



ASMFC

Fisheries *focus*

Volume 8, Issue 3

March 1999

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

Large Whale Take Reduction Team Meets; NOAA Releases Final Plan

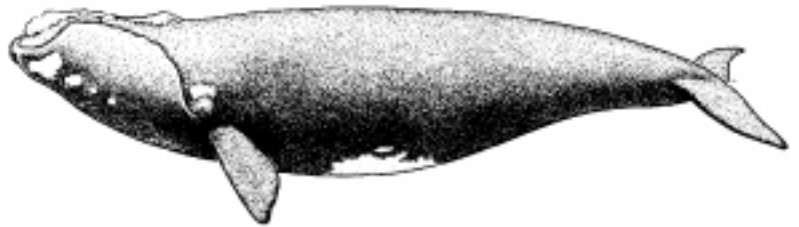
In early February, the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team met, after being on hiatus for over two years, to provide advice to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regarding full implementation of the Final Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The Plan, which was developed nearly three years ago and released as an interim rule in July 1997, was released as a final plan on February 16, 1999. The Team, which met for three days, reviewed the draft final plan and discussed issues regarding its implementation, slated for April 1, 1999. The Team also discussed what it saw as its current and future roles as the Plan is finalized and fully implemented.

What was clear from the meeting was that none of the team members, which included fishermen, environmentalists, marine mammal biologists and scientists, and state and federal marine resource managers, were fully satisfied. Team members acknowledged that more work needed to be done on a continuing basis to make the plan a truly workable plan that protected large whales from serious injury and mortality, while minimizing, to the greatest extent possible, impacts to fishermen.

Of greatest concern to team members were NMFS' changes in the final plan regarding gear marking requirements. Some members believed that the gear marking requirements would not provide enough useful information because the area(s) in which they are required were too limited (i.e., critical habitat areas only). Others believed that the requirements posed too great a burden on the fishing industry without the proposed potential gain of information. All in all, the team unanimously agreed that the gear marking protocols/requirements needed further refinement. Further, the team recommended that NMFS suspend, if possible, all gear marking requirements until November 1, 1999 and allow the development of new gear marking protocols within this period. Unfortunately, NMFS was not able to meet this request since the final rule was published just days after the meeting ended.

Upon its release in mid-February, Dr. Andrew Rosenberg, NMFS Deputy Director, stated, "This is a good plan that makes our waters safer for whales, but it is not the last word on protecting whales. The plan will continue to evolve as we learn more about how whales become entangled in gear and how fishing practices can be modified to prevent entanglements."

The Plan calls for a continuation of seasonal closures of some fishing grounds in the southeast U.S. and New England. It makes some changes to gear restrictions already in place for lobster pot and gillnet gear. It also calls for research into whale behavior and fishing gear and requires continued work on an existing whale disentanglement network.



The reduction of human-whale interactions is presently managed under an interim plan, which was developed with input from the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team. The main changes from the interim plan involve exempted waters, gear marking, and some changes in gear requirements.

The Plan focuses on protecting right whales, the most endangered of the large whales. Scientists estimate there are 300 or fewer right whales left in the north Atlantic. The plan also protects humpback and fin whales (also endangered) and minke whales (not endangered).

Whales that get caught in fishing gear are sometimes able to disentangle themselves, but some entanglements cause serious

continued on page 6

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

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

David V.D. Borden (RI), Chair
Susan Shipman (GA), Vice-Chair
John H. Dunnigan, Executive Director
Dieter N. Busch, Director, Interstate Fisheries Management Program
Dr. Lisa L. Kline, Director of Research & Statistics
Laura C. Leach, Director of Finance and Administration

Tina L. Berger, Editor
tberger@asmfc.org

(202)289-6400 Phone • (202)289-6051 Fax

Upcoming Meetings

3/15 - 18:

ASMFC Meeting Week (Northern Shrimp Section, Striped Bass Advisory Panel, Tautog Management Board, Joint Striped Bass Management Board and Advisory Panel Workshop, Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board, Joint Weakfish Management Board and Advisory Panel, Horseshoe Crab Management Board, Bluefish Management Board, American Eel Management Board, Habitat Committee, Habitat Committee SAV Implementation Subcommittee), Ramada Plaza Hotel, Alexandria, Virginia; (703)683-6000.

3/16 - 18:

Boston Seafood Show, Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Massachusetts.

