)**

ASMFC Northern Shrimp Section Webinar (go to <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/12/2019/northern-shrimp-section-webinar/1478> for more details)

#### **December 9 - 12**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Westin Annapolis, 100 Westgate Circle, Annapolis, MD

#### **December 11 (begins at 1 PM) - 12 (ends at 1 PM)**

ASMFC Tautog Ageing Workshop, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, 30 Emerson Avenue, Gloucester, MA

#### **December 17 (begins at 10 AM) - 18 (ends at 3 PM)**

ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee, ASMFC, 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200A-N, Arlington, VA

#### **January 28 - 30**

New England Fishery Management Council, Portsmouth Event Center, Portsmouth, NH

#### **February 4 - 6**

ASMFC Winter Meeting, The Westin Crystal City, 1800 S. Eads Street, Arlington, VA

#### **February 11 - 13**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Sanderling Resort, 1461 Duck Road, Duck, NC

#### **March 2 - 6**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Westin Jekyll Island, 110 Ocean Way, Jekyll Island, GA

#### **April 1 (begins at 9 AM) - April 2 (ends at 3 PM)**

ASMFC Quality Assurance Fish Ageing Workshop, FL FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, St. Petersburg, FL

#### **April 7 - 9**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Stockton Seaview, 401 South New York Road, Galloway, NJ

#### **April 14 - 16**

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, CT

#### **May 4 - 7**

ASMFC Spring Meeting, The Westin Crystal City, 1800 S. Eads Street, Arlington, VA

#### **June 2 - 4**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, 3001 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA

# Report From the Chair: Reflections on Our Past & Future



For this issue, we are dedicating this space to past Commission Chair James Gilmore and the speech he presented to Commissioners at our 78<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in New Castle, New Hampshire.

"As my last opportunity to come before you as Commission Chair, I wanted to first thank you for all the support you have given Pat Keliher and me these past two years. It's been a tremendous honor serving as your Chair and I am indebted to you for helping us navigate through some difficult issues. I am particularly grateful to our Legislative and Governor-appointed Commissioners and proxies, who serve without compensation and get little credit for the work they do. I am also deeply appreciative for the efforts of our staff – those at the Commission and within the state and federal agencies for providing sound scientific advice and technical input to guide us in our decision-making.

From a management perspective, I am very pleased about our quick and decisive response to the decline in the striped bass resource and am hopeful the measures that we approved this week will end overfishing within one year. While this is an important first step in rebuilding the stock, there will be more that we have to do to fully rebuild it. But rest assured we will

Let's find ways to harness the vast array of knowledge and expertise we have among our Commissioners, scientists and stake-holders and find creative solutions to the problems before us.

do so. We've been in a much more dire position before with the striped bass resource and were successful in restoring the stock. There is no reason why we cannot do so again.

I am also excited about the progress we have made towards beginning to manage Atlantic menhaden for its role as a forage species.

The Commission and the states have made considerable investments in the development of two related benchmark assessments – a single-species assessment for menhaden and one that explores the use of ecological reference points (ERP) to manage menhaden based on the demands of the species that prey on it. Both of these assessments will be peer-reviewed in November and presented to the Management Board in February. If approved for management use, the ERP assessment has the potential to significantly change the way we manage menhaden and its primary predators. However, there is much more work to be done before we fully get there and decisions will need to be made about management goals and objectives for each of the species involved. We are heading into uncharted territory and I am equally excited and a bit overwhelmed about the work we have ahead of us.

The effects of climate change and warming ocean waters will continue to be a growing challenge, with shifts in species productivity and distribution resulting in the need for us to revisit outdated management programs and resource allocation among the states and between users groups. Further complicating resource allocation issues is the effect of revised recreational estimates on the balance of commercial and recreational fisheries. Making changes to long-established allocation schemes can be a highly contentious process, staking one state against the other. Unfortunately, climate change is a reality and our stocks are moving, leaving us no choice but to deal with this issue head on. What is required of us is the shared commitment to work together to seek innovative solutions and the willingness to compromise.

Looking ahead, I also see continued challenges to our authority under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and our ability to work successfully as an interstate management body. I remain deeply concerned about the political and stakeholder pressure placed upon us as individual states and as an organization as a whole that can fracture our unity and undermine interstate cooperation. We all face the dilemma between state needs and the greater good for the resource, and the real possibility that if you go for the greater good, you may not have a job when you get home. While I have no easy fix, the one constant that will aid us in our decision-making and in ensuring the sustainability of our fishery resources is the absolute need to put the science first.

When faced with challenges or conflicts, the tendency is want to hunker down and take care of what's mine. But in the world of fisheries management, there really is no mine, there is only ours. The only way to protect what's ours and do what's best for the resource and our stakeholders is to remain united and approach problem solving together. Let's find ways to harness the vast array of knowledge and expertise we have among our Commissioners, scientists, and stakeholders and find creative solutions to the problems before us. Most importantly, let us not forget that we are all here for the same reason – we are genuinely committed to being good stewards to the resources under our care not just for short-term gain but for the benefit of future generations.

Again, it has been my honor to serve as your Chair and I look forward to continuing to work with you all and our new leadership to achieve our vision of *Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*."

# Species Profile: Bluefish

## 2019 Stock Assessment Finds Resource Overfished; ASMFC & MAFMC to Address Rebuilding in Draft Amendment

### Introduction

Bluefish are one of the most popular sport fish along the Atlantic coast. A highly mobile species, they are renowned for their predatory instinct, razor sharp teeth, and aggressive behavior. In the late 1970s, anglers petitioned the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to develop a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for bluefish to address concerns over population declines. The Bluefish FMP, passed in 1989, was the first management plan developed jointly by an interstate commission and regional fishery management council.

Roughly a decade later, concern about the continued decline in bluefish abundance once again necessitated joint management action. By this time, a coastwide collaborative research group had begun studying the dynamics of the coastal bluefish population to aid in management. Amendment 1 (1998) marked the start of a long-term plan to restore bluefish through progressive harvest restrictions. In 2009, stock biomass exceeded its target level, and the stock was declared rebuilt a year earlier than planned.

Stock status has changed once again following the 2019 operational stock assessment, which revealed the stock is overfished. This change in stock status is largely due to the revised estimates of recreational effort from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The Council and the Commission are working cooperatively to develop a plan that will rebuild the stock.

### Life History

Bluefish are a migratory, pelagic species found throughout the world in most temperate coastal regions, except the eastern Pacific. Bluefish migrate seasonally, moving north in spring and summer as water temperatures rise and moving south in autumn and winter to the South Atlantic Bight. During the summer, concentrations of bluefish are found in waters from Maine to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. During winter's colder months they tend to be found offshore between Cape Hatteras and Florida. Bluefish generally school by size, with schools covering up to tens of square miles.

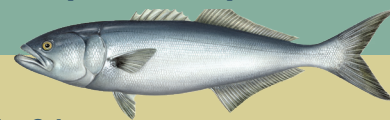
Bluefish are fast growers and opportunistic predators, feeding voraciously on almost any prey they can capture. Over 70 species of fish have been found in their stomach contents, including butterfish, mackerel, and lobster. Razor sharp teeth and a shearing jaw movement allow bluefish to ingest large parts, which increases the maximum prey size bluefish can catch. Bluefish live up to 12 years and may exceed 39 inches and 31 pounds.

