

ASMFC Fisheries Focus

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ASMFC Charts Its Course for the Next Five Years: *Five-Year Strategic Plan Approved*

On October 22, 1998, the fifteen Atlantic coastal states of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission reaffirmed their mutual commitment to each other's success through the adoption of a five-year (1999 through 2003) Strategic Plan for the Commission. The Commission's long-term vision, as outlined in the Plan, is for healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration well in progress, by the year 2015. The vision implies that the Atlantic coast states are committed to work together through the Commission to ensure the continued sustainability of renewable natural populations of marine and estuarine resources along the Atlantic coast.

The 15 Atlantic coastal states, from Maine to Florida, took steps beginning in the late 1930s to develop cooperative mechanisms to define and achieve their mutual interests in coastal fisheries. The most notable of these was their commitment to form the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in 1942, and to work together through the Commission to promote, protect, and conserve shared marine fishery resources. Through the Commission, the states cooperate in a broad range of programs that today includes interstate fisheries management, research and statistics, habitat conservation, sport fish restoration, and law enforcement. The coastal states are committed to cooperatively conserving renewable marine and estuarine resources and to ensuring healthy self-sustaining fish stocks along the Atlantic coast.

This Strategic Plan begins with an analysis of the planning context facing the Commission today and then sets forth the goals that the states will seek to achieve during the five year planning horizon, and strategies for achieving these goals. The Commission will pursue seven major goals during the five-year planning period, from 1999 through 2003 and these goals include:

- ? Rebuild, restore and maintain Atlantic coastal fisheries through cooperative regulatory planning.
- ? Strengthen cooperative research capabilities.
- ? Promote and coordinate cooperative fisheries statistics programs.
- ? Expand cooperation in law enforcement.
- ? Enhance conservation, restoration and protection of fish habitat.
- ? Promote responsible fisheries policies; and represent the interests of the states in national and federal forums.
- ? Strengthen the operations, management and administration of the Commission's business affairs.

The Commission and its staff together are committed to ensuring that this document not become simply another space-taker on library shelves; but rather that it contain a workable process to ensure that it is instead a living functioning document. During the Plan years, the Commission and its staff will annually monitor progress in meeting the Commission's seven goals, and reevaluate the effectiveness of the strategies.

To receive a copy of the Strategic Plan, please contact: Leuvet Stevens, Executive Secretary, at (202)289-6400, ext. 315.

For more information, please contact: Tina Berger, Public Affairs & Resource Specialist, at (202)289-6400, ext. 310.

Upcoming Meetings

11/11 - 13:

RecFIN(SE), FIN, and ComFIN, Embassy Suites, University of Southern Florida, Tampa, Florida.

11/16 - 19:

ASMFC External Stock Assessment Peer Review for Atlantic Menhaden, Baltimore, Maryland.

11/19:

ASMFC/MAFMC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Technical Monitoring Committee, BWI Comfort Inn, Baltimore. Maryland.

11/30 - 12/4:

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Ramada Inn, Kill Devils Hill, North Carolina.

11/30 - 12/4:

National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Fisheries Science Center Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee,

12/9 & 10:

New England Fishery Management Council, Colonial Hilton, Wakefield, Massachusetts.

12/10 - 11:

“Pfiesteria and the Environment: Convergence of Science and Policy.” Prominent discussants from academia, government, business and the environmental community. Georgetown University Conference Center, Washington, D.C.; (202)964-6400.

12/14 & 15:

ASMFC Nearshore Trawl Survey Program Support Workgroup, Providence, Rhode Island (tentative location).

12/15 - 17:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Radisson Hotel, Philadelphia Airport, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

12/16 & 17:

ASMFC Nearshore Trawl Survey Design Workgroup, Providence, Rhode Island (tentative location).

1999

1/11 - 14:

ASMFC Meeting Week, Alexandria, Virginia.

1/27 - 28:

New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Portsmouth, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

From the Executive Director's Desk

One of the great joys in life is the pleasure of the unexpected, pleasant surprise. I was reminded of this when I returned home after — long after — the Commission's 57th Annual Meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia. When I left we were still in the last days of summer, despite the word "October" displayed across the top of the calendar page. Trees not only held their leaves, but they were green and lush. It took me five extra days to return home from Georgia, due to other meetings that followed immediately after. So I was gone for almost two full weeks. And what was waiting for me but a magnificent display of full fall color all around, one of the prettiest falls that I can remember anywhere.

Part of the unexpected pleasure was the suggestion that we were not going to have a very nice fall. Because of the drought conditions that prevailed during most of the year in the Mid-Atlantic area, we were told to expect a quick turn to brown and the barrenness of winter. Instead, we were treated to a fall rainbow of brilliant hue. Our local golf course (I don't play golf; I "play at" it — ask Dennis Abbott) has never looked so splendid as the peaceful afternoon I spent there last week.

The joy of fall was a perfect cap to the 57th Annual Meeting, one of the Commission's most successful. The Commission approved five — count 'em, five — new fishery management plans or significant amendments: for shad and river herring, horseshoe crab, bluefish, Atlantic herring, and summer flounder, scup and black sea bass. That is testament to a lot of hard work by Commissioners and staff during 1998 to put the Commission in a position to accomplish so much in Georgia. One of the very best examples of states going above and beyond the call was the commitment of Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey to the development of the Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management Plan. The Commission finished this work in record time, due in no small part to the extra resources that these three states put on the table to get the job done. Their extra efforts were impressive and set a fine example of what states can accomplish together.

The Commission also approved its new Strategic Plan. After many years of thinking about it, two years of planning and six months of working on drafts, the fifteen Atlantic coastal states have articulated the direction that their Commission should pursue over the next five years. The Strategic Plan emphasizes the role of the Commission as the tool that the states use to define and achieve their mutual best interests in coastal fisheries. It also sets forth their shared values and vision: that "the resource comes first," that the states achieve their own individual interests by working for the benefit of all, that our commitment is to healthy, self-sustaining populations of coastal fish species, and more. Now the challenge for the Commission — and its staff — is to translate the language of the Strategic Plan into concrete action. It will be a busy end-of-year period as we follow through on the direction that was chosen in Georgia.

And it was nice to see the Commission recognize one of the stalwarts of cooperative state-federal law enforcement, Bob Babula, with the Capt. David H. Hart Award. Bob has always been a no-nonsense kind of guy, typical of law enforcement personnel. Part of "no-nonsense" is recognizing that nobody can go it alone, and that we all have to support and learn from each other. Bob Babula's hard work for many years is one of the fundamental reasons that we have a working cooperative, interstate, state-federal law enforcement program along the Atlantic coast. The award was richly deserved. Many thanks, Bob!

And many thanks to the Commissioners and staff who made the 57th Annual Meeting so successful!

ASMFC Approves Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crabs: *Delaware Bay States to Maintain Existing Regulations; Extensive Monitoring Requirements to be Implemented to Improve Stock Assessments*

On October 22, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved the *Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab*. The Horseshoe Crab Management Board met on October 20th to review the public's comments on the draft management plan and the results from the Commission's external peer review of the horseshoe crab stock assessment prior to forwarding the final plan to the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board for adoption.

