ASMFC
FISHERIES focus
Volume 20, Issue 4
June/July 2011
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission • 1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA
Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

ASMFC Summer Meeting
August 1-4, 2011

Crowne Plaza Hotel Old Town
901 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Preliminary Agenda

PLEASE NOTE: The agenda is subject to change. The agenda reflects the current estimate of time required for scheduled meetings. The Commission may adjust this agenda in accordance with the actual duration of meetings. Interested parties should anticipate meetings starting earlier or later than indicated herein. Please see page 7 for the Commission's Public Comment Guidelines.

August 1, 2011

1:00 - 3:00 PM	American Lobster Management Board
3:15 PM - 5:45 PM	Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board

August 2, 2011

8:00 - 11:00 AM	Tautog Management Board
11:15 AM - 1:15 PM	ISFMP Policy Board - Marine Recreational Information Program Update
2:30 - 4:00 PM	Spiny Dogfish & Coastal Sharks Management Board
4:15 - 6:15 PM	Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

August 3, 2011

7:15 - 9:00 AM	Executive Committee
8:00 - 9:00 AM	Stock Assessment Workshop for Commissioners not attending the Executive Committee
9:15 - 10:45 AM	Business Session - Commissioners meet with Eric Schwaab, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
11:00 AM - Noon	Weakfish Management Board
1:15 - 3:15 PM	ISFMP Policy Board (continued)

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Inside This Issue

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 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.

Upcoming Meetings

7/12 & 13:
Fixed Gear Workshop, URI Bay Campus, Corliss Auditorium in Narragansett, Rhode Island. Contact Laura Skrobe at 401.874.9360 or lskrobe@uri.edu for more information.

8/1 - 4:
ASMFC Summer Meeting, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; 703.683.6000.

8/8 - 10:
ASMFC River Herring Stock Assessment Subcommittee, location to be determined.

8/9 - 11:
ASMFC Striped Bass Tagging Committee, location to be determined.

8/11 & 12:
ASMFC Striped Bass Stock Assessment Subcommittee, location to be determined.

8/16 - 18:
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Suites, 422 Delaware Avenue, Wilmington, Delaware; 302.654.8300.

9/4 - 8:
American Fisheries Society 141st Annual Meeting - "New Frontiers in Fisheries Management and Ecology: Leading the Way in a Changing World," Seattle, Washington.

9/12 - 16:
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Charleston Marriott Hotel, 170 Lockwood Boulevard, Charleston, South Carolina; 800.968.3569.

9/26 - 30:
ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week.

9/27 - 29:
New England Fishery Management Council, Crowne Plaza, Danvers, Massachusetts.

10/11 - 13:
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Seaview Dolce, 401 South New York Road, Galloway, New Jersey; 609.652.1800.

11/7 - 10:
ASMFC 70th Annual Meeting, The Langham Hotel, 250 Franklin Street, Boston, Massachusetts; 617.451.1900.

11/15 - 17:
New England Fishery Management Council, Newport Marriot, Newport, Rhode Island.

Difficult Issues -- Difficult Decisions

Paul Harvey, the radio commentator, was known to generations of listeners for closing his vignettes on interesting people and incidents by saying, "and now you know the rest of the story." In a modified version of that approach, here is a collection of various fisheries issues, with some additional thoughts that might not be getting as prominent coverage as the issues themselves. They have a central theme of illustrating the need for us all to be well informed, willing to engage in open and constructive dialogue, and committed to seeking workable solutions.

Recreational Fisheries Statistics

Many recreational fishermen were pleased to see the National Research Council's (NRC) report outlining short-comings in the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS), as the findings comported with many of their own perceptions. Although they were heartened by NOAA Fisheries Service's commitment to address the findings of the report, some are growing increasingly frustrated with the time it is taking for a "new" system to come on-line. In actuality, NOAA Fisheries Service has had scientists and statistical experts working on the shortcomings identified by the NRC report since its release. Many of the proposed fixes need to be field-tested and compared to the existing system to validate the results and quantify the improvements. The reality is fixing MRFSS right and fast is not an option. Given the loud message from fishermen to get it right, NOAA Fisheries Service is taking the time to do just that. (For more information, see page 8, or track progress at www.countmyfish.noaa.gov)

Mandatory Catch Reporting

Historically in many areas, commercial fishermen have opposed mandatory catch reporting. Some feel the requirement is an unwarranted intrusion of government into their businesses. Others are fearful that establishment of individual catch histories will lead to implementation of IFQs or other types of fisheries management measures they do not want. In some regions, unreported landings are part of a "cash fishery" where few records are kept when pounds and dollars are exchanged. Besides confounding the jobs of scientists trying to estimate removals so they can assess fish populations, there are other unintended consequences. Fishermen in some states have found that when fisheries managers decide to adopt state-by-state quotas based on historical landings, states with incomplete reports might not receive what their fishermen feel is their fair share.