Bluefish reach sexual maturity at age two and spawn offshore from Massachusetts through Florida. Discrete groups spawn at different times and are referred to by the season in which they spawn: the spring-spawned cohort and the summer-spawned cohort. (A cohort is defined as a group of fish spawned during a given period, usually within a year; also known as a year-class or age-class.) Recent research has also identified a fall-spawned cohort, demonstrating an expanded and prolonged spawning season. The cohorts mix extensively on the fishing grounds and probably comprise a single genetic stock.

### Recreational & Commercial Fisheries

Bluefish are predominantly a recreational fishery, with recreational harvest accounting for approximately 87% of total removals in recent years. As

### Species Snapshot



#### Bluefish

*Pomatomus saltatrix*

#### Management Unit

Maine to Florida

#### Common Names

Snapper, baby blues, choppers, elf, tailors

#### Interesting Facts

- Widely distributed around the world in tropical and subtropical waters
- Voracious predators, known to be cannibalistic
- Fish exhibit a feeding behavior known as the "bluefish blitz," where large schools of big fish attack bait fish near the surface, churning the water like a washing machine.
- As in all extremely active predators, the digestive enzymes in bluefish are powerful and their meat will spoil quickly, so they need to be cooked soon after capture.

#### Largest & Oldest Recorded

31 lbs., 12 oz.; 12 years old

#### Age/Length at Maturity

2 years/14.9-20.1"

#### Age/Length at Recruitment

1 year/9.3-11.1"

#### Stock Status

Overfished but not experiencing overfishing

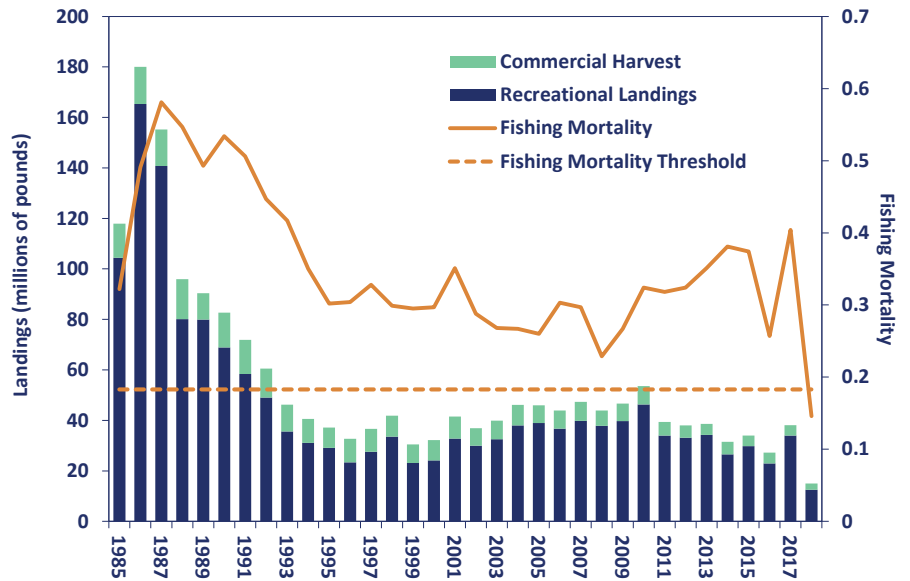


Photo (c) Toni Kerns

bluefish migrate seasonally up and down the Atlantic coast, anglers from Maine to Florida target these voracious predators near inlets, shoals, and rips, where they come to feed on large schools of bait. The species' aggressive feeding behavior and the fight it puts up on the line make it a very popular sportfish. Recreational harvest peaked at 165 million pounds in 1986, but quickly declined in the 80s and 90s to its current average annual recreational harvest of approximately 32 million pounds. In 2018, anglers harvested a time series low of approximately 13 million pounds, representing a 63% decrease by weight, and a 26% decrease in number of fish from 2017. The difference in percentages indicate that bluefish harvested in 2018 were considerably smaller than those harvested in 2017. Bluefish recreational discards have averaged approximately two-thirds of the total recreational catch in numbers of fish since 1999.

### Bluefish Commercial and Recreational Landings

Source: Bluefish Operational Stock Assessment, 2019



Commercial fishermen target bluefish using a variety of gears including trawls, gillnets, haul seines, and pound nets. Commercial landings decreased from 16.5 million pounds in 1981 to 7.3 million pounds in 1999. Since a state-specific quota system was implemented in 2000, commercial landings have averaged around 6.3 million pounds annually. 2018 marked a commercial landings time series low of 2.44 million pounds. Qualitative reports indicate that this low commercial landings year was an availability issue. The majority of bluefish were landed in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, North Carolina, and Florida in 2018.

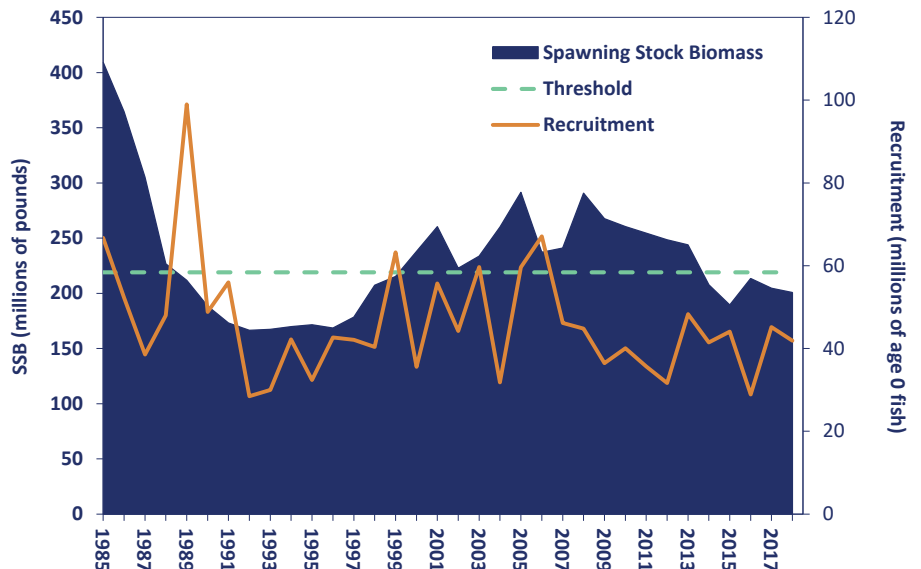
### Status of the Stock

Based on the 2019 operational stock assessment and peer review conducted by the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop, bluefish are overfished, but did not experience overfishing in 2018 relative to the updated biological reference points defined in the assessment. The updated stock assessment incorporated data through 2018 and included revised estimates of recreational effort from MRIP. MRIP uses surveys to estimate how many fishing trips recreational anglers take every year and how many fish per trip they catch. In 2018, MRIP transitioned from a phone-based survey to a mail-based survey to estimate the number of angler trips. The new, improved survey showed the number of trips taken across the time series was much higher than had been previously estimated, and as a result, estimates of recreational catch were much higher for bluefish. This had a significant influence in scaling up recruitment estimates as well as projections for potential biomass. The biological reference points for spawning stock biomass (SSB) increased relative to the estimates of existing SSB, causing a switch from the not overfished status in the 2015 benchmark assessment to the overfished designation in the 2019 operational assessment.

