



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

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

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

The SEAMAP Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise Turns 20

The 20th Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise took place in January 2007 aboard the NOAA Ship OREGON II. The 13 person scientific party included representatives from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, East Carolina State University, North Carolina State University, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



The OREGON II, a 170-foot side trawler, set out from Morehead City, North Carolina for an eight-day research trip. Cruising the offshore waters of North Carolina and Virginia, the vessel towed two 65-foot bottom trawl nets for six days to bring fish aboard the vessel's stern, where the scientific party sorted, processed, and either released alive or bagged for later analysis numerous species of fish. Among the catch was Atlantic striped bass, weakfish, Atlantic croaker, horseshoe crab, butterfish, squid, kingfish, silver perch, dogfish, summer and windowpane flounder, clearnose, little, and winter skate, hake, herring, menhaden, and thresher shark. For the first time in the cruise's history, a 20 to 30-foot basking shark, the second largest shark species after the whale shark, was also ensnared in the net before being released unharmed.



In addition to the primary goal of tagging migratory striped bass, this year's cruise included work for numerous other projects. Scientific party members tagged and released three other species, collected genetic, reproductive, diet, scale, and otolith samples from a variety of species, and measured and/or counted several additional species. During the course of the trip, 369 striped bass were tagged, as were 5,493 spiny dogfish, 16 horseshoe crabs, and 13 Atlantic sturgeon. The largest striped bass was approximately 48 inches, while the largest Atlantic sturgeon measured approximately 67 inches. Although this year's cruise ranked low for the number of striped bass tagged (per-

haps the result of warmer than usual water temperatures), the Winter Tagging Cruise has collectively tagged over 42,000 striped bass during its 20-year history.

All the information collected during the Winter Tagging Cruise will aid in the development and implementation of fisheries regulations by state and federal fishery management agencies, the three East Coast Fishery Management Councils, and the Commission. Rewards for striped bass and Atlantic sturgeon tag returns are offered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Fisheries Resource Office, as part of the coastwide tagging program for these two species. East Carolina University distributes rewards for spiny dogfish tag returns. For more information, please contact Wilson Laney, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at (919) 515-5019 or wilson_laney@fws.gov.

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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, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

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Upcoming Meetings

4/3:

ASMFC American Lobster Management Board, The Hotel Providence, 311 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

4/4 (9:30 AM - 5:00 PM):

ASMFC American Lobster Technical Committee, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, 1213 Purchase Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts; (508) 990-2860.

4/10:

ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panels, Holiday Inn - Inner Harbor, Baltimore, Maryland; (410)685-3500.

4/10:

ACCSP Advisory Committee, Holiday Inn - Inner Harbor, Baltimore, Maryland.

4/10 - 11:

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office Fisheries Symposium, Patuxent Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, 12100 Beech Forest Road, Laurel, Maryland.

4/10 - 12:

New England Fishery Management Council, Mystic Hilton, Mystic, Connecticut.

4/12:

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee, Patuxent Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, 12100 Beech Forest Road, Laurel, Maryland.

4/16 & 17:

ASMFC Habitat Committee, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 6 Herndon Avenue, Annapolis, Maryland.

4/16-18:

ASMFC Weakfish Technical Committee, Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore, 20 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

4/23 & 24:

ASMFC Sturgeon Bycatch Workshop, National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

5/7 - 10:

ASMFC Spring Meeting Week, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333 (see preliminary agenda on page 7).

“Do what is best for the fish stocks and be fair to each other.” When I first read these words I was struck with how succinctly they described what the Commission is all about. Of course, we have the mission and vision statements in our Strategic Plan, and we have the original statement of purpose from the Compact approved in 1942. But in today’s world of information overload and communication by sound bite, I would be hard-pressed to come up with a better quote.

First, for the folks who might be getting nervous, these words were offered in the context of sustainable fisheries management and included the concept of resource use. So, with that understanding, the strategy is to put the resource first. The obvious logic here is that without a resource there are no benefits to any stakeholders, be they recreational anglers, commercial harvesters, fish processors, seafood consumers, or conservationists.

Doing what is best for the fish recognizes an inherent need to put constraints on stakeholders. This is almost never easy and is frequently controversial. The costs of such decisions are often reflected in the resultant challenges and criticisms to regulations by those most affected. Few people like cutbacks and some would argue that a management system that leaves stakeholders free to do as they please would be best. Unfortunately, such thinking ignores historical reality; when provided unlimited access to public resources, our collective, sad response has been to destroy those resources.

Doing what is best also implies a commitment to science. It suggests using a comprehensive and objective approach in trying to understand the size and range of fish populations. Sounds obvious and logical, but it is often difficult to do, especially when those results don’t comport with our own (and sometimes limited) perceptions of fish abundance. This skepticism with the science frequently increases when advice indicates a need to reduce catch rates. Skepticism is fine and indeed healthy, but our collective response should be to look out for the fish while we work to improve the science.