3/22 & 23:

ASMFC American Lobster Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

3/22 & 23:

ACCSP Outreach Committee, Washington, D.C.

3/25 & 26:

ACCSP Operations Committee, Capital City Hotel, 1155-14th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

4/5 & 6:

ASMFC Committee on Economics and Social Sciences, Capital City Hotel, 1155-14th Street, N.W., Washington, DC; (202)737-1200.

4/12 - 15:

EPRI Conference on Power Plant Impacts on Aquatic Resources, Renaissance Waverly Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia.

4/14 & 15:

New England Fishery Management Council, Providence Biltmore Hotel, Providence, Rhode Island.

4/21 & 22:

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Committee and Plan Development Team, DoubleTree Hotel, Norfolk, Virginia; (757)461-9192.

4/27 - 29:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Hotel, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

5/17 - 20:

ASMFC Spring Meeting Week, Royal Pavillion Resort, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

Last month's column was about a theme that I keep coming back to – ever-present change, and how it is influencing fishermen and fishery managers. The pervading fact of constant change dominated the Commission's consideration of its new Strategic Plan. The demand for fish and fishing is increasing, and fishermen of all sorts are better able today to pursue fish stocks to the point that they become stressed. Government agencies are finding that they must work more closely together than in the past; and that they all must work more closely with fishermen. These types of change are important to the Commission because they drive the agendas of the member states; and we need to remember that *the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is nothing more, nothing less, than the place where the states come together to define what needs to be done to accomplish their mutual interest and to pledge to work together to effectively pursue these goals.*

Recognition of this change leads to two fundamental questions for the state fishery agencies as they try to carry out their responsibilities to the citizens of their states. First, what is it that they really want to try to work together to bring about? Second, what are the fundamental principles that will guide the states as they try to work together?

The answer to the first question is the shared *vision* that the states pursue together through their participation in the Commission. Another way of understanding vision is to ask, if we are successful, what kind of a world will we see at the end of some period of time? The Commission's Strategic Plan articulates the shared vision as: **Healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration well in progress, by the year 2015.** "Healthy" implies a sense that the size of a fish stock, and its geographic distribution and relative year class strengths, are consistent with having productive fisheries. The states are not interested in having fish in the ocean for their own sake, but so that people can profitably harvest them over the long-term. How many fish is this; *i.e.*, how much biomass or year class strength is necessary? After all,

fish stocks can be "sustained" at relatively low levels. The simple answer to that question is: enough to allow us to have the kind of fisheries over time that we would like to see. There has been a lot of focus lately on maximum sustainable yield, or its biomass counterpart, "B_{msy}." This is likely to be unattainable across the board, and may be inappropriate for many fisheries. Although, generally, today it is a direction we would all like to move in, one of the continuing challenges will be for government and industry to work together to flesh out the types of fisheries that we would like to have, and to define the fish stock populations that are required to give us these.

One question that came up in considering the Strategic Plan was the timeframe. The states in this plan are looking at essentially a fifteen year horizon. Some argued that the ten-year planning frame of the Sustainable Fisheries Act ought to be the controlling factor. The problem is that this is an artificial regulatory planning target, and is more of a goal than a vision. The states have committed to a vision of the world as they would like to see it, and one that can realistically be attained.

And, no matter how hard we work nor how well-intentioned we are, not everything will be achievable. Atlantic sturgeon will not likely be healthy in any of our lifetimes. Other species are uniquely dependent on habitat or environmental variables that are beyond the regulatory control of state fishery agencies. So the world that the states see as successful includes those species that may not be healthy, but they should at least be measurably on the road to recovery.

All of this, if it can be brought about in the next decade and a half, will spell success for the partnership of state marine fishery agencies working with their colleagues in the federal government and the fishing communities.

continued on page 4

From Executive Director's Desk (continued from page 3)

And while the states work to make this vision a reality, a number of basic principles and philosophies will guide their mutual activities. These are the *values* that the states share and have committed to each other to pursue and maintain. It is a commitment to a way of doing business with each other. First among these is that the states will keep the needs of the resource first, since that is the way for all of the states to achieve their greatest mutual interest. The states also recognize that each is sovereign; and that within some common set of parameters, each state should have latitude to solve its own problems. The states will use the Commission as the vehicle for defining and carrying out their mutual program; and the Commission will be sure to proactively bring the public into its processes.