Although the Management Board concluded that there was insufficient data to support coastwide harvest reduction measures, Board members agreed that there was too much at stake to delay the adoption of the management plan. Recognizing that Delaware Bay is the epicenter of the horseshoe crab fishery and the primary stopover area for migratory shorebirds, Board members approved the following management option:

The states of New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland must maintain existing state laws and regulations pertaining to the harvest and landing of horseshoe crabs. Other states are encouraged to implement a two day per week harvest prohibition within 1,000 feet of the low mean water line between April 15 through June 15.

The monitoring components, which are considered to be the heart of this management plan, were fully approved by the Management Board. These measures include:

? **Mandatory Monthly Reporting** — all states must continue or initiate mandatory monthly reporting of all harvest and identify percent mortality of horseshoe crabs captured for biomedical use up to the point of release;

? **Benthic Sampling Programs** — Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia must continue existing benthic sampling programs and collect data on horseshoe crabs;

? **Coastwide Survey Workshops** — states will participate in two coastwide workshops to formulate standardized and statistically robust surveys to estimate annual egg deposition and the number of spawning crabs. The states of New Jersey and Delaware must implement pilot programs to survey horseshoe crab eggs and the number of spawners by the 1999 horseshoe crab spawning season. Maryland must also implement a pilot program to survey horseshoe crab spawning by the 1999 horseshoe crab spawning season.

? **Biomedical Tagging Program** — All states must ensure that any biomedical industry in their state implement a tagging program to evaluate the post-release mortality of horseshoe crabs used by the biomedical industry.

? **Horseshoe Crab Habitat** — All states must identify potential horseshoe crab habitat within its jurisdiction by December 31, 1999.

According to Bruce Freeman, Chair of the Horseshoe Crab Management Board, “While we have accomplished a great deal in 1998, adoption of this Plan is not an endpoint but rather a framework by which the states can work together towards the conservation of horseshoe crabs for both the fishermen and the other resources that utilize horseshoe crabs as an important food source. The monitoring components provide for an ambitious 1999 work schedule but, if accomplished, will begin to provide the necessary information to make effective management decisions in the future.”

Development of the FMP began in earnest in November of 1997 when the States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and the Commonwealth of Virginia agreed to commit the necessary resources, both manpower and fiscal, to complete the Plan by October 1998. Concern over increases in harvest levels in recent years and the impact of this harvest on the horseshoe crab resources and other dependent species, particularly migratory shorebirds, initiated Plan development.

Bruce Freeman further stated, “Many people are responsible for the timely completion of the FMP including: the States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and the Commonwealth of Virginia for their contribution of funding and manpower, and the members of the Horseshoe Crab Management Board, Technical Committee, Plan Development Team and Advisory Panel for their significant contributions of time and hard work in the development of the Plan.”

Published copies of the FMP, stock assessment, and external peer review will be available from the Commission by the end of the year. For more information, please contact: Tom O’Connell, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, at (410)260-8271.

Sergeant Robert Babula Receives Prestigious David H. Hart Award

On October 21, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission proudly recognized the enormous commitment of Sergeant Robert Babula to the conservation and management of Atlantic coast fisheries. The award was presented to Sergeant Babula at the Commission’s 57th Annual Meeting on Jekyll Island, Georgia.

In presenting the award to Sergeant Babula, Georgia host and newly elected Vice-chair of the Commission, Susan Shipman stated that, “For over 22 years, Sergeant Robert Babula has committed his life to the conservation and management of marine fishery resources. Involved at both the state and federal level, he has been instrumental in crafting meaningful state laws and regulations that not only protect the resource and meet the needs of the fishermen, but also are truly enforceable. Time and time again, Sergeant Babula’s knowledge of marine resources and the illegal methods of harvesting these species have been invaluable. For example, he participated in the planning and execution of joint enforcement operations with both the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. He has been a key player in long-term state/federal cooperative covert investigations such as Operation Coastal Catch and Operation Safe Shellfish, which resulted in the large-scale apprehension and successful prosecution of individuals involved in the illegal harvest and sale of undersized “short” lobsters and contaminated shellfish, respectively.

Presentation of the award today is particularly significant in that it is the first time that someone in the field of marine resource law enforcement will be its recipient. This can only testify to the tremendous contributions of Sergeant Babula to the development of implementable and

enforceable state and federal regulations and excellence with which he has preformed his daily enforcement activities.

Sergeant Babula's unerring dedication to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is noteworthy. For nearly ten years, he has been actively involved in the Commission's programs, most notably the Law Enforcement Committee for which he served as both Chair and Secretary. During his service on the Law Enforcement Committee, Sergeant Babula was particularly committed to increasing the level of involvement of law enforcement representatives in the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program and is in part responsible for their full involvement at the management board level today. He also helped to usher in many of the changes we now see in the Interstate Fisheries Management Program, having played an integral role in the development of the standards and procedures for the ISFMP Charter.

The Commission would truly not be where it is today without Sergeant Babula's active participation. And without a doubt the field of law enforcement has benefited because of his involvement. The many individuals who he has busted during their illegal activities may not be happy, but you can be sure that the fishery resources that he has sworn to protect have been safeguarded under his watchful eye. And thus, with a warm heart and tremendous gratitude, it is my great pleasure to present the 1998 Hart Award to Sergeant Robert A. Babula, Conservation Officer with the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department."

The Commission instituted the "Captain David H. Hart Award" in 1991 to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the betterment of marine fisheries on the Atlantic coast. The award is named for the Commission's oldest and longest-serving member, an appointee from New Jersey who was dedicated to the advancement and protection of marine fishery resources. Past recipients of the award are: Irwin M Alperin, longtime Executive Director of the Commission; Representative Walter B. Jones of North Carolina; Dr. Edwin B. Joseph with South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources; Richard H. Schaefer, Chief of Staff for Intergovernmental and Recreational Fisheries of the National Marine Fisheries Service; David G. Deuel of the National Marine Fisheries Service; Philip G. Coates, Director of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; and David M. Cupka of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

ASMFC Approves Amendment 1 to the Shad & River Herring FMP

On October 22, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved *Amendment 1 to the Shad and River Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP)*. This Plan replaces the 1985 version of the plan, which provided general recommendations but no specific means for protecting and enhancing stocks of American shad, hickory shad, and river herring.

The three primary regulatory requirements of the Amendment include: (1) a five-year phase-out of the ocean intercept fishery; (2) the management of in-river fisheries at levels not to exceed F₃₀ for assessed stocks, establishment of Commission-approved recovery plans for all stocks, and the maintenance of existing or more conservative regulations for river herring and hickory shad fisheries; and (3) an aggregate 10 fish daily creel limit in recreational fisheries for American shad and hickory shad, with all jurisdictions maintaining existing or more conservative recreational regulations for river herring. In addition, the Amendment establishes extensive monitoring programs for the collection of fisheries-dependent and independent data for all species.

According to Byron Young, Chair of the Shad & River Herring Management Board, “This Plan has been a long time in the making. It’s taken us nearly four years to get to the point where all of the Atlantic coastal states and the two federal agencies agree that we have a plan that will manage and restore American shad stocks over the next several years. This Plan reflects that hard work and dedication of the states, Commission staff, and advisors to protecting these important resources.”