Putting the fish first recognizes a responsibility to accept a stewardship role in our actions, even if not specifically required by the regulations. Editorials in sport fishing magazines extolling the virtues of circle hooks to reduce hook and release mortality reflect this ethic. Efforts by the commercial sector to develop and adopt gear modifications to reduce the impacts on non-targeted and juvenile fish also reflect a stewardship role.

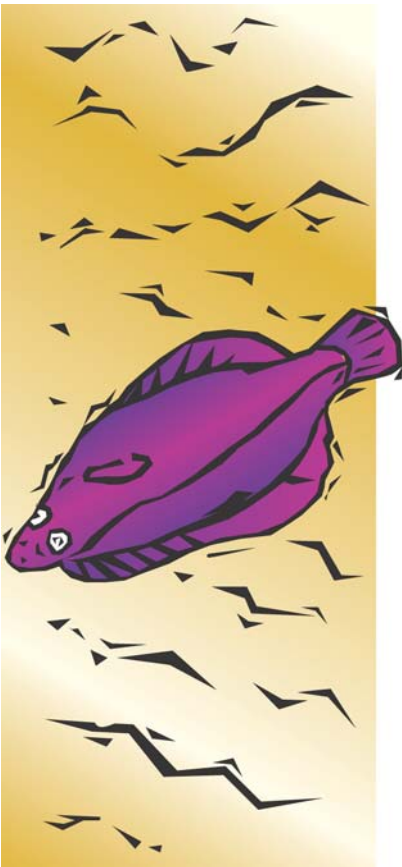
Hopefully, everyone can support the critical need to improve data collection on effort, landings, and discards for both sectors. With all of these actions there is an implicit assumption that in doing what is best for the fish we potentially maximize stakeholder benefits.

Being fair to each other reflects the fundamental need to work together because the fish do not recognize state boundaries. Protecting foraging fish in some states is just as important as protecting spawning and nursery areas in other states. This means individual states can’t harvest all the fish their fishermen are capable of taking. It suggests a process that seeks an outcome fair to all rather than best for one. Something that is easy to say, but much harder to define.

Being fair suggests a willingness to consider a range of alternatives and arguments. Think about the arguments you have heard. Historical landings best reflect a state or sector’s dependence on the resource. Or, historical non-landings demonstrate sacrifices made to promote conservation. Some will seek credit for the amount of spawning area contained within a state, while others will point to the amount of time certain species spend in state waters. Sometimes seasonal quotas are promoted because they give some the advantage when fish are available to certain sectors or gear types. And then there are the arguments about size limits. Reduce the minimum size so more fish can be harvested in our waters; we never see the big fish. Increase the minimum size, so more fish make it to our state. Obviously, the list goes on, and with it the underlying challenge of deciding what is fair.

Fairness is probably easier to recognize than it is to define. I like the example of three partners trying to divide up the various and unequal tangible assets of their dissolved business. The partners draw straws to elect the person to divide the assets into three packages; that person also picks last. The other two draw to decide who picks first and second. In the absence of a conspiracy it would seem like the results would come pretty close to being fair. The rules drive at least one of the partners to treat the others as she would want to be treated. That seems like a pretty good description of fairness to me.

“Do what is right for the fish and be fair to each other.” These aren’t my words, but I wish they were. They came from one of our Commissioner proxies. I like these words and intend to use them again. I hope they reflect an approach we can all agree with.



Summer Flounder
Paralichthys dentatus

Common Names: fluke,
flounder

Interesting Fish Facts:
•**Left-eyed flatfish (both eyes on the left side of its body when viewed from above with the top fin facing up).**

•**Begin with eyes on both sides of body; the right eye migrates to the left side in 20 - 32 days.**

•**Called chameleons of the sea because of their ability to change color to match the bottom on which they are found.**

Age at Maturity: 50% mature by age 1 (9.8") for males and age 1.5 (11") for females

Stock Status: Not overfished & overfishing is occurring

Current FMP rebuilding Goal: Scheduled to be rebuilt by 2013

Species Profile: Summer Flounder **Lawmakers & Managers Strive to Stay on Track with Species Rebuilding While Addressing Industry Concerns**

Introduction

The reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in December 2006 is the result of hard work and negotiations between lawmakers, the fishing industry, and environmental groups. Lawmakers responded to the concerns of summer flounder fishermen in the passing of the Act. Specifically, they included language that extends the summer flounder rebuilding period to 13 years (with the new rebuilding deadline set at 2013) and requires all other overfished stocks to be rebuilt within a ten year time period.

The summer flounder extension will allow recreational harvest limits and commercial quotas to be higher than they would have been under the 2010 rebuilding timeline. Following the Act's reauthorization, the 2007 total allowable landings limit for summer flounder was set at 17.11 million pounds. With the rebuilding extension, lawmakers have alleviated some of the economic hardships the summer flounder fishing industry was facing.