The Commission's staff also has to reflect these values. We exist to serve our members and to help them achieve their shared vision. We also need to identify and respect the constituents of the state members, recognizing that they are our customers as well.

And so, given the situation the states find themselves in, and their shared vision and values, what steps need to be pursued to make the vision a reality? Stay tuned.

Next Month: *Goals and Strategies*

Lobster Board Approves Addendum 1 for Public Hearings

The American Lobster Management Board met on February 22, 1999 in Providence, Rhode Island, to discuss and approve for public hearing Draft Addendum 1 to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. Addendum 1 clarifies provisions of Amendment 3 and begins to incorporate the Lobster Conservation Management Team (LCMT) proposals into the management program.

Over the last six months the Board has been engaged in discussions to fully implement Amendment 3. Amendment 3 establishes a framework for area management that encourages industry participation in developing a management program which suits the needs of the area while meeting targets established in the plan. The Board endorsed all area management proposals that have been submitted. Addendum 1 will be the first step in translating the proposals into area management plans.

The Board approved the following items to be included in the Addendum 1 for public hearings:

- components of a trap tag system;
- *de minimis* specifications;
- monitoring and reporting requirements;
- possible revisions to the egg production rebuilding schedule;
- circular escape vent size;
- trap limits (including historical participation) for each area;
- limits on vessel upgrades in Area 3;
- area closures in Area 4;
- continuing review of the effectiveness of the area management program; and
- adjustment to the compliance schedule.

The second step in translating the LCMT proposals into area management plans will take place during the fall of 1999. The Board expressed concern in implementing measures to increase egg production based on the latest stock assessment from 1996. A new stock assessment is being conducted this spring and will be peer reviewed in July 1999. The Board will review the results from the Peer Review Panel in order to base decisions related to increasing egg production on current information. The Board passed a motion to proceed with proposed measures relating to egg production prior to December 31, 1999.

The public hearings will be held in April and early May. The Commission will send out a press release with this information once arrangements have been finalized.

In other business, the Board passed a motion to recommend that the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board approve preparation of an amendment to allow states, under conservation equivalency, to raise the limit on trawl-caught lobsters from within state waters. This issue will be forwarded to the Policy Board for consideration, although it is expected to be some time before the Policy Board will be able to deal with the Board's recommendation.

For more information, please contact Amy Schick, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400.



SEAMAP Completes Bottom Mapping CD-ROM for North Carolina to Florida Coast

In 1985, the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP-South Atlantic) established a Bottom Mapping Work Group to develop a regional database that describes the location and characteristics of hard-bottom habitat on the continental shelf off the southeastern U.S. (North Carolina to Florida). These diverse areas represent essential fish habitat for a wide variety of species that are commercially and recreationally harvested in the south Atlantic region. In order for state and federal resource agencies to better maintain these fisheries, there is a need to identify the location and extent of reef habitat, determine the carrying capacity of these habitats, and obtain more information on the ecological relationships of the resources supported by hard-bottom reef habitat. This knowledge will also assist resource managers in evaluating the effects of past and future fishery regulations and anthropogenic stresses on these valuable resource areas. Recent consideration of the establishment of marine fishery reserves will also benefit from the knowledge of how reef and non-reef habitats are distributed in the region.

The primary objectives of the Work Group are to:

1. conduct an extensive search of existing databases to identify all known reef habitats on the continental shelf off the southeastern U.S. coast from the North Carolina/Virginia border to the Florida Keys and from the beach out to 200 meters in depth; and
2. summarize the bottom type information into flexible, easy to use databases which will provide managers and researchers with pertinent information concerning the location and extent of these areas, types of data used in determining bottom type, and data sources.

Intensive efforts to compile and analyze existing data sources began in 1992 after efforts were completed to: (1) identify agency needs; (2) finalize the format and structure of the bottom mapping database; and (3) standardize the approach for evaluating each type of data. Primary efforts have focused on evaluating data available from state and federal agencies and other sources that have conducted scientific assessments of bottom resources in the region. Non-scientific sources, such as recreational diver records and commercial fishing maps, have not been incorporated into the database to date. The data sources vary in infor-

mation content and accuracy in the location of the reef habitat. Criteria for evaluating some data types (e.g. finfish collections) have varied slightly in each portion of the region due to latitudinal differences in the distribution and ecology of some species. Additionally, new types of data (e.g. sediment cores, aerial photography) have been incorporated into some of the more recent data sets evaluated.