In the Gulf of Mexico, fishermen unable to document their catch and earnings were denied compensation claims from the Special Master appointed to disburse BP disaster relief funds. While there are no oil wells on the East Coast, there has been a sad history of tanker and tank barge groundings resulting in large oil spills. Closing state fisheries to protect the public health and the state's marine fisheries brand are distinct possibilities. Fishermen without documented catch reports risk not receiving their fair share of disaster relief monies. Dealer-only reporting could leave the dealers holding the catch history, something fishermen concerned about catch shares need to think carefully about.

Fisheries Surveys

Commercial and recreational fishermen often agree on the need for more and better fisheries data, especially when they believe that stock abundance is greater than what scientists report. They feel that if scientists were to conduct more surveys each year, or complete assessments more often, they would conclude there are more fish, leading to higher quotas. Stock assessments and surveys have been government functions, paid for by state and federal agencies.

Given the current pressure on state and federal budgets, spending more money on fisheries science raises the question of who pays. Should the groups demanding more services pay extra, or should those most likely to benefit from higher quotas pay with a portion of their catch? Or, since all fishermen benefit from better science, should everyone pay through a portion of their license and permit fees? Economists use a willingness to pay as a measure of the value people place on a good or service. Some would interpret a reluctance of those to pay for more science as an acceptance of the status quo.

While these are diverse issues, they share the common point that many of our fisheries management challenges are complex with few easy solutions. If the fixes were easy or inexpensive, they would have already been implemented. In fact, the solutions reside within trade-offs, where the answers will reflect compromise rather than optimization. The first step to doing that is to proceed with an open mind, have a full understanding of the facts, and engage in a frank discussion about the trade-offs. Hopefully, this approach is something we can all agree to pursue.

Atlantic Menhaden
Brevoortia tyrannus

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

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

Interesting Facts:
*** The "modern" record for the largest menhaden landed occurred in Reedville, VA in 1996, measuring in at 19.4" and weighing 3.4 lbs.**
*** Pre-colonial Native Americans called menhaden 'munnawhatteaug," which means fertilizer.**
*** A large crustacean parasite is commonly found in the mouth of Atlantic menhaden; hence its common name "bugmouth."**
*** Adults can filter 6-7 gallons of water/minute.**

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

Stock Status: Not overfished but experiencing overfishing

Species Profile: Atlantic Menhaden
Board Explores New Biological Reference Points for the Short- and Long-term

Introduction

Atlantic menhaden are a small, oily, schooling fish of historical, ecological, and economical importance. Historically, menhaden supported large scale commercial fisheries bringing considerable growth to Atlantic coastal communities.

Uniquely, menhaden flesh is a major source of omega-3 fatty acids, a popular diet supplement and food additive because it is not produced naturally in the human body. Omega-3 has been shown to aid metabolic processes and cut risks of heart disease and possibly Alzheimer's. Additionally, menhaden are increasingly valuable for use as bait in many important fisheries, including American lobster and blue crab commercial fisheries and striped bass recreational fisheries. Menhaden are also commonly used in agriculture; they are processed directly into fishmeal and oil and used in livestock and aquaculture feeds.

Ecologically, the species plays an important role in marine ecosystems as a forage fish (food) for many fish, sea birds, and marine mammals. Currently, a multispecies modeling approach is being developed to account for predator-prey interactions and manage Atlantic menhaden on an ecologically sustainable basis.

Life History

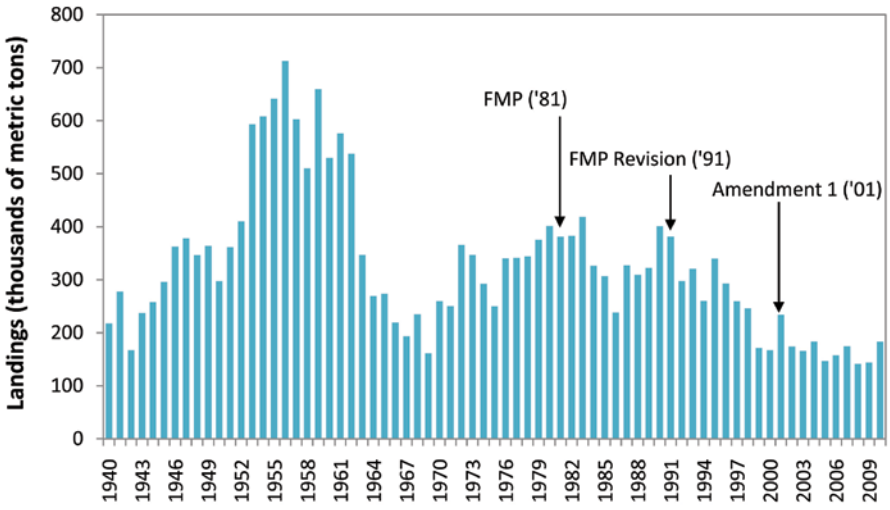
Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) occupy estuaries and coastal waters from northern Florida to Nova Scotia and are believed to consist of a single population. Adult and juvenile menhaden form large, near-surface schools, primarily in estuaries and nearshore ocean waters from early spring through early winter. By summer, menhaden schools stratify by size and age along the coast, with older and larger menhaden found farther north. During fall-early winter, menhaden of all sizes and ages migrate south around the North Carolina capes to spawn.