SSB in 2018 was estimated to be 201 million pounds, which is 92% of the SSB threshold of 219

### Bluefish Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) and Recruitment

Source: Bluefish Operational Stock Assessment, 2019



*continued, see BLUEFISH on page 14*

## ASMFC Presents Thomas P. Fote Prestigious Captain David H. Hart Award

The Commission presented Thomas P. Fote, New Jersey's Governor Appointee to the ASMFC, the Captain David H. Hart Award, its highest annual award, at the Commission's 78<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in New Castle. Mr. Fote has admirably served the State of New Jersey and the Commission since 1991 when he replaced Captain David Hart as New Jersey's Governor Appointee to the Commission.

Mr. Fote's longstanding service to marine conservation and management is notable. His history is one of dedicated volunteerism on a continuous basis. After volunteering to serve in Vietnam, Mr. Fote was medically retired from the US Army as an Army Captain in 1970. Upon his return, Mr. Fote began to carve out a critical spot for himself in the world of marine conservation through diligent study, hard work, the willingness to ask penetrating questions, and engagement into a wide spectrum of conservation and fisheries management roles, all as a full time volunteer. In the process, he has become a knowledgeable and staunch fishery advocate, acting locally on behalf of his fellow New Jersey anglers, while also considering the needs of other states.

A strong proponent of habitat protection and enhancement, Mr. Fote recognizes the critical role healthy habitat plays in fisheries management. As the founding member and first chair of the Habitat Committee, Mr. Fote was instrumental in the

development of the Commission's Habitat Program. Throughout his life, he's become increasingly active in environmental issues and has been a powerful voice in opposition to those who would degrade the marine environment. Having seen firsthand the

Commission process, Mr. Fote goes out of his way to help new Commissioners understand the complexities of the organization and how to work through the sometimes confusing maze of options.

Mr. Fote firmly believes in the inherent strength of partnerships and collaboration. He frequently communicates with others to develop a compromise and/or coalition for the common good. His extensive knowledge, reputation, and impassioned viewpoint are key catalysts in bringing divergent groups together for a common cause. This is exemplified through his work as a volunteer with numerous organizations including the New Jersey Environmental Federation and the New Jersey Coast Anglers

Association. Throughout his life, Mr. Fote has demonstrated that a conservation ethic and spirit of volunteerism can be lifelong passions. Atlantic coast fisheries management is better because of his involvement.

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.



From Left: ASMFC Past Chair Jim Gilmore, Hart Award Recipient Thomas Fote and ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal

devastation of "Agent Orange" in Vietnam, Mr. Fote found that this same Agent Orange had been made in New Jersey and dumped into Newark Bay. Mr. Fote worked with numerous conservation agencies to rid New Jersey's waters of a whole spectrum of contaminants.

With his service to the Commission dating back to 1991, Mr. Fote's has become the onsite "functional historian" for the Commission. His long range perspective puts difficult decisions into context and brings clarity to confusing dilemmas. Understanding how important it is to bring new members up to speed so they can quickly and constructively engage in the



Photo (c) Tom Crews, USFWS

## Atlantic Menhaden

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the Commission found the Commonwealth of Virginia out of compliance with a mandatory management measure contained in Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Menhaden. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, the Commission notified the Secretary of Commerce of its finding. This action was taken pursuant to the provisions of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act of 1993.

Specifically, the Commonwealth of Virginia has failed to effectively implement and enforce Section 4.3.7 Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap of Amendment 3. In order to come back into compliance, the Commonwealth must implement an annual total allowable harvest from the Chesapeake Bay by the reduction fishery of no more than 51,000 mt. The implementation of this measure is necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of Amendment 3 and maintain the Chesapeake Bay marine environment to assure the availability of the ecosystem's resources on a long-term basis.

Upon notification by the Commission, the Secretary of Commerce has 30 days to review the recommendation and determine appropriate action, which may include a federal moratorium on fishing for or possessing Atlantic menhaden in the Commonwealth's state waters.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, ISFMP Director, at [tkerns@asmfc.org](mailto:tkerns@asmfc.org).

## Atlantic Striped Bass

The Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum VI to Amendment 6 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum reduces all state commercial quotas by 18%, and implements a 1 fish bag limit and a 28"-35" recreational slot limit for ocean fisheries and a 1 fish bag limit and an 18" minimum size limit for Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries. States may submit alternative regulations through conservation equivalency to achieve an 18% reduction in total removals relative to 2017 levels.

Addendum VI was initiated in response to the 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment, which indicates the resource is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Addendum's measures are designed to reduce harvest, end overfishing, and bring fishing mortality to the target level in 2020.

Since catch and release practices contribute significantly to overall fishing mortality, the Addendum requires the mandatory use of circle hooks when fishing with bait to reduce release mortality in recreational striped bass fisheries. Outreach and education will be a necessary element to garner support and compliance with this important conservation measure.

States are required to submit implementation plans by November 30, 2019 for review by the Technical Committee and approval by the Board in February 2020. States must implement mandatory

circle hook requirements by January 1, 2021. All other provisions of Addendum VI must be implemented by April 1, 2020. In May 2020, the Board will consider a postponed motion to initiate an Amendment to rebuild spawning stock biomass to the target level and address other issues with the management program.

Addendum VI is available at [http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd447baStripedBassAddendumVI\\_Amend6\\_Oct2019.pdf](http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd447baStripedBassAddendumVI_Amend6_Oct2019.pdf). For more information, please contact Max Appelman, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [mappelman@asmfc.org](mailto:mappelman@asmfc.org).

## Horseshoe Crab

The Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved the harvest specifications for horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay origin. Under the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework, the Board set a harvest limit of 500,000 Delaware Bay male horseshoe crabs and zero female horseshoe crabs for the 2020 season. Based on the allocation mechanism established in Addendum VII, the following quotas were set for the States of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and the Commonwealth of Virginia, which harvest horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay origin:

	Delaware Bay Origin Horseshoe Crab Quota (no. of crabs)	Total Quota**
State	Male Only	Male Only
Delaware	162,136	162,136
New Jersey	162,136	162,136
Maryland	141,112	255,980
Virginia*	34,615	81,331

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

\*\* Total male harvest includes crabs which are not of Delaware Bay origin.