The most significant component of the Amendment from the fishermen’s perspective is the five-year phase-out of the ocean intercept fishery, with the provision that states must achieve at least a 40 percent reduction in ocean intercept effort in the first three years of implementation, which begins in the year 2000. The ocean intercept harvests shad from many stocks during their coastal migrations in early spring and late winter. The fate of this fishery has been a source of controversy throughout the development of Amendment 1, with many arguing that restoration of river specific stocks would be made more difficult with removals from the ocean intercept fishery. Public comment on the Draft FMP generally supported closing the ocean intercept fishery. Further the recent peer review of the stock assessment for American shad indicated that the fishery was sufficiently large to inhibit recovery of stocks under restoration.

For in-river fisheries, the Amendment allows states to manage certain stocks which show no signs of overfishing at levels not to exceed F_{30} (the overfishing definition for American shad). For American shad stocks targeted for recovery, states must establish Commission-approved fishing plans. Additionally, states will be required to maintain their existing or more conservative commercial regulations for river herring and hickory shad.

All jurisdictions will be held to an aggregate 10 fish daily creel limit for American shad or hickory shad, with the provision that for those stocks under restoration, states must adopt recreational creel limits consistent with restoration targets. Recreational fisheries for river herring shall be maintained at existing or more conservative regulations.

In addition, states must now require mandatory reporting of catch and effort from all commercial American shad fisheries and continue a number of fishery-independent monitoring programs from Maine to Florida. States that permit ocean-intercept fisheries for American shad are required to participate in a coastwide tagging study for the next several years to determine impacts on recovering shad populations.

Sharp declines in commercial landings of shad and river herring, as well as other indications of stock declines, prompted the member states of the Commission to adopt the *1985 Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American Shad and River Herring*. This management plan addressed four species of anadromous herrings found along the coast from Maine to Florida: American shad, hickory shad, blueback herring and alewives (the last two are often referred to as “river herring”). Although the 1985 FMP recommended general approaches to control exploitation, monitor harvest, implement hatchery programs, and effect habitat restoration it lacked specific management measures (e.g. quotas, bag limits, etc.) and monitoring programs for the states to implement. With the passage of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA), all Commission management plans became mandatory for the states but the 1985 shad and river herring FMP still lacked specific standards by which the states could control exploitation and analyze state-by-state implementation.

The lack of stock improvement in most areas and the need to update the Plan following passage of ACFCMA prompted the Commission to amend the 1985 Plan in 1994. The past three and a

half years were used to collate landings information, analyze stock trends, and define overfishing rates. Of the four species covered in the management plan, only American shad fisheries have been monitored adequately to permit a reliable stock assessment. Therefore, Amendment 1 specifies new regulations and monitoring programs for American shad fisheries while maintaining the status quo in hickory shad and river herring fisheries. These species will be addressed in future amendments to the FMP as data become available. For more information, please contact: John Field, Anadromous Species Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 301.

ASMFC Solicits Comments on the Development of Tagging Program Protocols

In October 1997 the Commission adopted a *Resolution Concerning Citizens' Tagging Programs* that identified several potential shortcomings of angler-based tagging programs such as lack of set goals and objectives; problems related to improper handling of fish and poor tagging techniques; and increased need for education, training information, data management, and incentive programs. The resolution also identified several benefits that angler-based tagging programs may have to fisheries management, such as the collection of detailed information on the life history, movement, and stock identification for a variety of finfish species; and increased citizen involvement and awareness of fisheries issues.

On August 27, 1998, the Commission conducted a Workshop on Developing Tagging Program Protocols in conjunction with the American Fisheries Society meeting in Hartford, Connecticut. This workshop was initiated by the need to maximize the utility of data collected by scientific and angler-based tagging programs. Collection of tagging data using standard protocols and consistent formats may provide greater compatibility of data among various tagging programs and ensure more extensive use of data for stock assessment and management purposes. A draft report has been developed and has been reviewed by the Commission's Management and Science Committee. This report will be forwarded to all workshop participants for review and input, prior to presentation and possible adoption by the Commission at the 1999 Spring Meeting.

The workshop was designed to foster input from a variety of perspectives regarding attributes which all tagging programs should incorporate and to differentiate what volunteer-based programs should do to better contribute to management efforts. The goal of the workshop was to "*Improve the value of all tagging programs, both scientific and angler-based*", with specific objectives being to (1) develop protocols for conducting tagging programs, and (2) develop tactics to achieve these protocols. Standard protocols drafted by this workshop were grouped into eight broad topics: (1) program objectives, (2) design elements, (3) data management issues, (4) commitment, (5) training, (6) communication, (7) coordination, and (8) certification.

The accompanying article briefly summarizes the proposed tagging program protocols. If you are interested in reviewing the report in its entirety and providing comments please contact Dr. Lisa Kline at 202-289-6400 or lkline@asmfc.org.

Proposed Tagging Program Protocols

Tagging Programs should include the following:

1. Established objectives, stated program purpose, and should address valid scientific questions such as:
 - Movement/migration of fish.
 - Growth rates and patterns of fish.
 - Defining management units (individual stocks) of fish.
 - Evaluate reporting rates of tagging programs.
 - Measuring fishing mortality rates.
 - Measuring tag retention rates.
 - Measuring tag event mortality.
 - Application to specific fishery management plans (or other management documents).

Programs should specifically **identify species to be tagged prior to initiation of tagging**. Programs should not be initiated to tag a broad range of species in a generalized manner.

Tagging programs should identify a **specific time-line for conducting tagging** and should provide a strong long-term commitment to continuation of the program (see below).

2. Minimum design standards consisting of:
 - a. Tag type/color specifications
 - b. Tag identification information, including: unique alpha numeric numbering for each tag program; address *or* toll free number for returning tags; agency/organization identifier; and reward information.
 - c. Minimum data elements consisting of:
 - Area or location of release
 - Date of release
 - Tag number
 - Length of fish at release and units of measure
 - Contact information (name, etc.)for tagger and agency/organization
 - d. Verification (quality assurance/quality control) procedures, including:
 - Rapid follow-up to the person returning the tag report.
 - Mechanisms to respond rapidly to the individual who tagged the fish.
 - Random data audits to ensure accuracy of tagging information.
 - Local knowledge of the fish species and fisheries by the person conducting quality assurance/quality control.
 - “Angler friendly” tag reporting procedures to facilitate returns.
 - e. An evaluation of tag non-reporting/loss (shedding) rates of all tag types and tagging methods.
 - f. Recapture Procedures.
3. Data management issues:

- Data should be made widely available.
 - Data management by angler-based tagging programs should be coordinated through a management agency or scientific institution to ensure direct application of tagging data to management programs.
 - All tagging data should be verified through bounds checks, audits and other checks for quality of data input.
 - Procedures for recapture should incorporate the fate or disposition of the fish.
4. Dedicated commitment to meet the objectives of the program and to fulfill obligations to tag recapturers and taggers. Adequate resources should be provided by the tagging organization to:
 - Meet program objectives for the duration of the tagging program.
 - Provide for staffing requirements.
 - Provide program equipment and other required resources including computer hardware/software, tagging equipment, incentive rewards, etc.
 - Fulfill tag recapture requests after completion of the tagging program.
 5. Develop and implement a training program for taggers.
 6. Develop procedures to adequately communicate with volunteer taggers, individuals who report recaptures, and management agencies. Mechanisms to ensure communication should include:
 - Outreach to taggers;
 - Feedback to taggers regarding appropriate tagging methods, etc. (update training);
 - Feedback to recapturers;
 - Incorporation of professional guidance regarding tagging techniques
 - Incorporation of tagging data in stock assessment activities and fishery management plans;
 - Dissemination of publicity and reward information to increase tag return rates.
 7. A mechanism to ensure coordination among all agencies/organizations conducting tagging programs should be developed.
 8. A Certification Program should be developed to help ensure that Atlantic coast tagging programs are collecting high quality and accurate data for use in fisheries management.