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

Photo courtesy of RI DEM

Menhaden are very efficient filter feeders. Water is pushed through specialized gill rakers that are formed into a basket that allows them to capture plankton. Menhaden are an important component of the food chain, providing a link between primary production and higher organisms by consuming plankton and providing forage for species such as striped bass, bluefish and weakfish, to name just a few.

Figure 1. Atlantic Menhaden Reduction Landings
Source: ASMFC State Compliance Reports, 2011



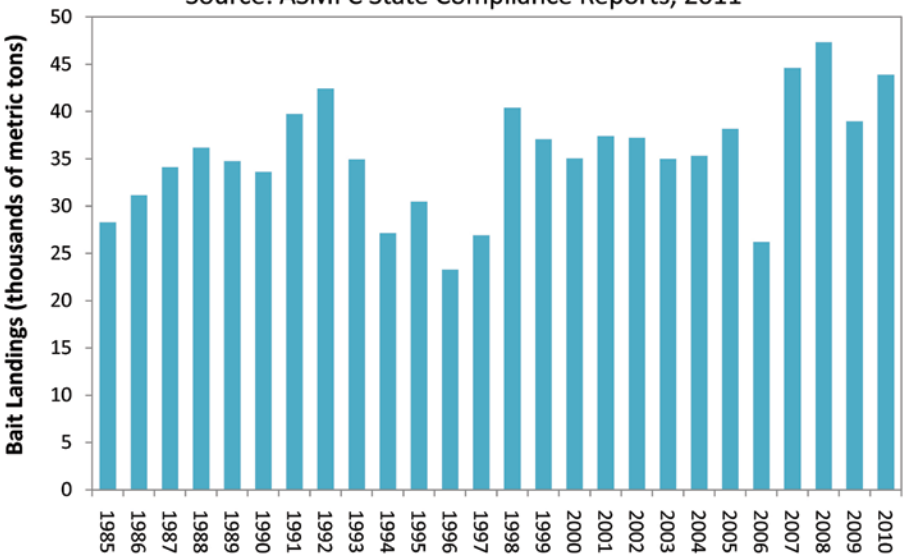
Commercial Fishery

The Atlantic menhaden commercial fishery consists of both a reduction fishery and a bait fishery. The reduction fishery, named because it processes the whole fish into fish meal, fish oil and fish solubles, first began in New England during the early 1800s and spread south after the Civil War. The reduction fishery grew with the advent of purse seine after the Civil War in the mid-1800s. Purse seine landings reached a high point in the 1950s with peak landings of 712,100 metric tons (mt) in 1956 (Figure 1). At that time, over 20 menhaden reduction factories ranged from northern Florida to southern Maine. In the 1960s, the Atlantic menhaden stock contracted geographically, and many of the fish factories north of Chesapeake Bay closed because of a scarcity of fish. Reduction landings dropped to a low of 161,000 mt in 1969. In the 1970s and 1980s, the menhaden population began to expand (primarily because of a series of above average year classes entering the fishery), and reduction landings rose to around 300,000-400,000 mt. Adult menhaden were again abundant in the northern half of their range and, as a result, reduction factories in New England and Canada began processing menhaden again by the mid-1970s. However, by 1989 all shore-side reduction plants in New England had closed mainly because of odor abatement regulations.

During the 1990s, the Atlantic menhaden stock contracted again (as in the 1960s) mostly due to a series of poor to average year classes. Over the next decade, several reduction plants consolidated or closed, resulting in a significant reduction in fleet size and fishing capacity. Since 2005, there is one remaining reduction plant in operation on the Atlantic coast processing menhaden into fishmeal and oil. The coastwide bait fishery supplies fishermen with bait for popular commercial and sport fish.

The 2010 harvest of Atlantic menhaden for reduction was 183,085 mt, which was a 27% increase from harvest in 2009 (143,754 mt) and 19% above average landings for the previous four years (154,000 mt). Ten purse-seine vessels landed Atlantic menhaden during the 2010 season. Most of the catch occurred in the waters off of Virginia and New York.

Figure 2. Atlantic Menhaden Bait Landings
Source: ASMFC State Compliance Reports, 2011



The bait fishery has become increasingly important from North Carolina to New England, supplying fishermen with bait for popular commercial (e.g., American lobster and blue crab) and sport fisheries (e.g., striped bass, bluefish). In recent years, the majority of bait landings has been harvested from Virginia and New Jersey waters, followed by Massachusetts and Maryland. Bait landings for 2010 were 43,869 mt, 12% above the average landings for the previous four years (39,000 mt) (see Figure 2). Between 2001 and 2010, the percent of total menhaden landings attributed to the bait fishery rose from 13% to a high of 25% in 2008. Currently, bait harvest is approximately 19% of the total menhaden harvest.