Life History

Summer flounder are found in inshore and offshore waters from Nova Scotia, Canada to the east coast of Florida. In the U.S., they are most abundant in the Mid-Atlantic region from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Fear, North Carolina. Summer flounder migrate annually between inshore, coastal, or estuarine summering grounds and offshore (depths of 120 to 600 feet) wintering grounds on the outer continental shelf. Migration to offshore wintering grounds occurs earlier in the northern part of the range than in the southern part of the range. Summer flounder usually begin to spawn at age two or three, at lengths of about 10 inches.

Spawning occurs in the fall while the fish are moving offshore. Spawning migration is linked to sexual maturity, with the oldest and largest fish migrating first. As in their seasonal migrations, spawning summer flounder in the northern portion of the geographic range spawn and move offshore earlier than those in the southern part of the range. Larvae migrate to inshore coastal and estuarine areas from October to May. The larvae, or fry, move to bottom waters upon reaching the coast and spend their first year in bays and other inshore areas. At the end of their first year, some juveniles join the adult offshore migration.

Adults spend most of their life on or near the sea bottom burrowing in the sandy substrate. Flounder lie in ambush and wait for their prey. They are quick and efficient predators with well-developed teeth allowing them to capture small fish, squid, seaworms, shrimp, and other crustaceans. A great fishing technique to take advantage of their ambush behavior is to fish close to bottom with moving bait.



Photo courtesy of John Chisholm, MA DMF

Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

Summer flounder are one of the most sought after commercial and recreational fish along the Atlantic coast. Using baseline data from 1980 to 1989, the current plan allocates the summer flounder quota on a 60/40 percent basis to commercial and recreational fisheries, respectively. This period was chosen because the data represent the most complete and accurate landings information available for both commercial and recreational fisheries prior to the implementation of coastwide management measures.

Two major commercial trawl fisheries exist — a winter offshore and a summer inshore. Summer flounder are also taken by pound nets and gillnets in estuarine waters. Throughout the 1980s, commercial landings ranged from 21 to 38 million pounds. By 1990, landings reached a low of nine million pounds and have since fluctuated between nine and 17 million pounds. In 1993, the coastwide quota was implemented for the first time, setting a commercial landings limit of 12.35 million pounds. Commercial quotas have since ranged from 11.11 to 18.18 million pounds. Commercial landings have ranged from 8.81 million pounds to 18.17 million pounds since 1993. 2005 commercial landings were estimated at 17.14 million pounds (see Figure 1). Commercial discards, estimated from fishery observer data, accounts for five to ten percent of the commercial catch, assuming a discard mortality rate of 80%.

A highly prized food fish, summer flounder are one of the most popular recreational fish on the Atlantic coast. Anglers catch summer flounder from the shore, piers and boats with hook and line. From 1980 through 2004, recreational landings have varied widely from a high of 38 million pounds in 1980 to a low of three million pounds in 1989. From 1996 to 2006, landings have ranged from 10 to 17 million pounds. Preliminary 2006 recreational landings are estimated at 11.2 million pounds (4.1 million fish). In 2006 the states of New Jersey, Virginia, and New York landed the highest number of summer flounder. Recreational discards have recently accounted for 10-15 percent of the total recreational catch, assuming a discard mortality rate of 10 percent. Combined commercial and recreational landings were 27.16 million pounds in 2005.

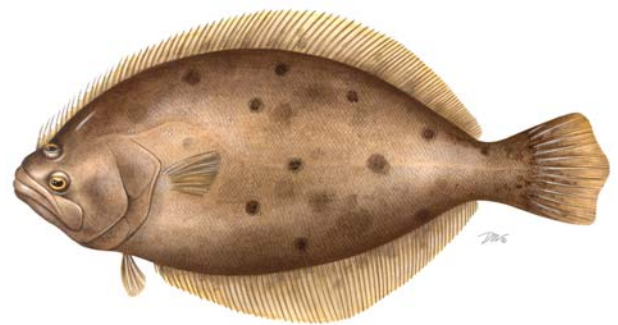
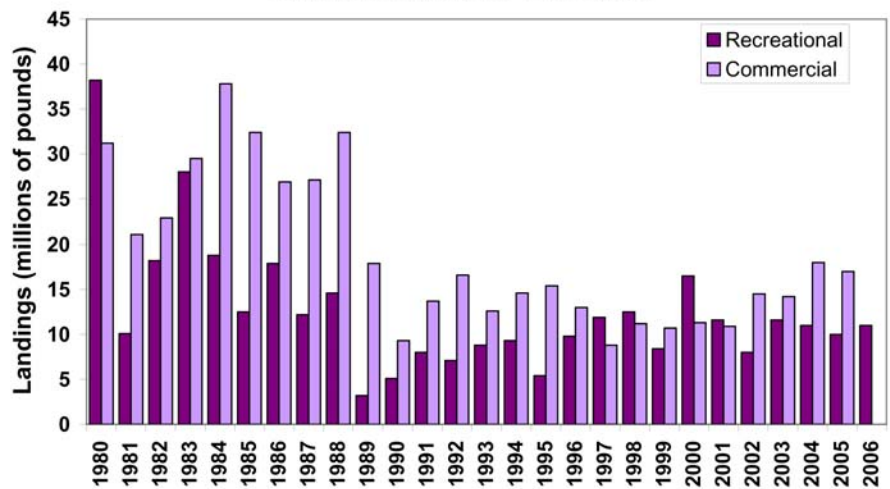
Stock Status

