FISHERIES SCIENCE PROGRAM

The Commission's Fisheries Science Program coordinates research, surveys, and produces stock assessments to inform effective fisheries management. The Program's objective is to ensure the best scientific information available – biological, social, and economic – is incorporated into the Commission's fishery management plans. The Program provides a focal point for coordination and enhancements to fishery-dependent and -independent data collection and management; stock assessments and independent peer reviews; multispecies assessments and ecological reference points; socioeconomic information; fish habitat partnerships; fish passage guidance, and fishing gear technology research. Fisheries Science also guides various research activities among state and federal marine resource agencies and universities on the Atlantic coast. Initiatives include developing new surveys, establishing fish ageing and maturity measurement protocols, and evaluating climate change effects on fisheries resources.

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan charges the Fisheries Science Program with producing sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed, in cooperation with the fishing industry, by a broad network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. This goal encompasses the development of novel and innovative scientific research, modern assessment methodology, and enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure robust science is available as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

Annual action planning is guided by the following objectives:

- Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs; strengthen stakeholder involvement in collaborative research projects
- Explore the use of emerging technologies to improve fishery-independent surveys, monitoring, and the timeliness of scientific products
- Provide training to enhance the expertise and participation of state and staff scientists in conducting stock assessments
- Streamline assessment data assimilation within individual states, and among states and the Commission
- Conduct stock assessments based on comprehensive data sources and rigorous technical analysis; deliver direct, concise scientific advice in order to achieve clear endpoints in the assessment process; generate indicators/rapid assessments for all stocks
- Balance requests from fisheries management with finite assessment workload capacity

- Support the development and utilization of industry-based surveys and other cooperative research opportunities.
- Integrate estuarine/state waters and federal waters environmental data for use in stock assessments to inform fisheries management decisions
- Communicate with stakeholders to ensure scientific advice and on-the-water observations are consistent
- Characterize the risk and certainty associated with the scientific advice provided to decision-makers
- Explore the use of management strategy evaluations to inform management decisions