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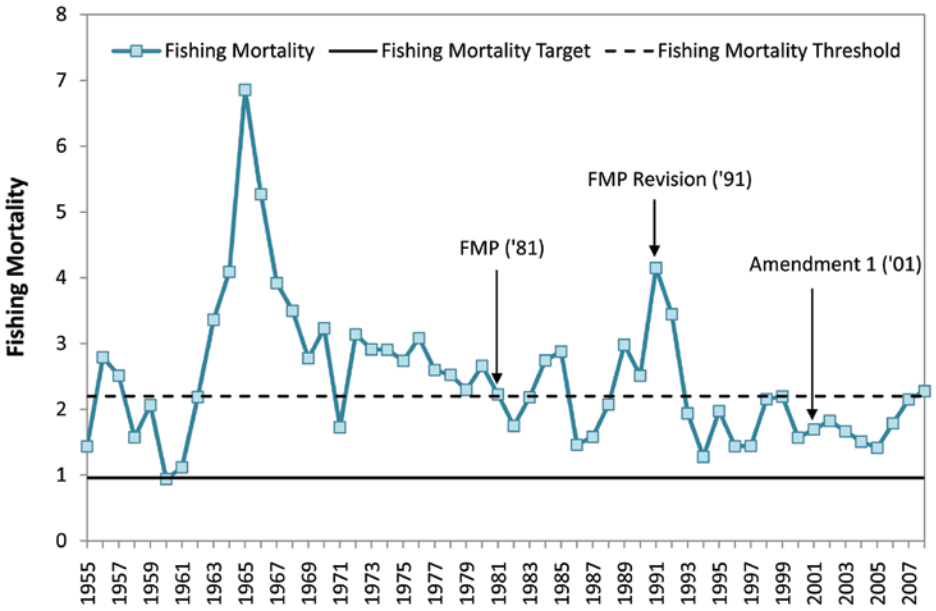
Atlantic Menhaden Species Profile (continued from page 5)

Status of the Stock

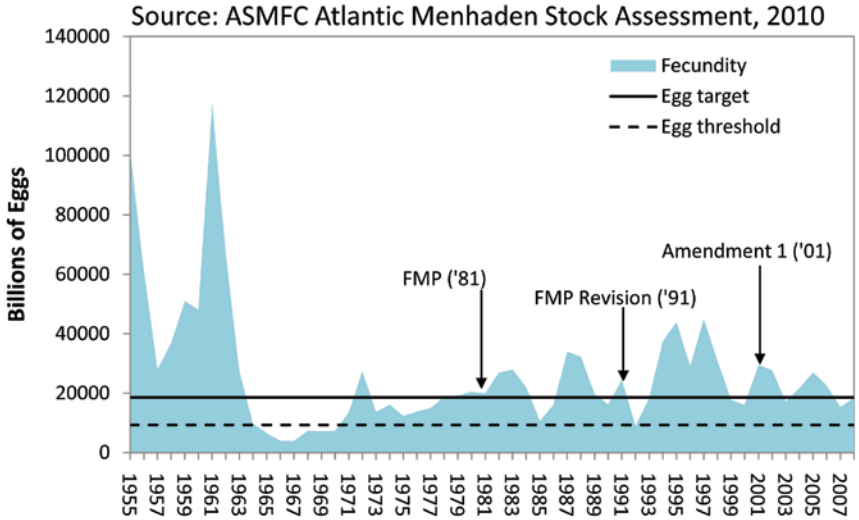
According to the 2010 peer-reviewed stock assessment and the management plan's current reference points, Atlantic menhaden are not overfished but are experiencing overfishing. The overfishing threshold for menhaden is F_{MEDIAN}, the instantaneous fishing mortality rate that should allow the population to replace itself. In earlier decades, fishing mortality rates were largely above the median line, however in the last decade, rates have fluctuated at or below the median. Fishing mortality (full F) in 2008 (the latest year in the assessment) is estimated at 2.28, which was above the target and threshold in 2008, hence overfishing is occurring. Given the current overfishing definition, which sets the fishing mortality rate target at 0.96 and the threshold at 2.2, this is the first time overfishing has occurred since 1998 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Atlantic Menhaden Fishing Mortality (Full F)
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment, 2010)



The biological reference point that determines the fecundity target for Atlantic menhaden is defined as the mature egg production one would expect when the population is being fished at the threshold fishing mortality rate. Population fecundity, a proxy for biomass, was estimated to be well above the threshold and near the target. This means that the spawning stock in 2008 appears to be adequate to produce the target number of eggs; thus, the population is deemed not overfished (see Figure 4). However, the number of young fish in the population has been consistently low in recent decades, indicating that high egg production may not be translating into high survival of young menhaden. The cause of the poor recruitment is unknown, but may be linked to environmental conditions.