ASMFC Approves FMPs for Atlantic Herring, Bluefish, and Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass

On October 22, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved its Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for Atlantic Herring, Bluefish, and Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass. Specifically, the Commission approved *Amendment 1 to the FMP for Atlantic Herring*, which was developed in conjunction with the New England Fishery Management Council's FMP for Atlantic Herring. The other two FMPs – *Amendment 1 to the Bluefish FMP*

and *Amendment 12 to the FMP for Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass* – were prepared jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

The Commission approved Amendment 1 to the FMP for Atlantic Herring contingent upon certification by the Atlantic Herring Section that the New England Fishery Management Council approves a similar Plan. The Commission placed contingency upon its approval in the event that the Council significantly modifies its version of the FMP. The Council has already approved provisions of its Atlantic Herring FMP which include its management measures and the summary of impacts. The Council is slated to fully approve the plan in December. Amendment 1 establishes an overfishing definition for Atlantic herring and specifies management areas, total allowable catch, effort controls and spawning area restrictions, in addition to other measures.

Amendment 1 to the Bluefish FMP modifies the overfishing definition for bluefish and provides a number of commercial and recreational management measures that could be used to conserve the bluefish resource. The Amendment establishes a nine-year rebuilding schedule, commercial quota system, and a recreational harvest limit. For more details, see article on page 15.

The Commission approved Amendment 12 to the FMP for Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass contingent upon certification by the Board that the final Draft of Amendment 12 has addressed the Board's and the National Marine Fisheries Service's concerns about compliance with National Standard 9 of the Sustainable Fisheries Act. Amendment 12 establishes new overfishing definitions and describes and identifies essential fish habitat. The changes in the overfishing definition will not modify the current mortality targets or rebuilding schedules of any of the three species.

For more information, please contact either: Dr. Joseph Desfosse, Atlantic Herring Plan Coordinator, or Robert Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400.

7th Annual Laura Leach Fishing Tournament Lands the Big One\$

The Seventh Annual Laura Leach Invitational Fishing Tournament succeeded in its goal of surpassing funds raised last year to support children's fishing activities in the host state. Over \$1,700 was raised this year, and all of this money will go to help support the 1999 Golden Isles Parent-Child Derby in association with National Fishing Week.

Appreciation is sincerely extended to all that entered the tournament – over 160 people entered the tournament even though the majority once again knew that they would not have an opportunity to fish.

The tournament was a success thanks to the organizers from Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Coastal Resources Division (CRD) — Jim Music, John Pafford and Spud Woodward. Many others from Georgia DNR CRD also helped with the tournament, and we appreciate their efforts. Thanks also to the tournament sponsors: Georgia DNR CRD Shakespeare Fishing Tackle, Penn Fishing Tackle, Constant Threat Fishing Team and Guide Service, Central Hardware and Golden Isles Kingfish Classic. All of these folks and businesses donated their time, energy and prizes so that 100 percent of the entry fees would be given to support the Parent Child Fishing Derby.

Women took three of the four prizes this year...some grumbling was heard during the business meeting that perhaps the women should attend the meetings next year so that the men could fish...! Congratulations to Terrie Street of North Carolina for catching the largest red drum (370 mm); Joan Rice of Pennsylvania for catching the largest spotted seatrout (370 mm); Pat Augustine (our only male winner!) for catching the second largest spotted seatrout (260 mm) and Cathy Goldsborough of Maryland for the most species caught (catfish, toadfish, sea bass, silver perch, bluefish, ray and bonnethead shark!)

ASMFC Legislative Committee Reviews Legislation for the 106th Congress

On October 20, 1998, the Commission's Legislative Committee met to discuss timely appropriations activities, and some draft legislation slated for introduction in the 106th Congress.

The Committee reviewed some breaking news on the omnibus appropriations bill adopted by the House that day, approved in the Senate the next. The Omnibus Appropriations Bill provides funding for the Departments of Interior and Commerce, as well as several other federal agencies. The Interior Department is funded through the end of the federal fiscal year, September 30, 1999. Though the bill increases appropriations to Fish and Wildlife Resource Management slightly, though the increase is largely earmarked for freshwater fisheries disease and non-Atlantic regional programs.

The Commerce Department is only appropriated through June 15, 1999, due to disagreement between the GOP-controlled Congress and the Administration concerning whether to allow statistical sampling in taking the next Census. The bill cites annual appropriations figures, though additional legislative authority will be necessary to release the funds for expenditure after June 15, 1999. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is funded at \$370.55 million, a \$24.315 million increase over fiscal 1998. The three interstate marine fish commissions will each receive \$250,000 for operational expenses and seven million dollars, the fully authorized level, has been provided for implementation of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Fisheries Management Act.

Several line items in the NMFS budget realized appropriations increases. \$106.675 million was appropriated for resource information; \$29.9 million for Fisheries Management Programs; \$13 million for the Regional Management Councils; \$23 million for Endangered Species Act Recovery Plans; \$9 million for Habitat Conservation; \$17.775 million for Enforcement and Surveillance; and one million dollars for Bluefish/Striped Bass interaction research. Funding was provided for research on southeastern sea turtles (\$300,000), and Chesapeake Bay oysters (\$450 million), and new money was provided for lobster sampling (\$100,000), Atlantic herring and mackerel research (\$200,000), and hard clam populations (\$450,000). Also included is \$300,000 to prevent importation of swordfish in violation of international fisheries conservation (ICCAT). Within the Saltonstall-Kennedy funds, \$250,000 has been earmarked for research into *Vibrio vulnificus*, seafood poisoning often due to raw shellfish consumption by immuno-compromised people.

The following programs were level funded: Fisheries Statistics, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Grants, Anadromous Grants, Chesapeake Bay Studies, Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program, New England Stock Depletion, Atlantic Salmon Research, Gulf of Maine Groundfish Survey, and George's Bank Management. It is expected that a Long Island trawl survey will be funded through other funds appropriated to NMFS, since the Anadromous Fishery

Project funding was not provided again this year. Though the Recreational Fish Harvest Monitoring program was level funded in the budget, for the first time this funding will be equally divide between the three the Pacific, Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts.

Slight decreases were realized in the following: Right Whale Research, Marine Fisheries Initiative (of which \$500,000 will be used in the Northeast, and \$250,000 appropriated for research in the Southeast), and for the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Funding was not provided for east coast observers.