The Board chose a harvest package based on the recommendations of the Delaware Bay Ecosystem Technical Committee and ARM Subcommittee. The ARM Framework, established through Addendum VII, incorporates both shorebird and horseshoe crab abundance levels to set optimized harvest levels for horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay origin. The horseshoe crab abundance estimate was based on data from the Benthic Trawl Survey conducted by Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech). This survey, which is the primary data source for assessing Delaware Bay horseshoe crab abundance for the past two years, as well as the ongoing benchmark stock assessment, does not have a consistent funding source. However, due to the efforts of three Senators and six Representatives – namely, Senators Chris Coons (D-DE), Tom Carper (D-DE), Cory Booker (D-NJ); and Representatives Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ), Lisa Blunt-Rochester (D-DE), Donald Norcross (D-NJ), Chris Smith (R-NJ), and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) – and the support of NOAA Fisheries, annual funding for the survey has been provided since 2016. They have also requested that NOAA Fisheries incorporate the survey into the agency's annual budget.

For more information, please contact Dr. Michael Schmidtke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [mschmidtke@asmfc.org](mailto:mschmidtke@asmfc.org).

*continued, see FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS on page 8*

# Fishery Management Actions

FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS, continued from page 7

## Mid-Atlantic Species: Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish

The Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) and Bluefish Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to adopt 2020-2021 specifications for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish and review previously-implemented 2020 specifications for summer flounder. During the meeting, the Boards and Council reviewed the results of operational stock assessments for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish, which were peer-reviewed and accepted for management use in August 2019. The assessments incorporated fishery catch and fishery-independent survey data through 2018, including revised recreational catch data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The revised MRIP data are based on a new estimation methodology accounting for changes to the angler intercept survey and the recent transition to a mail-based effort survey. For these four species, the revised estimates of catch and landings are several times higher than the previous estimates for shore and private boat modes, substantially raising the overall catch and harvest estimates.

### Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications

The following table summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. In setting catch and harvest limits for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, the Boards and Council also took into account recommendations

from the Council’s Statistical and Science Committee (SSC), Monitoring Committee, and Advisory Panels (APs) for each species. The summer flounder limits, which were previously approved by the Board and Council in March 2019, were maintained. No changes were made to the commercial management measures for the four species. For scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, the Commission’s actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore); the Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

### Summer Flounder

For summer flounder, the Board and Council received a data update, including updated catch, landings, and fishery-independent survey indices through 2018. State and federal survey indices indicate the stock increased from 2017 to 2018 and recruitment in 2018 was above average. Considering the positive status of the summer flounder stock and recommendations from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, and AP, the Board and Council maintained the previously-implemented specifications for summer flounder. For 2020, the commercial quota is 11.53 million pounds and the RHL is 7.69 million pounds.

### Scup

The 2019 scup operational assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about two times the target. The assessment indicated the stock experienced

very high recruitment in 2015 and below-average recruitment during 2016-2018. The Board and Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 35.77 million pounds for 2020 and 30.67 million pounds for 2021. After accounting for expected discards, this results in a commercial quota of 22.23 million pounds and an RHL of 6.51 million pounds in 2020, and a commercial quota of 18.06 million pounds and an RHL of 5.34 million pounds in 2021.

The Board and Council also reviewed an evaluation of scup discards by mesh size, quarter, and statistical area in the commercial fishery. While discards have been well above average in recent years, the Board and Council agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation that no immediate management action was needed but discards should continue to be monitored.

### Black Sea Bass

The 2019 black sea bass operational stock assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 2.4 times the biomass target in 2018. Recruitment was above average in 2015 and below-average during 2016-2018. The Board and Council adopted an ABC of 15.07 million pounds for 2020 and 2021, which results in a commercial quota of 5.58 million pounds and an RHL of 5.81 million pounds for both years after accounting for expected discards. This represents a 59% increase for both the commercial quota and the RHL compared to the 2019 measures. This could allow for a notable increase in commercial landings.

However, because the recently revised recreational harvest estimates are higher than the 2020 and 2021 RHLs, managers will not be able to liberalize recreational measures in 2020, despite the increase in the RHL. Changes to recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) to constrain harvest to the RHL will be considered at the Council and Board’s December 2019 joint meeting.

continued, see FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS on page 13

**Table 1. 2020-2021 Commercial Quotas and Recreational Harvest Limits for Scup, Black Sea Bass, Summer Flounder and Bluefish (2019 values are provided for comparison purposes). Note: Landings limits shown in the table are initial limits prior to any deductions for past overages.**

Year	Scup			Black Sea Bass			Summer Flounder			Bluefish		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
<b>Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)</b>	23.98	22.23	18.06	3.52	5.58	5.58	11.53	11.53	11.53	7.71	2.77	2.77
<b>Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)</b>	7.37	6.51	5.34	3.66	5.81	5.81	7.69	7.69	7.69	11.62	9.48	9.48



## COMMISSIONERS



### BOB BALLOU

For nearly a decade, Bob Ballou served as proxy for Rhode Island's Administrative Commissioner. While Bob played an important role on all the management boards he served on, his exemplary leadership on two high profile management boards – Summer

Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass and the Atlantic Menhaden -- are particularly noteworthy. With both species, he led the boards in developing and adopting new management programs for menhaden and fluke. We are grateful for Bob's thoughtful and dedicated chairmanship and participation in our fisheries management process. We wish him the best in all his future endeavors.



### DOUG GROUT

For over three decades, Doug Grout of New Hampshire Fish and Game has been steadfast in his dedication to the Commission and its mission. His longstanding involvement extends from his early years working as a state biologist on species technical committees

and the Management & Science Committee (MSC), to his latter years as Chief of New Hampshire's Marine Fisheries Division, ASMFC Commissioner, and ASMFC Chair. In all his roles, Doug freely shared his knowledge and expertise and willingly invested his time to committee and board tasks. As MSC Chair, Doug oversaw development of the Commission's Stock Assessment and Peer Review Process, strengthening the scientific credibility of our fisheries science activities. As ASMFC Chair and Chair to several boards/sections, his firm and steady leadership helped guide Commissioners to make decisions that were in the best interest of the resource or the Commission as a whole. We are forever grateful for all Doug has done for the Commission and marine fisheries management along the Atlantic coast. We wish him a long and happy retirement.



### DAVID PIERCE

At the Annual Meeting, Commissioners also bid farewell to Dr. David Pierce, who has served Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries for 47 years. Like Doug, David has contributed to the Commission's programs in many ways and at many different levels,

from his beginnings as a state biologist participating on species technical committees and the MSC to the last two decades as an outspoken and impassioned advocate for effective management at the state, interstate and regional levels. He consistently brought his unique combination of skills, which blended science, policy, and decades of fisheries management knowledge, to Board deliberations, helping to provide focus in addressing a number of complex fisheries management issues. Never afraid

to think outside the box, David could be counted on to provide novel approaches to difficult challenges. David's ability to bridge the gap between stakeholders and the complex and often convoluted fishery management processes made him an indispensable asset to and advocate for his state's fishing constituents. We are deeply indebted to David for his nearly 50 years of service to Massachusetts, its fisheries, and fisheries management along the Atlantic. We wish him a wonderful retirement.



### REPRESENTATIVE TREY RHODES

In July, Representative Trey Rhodes, Chair of the Georgia House of Representatives Game, Fish, and Parks Committee was appointed to the ASMFC as Georgia's Legislative Commissioner. Representative Rhodes has served Georgia's 120<sup>th</sup> district

since 2015. Notably, he is from a long line of public servants, with his grandfather, father and mother all having served on his hometown city council. Representative Rhodes lives in Greene County with his wife and three children. Welcome aboard, Representative Rhodes!