The databases from all study phases completed to date have been compiled in a single database using a PC-compatible format (D-Base) according to procedures developed by the Bottom Mapping Work Group. The database has also been incorporated into ArcView files for analysis and viewing using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and into Portable Document Format (PDF) files for use in viewing summary maps of the data with software provided on this CD product. This latter effort was completed by the Florida Marine Research Institute.

To date, 65,727 data records have been compiled from databases obtained from North Carolina, South Carolina/Georgia, and Florida in three major study phases. A brief summary of the records available off each of the states is provided in the following table.

	<u>N. Carolina</u>	<u>S. Carolina</u>	<u>Georgia</u>	<u>Florida</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Bottom type:					
Hard bottom	2,006	4,414	1,206	14,058	21,684
Possible Hard Bottom	1,527	1,261	894	3,292	6,974
No Hard Bottom	9,224	5,700	1,664	19,648	36,236
Artificial Reef	113	147	119	312	691
Artificial Reef/ Hard Bottom	0	12	0	2	14
Not Applicable	0	0	3	105	108
Total No. of Records	12,890	11,534	3,886	37,417	65,727

Information on the specific databases evaluated and the methods used for analyzing and tabulating the data were summarized in three final reports submitted to the SEAMAP-SA Committee. Each of these reports is reproduced in this CD.

The Bottom Mapping Workgroup is continuing efforts to acquire and analyze new and existing data on bottom characteristics in the regions that could not be processed within the available budget and time constraints. Recommendations to the SEAMAP-SA Committee for mapping unexplored bottom areas, and expanding the database to deeper water habitats are also being considered. For more information, please contact: Geoff White, Fisheries Research Specialist, at (202) 289-6400 or gwhite@asmfc.org.

Large Whale Take Reduction Team Meets; *NOAA Releases Final Plan* (continued from page 1)

injury or death. Between 1991 and 1997, NMFS confirmed four reports of right whales seriously injured by entanglement. In addition, entanglement caused or contributed to the death of two other right whales. With so few right whales left in the North Atlantic, a single human-caused mortality could affect the species' chances of survival.

The regulations published in the Federal Register reaffirm the five main elements of the interim plan that has been in effect since 1997:

1. Critical right whale habitats are closed to some types of fishing gear during times when right whales are likely to be present. The areas of critical habitat include: Cape Cod Bay, Great South Channel, and Stellwagen Bank/Jeffreys Ledge.
2. Some fishing practices that increase risk of whale entanglement are prohibited — leaving inactive gear in the water, for example.
3. NMFS will continue to fund gear research to develop gear less likely to entangle whales — e.g., gear with “weak links” that break when a whale pulls on the gear but do not break when fishermen haul the gear.
4. NMFS will continue outreach efforts to inform fishermen of the entanglement problem and to ask for their help in designing whale-safe gear.
5. Until safer gear is available, NMFS will continue to operate a Whale Disentanglement Network to locate entangled whales and to remove gear from them.

In addition, inshore waters on the coast of Maine that were exempted under the interim plan are included in the final plan because public comments indicated that fishermen set gear on both sides of the line. Also, right whales are known to move through waters on both sides of the interim plan's exemption line.

Gear marking requirements were eliminated for most waters. Gear marking now will be required only in areas where the risk of entanglement is highest: right whale critical habitat areas, the southeast observer area, Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge.

The Plan includes menus of gear restrictions from which lobstermen and gillnetters can choose one or more options that make their gear safer for whales. An “anchor” option on the gillnet menu in the interim plan is removed in the final plan because it could make it more difficult for whales to escape an entanglement.

The effort to involve the fishing industry in gear research and whale disentanglement began under the interim plan and will continue under the final plan. In 1998, NMFS' whale plan outreach coordinator Glenn Salvador enlisted more than 300 fishermen to help with disentanglement. Salvador also worked with Gulf of Maine fishermen to test gear ideas on the water. Fishermen who have gear ideas or who are willing to test gear ideas can contact him at (207)636-2766.

The regulations were published in the Federal Register on February 16, 1999. They take effect on April 1, 1999. For more information, please contact: Gregory Silber, NMFS Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Coordinator, at (301)713-2322.

ASMFC Comings & Goings

Connie Young-Dubovsky – February 26th marked Connie's last day with the Commission in the capacity of Program Manager for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). She will be working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Bay Program in its Annapolis office.