Figure 4. Atlantic Menhaden Fecundity
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment, 2010



Atlantic Coastal Management

Atlantic menhaden are managed under Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (2004) and its subsequent addenda (Addenda I – IV). Addendum I established the management program's current biological reference points (targets and thresholds for fishing mortality and egg production). Addendum II (2005) initiated a five-year research program for Chesapeake Bay aimed at examining the possibility of localized depletion. Addendum IV extends the annual cap on reduction fishery harvests in the Chesapeake Bay, which was first established in 2006 through Addendum III, until 2013. Harvest for reduction purposes is prohibited in the Chesapeake Bay when 100% of the cap (109,020 mt) is landed. Over-harvest in any given year will be deducted from quota of the following year. The Addendum also includes a provision allowing under-harvest in one year to be credited only to the harvest of the following year, not to exceed 122,740 mt.

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ASMFC Summer Meeting Preliminary Agenda (continued from page 1)

August 3, 2011 (continued)

3:30 - 5:30 PM	Shad & River Herring Management Board

August 4, 2011

7:30 - 9:00 AM	Executive Committee
9:00 - 10:30 AM	South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board
10:45 AM - 12:45 PM	Horseshoe Crab Management Board
12:45 - 1:15 PM	Lunch for Commissioners & Proxies
1:15 - 1:45 PM	ISFMP Policy Board (continued)
1:45 - 2:15 PM	Business Session (continued)
2:30 - 4:30 PM	Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Coordinating Council

ASMFC Public Comment Guidelines

With the intent of developing policies in the Commission's procedures for public participation that result in a fair opportunity for public input, the ISFMP Policy Board has approved the following guidelines for use at management board meetings:

For issues that are not on the agenda, management boards will continue to provide opportunity to the public to bring matters of concern to the board's attention at the start of each board meeting. Board chairs will use a speaker sign-up list in deciding how to allocate the available time on the agenda (typically 10 minutes) to the number of people who want to speak.

For topics that are on the agenda, but have not gone out for public comment, board chairs will provide limited opportunity for comment, taking into account the time allotted on the agenda for the topic. Chairs will have flexibility in deciding how to allocate comment opportunities; this could include hearing one comment in favor and one in opposition until the chair is satisfied further comment will not provide additional insight to the board.

For agenda action items that have already gone out for public comment, it is the Policy Board's intent to end the occasional practice of allowing extensive and lengthy public comments. Currently, board chairs have the discretion to decide what public comment to allow in these circumstances.

In addition, the following timeline has been established for the **submission of written comment for issues for which the Commission has NOT established a specific public comment period** (i.e., in response to proposed management action).

1. Comments received 3 weeks prior to the start of a meeting week will be included on the briefing CD.
2. Comments received by 5:00 PM on the Tuesday immediately preceding the scheduled ASMFC Meeting (in this case, the Tuesday deadline will be **July 26, 2011**) will be distributed electronically to Commissioners/Board members prior to the meeting and a limited number of copies will be provided at the meeting.
3. Following the Tuesday, July 26, 2011 5:00 PM deadline, the commenter will be responsible for distributing the information to the management board prior to the board meeting or providing enough copies for the management board consideration at the meeting (a minimum of 50 copies).

The submitted comments must clearly indicate the commenter's expectation from the ASMFC staff regarding distribution. As with other public comment, it will be accepted via mail, fax, and email.

Science Highlight: *New Developments in the Marine Recreational Information Program*

National Saltwater Angler Registry

The National Saltwater Angler Registry has been implemented and is being used to collect trip data. Nearly three-quarters of a million fishermen have signed up with the registry since being launched on January 1, 2010. As of June 1, 2011, all of the East Coast states are gathering data from their fishermen consistent with the needs of NOAA Fisheries Service. This reduces the record-keeping and administrative burden on the federal government, and enables states to have critical information needed to manage their resources effectively. With the implementation of the registry, the tone and tenor of the discussion surrounding angler registration has shifted from whether registration is a good idea to how quickly registry data can be used to improve estimation. This shift feeds into the larger objective of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which is to ensure productive engagement with stakeholders.

NOAA Fisheries Service has adopted Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) with each of the Atlantic coastal states and the District of Columbia that formalize the states' designation as exempted states. Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Delaware, New York, and Connecticut have all begun the submission of their state license/registry data to the National Registry. The remaining states will be submitting their data by the end of 2011.