## STAFF



### MAYA DRZEWICKI

In September, Maya Drzewicki joined the Commission staff as its new Fisheries Administrative Assistant. Since then she has hit the ground running, balancing her workload between administrative tasks and support to the Commission's outreach, fisheries management, science and habitat programs.

Maya has a Bachelor of Science in marine biology with a minor in statistics from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her recent work include internships with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, MD and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, working with Chris Moore.



### TREVOR SCHEFFEL

This summer, Trevor Scheffel joined the Commission staff as a Recreational Data Coordinator for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program. Trevor has been helping coordinate the state conduct of the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey and

the For-hire Telephone Survey.

Before coming to the Commission, Trevor worked as a biologist for North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries on its multispecies tagging program. He has a Master's degree from University of North Carolina Wilmington, with his thesis work on estimating mortality rates of southern flounder. Trevor earned his Bachelor of Science in Biology from University of Maryland.

## Species Habitat Matrix

The Commission’s Habitat Committee is in the process of designating ‘Fish Habitats of Concern’ for Commission managed species, set to be released in late 2020. As part of its research to describe the most important habitats to our managed species, the Committee is turning to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP)’s [Species-Habitat Matrix Tool](#).

The Species-Habitat Matrix is a conservation planning tool to evaluate the relative importance of 26 coastal, estuarine, and freshwater habitats to 131 selected fish and invertebrate species, including all Commission-managed species (except Jonah crab) (Figure 1). Specifically, the Matrix quantifies the importance of different habitats as shelter, nursery, feeding, or spawning areas for each species during the egg/larval, juvenile/young-of-year, adult, and spawning adult life stages. Results from the Species-Habitat Matrix were [published](#) in *BioScience* in April 2016, and have already been viewed over 1,200 times and downloaded more than 400 times. The authors found the importance of different habitats, and the average number of individual habitats occupied over a life cycle, varied with latitude. While submerged aquatic vegetation was important for a large number of species along the whole coast, riverine habitats and soft sediments were more important in the north, and coral reefs and marshes were more important in the south. ACFHP has used these findings to help determine its subregional priority habitats (Figure 2).

The website tool was launched in December 2018 and is an online database that allows users to search by species, subregion, habitat, and/or life stage, and populates in real-time (Figure 3). You can download your results, or the entire database, as a CSV file for further analysis. ACFHP has incorporated this tool into its conservation project selection criteria, and has presented on how to use the tool at national conferences and regional meetings from coast to coast.

ACFHP’s hope is that people and organizations will use the information in the Species-Habitat Matrix to make better informed, quantifiable decisions about habitat conservation for Atlantic marine species. There is an opportunity to combine the results of this tool with spatial data in the future, in order to predict the best locations for habitat protection and restoration for individual species of interest.

For more information please contact Dr. Lisa Havel, ACFHP Coordinator, at [lhavel@asmfc.org](mailto:lhavel@asmfc.org).



**Figure 1. Habitat Categories and Types, included in the Species-Habitat Matrix**

ACFHP Habitats by Category and Type	
Habitat Category	Habitat Type
Marine and Estuarine Shellfish Beds	Oyster aggregations/reef Scallop beds Hard clam beds Shell accumulations
Coral and Live/Hard Bottom	Coral reefs Patch reef, soft corals, or anemones Live rock
Macroalgae	<i>Fucus</i> spp., <i>Laminaria</i> spp., <i>Ulva lactuca</i>
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation	Tidal fresh & oligohaline plant species Mesohaline & polyhaline plant species
Tidal Vegetation	Estuarine emergent marsh Tidal freshwater marsh Mangrove
Unvegetated Coastal Bottom	Loose fine bottom Loose coarse bottom Firm hard bottom Structured sand habitat
Riverine Bottom	Higher gradient headwater tributaries Lower gradient tributaries Higher gradient large mainstem river Lower gradient large mainstem river Low order coastal streams Non-tidal freshwater mussel beds Coastal headwater pond Non-tidal freshwater marsh

**Figure 2. ACFHP Subregional Priority Habitats**

ACFHP PRIORITY HABITATS BY SUBREGION	
<b>NORTH ATLANTIC</b> Riverine Bottom Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Marine and Estuarine Shellfish Beds	<b>SOUTH ATLANTIC</b> Riverine Bottom Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Marine and Estuarine Shellfish Beds Tidal Vegetation
<b>MID-ATLANTIC</b> Riverine Bottom Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Marine and Estuarine Shellfish Beds Tidal Vegetation	<b>SOUTH FLORIDA</b> Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Coral and Live/Hardbottom Tidal Vegetation (mangrove)

**Figure 3. The Species-Habitat Matrix online tool allows users to search by species, subregion, habitat, and/or life stage.**

[DOWNLOAD SEARCH RESULTS TO CSV](#)    [DOWNLOAD ENTIRE MATRIX TO CSV](#)

Species	Region	Habitat Category	Habitat Type	Life Stage	Rank	Numeric Rank
American Lobster	North Atlantic			Adult		
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Coastal Inert Substrates	Firm Hard Bottom (boulders to embed)	Adult	Very High	4.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Coastal Inert Substrates	Loose Coarse Bottom (gravel to cobble)	Adult	Very High	4.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Coastal Inert Substrates	Loose Fine Bottom (mud, silt, and sanc)	Adult	High	3.50
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Macroalgae	Fucus, Laminaria, Ulva lactuca Mat	Adult	High	3.50
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Coastal Inert Substrates	Structured Sand (shoals, capes, offshore)	Adult	Medium	2.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Marine & Estuarine Shellfish Beds	Hard Clam Bed	Adult	Medium	2.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Marine & Estuarine Shellfish Beds	Scallop Bed	Adult	Medium	2.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Other Sessile Fauna	Live Rock (inert hard bottom with hydr)	Adult	Medium	2.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Marine & Estuarine Shellfish Beds	Dead Shell Accumulation	Adult	Low	1.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation	Mesohaline & Polyhaline Species	Adult	Low	1.00
American Lobster	North Atlantic	Tidal Vegetation	Saltwater & Brackish Marsh	Adult	Low	1.00

# ACCSP Data and Recreational Teams Exceed Expectations

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistic Program (ACCSP) Recreational Fisheries Team and Data Team have worked diligently to collaborate with all state and federal partners to achieve never before met deadlines. The Data Team set the earliest data delivery deadline to date and successfully met or surpassed both the deadlines for the spring and fall data loads. The Recreational Fisheries Team also improved upon previous year's deadlines, delivering data five days ahead of schedule. With the cooperation of all program partners, the ACCSP continues to realize and improve upon its mission of producing dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for the Atlantic coast.



Photo (c) NC DMF

From 2017-2018 the Data Team has worked toward an earlier deadline for data availability during the spring and fall data loads. The data load is the routine of collecting, processing, and disseminating releasing commercial data for the Atlantic coast, which are made accessible via the online ACCSP Data Warehouse. The data are essential to inform stock assessment and management processes and the earlier the data are available, the better-informed decisions will be made by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and all ACCSP partners.