Connie initially worked with the Commission from June 1992 to October 1993 as Council Liaison and Striped Bass Coordinator. In 1993 Connie began working on coastal activities for USFWS in Washington, D.C. She had no idea then that she would again be working with the Commission, but in March 1997 Connie's services were loaned to the Commission by USFWS as part of its contributions to the ACCSP Program.

Over her two-year tenure as Program Manager, Connie developed the four technical source documents for the program as well as the program design. She also coordinated council and committee activities. We wish Connie all the best, but know that we will be in close contact with her, at least for the next few months, as she assists in transitioning the Commission's newly hired ACCSP Program Manager, Joe Moran, into the ACCSP.

continued on page 10

President Proposal Fiscal 2000 Budget for NMFS

On February 1, 1999, the President released the Administration's budget proposal for fiscal year (FY) 2000. The budget follows the same pattern as in recent years, with Administration cuts in congressionally-supported additions to past Presidential budget proposals. The Administration once again presented a balanced budget to the Congress, however, again it includes revenue programs to offset costs. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) budget includes a \$20.2 million fee proposal, as seen in recent NMFS budgets, which is not likely to be supported by Congress. The proposal is not accompanied by enacting legislation regarding the scope and management of the proposed program.

The President presented a new budget initiative in the FY2000 package. Under the proposal, the Lands Legacy Initiative, several agencies would receive a portion of these funds to preserve green spaces from development, establish additional estuary reserves and sanctuaries, and allow state, federal and local leaders to develop innovative approaches to addressing environmental concerns.

The Administration's request includes some increases to many core programs implemented by NMFS. The following programs would be increased over the FY1999 level [amount of increase over FY1999 appropriation indicated in brackets]: Fisheries Statistics [\$1 million]; Fisheries Management Programs [\$4.4 million]; Fisheries Habitat Restoration [\$22.7 million]; Northeast Fisheries Management [\$5.18 million]; Regional Councils [\$3 million]; Protected Species [\$2.6 million]; Endangered Species Act Recovery [\$27.45 million]; Observers Training [\$1.575 million]; Habitat Conservation [\$1.7 million]; and Enforcement and Surveillance [\$1.025 million]. The Administration proposes a \$51.567 million increase in the fleet replacement account for use in purchasing a new fisheries research vessel. This vessel, the first of four being proposed by the Administration over the next few years, would employ the latest technology to reduce vessel engine sound in order to deter displacement of fish from the research area resulting in more accurate information assessments.

The Administration introduces a massive new fisheries effort targeting Pacific salmon in this FY2000 budget. The Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Program is a \$100 million effort to assist in the conservation of Pacific salmon in at-risk areas. This interdepartmental effort will be coupled with conservation programs administered by the Pacific state, tribal and local governments.

As referenced earlier, several programs are proposed for funding reductions in FY2000. Congressionally-authorized funding over the Administration's FY1999 request were excluded from the FY2000 request, as a rule. The Administration requests reduced funding levels for the following programs (reduction from FY1999 appropriation included in parentheses):

Resource Information (\$11.461 million); Chesapeake Bay Studies (\$.39 million); Right Whale Research (\$.15 million); Bluefish/Striped Bass Studies (\$1 million); Recreational Fish Harvest Monitoring (\$.8 million); Driftnet Implementation (\$.1 million); Marine Mammal Protection Act Implementation (\$.358 million); Native Marine Mammals (\$.5 million); Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions (\$3.75 million); and Product Quality and Safety (\$1.7 million).

For more information, please contact Lori Rosa, Special Assistant, at (202)289-6400.

Delaware Bay Blue Crab Stock Determined to be Fully Exploited

The following article was submitted by Dr. Desmond Kahn, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The first comprehensive assessment of the Delaware Bay blue crab stock was completed in February 1999. Findings from the assessment indicated that the stock has increased over the last twenty years and is currently fluctuating about a relatively high level of abundance. Recruitment has increased on average over the period, although variations in recruitment are a prominent feature of the stock. Commercial fishing effort in this bi-state fishery has increased more than five times since 1977. The assessment, was conducted to provide management advice for a new bi-state fishery management plan (FMP) being developed for Delaware and New Jersey.