The law authorizes collection of four million dollars in fees to offset the Community Development and Individual Fishery Quota Programs. Though \$3.5 million is earmarked for operational activities of the Commission on Ocean Policy, expenditure of this money is prohibited unless authorizing legislation is enacted during the fiscal year. Consistent with the previous year's appropriations bill, the omnibus bill restricts vessels greater than 165 feet in length, more than 750 gross registered tons and producing over 3,000 shaft horsepower from fishing for Atlantic herring and mackerel unless a fishery management plan specifically permits such entry to the fishery.

Appropriations have requested NMFS is report to them on lobster gear modification research, data collection improvement efforts, and inconsistencies in the fishing seasons for bluefin tuna. Additionally, Congress has directed the General Accounting Office to research NMFS implementation of National Standards 2 (requirement to use the best available scientific data in management) and 8 (management impact on local fisheries-dependent communities) as defined in the Magnuson/Stevens Act.

Within the National Ocean Service, a total of \$8.125 million was appropriated for research and monitoring on pfiesteria, hypoxia and other harmful algae blooms. The bill increases Coastal Zone Management Act implementation grants to \$54.7 million, and \$4.3 million for the National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The Environmental Protection Agency was funded under a separate bill, which includes \$1.7 billion for implementation of the President's Clean Water Action Plan. Though a draft of the bill contained several anti-environmental legislative riders, including a wetlands mitigation banking proposal, these provisions were removed from the final law.

The Committee reviewed a draft proposal from the sportfishing community and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) to introduce the Fishable Waters Act in the next Congress. The draft bill is designed to amend the Clean Water Act to achieve the fishable waters objective defined in the Act by directing states to establish a non-governmental council to provide grants for freshwater fisheries restoration. The program would be capitalized through a grant from the Department of Agriculture and 50 percent of the state's Clean Water Act non-point source pollution clean-up grants. Additionally, the draft bill provides incentives for freshwater fisheries restoration in urban and economically depressed areas, and authorizes these grants for use as the non-federal match for obtaining certain federal grants (e.g., Wallop/Breaux). The Legislative Committee will be assisting a Commission Habitat subcommittee develop suggested amendments which will be presented to the drafters and a position statement on the legislation as it moves toward Congressional introduction.

Finally, the Committee reviewed two bills to use revenues from outer continental shelf leases to restore coastal and wetlands areas and for non-consumptive wildlife restoration. Half of the lease revenues would remain in the Treasury Department for general federal spending. The remaining

50 percent would be divided as follows: 27 percent for coastal impact assistance in states within a regional proximity to the lease sites; 13 percent for watershed and wetland restoration and conservation in the 50 states, and 10 percent for conservation and restoration of non-consumptive fish and wildlife in the 50 states. These wetlands and wildlife restoration grants would be divided according a mechanism established in the bills. This proposal, which is endorsed by the IAFWA, will be closely monitored and considered for endorsement by the Legislative Committee in the 106th Congress.

For more information, please contact: Lori Rosa, Special Assistant, at (202)289-6400, ext. 314.

ASMFC Approves Addendum III to Amendment 5 to the Striped Bass FMP: *Freezes 1999 and 2000 Striped Bass Fisheries at Current Levels*

On October 21, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Striped Bass Management Board approved *Addendum III to Amendment 5 to the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan*. Addendum III implements a two-year freeze on state fishery regulations, with the provision that states will still be allowed to submit alternative management programs for Technical Committee review and Board approval.

At the same time, the Management Board approved alternative state proposals for Massachusetts, North Carolina and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC). Proposals from both Massachusetts and North Carolina included small increases in their respective quotas, while the PRFC proposal sought an increase in the length of its recreational season and changes to the PRFC's harvest monitoring program. Additionally, the Board declared the Delaware River stock of striped bass restored to historical population levels. This finding was based on a report of the Delaware River Basin Commission showing high juvenile recruitment, increasing spawning stock biomass, and low fishing mortality rates. The Striped Bass Technical Committee endorsed the report this past summer.

The Board's decision to implement Addendum III and freeze state fisheries for 1999 and 2000 at current levels was primarily based on the fact that current fishing mortality rates are at or near the target fishing mortality rate ($F=0.31$) established by Amendment 5. Further Amendment 5 suggest that, given this situation, states should not implement increases in harvest. The next two years will be spent evaluating important broad management issues such as allocation (state-by-state and among user groups), quality fishing, and new target fishing mortality rates.

For more information, please contact: John Field, Anadromous Species Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 301.

ASMFC Establishes Annual Awards of Excellence

During the Commission's Annual Meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia, the Awards Committee met and established a series of four new awards to be added to the Commission's premier award -- the David H. Hart Award.

The new awards will be called *ASMFC's Annual Awards of Excellence* and will be presented during the Commission's Spring Meeting every year. The four new awards will be in the areas of:

- Scientific, Technical, or Advisory Excellence

- Congressional or Legislative Excellence
- Law Enforcement Excellence
- Management or Policy Excellence

Award recipients must be individuals who have made significant contributions to the management and conservation of Atlantic coastal fisheries. Such contributions must be for work on conservation issues of an interstate nature, i.e. regional or Atlantic coastwide importance.

Awards may not necessarily be given in each category every year, although there may be more than one recipient in a category at any time.

Susan Shipman, Chair of the Awards Committee stated, “While the Hart Award will still remain the Commission’s most prestigious award, we wanted to be able to recognize some of the many other individuals who significantly contribute to the conservation and management of Atlantic coastal resources.”

The solicitations for nominations will be sent out by January 15th to the full list of Commission participants, including Commissioners, and technical, advisory and law enforcement representatives. The deadline for nominations will be March 1st.

For more information, please contact: Laura Leach, Director of Administration and Finance, at (202)289-6400.

ASMFC Finds Massachusetts Out-of-Compliance with the Scup FMP

On October 22, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission determined that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is out-of-compliance with *Addendum 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Scup*. Specifically, Massachusetts was found out-of-compliance for not fully and effectively implementing and enforcing the state-by-state quota management system established in Addendum 1.

The determination was based upon the recommendations of the Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Policy Board and the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board that Massachusetts exceeded its 1997 quota for scup and, therefore, should not have allowed its 1998 summer period commercial scup fishery to open. In order to come back into compliance the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must implement and enforce the commercial quota limitations of the fishery management plan. Specifically, Massachusetts must close its summer period commercial scup fisheries until all harvest overages have been repaid. Additionally, Massachusetts must hold its summer period commercial scup fishery to the specified state-by state quotas in the plan, closing the fishery once the quota has been met.

Massachusetts has challenged the validity of the Scup Fishery Management Plan under federal law, in separate litigation against the Secretary of Commerce in federal court. On April 27, 1998 the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts ordered that the portion of Addendum 1 establishing a state-by-state allocation of the summer commercial scup fishery is void and any enforcement of overages by the Secretary of Commerce is forbidden. The Commission

recognized that this may prevent the Secretary from imposing a moratorium under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA).