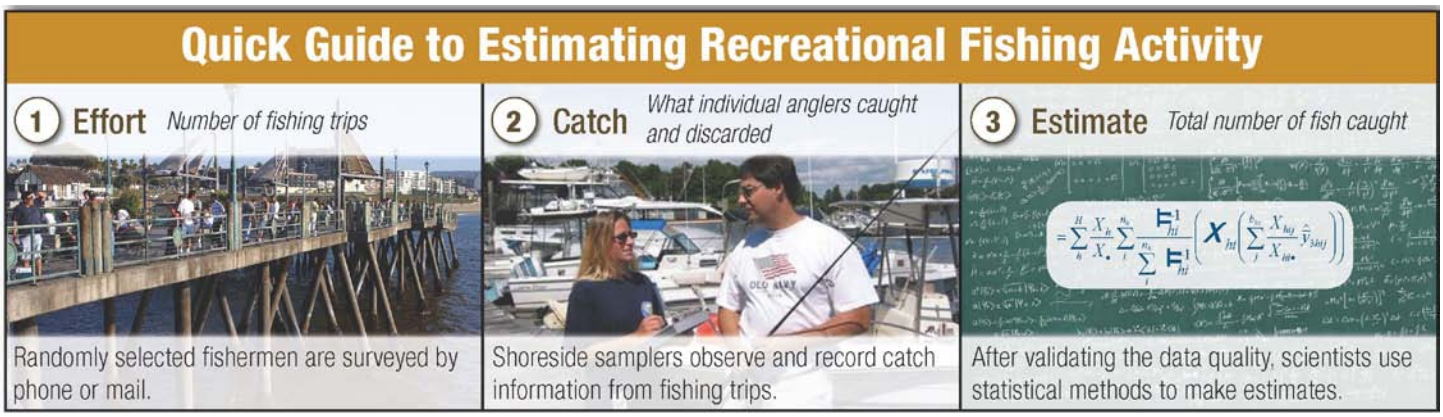
Beginning with the FY 2010 budget appropriation, NOAA Fisheries Service is providing financial assistance to states to develop state registration and/or licensing programs that meet the requirements for a complete and regularly updated National Registry of marine recreational fishing participants. The initial round of project funding occurred in the fall of 2010. The National Saltwater Angler Registration portal can be viewed at: https://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov/register/.

New Recreational Survey Catch Estimates

NOAA Fisheries Service has addressed one of the major concerns of the National Research Council's (NRC) evaluation of the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS) by developing a new estimation methodology for the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS). The concerns identified in the NRC Review included matching the estimation design to the sampling design and incorporating selection probabilities into estimation calculations. To address these concerns, MRIP initiated a project to assess the current estimation design for the MRFSS APAIS survey, which collects catch data from completed recreational fishing trips to estimate catch per unit effort (CPUE). This project resulted in a revised estimation design that incorporates the selection probabilities and sample weights for each angler interview. The resulting estimation design has been independently peer-reviewed, found to be design-unbiased, and will subsequently produce more accurate estimates of CPUE and the variances of CPUE estimators. The new design is being applied to historical MRFSS surveys dating back to 2004, as well as for all future estimates beginning in early 2011. Public release of new estimates is anticipated sometime after July 2011.

New Recreational Survey Sampling Methodology

As with the estimation design, the NRC review criticized the sampling design for APAIS for its reliance on unverified assumptions. In addition, the NRC suggested that, "the onsite sampling frame for the MRFSS should be redesigned" and that "the sampling process requires greater quality control." These



What's New?

MRIP is challenging the way things have been done in the past through rigorous scientific testing and evaluation of its methods.

WHAT THEY'RE TESTING	WHAT THEY'VE DONE IN THE PAST	WHAT THEY'RE EVALUATING FOR THE FUTURE
How phone surveys are conducted	Phone surveys were conducted using random-digit dialing of coastal households only. Lots of calls were made to non-anglers, and anglers who didn't live on the coast were never called.	The new National Saltwater Angler Registry will serve as a national "phone book" of fishermen, significantly increasing MRIP's ability to target anglers directly.
Timeliness of data	All data was delivered to managers every two months.	MRIP is developing survey designs that could be modified to provide more frequent updates in response to management needs.
How catch is measured per trip	It was assumed that catch sampled during peak times could accurately estimate catch across an entire 24-hour period.	Sites will be sampled during four specified six-hour blocks. Sampling during both peak and non-peak times will enable the program to more accurately estimate catch across a whole day.
How samplers gather information	Samplers had some discretion in which sites to go to and in what order.	Samplers will conduct interviews at a specific cluster of sites in a specific randomized order, ensuring more structured sampling and less sampler discretion.
Where samplers interview	Samplers were directed to maximize the number of angler interviews, potentially creating a bias toward peak times and popular areas.	Samplers will now be directed to maximize the number if sites visited – including continuing to visit sites where there is no or low fishing activity – to ensure a more representative look at fishing activity across a geographic area.
When samplers conduct interviews	Little or no sampling was done late at night.	Samplers will now work during all day parts, including at night, because the number of people fishing and what they're catching can vary greatly during different times of day.

concerns are being addressed through a study that is testing a revised sampling design for the APAIS. The one-year pilot test, which was implemented in North Carolina during January 2010, includes a revised sampling frame; eliminates interviewer latitude in selecting interviewing sites; establishes discrete sampling periods of fixed duration, including nighttime sampling; and requires interviewers to collect detailed information about the number of completed boat and angler fishing trips during the sampling period. The result of these modifications is a sampling design that adheres to the principles of probability theory and minimizes the reliance upon untested assumptions. NOAA Fisheries Service is planning for implementation of the new sampling design in the Atlantic and Gulf coast fisheries beginning with Wave 2 of 2011 (March-April), contingent on peer review of the final project report and final approval of the design by NOAA Fisheries Service later this summer.