The Recreational Fisheries Team cooperatively transitioned the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) from paper to tablet-based data collection with the help of Atlantic state partners in 2019. APAIS data are an important component of the estimation of recreational fishing activity by NOAA

Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program. Electronic submission improved overall quality assurance/control processes, decreased staff burden on manual processes, and allowed for improvement in the data deliverable timeline to NOAA Fisheries. Tablet-based interviewing also streamlined the data collection process, increasing the overall number of interviews conducted on recreational anglers in 2019.

For more information on the data loads, please contact Heather Konell, Senior Data Coordinator, at [heather.konell@accsp.org](mailto:heather.konell@accsp.org); and for more information on the tablet-based data collection, please contact Alex DiJohnson, Senior Recreational Data Coordinator, at [alex.dijohnson@accsp.org](mailto:alex.dijohnson@accsp.org).



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. It is composed of representatives from natural resource management agencies coastwide, including the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the D.C. Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For further information please visit [www.accsp.org](http://www.accsp.org).

# Weakfish Assessment Update Indicates Stock Remains Depleted

The 2019 Weakfish Assessment Update indicates weakfish continues to be depleted and has been since 2003. Under the reference points, the stock is considered depleted when the stock is below a spawning stock biomass (SSB) threshold of 30% (13.6 million pounds). In 2017, SSB was 4.24 million pounds. While the assessment indicates some positive signs in the weakfish stock in the most recent years, with a slight increase in SSB and total abundance, the stock is still well below the SSB threshold. Given the weakfish management program is already highly restrictive with a one fish recreational creel limit, 100 pound commercial trip limit, and 100 pound commercial bycatch limit, the Board took no management action at this time.

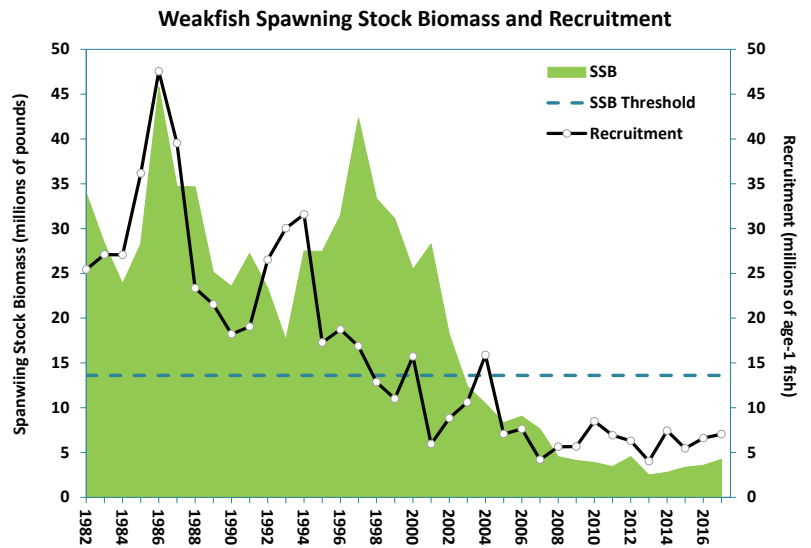
The assessment indicates natural mortality (e.g., the rate at which fish die because of natural causes such as predation, disease, and starvation) have been increasing since the early 2000s. Fishing mortality was also high during the mid- to late 2000s. Therefore, even though harvest have been at low levels in recent years, the weakfish population has been experiencing very high levels of total mortality (which includes fishing mortality and natural mortality), preventing the stock from recovering.

To better address the issues impacting the weakfish resource, the Technical Committee recommends the use of total mortality (Z) benchmarks to prevent an increase in fishing pressure when natural mortality is high. The assessment proposes a total mortality target of 1.03 and threshold of 1.43. Total mortality in 2017 was 1.45, which is above both the threshold and target, indicating that total mortality is too high. Fishing mortality has increased in recent years, but was below the threshold in 2017.

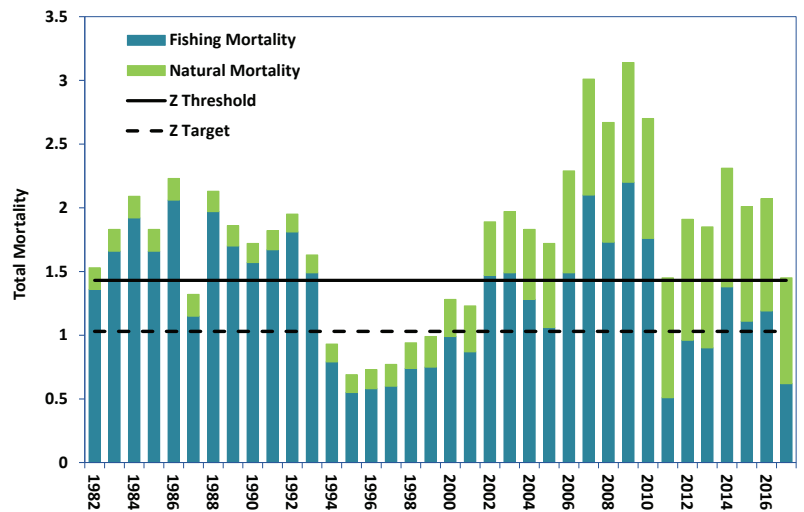
Weakfish commercial landings have dramatically declined since the early 1980s, dropping from over 19 million pounds landed in 1982 to roughly 180,560 pounds landed in 2017. The majority of landings occur in North Carolina and Virginia and, since the early 1990s, the primary gear used has been gillnets. Discarding of weakfish by commercial fishermen is known to occur, especially in the northern trawl fishery, and the discard mortality is assumed to be 100%. Discards peaked in the 1990s but have since declined as the result of management measures and a decline in stock abundance.

Like the commercial fishery, recreational landings and live releases have declined over time. It is assumed that 10% of weakfish released alive die, so that total recreational removals are equal to the number of weakfish landed plus 10% of the weakfish released alive. The assessment update used the new time-series of calibrated estimates of landings and live releases from the Marine Recreational Information Program. These estimates were higher than the values used in the 2016