2006 Stock Assessment Update & Peer Review Recommendations

The National Marine Fisheries Service (aka NOAA Fisheries Service) conducted an update and peer review of the summer flounder assessment and reference points in September 2006. The Peer Review Panel recommendations called for a revision to the summer flounder assessment model, biological reference points, and projection calculations. One recommendation was to use spawning stock biomass (SSB) in place of total stock biomass to track the status of the stock because SSB is viewed as a more accurate proxy for the reproductive potential of the stock. Another recommendation was to change the way recruitment is measured and use a mean value rather than a median value to estimate long-term recruitment. Median recruitment tends to underestimate the level of biomass expected from a rebuilt stock because most biomass comes from the larger recruitments (NEFSC, 2006).

The Peer Review Panel also recommended updated biological reference points, with the target SSB set at 197.118 million pounds and the threshold SSB set at 98.559 million pounds. The previous reference point was a total stock biomass target of 204 million pounds. Another suggested change is to modify the fishing mortality target/threshold from $F=0.276$ to $F=0.28$.

Figure 1. Recreational & Commercial Summer Flounder Landings
Source: NOAA Fisheries Service, 2006



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Species Profile: Summer Flounder (continued from page 5)

2006 Stock Assessment Update & Peer Review Findings

The assessment update estimated 2005 SSB at 104.7 million pounds, above the biomass threshold of 98.559 million pounds but well below the biomass target of 197.118 million pounds (see Figure 2), an amount that would support nearly twice the current harvest. The assessment indicated that while the species is not overfished, biomass has not recovered to the level projected by earlier assessments. It also indicated that overfishing continued in 2005, with the current estimate of fishing mortality (0.407) above the target and threshold fishing mortality rates of 0.280. While the abundance at age for most age classes has continued to increase over the last ten years (see Figure 3), the 2005 year class is estimated to be the smallest since 1988 at about 15 million fish (NEFSC, 2006).

The 2005 estimate of fishing mortality (0.407) may underestimate the actual fishing mortality, as the retrospective analysis shows that the current assessment method tends to underestimate recent fishing mortality rates, continuing the retrospective pattern of previous assessments. The annual retrospective increase in fishing mortality has averaged 34% over the last five years, meaning that the annual rate of fish removal is actually 34% higher than predicted on average for the past five years. Retrospective analysis also shows a variable pattern in the estimation of recruitment, with the annual retrospective increase in recruitment averaging 4% in the last five years (NEFSC, 2006).

Atlantic Coastal Management Considerations

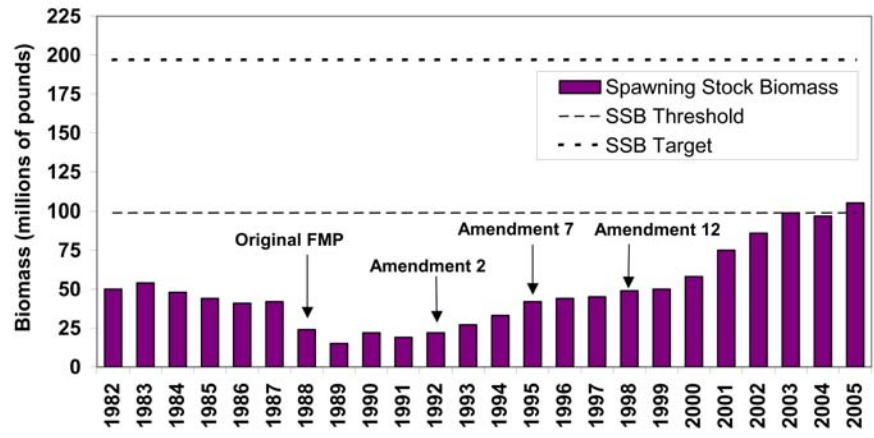
The Commission approved the first Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Summer Flounder in 1982, followed by a similar FMP approved by the Mid-Atlantic Council in 1988. Since then, both agencies have made significant revisions to the plan, increasing the protection of juvenile fish and ensuring the maintenance of an adequate spawning population. This increased protection was achieved through the implementation of larger minimum size limits across all sectors, increased mesh sizes, and decreased recreational possession limits. Cumulatively, these changes have contributed to rebuilding the resource. This is not to say that challenges in managing this species do not still exist. Recreational and commercial allocation issues persist. While states have adopted management measures to stay within their commercial and recreational quotas, overages continue to occur, particularly in the recreational sector. Preliminary estimates for recreational landings exceed the target in 2006. Additionally, managers and scientists continually strive to improve the data and science used to manage this species.