Summary

Once new methods for generating catch estimates, improving on-site intercept survey sampling designs, implementing registry-based surveys, and improving for-hire surveys have been implemented for the surveys for which NOAA Fisheries Service is the principal manager, NOAA Fisheries Service will initiate survey improvements to address user needs for timeliness and resolution. NOAA Fisheries Service will work with regional partners and stakeholders to identify and prioritize such needs on a regional basis, and will expand its data collections and revise survey designs as appropriate, subject to availability of funds. Examples of improvements that could be considered for implementation include: increasing the frequency of surveys from bimonthly to monthly; shortening the period for completing data quality control and completing preliminary catch estimates; achieving targeted improvements in the proportional standard errors of catch estimates for different sample strata required for management actions; and providing catch estimates with acceptable levels of precision for a limited number of sub-state domains. Such improvements in survey data timeliness and resolution are directly responsive to the needs of fishery managers as expressed to MRIP by the states and Interstate Commissions, Fishery Management Councils, and NOAA Fisheries Regional Offices and Fisheries Science Centers. The improvements directly respond to the NRC recommendations regarding consultation with fishery managers to provide data that meets the requirements of modern fishery management programs. For more information on MRIP, please visit http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov/outreach.html, or contact Gordon Colvin, NOAA Fisheries-MRIP, at 301.427.8118 or Gordon.Colvin@noaa.gov.

In Other Federal News

Proposed List of Fisheries for 2012 Published

NOAA Fisheries Service has published its proposed List of Fisheries (LOF) for 2012, as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The proposed LOF for 2012 reflects new information on interactions between commercial fisheries and marine mammals. NMFS must classify each commercial fishery on the LOF into one of three categories under the MMPA based upon the level of serious injury and mortality of marine mammals that occurs incidental to each fishery. The classification of a fishery in the LOF determines whether participants in that fishery are subject to certain

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ACCSP Releases 2010 Fiscal Year in Review

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) is pleased to release the 2010 Fiscal Year in Review to our constituents. This 36-page full-color document provides highlights about the Data Warehouse, Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information Systems (SAFIS) modules, and coastal program projects. The document also provides an overview of the significant milestones from the past fifteen years and has quotes from individuals who founded the Program.

"Supporting the collaborative data program (ACCSP) was the essential next step in addressing the needs of our coastal fishery resources. We had the management authority under the ACFCMA, but management could not be done well without better data. And we knew that we had to separate the data from the fishery management politics.

So the logical step was a cooperative data program the represented federal as well as state interests. ASMFC did what it does best facilitate organizations and people coming together for common cause and mutual benefit. The ACCSP is successful because it is nobody's program -- it is everybody's program! It has worked because everyone stayed committed to something that was bigger than their own interests. The politics was right, and leadership dedication committed, and the staff outstanding! That's still a pretty good prescription for success."

-- Jack Dunnigan, Former ASMFC Executive Director & Assistant Administrator with the NOAA National Ocean Service

Copies of the report can be downloaded at http://www.accsp.org/documents/ACCSP_2010FiscalYearinReview.pdf. Please contact info@accsp.org if you would like to receive a hard copy of the report.

WWF Launches 2011 International Smart Gear Competition

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) announced the launch of the 2011 International Smart Gear Competition to find innovative ways to reduce the amount of fisheries bycatch. Open to anyone from fishermen, backyard inventors and students, the competition will be open from March 1 to August 31, 2011.

"WWF's goal with the Smart Gear Competition is to inspire innovative ideas for environmentally-friendly fishing gear," stated WWF VP of Fisheries Bill Fox. "In addition to fishermen losing millions of dollars each year due to bycatch, many other species, sometimes endangered marine life are unintentionally and needlessly killed by antiquated fishing gear, and it is jeopardizing their survival. This competition identifies real-world fishing solutions that allow fishermen to fish smarter while helping to maintain ocean health."

The 2011 International Smart Gear Competition is offering a grand prize of $30,000 and two $10,000 runner-up prizes. Additionally, in partnership with the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, the competition is offering a $7,500 special tuna prize that will be awarded to the idea that will reduce the amount of bycatch found in tuna fisheries. Tuna sustainability is the top WWF global fisheries conservation priority.