Drs. Thomas Helser and Desmond Kahn of the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife developed the assessment by employing a modified DeLury model (or Collie-Sissenwine model) to develop estimates of stock sizes from 1979-1998. Fishing mortality rates were computed for the period 1979-1997. In addition, biological reference points, calculated from spawning stock biomass-per-recruit models and a stock-recruitment model, were developed in the assessment. The reference points consisted of an overfishing rate threshold, a fishing rate target and a minimum spawning stock biomass threshold. The assessment's assumptions regarding the life history of blue crabs differed in important respects from those used in recent assessments of the Chesapeake Bay stock. The assessment was reviewed by federal, state and academic scientists during meetings held on January 14 & 15, 1999, in Delaware and through written comments. Findings from the assessment indicate the following:

continued on page 9

National Symposium on Catch and Release in Marine Recreational Fisheries: *Call for Papers, Presentations and Posters*

December 5 - 9, 1999

Virginia Beach Resort Hotel & Conference Center
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Sponsors include:

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Sea Grant Office
Sea Grant Marine Advisory/Extension Programs
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Symposium Objectives:

- Address diverse and sometimes contentious issues defining catch and release fishing across marine recreational fisheries, various fishing modes and different cultures.
- Examine current research on hook-release mortality; assess applications of catch and release fishing in marine fisheries management, including impacts on fishing activity and the marine sportfishing industry.
- Develop an action agenda to help focus future research on significant catch and release fishing issues.
- Assess education and outreach efforts targeting marine anglers' use of catch and release (and tag and release) practices; explore strategies for improving and expanding such efforts among all angling groups as part of developing a stronger marine angling conservation ethic.
- Develop an action agenda to stimulate imaginative outreach and education projects directed at stimulating a broader spectrum of marine anglers to more regularly use effective catch and release practices.

Format for Abstracts and Deadline (May 15, 1999)

All abstracts for contributed papers, presentations, and posters must be submitted electronically using the American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting format. Immediately following the abstract body, specify the *Topic* which best fits the concept of your abstract and your *Preference* for Oral Presentation, Poster Presentation or Oral Presentation Preferred/ Poster Acceptable. Abstracts must be received **no later than May 15, 1999**. The program committee will review and judge the abstracts for inclusion in the symposium and notify authors as to their presentation status.

Special Note—Proceedings

A proceedings document will be published by the American Fisheries Society. Researchers interested in the peer-review paper option should specify such at the end of their abstract materials. The Program Committee will evaluate such abstracts separately and notify authors regarding their status on this issue.

General Topics for Contributed Papers, Presentations and Posters

Hook Release Mortality in Marine Fisheries, Catch and Release in Marine Fishery Management, Marine Anglers Participation in Catch and Release, Sportfishing Industry Involvement in Marine Catch and Release, Conflicts in Marine Fisheries Regarding Catch and Release, Catch and Release Education-Outreach in Marine Fisheries (private-boat, charter-party boat, pier, surf-shore fishing), Marine Anglers' Conservation Ethic, Improving Catch and Release Effectiveness in Marine Fisheries, Other (please specify).

Who to Contact

Submit abstracts via e-mail to Jon A. Lucy (lucy@vims.edu). The "Call for Papers" announcement and additional information on the symposium is posted at: <http://www.vims.edu/adv/catch>.

Delaware Bay Blue Crab Stock Determined to be Fully Exploited (continued from page 9)

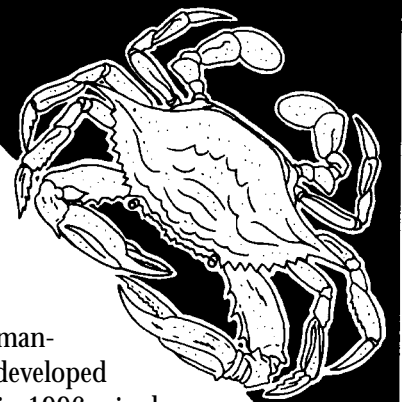
- ✓ Stock abundance has increased over the past two decades after a sharp drop due to severe winters in 1977 and 1978. Abundance levels peaked in 1990 and have fluctuated without trend since that time. Recruitment levels, on average, have increased over the period.
- ✓ Fishing effort has increased since the early 1980s in concert with stock abundance. However, effort continued to increase after 1990 even though stock abundance had leveled off. As such, commercial catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) has been declining, although there has been no consistent decline in stock size. Since 1996, a decline in the number of commercial licenses issued has been evident, presumably due to the moratoriums that are in place in both states.
- ✓ While the average fishing mortality (F) over the twenty year period has been $F = 0.8$, the average of the last three years (1995-1997) has increased to $F = 0.9$. The highest fishing mortality estimate, however, was for 1995 when $F = 1.45$.
- ✓ Comparison of estimates of fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass indicate that the fishery is generally operating at sustainable levels near the target rate of $F = 0.9$. Nevertheless, the fishery has exceeded the overfishing rate threshold of $F = 1.3$, most recently in 1995. Estimates of spawning stock biomass have shown a significant declining trend since 1985. In some years biomass levels declined below the minimum biomass threshold.