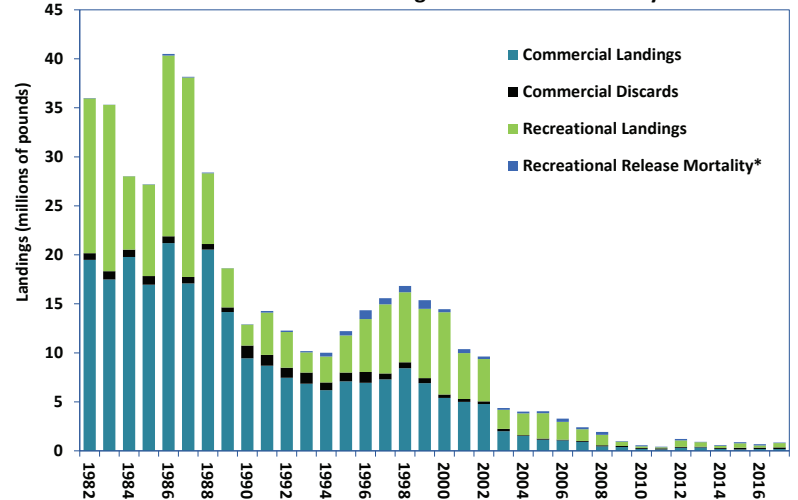
WEAKFISH continued on page 14



**Contribution of Fishing and Natural Mortality to Total Weakfish Mortality**



**Weakfish Commercial Landings and Discards & Recreational Landings and Release Mortality**



\*10% of fish released alive are assumed to die

### Bluefish

For bluefish, the 2019 operational assessment designated the stock as overfished though overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Based on the SSC's recommendation, the Bluefish Board and Council adopted an ABC of 16.28 million pounds for both 2020 and 2021. After accounting for discards, the ABC translates to a commercial quota of 2.77 million pounds and an RHL of 9.48 million pounds. Compared to 2019, this represents a 64% decrease in the commercial quota and an 18% decrease in the RHL. Because the recreational fishery is anticipated to fully harvest the RHL, the Board and Council did not authorize a quota transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector for 2020-2021.

### Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocations Amendment

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and the Council initiated the development of a joint amendment to reevaluate the FMP's commercial and recreational sector allocations. This action aims to address the allocation-related impacts of the revised recreational catch and landings data provided by MRIP. The initiation of the amendment directs Commission and Council staff to begin preparing analyses to guide development of a Public Information document and scoping process. The Board and Council will discuss this issue during their next joint meeting in December 2019.

### Black Sea Bass Commercial Addendum

After reviewing potential management strategies and engaging in a joint discussion on Council involvement, the Board initiated an addendum to consider changes to black sea bass commercial state-by-state allocations. Consistent with the Board's August 2019 discussion, this action will consider the current distribution and abundance of black sea bass as one of several adjustment factors to achieve more balanced access to the resource. Proposed strategies for adjusting the commercial state allocations include: 1) a dynamic

approach, referred to as "TMGC," which gradually shifts allocations over time based on a combination of historical landings information and current stock distribution information; 2) several trigger-based allocation approaches; 3) a method to raise the Connecticut quota to 5% in addition to any other reallocation method; and 4) hybrid approaches. Although this is a Board-specific action, both the Board and Council agreed future discussions of the addendum should occur at joint meetings to allow for Council input. The Council deliberated the need for a joint action, but decided to postpone further consideration of a joint action until the December 2019 meeting.

For more information on the Commission's actions pertaining to black sea bass, please contact Caitlin Starks, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at [cstarks@asmfc.org](mailto:cstarks@asmfc.org) and contact Dustin Colson Leaning at [dleaning@asmfc.org](mailto:dleaning@asmfc.org) for more information pertaining to the Commission's actions on bluefish and summer flounder.

### Spiny Dogfish

The Commission's Spiny Dogfish Management Board approved Addendum VI to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Spiny Dogfish. The Addendum allows commercial quota to be transferred between all regions and states to enable the full utilization of the coastwide commercial quota and avoid quota payback for unintended quota overages.

The Commission's FMP allocates the coastwide quota to the states of Maine-Connecticut as a regional allocation and to

the states of New York-North Carolina as state-specific allocations. Previously, the FMP only allowed quota transfers between states with individual allocations, with regions excluded from benefitting from quota transfers. The 2019-2020 coastwide quota was reduced by 46% due to declining biomass. If landings in the 2019-2020 fishing year remain the same as 2018-2019 landings, there was concern the coastwide quota would not be exceeded but some states could face early closures due to reaching their allocation and being unable to access available unused quota from the northern region through quota transfers.

In order for the northern region to participate in quota transfers the Director of each state's marine fisheries agency within the region must agree to the transfer in writing. As with transfers between states, transfers involving regions do not permanently affect the shares of the coastwide quota. Additionally, the Addendum extends the timeframe for when quota transfers can occur up to 45 days after the end of the fishing year to allow for late reporting of landings data. The Addendum's measures are effective immediately and allow for transfers between all states and the northern region starting with the 2019-2020 fishing year.

Addendum VI will be available on the Commission's website ([www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)) on the Spiny Dogfish webpage in November. For more information, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at [krootes-murdy@asmfc.org](mailto:krootes-murdy@asmfc.org).



Photo (c) Ashton Harp

BLUEFISH, continued from page 5

million pounds. Fishing mortality (F) in 2018 was estimated to be 0.146, below the F threshold ( $F_{MSY\ PROXY} = F35\% = 0.183$ ). Though the assessment indicated bluefish are not experiencing overfishing in 2018, the stock has experienced overfishing, relative to the updated reference points, in all prior years dating back to 1985. This fundamental shift in managers' understanding of the status of the fishery is largely due to the new estimates of recreational catch.

## Atlantic Coastal Management

Bluefish is managed under Amendment 1 to the Interstate FMP for Bluefish and Addendum I. Amendment 1 allocates 83% of the resource to recreational fisheries and 17% to commercial fisheries. However, the commercial quota can be increased up to 10.5 million pounds if the recreational fishery is projected to not land its entire allocation for the upcoming year. The commercial fishery is controlled through state-by-state quotas based on historic landings from 1981-1989, while the recreational fishery is currently managed using a 15 fish bag limit. A coastwide biological sampling program to improve the quantity and quality of information used in future bluefish stock assessments was implemented in 2012 through Addendum I.

The Commission and Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit of 16.28 million pounds for the 2020 fishing season, an approximate 25% decrease from 2019 levels, in response to the findings of the 2019 operational stock assessment. After accounting for discards, the ABC translates to a commercial quota of 2.77 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 9.48 million pounds. The Commission and Council will meet jointly in December to set coastwide recreational measures in an effort to restrict harvest to the limit.

In December 2017, the Board and Council initiated an amendment with the goal of reviewing and possibly revising the FMP goals and objectives, allocations between sectors and states, and the quota transfer process. The scoping and public information document was distributed and received public input the summer of 2018. However, the amendment development process was put on hold while the Board, Council, and stakeholders awaited the results of the 2019 operational stock assessment. Following the overfished designation, the Council's Fishery Management Action Team is in the process of incorporating a rebuilding plan into the amendment to restore the stock to its target level. Input from technical staff, the advisory panel, and the public will be relied upon to produce the draft amendment.

For more information, please contact Dustin Colson Leaning, FMP Coordinator, at [dleaning@asmfc.org](mailto:dleaning@asmfc.org) or 703.842.0740.



Photo (C) John McMurray, nycflyfishing.com

LEADERSHIP, continued from page 1

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership funded restoration projects in six states to conserve a total of 40 acres of fish habitat and provide access to over 29 river miles and 3,900 acres of spawning habitat. It also launched a redesigned website, created an online query tool for the Species-Habitat Matrix, and completed a research project to understand black sea bass habitat use in the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

A Gardiner native, Mr. Keliher has spent much of his life in the woods and on the waters of Maine. His experiences as a youth, fishing and lobstering with family in Casco Bay, instilled in him early on an appreciation for the importance and value of our natural resources. He has been Commissioner of Maine's Department of Marine Resources since January 2012.