Managers are currently considering issues to include in Draft Amendment 15 to the summer flounder fisheries management plan. The public information document for Draft Amendment 15 addressed a broad range of summer flounder management issues. These included management strategies for allocating quota in the commercial and recreation fishery, identifying ways to quantify discards, address rollover of unused quotas, and consider recreational management strategies. Please check the ASMFC website (www.asmfc.org) and future issues of *Fisheries Focus* to stay abreast of upcoming activities. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns at tkerns@asmfc.org.

Source: NEFSC.2006:http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/saw/2006FlukeReview/BRP2006_Review.pdf

Figure 2. Summer Flounder Spawning Stock Biomass

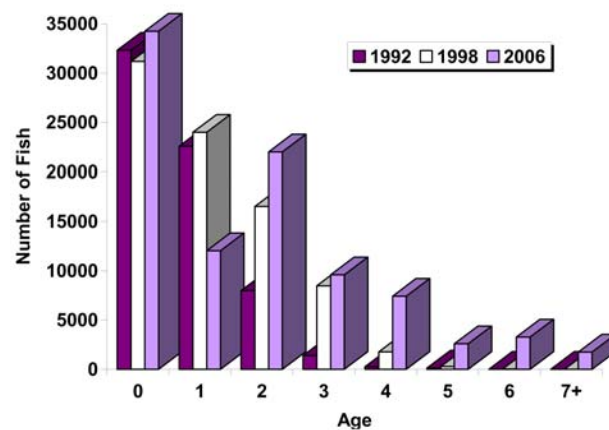
Source: Summer Flounder Assessment & Biological Reference Point Update, 2006



* Note that 2005 data are based on model projections.

Figure 3. Summer Flounder Abundance at Age: 1992, 1998, and 2006

Source: Summer Flounder Assessment & Biological Reference Point Update, 2006



ASMFC Spring Meeting

**May 7 - 10, 2007
Radisson Hotel
901 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, Virginia**

Preliminary Agenda

Please note: The preliminary 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. The detailed final agenda will be posted to the Commission's website (www.asmfc.org) two weeks prior to the meeting. If you intend to bring any meeting materials for use by a board or committee not included in the Commission's Spring Meeting Briefing Materials/CD-ROM, please bring 50 copies.

Monday, May 7, 2007

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	Atlantic Herring Section
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Management & Science Committee
2:45 PM - 5:45 PM	Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Coordinating Council

Tuesday, May 8, 2007

8:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Law Enforcement Committee
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Management & Science Committee
8:00 AM - 9:30 AM	Tautog Management Board
9:45 AM - 11:15 AM	Weakfish Management Board
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	American Eel Management Board
1:45 PM - 5:00 PM	American Lobster Management Board
6:30 PM - 8:00 PM	Awards Reception

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM	Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
1:30 PM - 4:00 PM	ISFMP Policy Board
4:15 PM - 6:15 PM	South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board

Thursday, May 10, 2007

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM	Executive Committee
8:45 AM - 9:45 AM	Horseshoe Crab Management Board
10:00 AM - 12:30 PM	Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Sharks Management Board
12:30 PM - 12:45 PM	Buffet Lunch for Commissioners and Proxies
1:00 PM - 1:30 PM	ISFMP Policy Board
1:30 PM - 2:00 PM	Business Session

Science Highlight: *Dealing with Retrospective Patterns in Fisheries Stock Assessment Models*

Fisheries scientists use stock assessment models to estimate fish abundance and fishing related impacts to fish stocks because these variables cannot be directly measured. These models have been very useful in estimating biomass, fishing mortality, and other parameters that can be used for management decisions. However, some inherent limitations of these models necessitate an understanding of their outputs and how this information can be used properly to make sound management decisions.

Retrospective Patterns in Models

Virtual population analysis (VPA) is a model that is used extensively in fish stock assessments. It uses catch-at-age (age-structured) data to back-calculate stock sizes and fishing mortality of different age classes (e.g. fish grouped by age). The model has difficulty in estimating the terminal (or most recent year's) parameters (such as fishing mortality, spawning stock biomass, and abundance). This sensitivity to the terminal parameters can be assessed by performing a retrospective analysis. Through this analysis, the model is calculated by going back one year at a time and removing the most recent year of data to see what the model would have estimated for stock size and fishing mortality for each of those previous years, given data only through that year. In some cases, a pattern is detected where the previous years' estimates of fishing mortality/abundance/spawning stock biomass are over or underestimated; this is called a retrospective pattern (sometimes referred to in statistics as a retrospective bias). Retrospective patterns are most problematic for fisheries management when fishing mortality is consistently un-

derestimated and abundance is overestimated. A famous example of this extreme case was seen in the collapse of the Newfoundland northern cod. It is also possible for the pattern to occur in the opposite direction, where fishing mortality is overestimated and abundance underestimated. These patterns may also switch back and forth between the two types of biases.