The assessment concluded that increases in fishing effort should be prevented in order to help insure that fishing mortality rates do not increase. Although both Delaware and New Jersey have limited entry fisheries with a moratorium on new license sales, some latent effort (i.e., licenses that are held but not used) still exists. As such, the potential for increased effort exists despite the current license moratoriums. The assessment recommends that this additional potential effort be addressed to insure that it does not eventually translate into higher fishing mortality rates. Furthermore, the assessment concludes that increased targeting of mature female crabs should be discouraged.

Efforts to protect adult female crabs should be encouraged. The assessment also presents a list of research recommendations that include the following: (1) analyze and possibly expand the New Jersey research trawl survey; (2) review the New Jersey log book data collection program; (3) improve estimates of fishing effort; (4) conduct additional research into blue crab life history; (5) sample the commercial landings; (6) explore sex-specific modeling; and (7) conduct simulation studies of management





strategies. It was also recommended that the assessment be updated annually.

The draft bi-state fishery management plan (FMP) was developed after a decline in landings in 1996 raised concern in Delaware about the state of the stock and the fishery. An extensive review process of the FMP will be required before final adoption. It is anticipated that legislative bodies from both New Jersey and Delaware will review the document in conjunction with state management agencies and citizen advisory councils within both states. The completed assessment document and copies of the draft FMP are available from the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife at (302)739-4782.



New Commission Publications Now Available

Four new reports are now available from the Commission. They are:

-  Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sea Herring;
-  Terms of Reference & Advisory Report for the Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Peer Review;
-  Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Report for Peer Review; and
-  Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessment Report for Peer Review.

To obtain a copy of any of these publications, please contact: Edith Carr, Staff Assistant, at (202)289-6400.

Fishermen Take Notice: *New England & Mid-Atlantic Marine Mammal Area Closures*

The National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Region has just released a lengthy list of marine mammal area closures and regulations for both New England and Mid-Atlantic areas. To find out whether you are affected, contact the NMFS Northeast Region at (978)281-9315 and request a copy of Information Factsheet No. 9.

ASMFC Comings & Goings (continued from page 8)

Joe Moran — Joe joined the Commission on March 1, 1999 as the ACCSP Program Manager. Joe, a native of South Carolina – Charleston to be specific, has relocated his family from sunny Charleston to the hustle and bustle of the Washington, DC area for one reason -- he believes 100% in the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program. Prior to working for the Commission Joe worked as the Section Leader for Fisheries Statistics for South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). In that position, he restructured data collection and management procedures. He also established a rapport with the SCDNR Marine Patrol for monitoring out of compliance data reporting. Joe has worked in the past on several ACCSP committees and is quite familiar with the potential and the need for this important program. We would like to welcome Joe and his family to the Washington DC area and we look forward to the added expertise Joe will bring to the ACCSP.

Garry Laguerre – Garry began working with the Commission this February as Accountant for Finance and Administration. Prior to coming to work for the Commission, Garry

worked at the American Youth Hostile. There he also worked in accounting, more specifically, accounts receivable and inventory. He implemented procedures that made the payment collection process more efficient, resulting in a decreased number of delinquent balances owed. Garry, who is a native of Haiti, came to the U.S. in 1989 on a scholarship and is currently working towards receiving his MBA at Johns Hopkins University majoring in International Business. We are very glad to have Garry on our staff and look forward to benefiting from his talents.

Lisa D. Bethea – Lisa, formerly the assistant to the Finance & Administration Department, has, as of February 1999, been promoted to the position of Personnel & Benefits Administrator. In this new position she will be responsible for the daily administration of the Commission's personnel activities and employee benefits package. Lisa will be responsible for developing comprehensive and current information on all employee benefits provided by the Commission, as well as assisting the Director of Finance & Administration with hiring of personnel. Congratulations Lisa!

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1444 Eye Street, N.W., 6th Floor
Washington D.C. 20005

Return Service Requested