Scup is managed jointly by the Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Addendum 1 to the Scup FMP provides an annual coastwide quota to be divided among three periods. The Winter I period extends from January 1 through April 30, the summer period runs from May 1 through October 31, and the Winter II period extends from November 1 through December 31. During the winter periods the quota is available coastwide and is constrained through trip limits. The summer period is managed through a state-by-state quota system that are distributed to the states based on their percentage share of commercial landings for the period May to October 1983 through 1992.

According to John H. Dunnigan, Executive Director of the Commission, “While the court may have found the state-by-state quota system established by Addendum 1 invalid under federal law, the plan still stands from the perspective of the states. The Commission realizes that its determination of non-compliance places the Secretary of Commerce in a difficult situation. But it felt that it was important, at least as a matter of record, to follow through on its procedures.”

The ISFMP Charter requires the Executive Director to notify the State, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of the Interior of the Commission’s determination within ten working days of the Commission’s finding. Upon receipt of the recommendation, the Secretary of Commerce has 30 days to review the recommendation and take final action, which can include a complete closure for the commercial harvest of scup in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These actions are the result of ACFCMA, which mandates a cooperative state/federal program to conserve and manage valuable coastal fisheries. It requires the Commission to prepare and adopt fishery management plans (FMPs). It also imposes an obligation on each state covered by the FMP to implement and enforce the FMP’s regulations in state waters, or else face the possibility of a federal moratorium on fishing for the affected species in that state.

For more information, please contact: Robert Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400, ext. 318.

ASMFC 1999 Meeting Week Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>
January 11 -14	Alexandria, Virginia
March 15 - 18	Washington, D.C. area
May 17 - 20	North/South Carolina area
August 2- 5	Washington D.C. area
October 31 - November 4 (dates tentative)	Mystic, Connecticut

Scientific Activities of the Management and Science Committee

The Management and Science Committee met on October 20-21, 1998 at the Commission's Annual Meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia. The committee reviewed a report on recommendations for developing a coordinated nearshore ocean trawl survey for the Northeast Region. The objective of this initiative is to fill gaps in existing survey coverage and ensure coordination among surveys. The report summarizes recommendations developed on program organization and support, survey design of new surveys to fill gaps in coverage, coordination among existing and new surveys, gear and vessel acquisition, vessel docking and maintenance, and data management. The objectives of the coordinated nearshore trawl survey are to: (1) collect data on species composition, biomass, relative abundance, distribution, and seasonality of living marine resources; (2) record biological information to include size, age, and reproductive condition for target species; (3) identify and monitor essential fish habitat; (4) collect environmental data coincident with living marine resource monitoring activities; (5) provide biological specimens to cooperating agencies and other investigators upon request, subject to time and space limitations; and 6) manage and disseminate data collected by the survey. This program is modeled after a similar trawl survey conducted by the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program, South Atlantic region (SEAMAP-SA). Further details of this program will be developed prior to the Commission's Spring Meeting.

In May 1997 the MSC developed a Stock Assessment Peer Review Process, which was subsequently adopted by the ISFMP Policy Board. The MSC has further developed this process by drafting standard procedures for conducting Commission stock assessment peer reviews, including appointment of external panel members, meeting logistics, invitational travel, and standard report formats. The full Process was readopted by the Policy Board at the October 1998 annual meeting and will be published and distributed by the Commission. The Commission has used this process for the American shad, Atlantic sturgeon, and horseshoe crab external peer reviews and is currently using this process in conducting the Atlantic menhaden peer review on November 16-18, 1998 (see article on pages 6 & 12).

The MSC is continuing to compile information on fisheries-independent and power plant data sources, as well as information to characterize Atlantic coast recreational and commercial fisheries. This information will be published by the Commission upon completion. The MSC will be working on several new initiatives during 1999, including a workshop on alternative uses of regulatory discards, a workshop on multispecies interactions focused on Atlantic sea herring and Atlantic menhaden, a workshop on modeling uncertainty in marine fisheries stock assessments, aquaculture activities following on the NMFS workshop, and fish health issues. If you would like further information on these issues please contact Dr. Lisa Kline at 202-289-6400 or lkline@asmfc.org.

ASMFC Lobster Management Board Endorses LCMT Area Proposals: *Calls for Development of Addendum 1 to Implement Proposals*

On October 27, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission American Lobster Management Board reviewed proposals from four of the seven Lobster Conservation Management Teams (LCMT) established by Amendment 3 to the American Lobster Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Specifically, the Board endorsed the initial proposals for Areas 3, 4, and 6, and the Outer Cape, recognizing that the LCMT and the states will need to refine these

proposals in the future based on updated technical and assessment information. The actions of the Board were identical to their endorsement of the Area 2 proposal in August, 1998.

At the meeting, Ernest Beckwith, Chair of the American Lobster Management Board and Director of the Connecticut Fisheries, stated his pleasure at the way the LCMT process has progressed. "The success of Amendment 3 is largely founded upon the ability of the LCMTs to develop sound conservation measures that will achieve the egg production milestones of the Plan, while ensuring the viability of the fishing industry which depends upon a healthy, productive American lobster resource. From what we've seen so far, the LCMTs are well on their way to succeeding in both fronts. Credit is also due to the states' in their efforts to make the LCMT process move smoothly and efficiently. We would not be where we are today without significant commitment of the lobster fishermen and state staff in the LCMT process."

Amendment 3 of the American Lobster FMP established LCMTs for each of the seven management areas established by the Plan. Area 3 encompasses offshore federal waters from Maine to North Carolina. Area 4 encompasses state and federal waters south of Long Island to mid-New Jersey. Area 6 encompasses state waters of Long Island Sound. The Outer Cape encompasses state and federal waters east from the tip of Cape Cod to Nantucket.

The LCMTs were created to advise the Board concerning all aspects of the implementation of Amendment 3 and to recommend changes to the management program. The LCMTs were charged with investigating the need for trap reductions or other conservation measures to achieve the egg production required in the rebuilding schedule. Area management allows lobster fishermen to address concerns and needs which may be specific to their fishing area.

All proposals were reviewed based on their ability to achieve the Plan's effort reduction and egg production goals. A draft addendum to include the proposed management measures will be prepared and distributed in December 1998 for comment.

The proposals submitted contain measures that will begin to rebuild egg production based on current information available. The proposals vary according to the area, and include the following management measures: increasing the minimum gauge size, maximum gauge size, increasing the vent size, capping effort, limiting the number of traps per vessel, and area closures.

For more information, please contact: Amy Schick, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 317.

NOAA Releases Draft FMP for Overfished Atlantic Swordfish, Sharks And Tunas

A Draft Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to address overfished North Atlantic swordfish, Western Atlantic bluefin tuna, and large coastal shark stocks is now available for public review from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). NMFS is seeking comment from fishermen, conservationists and other interested members of the public on the draft proposal to protect and rebuild these and other highly migratory species.

The Draft FMP was developed by NMFS to rebuild highly migratory species identified as overfished. The Draft FMP was completed with help from an advisory panel composed of fishermen, scientists, regional fishery management councils, state officials, and conservationists.

The Draft FMP is part of a number of new and modified stock rebuilding plans required for overfished stocks under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act amended by Congress in 1996. It is the second proposal to be distributed for public comment. The draft fishery management plan provides a list of alternative actions.