Possible Causes

It is very difficult to identify the underlying problem of retrospective patterns because there are numerous reasons as to why they arise. Some possible causes include:

- A change in natural mortality rate in nature that is not accounted for in the assessment
- An error or bias in ageing older fish
- A bias in catch estimates that has changed over time
- An error in sampling
- Under-reporting of landings or discards
- The grouping of oldest age classes

While retrospective patterns have been seen in most age-structured assessments, they tend to be more apparent in VPAs than in forward projecting statistical catch-at-age models.

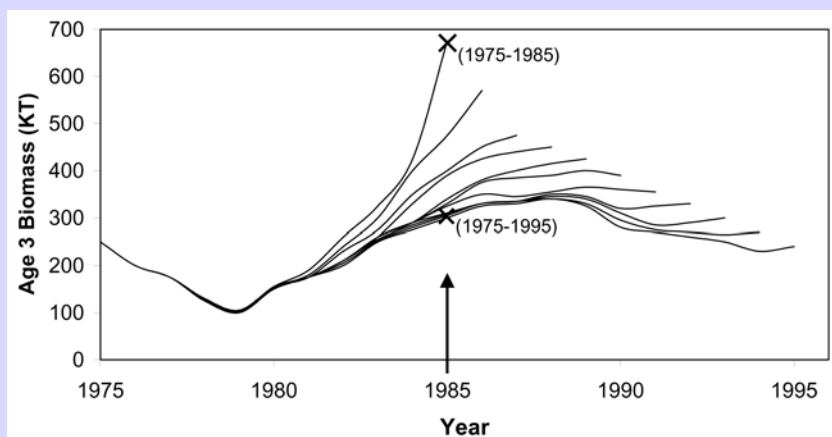
Addressing Retrospective Patterns

Since there are many possible sources of retrospective bias, it is necessary for each case to be evaluated individually. There are techniques that can be used to make corrections to retrospective patterns, such as quantifying the amount of retrospective bias for possible adjustment of quota levels. However, this may not be advisable as these patterns are not fixed and could switch to an opposite trend, or even disappear. At the minimum, these patterns may be considered as an additional source of uncertainty in the assessment, as it means there are inconsistencies in the data. Once managers are notified that these patterns exist, the most conservative approach would be to employ precautionary management regulations such as lowering quotas.

Commission Efforts

Recently, the Commission has taken steps to address retrospective patterns. These

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The above chart depicts a retrospective analysis of a fictional fish stock showing a retrospective pattern in the age 3 biomass estimates, where previous estimates (e.g. 1975 – 1985) have drastically overestimated biomass. In year 1985, for example, the biomass estimate using data from 1975-1985 reached almost 700 kilotons (KT), whereas the estimate using data from 1975-1995 was only about 300 KT.

Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Issues Ocean Policy Report Card: U.S. Receives Average Grade of C- for 2006

Early this year, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (JOCI) released its Ocean Policy Report Card, providing a retrospective assessment of the nation's collective progress during 2006 toward implementing the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission. The U.S. received an average grade of C-, showing a slight improvement over the grade of D+ assigned for 2005. The report card, now in its second year, is a tool JOCI uses to raise awareness on ocean issues and, ultimately, pressure the Administration, Congress, and regional and state decision makers to produce positive change.

Overall, the U.S. made modest progress in reforming ocean policy through state government initiatives, federal fisheries policy changes, and protecting waters of the northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

However, the accomplishments in 2006 were overshadowed by the lack of funding committed to the long-term preservation of our oceans.

The highest grade issued by JOCI was an A- for the subject of "Regional and State Ocean Governance Reform." JOCI highlighted new developments in 2006 such as the Massachusetts Oceans Act (introduced but not passed) and New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council, and ongoing multi-state efforts such as the Chesapeake Bay Program, Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, and Long Island Sound Study. JOCI acknowledges these positive 'bottom-up' initiatives but stresses national support and coordination is still needed.

JOCI assigned the lowest grade of F to "New Funding for Ocean Policy and

Programs." It cites chronic under investment in ocean-related science, management, and education. The President's FY08 Budget request for NOAA (\$3.8 billion) was an increase of \$100 million over the FY07 request. But it is still below the enacted level of funding for NOAA in FY06 (\$3.9 billion).

The U.S. received a B+ for the subject of "Fisheries Management Reform." As highlighted last month in Fisheries Focus (see "From the Executive Director's Desk"), the long-awaited Magnuson-Stevens Act was reauthorized providing a structure to more effectively manage our nation's fisheries. The true challenge now is to garner the resources and political will to carry out and enforce the new law.