The Commission also elected Spud Woodward, Georgia's Governor Appointee to the Commission, as its Vice-Chair.

WEAKFISH, continued from page 12

benchmark assessment, but showed the same overall trend. Total recreational removals peaked in 1987 at 20.4 million pounds and have declined since then to slightly less than 500,000 pounds in 2017. The proportion of fish released alive has increased over time; over the past 10 years, 88% of weakfish were released alive. Most of the recreational catch occurs in the Mid-Atlantic between North Carolina and New Jersey.

The Assessment Update and a stock assessment overview will be available on the Commission's website, [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org), on the Weakfish page under Stock Assessment Reports.

For more information on the stock assessment, please contact Katie Drew, ASMFC Stock Assessment Team Leader, at [kdrew@asmfc.org](mailto:kdrew@asmfc.org); and for more information on weakfish management, please contact Mike Schmidtke, FMP Coordinator, at [mschmidtke@asmfc.org](mailto:mschmidtke@asmfc.org).

## Atlantic Croaker & Spot

The Commission's South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board has released two documents for public comment: Draft Addendum III to Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Croaker and Draft Addendum III to the Omnibus Amendment to the Interstate FMPs for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout. The states of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina will be conducting hearings to gather public input on the Draft Addenda throughout December and January. The hearing details can be found [here](#).

The Board initiated the development of the Draft Addenda for Atlantic croaker and spot to incorporate updates on the annual traffic light approach (TLA) and propose changes to the management program. In the absence of an approved stock assessment, which is the case for both species, the TLA is conducted each year to evaluate fishery trends and develop management actions (e.g. bag limits, size restrictions, time and area closures, and gear restrictions) when harvest and abundance thresholds are exceeded. The TLA assigns a color (red, yellow, or green) to categorize relative levels of indicators on the condition of the fish population or fishery. For example, as harvest or abundance increases relative to its long-term average, the proportion of green in a given year will increase and as harvest or abundance decreases, the amount of red in that year will increase.

The Board annually evaluates the proportion of red against threshold levels to determine if management action is required. In recent years, fisheries for both Atlantic croaker and spot have experienced declines in harvest, but not declines in abundance as indicated by fishery-independent surveys used in the TLA. Therefore, management action has not been triggered. The lack of triggering management action with these harvest declines has raised concerns, leading to re-evaluation of TLA methods and the proposal of changes to management.

Both Draft Addenda present updates to resolve issues with the TLA analyses in order to better reflect stock characteristics, based on recommendations from the Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee and Spot Plan Review Team. Each Draft Addendum also presents options for four issues that address the TLA management triggering mechanism, triggered management responses for the recreational and commercial fisheries, and evaluation of the population's response to triggered management actions.

The Draft Addenda are available at [http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd808faAtlCroakerDraftAddIII\\_PublicComment\\_Oct2019.pdf](http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd808faAtlCroakerDraftAddIII_PublicComment_Oct2019.pdf) and [http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd80918SpotDraftAddIII\\_PublicComment\\_Oct2019.pdf](http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/5dd80918SpotDraftAddIII_PublicComment_Oct2019.pdf) or via the Commission's website at <http://www.asmfc.org/about-us/public-input>. Fishermen and other stakeholders are encouraged to provide input on the Draft Addenda either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. Public comment will be accepted until **5 PM (EST) on January 10, 2020** and should be sent to Dr. Michael Schmidtke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, 1050 N. Highland St, Suite A-N, Arlington, VA 22201; 703.842.0741 (FAX) or at [comments@asmfc.org](mailto:comments@asmfc.org) (Subject line: Croaker and Spot Draft Addenda III).

The Board will meet in February to review public comment and consider final approval of the Addenda.

## Atlantic Herring

In October, the Atlantic Herring Management Board initiated an addendum to Amendment 3 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Herring to consider new approaches for managing the

Area 1A (inshore Gulf of Maine) sub-annual catch limit (ACL) under low quota scenarios. This action responds to the challenges encountered in managing the reduced sub-ACL based on the 2018 benchmark stock assessment, which highlighted declining trends in recruitment and spawning stock biomass.

Currently, the Board can allocate the sub-ACL throughout the fishing season using bi-monthly, trimester, or seasonal quota periods to meet the needs of the fishery. For the 2019 fishing season, the Board implemented a bimonthly quota period approach to maximize the reduced sub-ACL when demand for bait is high. Due to the low quota, the 2019 fishery has experienced frequent closures to avoid an overage of the sub-ACL. It is anticipated the 2020 sub-ACL will be further reduced creating challenges in distributing the quota throughout the fishing season. The draft addendum will consider alternatives to allow the Board more flexibility in specifying the allocation under low quota scenarios moving forward. For 2020, the Board set the Area 1A sub-ACL with 72.8 percent available from June through September and 27.2 percent allocated from October through December. The Board may reconsider 2020 quota allocation following final action on the addendum.

Additionally, the Draft Addendum will consider expanding landing provisions for permit holders within the days out program. The Board utilizes days out of the fishery to slow the rate of Area 1A catch. In addition to days out of the fishery, landing restrictions, such as weekly landing limits, can be assigned to different vessel categories. The Draft Addendum will include options for the days out program such as expanding the small mesh bottom trawl fleet days out provision to all Category C and D permits.

The Board will consider approval of the Draft Addendum in February. For more information, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [krootes-murdy@asmfc.org](mailto:krootes-murdy@asmfc.org).



## Employee of the Quarter: Dr. Kristen Anstead

In her four years at the Commission, Dr. Kristen Anstead, Stock Assessment Scientist, has made notable contributions to the Commission's Fisheries Science Program. In recognition of her recent accomplishments, Kristen was named Employee of the Quarter for the third quarter of 2019.

As the lead analyst on a very challenging horseshoe crab benchmark stock assessment, Kristen exhibited both patience and persistence working with the states, ACCSP colleagues, and the biomedical industry to ensure the best data went into the assessment. She also worked closely with the staff at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to develop and include discard estimates in the horseshoe crab assessment for the first time, a significant improvement noted by the Peer Review Panel. Due to the collective hard work of Kristen and the Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessment Subcommittee, the assessment was endorsed by the Peer Review Panel and accepted for management



use by the Horseshoe Crab Management Board.

Kristen's leadership on the development of the Atlantic menhaden benchmark stock assessment ensured the full engagement of all members of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee members in the completion of the assessment. She worked closely with the lead analyst to keep the menhaden assessment on a tight timeline, compiled and edited content from several committee members,

and delivered the assessment report early for peer review. The findings of the assessment and November peer review will be presented to the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board in February 2020.

Kristen has also served as a scientific ambassador for the Commission, expanding our footprint by collaborating with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to review and advise its eel stock assessments. She is working with scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey to pursue new habitat modeling approaches to improve our American eel assessments.

Kristen's unique combination of analytical skills, high scientific standards, and dedication to her work, make her a valuable asset not only to the Commission but also to the scientific community at large. In appreciation of her efforts, Kristen received a cash award and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personal record. In addition, her name is on the plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Kristen!