The draft highly migratory species fishery management plan is the first comprehensive plan for Atlantic tunas, swordfish, and sharks. It replaces and updates separate plans that had been prepared for Atlantic swordfish and sharks. Under the draft, rebuilding plans are proposed for bigeye tunas, north Atlantic swordfish, and large coastal sharks. For Atlantic bluefin tuna, a preferred rebuilding alternative is not identified, due to the need to wait for the results of a new stock assessment and ICCAT management recommendations (available late November). The draft plan also addresses other important requirements under the Magnuson Stevens Act, including bycatch communities, essential fish habitat, and safety at sea.

A brief summary of the primary components of the draft plan for each species group follows:

Atlantic tunas: Prohibit gillnets, adopt June-May fishing year, limit longline access.

Bluefin tuna: Several alternative rebuilding programs are examined. The Fisheries Service does not identify a preferred alternative for rebuilding because new information on stock status and negotiations at the 1998 ICCAT meeting could identify new rebuilding alternatives. The preferred alternative for Atlantic bluefin tuna rebuilding will be developed following the November 1998 ICCAT meeting. The draft plan allows for modifications when new stock assessments are available and the actual rebuilding schedule to be implemented in the final rule.

Bigeye tuna: Adopt a 10-year rebuilding program to be negotiated at ICCAT.

Yellowfin tuna: Recreational bag limit of three fish/angler/trip

Atlantic swordfish: Adopt a 10-year rebuilding program which would require a 27 percent decrease in the total North Atlantic swordfish harvest level, (estimated to be 8,000 metric tons annually) which would be negotiated at ICCAT in 1999. The draft plan includes:

- adopting a three-month time/area closure in the Florida Straits for longline vessels to help protect juvenile swordfish populations;
- requiring a vessel monitoring system and gear marking to enforce time/area
- closures; count dead discards of swordfish in Atlantic fisheries against the total quota;
- deducting recreational swordfish landings from the incidental swordfish quota;
- providing workshops for longline vessel operators;
- establishing a limited access provision for the longline and handgear fisheries and place limits on gear and deployment in these fisheries.
- adopting measures designed to reduce longline fishery bycatch.

Atlantic sharks: Establish a limited access fishery. Add 15 species to the current list of five species that are prohibited from retention or landing, including dusky shark. Extend the finning prohibition to all species.

Commercial shark fisheries:

Large coastal sharks would be divided into two sub categories –ridgeback and nonridgeback.

- Establish a minimum size limit for ridgeback species under current catch levels.
- Reduce the non-ridgeback quota by 66 percent.
- Establish measures to account for all sources of fishing mortality.
- Set seasons and adjust any under or overharvests in the same half-year season.
- State-reported landings numbers identified after federal fishery closures would be deducted from the next year's quota.

Pelagic shark quota would be reduced to account for porbeagle catch and blue sharks dead discards over and above 10-year average.

Small coastal shark quota would be reduced by 80 percent (This reduction would still allow catch levels higher than currently observed.)

Recreational shark fishery:

- Catch and release only for large and small coastal sharks.
- Establish a bag limit of 1 pelagic shark/vessel/trip.
- Require that all sharks landed by recreational anglers have heads, tails and fins attached.

Other proposed measures for all highly migratory species fisheries:

- Require observers on bluefin tuna harpoon and purse seine vessels.
- Require completion of logbooks within 24 hours after hauling a longline set.
- Require mandatory registration of shark, swordfish, tuna recreational fishing tournaments.
- Require permits and logbooks for highly migratory species charter/headboat operators, with a provision to carry observers if selected.

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel, established through the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act, would replace the Shark Observation Team.

The public is invited to comment on the draft proposal through January 25, 1999. The draft proposal is available from written comments can be sent to: Rebecca Lent, Chief, Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. For more information, please contact: Susan Weaver at 202-482-2610.

ASMFC Approves Amendment 1 to the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan

The original Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Bluefish was prepared cooperatively by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine fisheries Commission. The FMP was adopted by the Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Council in October 1989. In 1996 the Commission and Mid-Atlantic Council began the development of Amendment 1 to the 1989 Bluefish FMP. Because the Bluefish FMP has a limited number of management options to control fishing mortality, the Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Council identified the need to broaden the suite of management measures that could be used to reduce fishing mortality on the bluefish stock. In addition, the amendment was developed to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act that was enacted in October 1996. The Commission approved that Amendment on October 22, 1998 at its Annual Meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia. The Mid-

Atlantic Council adopted the Amendment to be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval on October 7, 1998.

The plan's objectives are to: (1) increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery; (2) provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish; (3) provide for cooperation among the coastal states, the various regional marine fishery management councils, and federal agencies involved along the coast to enhance the management of bluefish throughout its range; (4) prevent recruitment overfishing; and (5) reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

To achieve these goals the Amendment includes a series of management measures, as well as, a nine-year plan for rebuilding the stock. Rebuilding will be accomplished through a graduated reduction in the fishing mortality rate (F). For the first two years of the rebuilding plan (1999-2000), F will remain at the current level (F=0.51) and then will be reduced to F=0.41 in years 3-5 (2001-2003) and finally to F=0.31 in years 6-9 (2004-2007). The Amendment also requires that the target fishing mortality rate for the next fishing year be set at the lesser level specified in the mortality rate reduction schedule or the level observed in the most recent year for which data are available.

The Amendment includes an overfishing definition comprised of two components: (1) a maximum fishing mortality (F) threshold; and (2) a minimum stock size threshold. The maximum F threshold is specified as F_{MSY} , which is currently defined as F=0.40, and the minimum biomass threshold is specified as $\frac{1}{2}$ the biomass required to produce the maximum sustainable yield, currently defined as 118 million pounds.

Operator permits for commercial, party, and charter boats; vessel permits for commercial, party and charter boats, as well as, dealer permits will be required by the Amendment. To help eliminate the duplication of state and federal permits, the Amendment will allow states with a permit system in place to implement mechanisms consistent with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). The Amendment also requires party vessel, charter vessel, commercial vessel, and dealer reports.

The Amendment establishes the Bluefish Monitoring Committee, which is a joint committee of the Commission and Mid-Atlantic Council. The Bluefish Monitoring Committee will annually review the best available data and recommend to the Commission Bluefish Management Board and The Mid-Atlantic Council Committee commercial and recreational management measures designed to assure that the target mortality level for bluefish is not exceeded.

At this time no minimum fish size or minimum mesh size is being recommended for the commercial bluefish fishery. The Amendment allows minimum fish and mesh sizes to be used, if needed, to control fishing mortality.

The Amendment establishes a state-by-state quota system where states quotas are based on the historic proportion of commercial and recreational landings for the period 1981-1989. 17% of the total allowable landings will be allocated to the commercial fishery based on the proportion of recreational and commercial catches from 1981-1989. If the commercial quota is less than 10.5 million pounds, the quota may be increased to 10.5 million pounds if the recreational fishery is not anticipated to land their entire allocation for the upcoming year.