To learn more about JOCI and to view the Report Card, please visit www.jointoceancommission.org

Marine Enforcement Units Target Illegal Tautog Markets

Over the last five years, law enforcement officers from New Jersey through Rhode Island have become increasingly aware of the growing market for undersized live tautog. In 1997, the minimum size for tautog was set at 14 inches. Despite the 14-inch size regulation, demand remains strong for live tautog in the 12-inch range which sell for up to \$10 per pound! Further, recreational fishermen have been found to use undersized tautog for striped bass bait. This demand has fueled an illegal market that is keeping law enforcement officers throughout the Mid-Atlantic busy. It is difficult to accurately measure the impact of this illegal trade on stock rebuilding efforts, but one thing is for sure -- law enforcement is now taking this issue very seriously.

Several factors contributed to law enforcement placing a higher priority on

the enforcement of tautog regulations. The first factor was complaints from fishermen who claimed that the illegal sale was ruining the market for the legal sized live tautog. Around the same time, law enforcement units began noticing an increase in suspicious activities related to the illegal catch and sale of undersized tautog. In addition, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Tautog Management Board, at its 2006 Annual Meeting, asked law enforcement agencies to place a high priority on the enforcement of tautog regulations.

In 2006, several marine units from various states, along with the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA Fisheries Service's Office of Law Enforcement have increased their communication and coordination of efforts directed at the illegal catching, storing,

dealing, and selling of tautog.

There are a variety of methods that law enforcement officers use to focus on tautog enforcement. New York City marine law enforcement officers have been going into the heart of Chinatown and Manhattan to disrupt retail sales of undersize tautog in restaurants. In 2006,



Photo courtesy of Eco Sean Reilly, NY Marine Enforcement Unit

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ACCSP Director Retires; ACCSP Promotes Program Awareness

ACCSP Director, Maury Osborn, Retires February 28, 2007 marked the end of a long career in fisheries for retiring Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Director, Maury Osborn. Ms. Osborn began her work with ACCSP as an Operations Committee member in 1995, contributing to the many decisions made during the program's planning phase. In 2002, she was appointed as the first director for the program. As Director, she served as the focal point for leadership and management, and was the public face of ACCSP. During her time with ACCSP, the program continued its forward progress in the development of a cooperative state-federal marine fisheries statistics data collection program that meets the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen of the Atlantic coast.

Ms. Osborn has had a long and varied career in fisheries conservation, serving the Gulf of Mexico and Northeast Region of the United States. After earning a Master's of Science in Aquaculture from Auburn University, she began her career as a Coastal Fisheries Research Analysts with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, where she was instrumental in implementing Texas' commercial trip ticket system and the development of the data management systems. Next she moved on to serve as a Fishery Biologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service. There she helped further develop the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey as its Program Manager.

The Operations Committee and ACCSP staff joined Ms. Osborn in Charleston,

South Carolina, for her send-off. Partners expressed thanks for her service and presented her with a framed resolution, highlighting her career and contributions to fisheries statistics data collection. A farewell luncheon was also held in her honor in Silver Spring, MD, giving her colleagues at the National Marine Fisheries Service a chance to wish her well.

Mike Cahall, Information Systems Manager, has been appointed Acting Director of ACCSP, effective March 1, 2007. He will serve as Acting Director until the Coordinating Council's Search Committee identifies a new person to fill the position. Mr. Cahall has been with ACCSP since 1999 and has contributed to the coordination of data collection programs, the continued evolution of standards, and the creation and operation of ACCSP Information Systems.

ACCSP Revitalizes Efforts to Increase Program Awareness

ACCSP staff is focusing efforts to revitalize program awareness among partners and stakeholders. In an energetic kickoff of this initiative, ACCSP staff presented a comprehensive program status update to members of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission at its Winter Meeting. The presentation reviewed the ACCSP's history, touched on its contribution to improving the state of fisheries data collection, and discussed future planning and challenges as the program moves forward to achieve its goals.

Through funding projects along the Atlantic coast, ACCSP has helped to significantly increase sampling levels for

recreational fisheries and deployed a new charter/headboat sampling method. On the commercial side, ACCSP has improved data collection in fishermen and dealer reporting, biological sampling, and registration tracking. ACCSP has also helped improve data collection coordination, reducing duplicity and overall reporting burden. The presentation also outlined how ACCSP has contributed to improved partner data management along the Atlantic coast, highlighting the development and implementation of the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) in nearly all Northeastern states.

ACCSP staff intends to provide this informational update to ASMFC Commissioners on an annual basis. Please visit ACCSP 2007 Update to view this presentation. Questions may be directed to support@accsp.org

About the ACCSP

The ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program to design, implement, and conduct marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and to integrate 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 Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the DC Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For more information, please visit www.accsp.org or call (202) 216-5690.