For more information visit: http://www.smartgear.org/.

provisions of the MMPA, such as registration, observer coverage, and take reduction plan requirements. The public comment period for this proposed rule is 30 days and will close July 28, 2011.

For more information, go to: http://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2011/06/28/2011-16209/list-of-fisheries-for-2012#p-3

Public Comment Sought on Proposed Measures to Protect GOM Atlantic Sturgeon

NOAA's Fisheries Service has proposed protective regulations on taking Gulf of Maine Atlantic sturgeon, a population currently proposed for listing as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. NOAA proposes to prohibit most takes, allowing them under very narrow circumstances for scientific research, assisting stranded fish, and salvage purposes. Other protective prohibitions allowed by the Act would apply.

A decision on listing the population is expected next fall. If NOAA determines that a listing is not warranted, then no final rule containing protective regulations will be published and the proposed rule will be withdrawn. Comments on the proposal must be received by August 9, 2011. For more information visit: http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/atlsturgeon/

Fishermen Encouraged to Release Shortfin Mako Sharks Alive

NOAA's Fisheries Service recently launched a voluntary program to encourage commercial and recreational fishermen to safely release Atlantic shortfin mako sharks alive and report the releases to NOAA for posting on an online map.

The new program is designed to encourage the conservation of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks. Scientific research shows many of these sharks are being caught and kept, damaging the long-term sustainability of the population. The most recent assessment of North Atlantic shortfin makos found that the population had declined about 50% from the 1950s.

"We are working with the fishing community to encourage fishermen to voluntarily release these sharks alive to help sustain the shortfin mako population," said Eric Schwaab, Assistant Administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "By releasing sharks that are unintentionally caught or caught for sport, U.S. fishermen will be leaders in encouraging fishermen from other nations to conserve this shark species."

Shortfin mako sharks, like other shark species, grow slowly, mature late, and produce few young, making them vulnerable to fishing. The average female shortfin mako shark becomes sexually mature at 18 years, while males are mature at 8 years. This highly migratory species is managed by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, to which the U.S. is a member. The U.S. has been a leader in urging the international commission to adopt conservation measures to help rebuild the species.

Shortfin makos are often caught unintentionally by commercial fishermen who are targeting swordfish and tuna with longline gear. They are also caught by recreational fishermen and are a popular catch in shark tournaments. An increasing number of these tournaments encourage the live release of sharks to promote conservation. It is legal for commercial and recreational fishermen to retain the sharks. However, recreationally caught sharks must not be smaller than 54 inches from the tip of the shark's nose to the fork of its tail. While some fishermen continue to retain shortfin makos for food, fins, and jaws, NOAA's Fisheries Service encourages fishermen to consider the long-term effect on the stock and choose to release them.

Captain Mark Sampson, who runs a charter fishing business that specializes in shark fishing and runs a shark fishing tournament, is interested in reporting live releases of shortfin mako sharks to NOAA so they can be posted on the new interactive webmap.

"I plan on making this a part of my daily routine if we catch and release any shortfin makos," said Sampson, who operates the charter vessel, Fish Finder, from Ocean City, Maryland. "I'll encourage fishermen who may not want to take home the shark they catch for food to consider releasing it."

NOAA encourages fishermen to learn how to safely release sharks so that they are not injured and the sharks are released in good condition. Fishermen may obtain a brochure at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/Compliance_Guide/index.htm on the safe release of sharks and other highly migratory species. For more information, go to: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/shortfinmako/index.htm

Photo by Captain Mark Sampson

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Return Service Requested

Atlantic Menhaden Species Profile (continued from page 6)

Photo by Brian Gratwicke

Recent Activities

In March 2011, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board initiated a draft addendum, proposing an interim biological reference point of 15% maximum spawning potential (MSP) with the goal of increasing abundance, spawning stock biomass, and menhaden availability as a forage species. The MSP approach identifies the fishing mortality rate necessary to maintain a given level of stock fecundity (number of mature eggs) relative to the potential maximum stock fecundity that would occur under unfished conditions (assumes the population has not been impacted by fishing pressure). In this case, a 15% MSP would equate to a fishing mortality rate threshold required to maintain approximately 15% of virgin stock fecundity. The proposed alternative reference point (15% MSP) is more conservative than the current MSP level of 9% under a fishing mortality target of 0.96. Currently, the Atlantic Menhaden Plan Development Team is exploring potential fishery management tools (e.g., season closures, quotas) to achieve 15% MSP.

Future Directions

The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board placed a high priority on continuing work to develop ecosystem-based reference points using a multispecies modeling approach (MSVPA). Ecosystem-based reference points are expected to address the forage needs of menhaden's predator species such as striped bass, weakfish, and bluefish. Given that MSVPA is more complex because it analyzes predator and prey populations simultaneously, implementation of this analysis pathway is expected to take a few years. The Multispecies Technical Committee is meeting later in June to plan further development of the MSVPA approach.

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