Science Highlight (continued from page 8)

trends have been detected in some stock assessments for a few Commission managed species (e.g. Atlantic herring, weakfish, summer flounder). This prompted the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Policy Board to task its Management and Science Committee (MSC) with addressing the causes and impacts of retrospective patterns in stock assessment models. Last spring, the MSC discussed the issue and provided the following recommendations regarding how managers could address retrospective patterns when making decisions: (1) manage conservatively when a consistent trend is detected, (2) include a term of reference as part of a species stock assessment and peer review process that explicitly addresses retrospective bias, and (3) task ASMFC species technical committees with being more specific with research needs that will reduce retrospective bias. These recommendations were forwarded to the Commission's Assessment Science Committee, which provides oversight to the Commission's stock assessment process, for further review and consideration this March. Their findings and recommendations will be presented to the ISFMP Policy Board this May at the Commission's Spring Meeting Week. These actions highlight the Commission's commitment to providing managers with the informa-

tion and tools to understand and interpret retrospective patterns and make informed management decisions. For more information, please contact Melissa Paine, Fisheries Research Specialist, at (202) 289-6400 or mpaine@asmfc.org.

Additional Reading

Cooper, A.B. A guide to fisheries stock assessment: From data to recommendations. <http://www.seagrant.unh.edu/newsstock.html>

Hutchings, J. A. & Myers, R. A. 1995. The biological collapse of northern cod off Newfoundland and Labrador: An exploration of historical changes in exploitation, harvesting technology and management. In *The North Atlantic fishery: Strengths, weaknesses and challenges*. Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada: Institute of Island Studies.

Mohn, R. 1999. The retrospective problem in sequential population analysis: an investigation using cod fishery and simulated data. *ICES Journal of Marine Science* 56: 473-488.

NOAA Fisheries Glossary. 2006. <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/documents/FishGlossary.pdf>

Marine Enforcement Units Target Illegal Tautog Markets (continued from page 9)

New York officers investigated dozens of cases involving illegal tautog. Charges included failure to possess a food fish license, possession of undersize tautog, exceeding the allowable possession limit, illegal commercialization of fish, and possession of tautog during a closed season. Violators of tautog regulations in 2006 included recreational and commercial fishermen, licensed and unlicensed fish dealers, and restaurants selling undersized tautog. Culprits use small coolers in subcompact cars, large tank trucks, and overboard totes to transport and conceal their illegal fish. In New York alone, more than a thousand undersized tautog have been released back into the wild as the result of recent law enforcement efforts.

undersize fish, both dead and alive; including striped bass, scup, codfish, flounder, black sea bass and lobster.

So what else can be done to cripple the illegal trade of tautog? It is unlikely that law enforcement agencies will be allocated more officers or bigger budgets to deal with this problem. Nor will the demand for undersized tautog go away. The reality of the situation is that marine law enforcement is extremely difficult. There are dozens of marine species with illegal activities requiring enforcement and there aren't enough officers to patrol all of fisheries all the time. Fishermen can help by reporting suspicious activities to local law enforcement officials.

spreading among enforcement units to take tautog violations seriously and issue heavy fines for violations. A survey of the states enforcement units revealed a consensus that the regulations are enforceable. Marine enforcement will continue to target the catcher, transporter, dealer, and retailer of illegal tautog, seeking increased penalties for subsequent offenders in courts. The public can play an important role by making sure they abide by the regulations and report violations to their local fisheries enforcement unit. A list of state and federal agency law enforcement contacts can be found on the ASMFC website under the law enforcement page at http://www.asmfc.org/law_enf.htm.

Other violations noted in these inspections involved many other species of

Regardless of the obstacles that enforcement officers face, the word is

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NOAA Fisheries Service Increases Fines for Striped Bass Fishing in the EEZ

At the request of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Striped Bass Management Board and Law Enforcement Committee, NOAA Fisheries Service has increased its fine structure regarding the illegal harvest and possession of recreationally-caught striped bass in federal waters (three to 200 miles offshore). The action, which occurred in late 2006, responds to a significant rise in the illegal harvest of striped bass in the EEZ in recent years. For instance, from December 2005 through August 2006, the U.S. Coast Guard made 14 cases involving recreational fishermen.

Fines have been increased from \$50 per fish to \$100 per fish (up to 10 fish) for first time offenders. For second time offenders, agents and officers may place a \$250 per fish fine (up to 10 fish) on the fisherman or refer the case for prosecution in the federal court system. If more than 10 fish are found in any given case, the matter should be forwarded to NOAA's General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation for prosecution and stiffer penalties. By increasing its fines, NOAA Fisheries Service aims to further deter recreational fishing for striped bass in federal waters.



Striped bass fishing in the EEZ has been prohibited since 1990. Last year, NOAA Fisheries Service considered reopening the EEZ to striped bass fishing, but decided to maintain the federal closure. NOAA Fisheries Service based its decision on concerns about further increasing fishing mortality, which is slightly below the management plan's fishing mortality goal.

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