Under this Amendment any state that has a commercial landings less than 0.1 percent of the total coastwide commercial landings in the last preceding year for which data are available would be eligible for *de minimis* status. States with *de minimis* status will only be required to report annually in lieu of weekly reporting.

The Amendment continues the current 10 fish recreational possession limit. No size limit or seasonal limits are being proposed at this time however these are management tools that can be used at a later time if needed to control fishing mortality. 83 percent of the total allowable landings would be allocated to the recreational fishery, based on the historic proportion of recreational and commercial landings from 1981-1989.

For more information, please contact: Robert Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 318.

RESOLUTION of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Recognizing and Thanking Georgia, the Host State of Our 57th Annual Meeting

WHEREAS, the weather has been smiling down upon us in fine Georgian fashion; and

WHEREAS, the Jekyll Island Club Hotel provided a lovely setting to sit out on the porch and let the gentle coastal breezes lull you to sleep; and

WHEREAS, the Spanish moss-covered live oaks, Victorian towers, and great Georgian porches on a misty morning cast a mystical spell transporting us back in time; and

WHEREAS, the welcoming reception was so well attended and enjoyed that no one wanted to leave at the appointed hour; and

WHEREAS, the sights and sounds of Crane Cottage encouraged chefs to serve up char-broiled fettuccini alfredo; and

WHEREAS, the golf tournament was the best attended and most professionally run by the very competent Georgia Coastal Resources Division; and

WHEREAS, the opportunities for fishing were enhanced by the thoughtful provisions of bait, tackle, license and maps of places to fish, almost every element needed to catch fish; and

WHEREAS, the clam island surf was ideal for a bath-like swim, which must have scared all the fish offshore; and

WHEREAS, the Coastal Resources Division was clever enough to enlist meeting participants to board the Research Vessel Anna and “shrimp for their supper” (we only hope no one asks Jack to sing, too); and

WHEREAS, there were so many wonderful events and functions to attend that it was exceedingly difficult to locate Commissioner and staff members; and

WHEREAS, there were so many fun activities for spouses that many were lost for hours and hours; and

WHEREAS, all the good folks at Georgia's Coastal Resources Division and the Jekyll Island Club Hotel took care to think of every detail to make our stay here comfortable, relaxing and still very productive; and

WHEREAS, the Low Country Boil was a real high-light and a hoot for everyone but the pig; and

WHEREAS, we are extremely fortunate that the Jekyll Island Club Hotel has not been declared a "peanut free zone;" and

WHEREAS, the quality and enjoyment of this meeting is a befitting celebration to the end of Paul Sandifer's tenure as Chairman.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission declares the 57th Annual Meeting set a new standard for great hospitality, good food, and scenic settings, that we declare this the best Annual Meeting of the 20th Century and that Georgia will always remain on our minds, in our memories and in our hearts.

Atlantic Coast States Resolve to Take a More Active Role in Fish Health Advisories

On October 22, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission adopted a resolution that supports a more active role by Atlantic coast state fisheries management agencies in the management and communication of risks posed by the consumption of chemically contaminated marine fish. Specifically, the resolution urges state fishery management agencies to develop a closer working relationship with their public health and environmental agencies to ensure the communication of consistent messages to the public about seafood consumption. To that end, the resolution also encourages state fishery management and public health agencies to work together in developing a consistent and unified coast wide position on the nature of public health risks posed by consumption of seafood with chemical contaminants.

In passing this resolution, the 15 member states of the Commission recognize the need for a standard approach to guide state fishery and public health agencies in their responses to public health concerns regarding the risks associated with the consumption of seafood contaminated with chemicals such as heavy metals, PCBs, dioxins, and related organochlorides. It has not been unusual for states, even neighboring states, to issue different public health advisories for the consumption of marine fish such as striped bass and bluefish. Not only does this confuse the fishing and seafood-consuming public, but also places doubt in the public's mind about the ability of state fishery management and public health agencies to make informed decisions about public health.

The U.S. Environmental Agency (EPA) has taken the lead in developing a step-by-step approach for the assessment, management and communication of risks posed by the consumption of chemically contaminated seafood. The resolution encourages the states to review the EPA-recommended approach and develop their own positions on the nature of public health risks posed by consumption of seafood with chemical contaminants. "With this resolution, state fishery managers have agreed to not only work within their respective states but with each other

to develop consistent fish health advisories. We also wanted to acknowledge the work EPA has done in developing a risk-based approach which the states can now use as a guideline,” said Paul Sandifer, Commission Chair, at the Commission’s Annual Meeting on Jekyll Island, Georgia.

For more information, please contact: Dr. Lisa Kline, Director of Research & Statistics, at (202)289-6400, ext. 305.

Many Legislators & Governors’ Appointees Turn Out for Productive Georgian Meeting

On October 21, 1998, the Commission’s Legislators and Governor’s Appointees (LGAs) met in one of the best attended meetings in the history of the Commission’s LGA meetings. The meeting of ten Legislators and twelve Governor’s Appointees continued the recent tradition of growing interest and participation on the part of LGAs.

Legislators’ Chair Senator Goldthwait first recapped the events of the Legislators Luncheon held during the August meeting week in Portland, Maine. Legislators and their proxies agreed to the success of the August meeting and suggested agenda items for the next Legislators meeting in August of 1999. These include the difficulty in persuading their respective legislatures and constituents to pass legislation necessary to implement Commission management decisions, management by the states of the steadily increasing Commission workload, and consideration of meeting schedules that accomodate critical session time and election cycles.

The LGAs were briefed by Rep. Abbott on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Restructuring Committee. The proposal, which you’ll recall having been discussed in the ISFMP Policy Board, will authorize a one year pilot program in which state delegations will serve on most all management boards and state votes will be determined by caucus of the delegation Commissioners in attendance. Additionally, Rep. Abbott explained the Committee addressed, though did not endorse, a proposal by the Advisory Committee to establish an “Advisory Seat” on each of the ISFMP management boards. The LGAs decided not to address the Advisory seat issue and adopted the following endorsement:

Move that the recommendations of the Ad Hoc ISFMP Restructuring Committee, excluding the recommendations concerning the Advisory process, be adopted.

The LGAs wish to continue to convene during the year. Mr. Melvin Shepard recommended that a subsequent LGA agenda include consideration of the role of LGAs, including the purpose of meetings and the responsibility of LGAs for adequate state participation by all appointees. The LGAs wish to meet in general sessions at the Spring and Annual Meetings to consider and discuss amendments to the one year pilot program to improve the management process.

The LGAs then heard from LGA management board representatives on species updates. An offshoot from this discussion was a suggestion that executive summaries be provided in the briefing books to assist in organizing and highlighting the issues and decisions facing the boards and committees. The Councils currently provide these overviews with their briefing materials and those Commissioners who also attend Council meetings, have found the overviews helpful. The LGAs then adopted the following motion:

Move that the Legislators and Governor’s Appointees recommend to staff in the future that an executive summary be prepared for each section of the briefing book, including motions and

ongoing issues of importance, in addition to the full document that is generated for each Commissioner.

The groups then elected officers for 1999. The Chair of the Legislators will again be Maine State Senator Jill Goldthwait, and the Vice Chair, New Hampshire State Representative Dennis Abbott. The Governor's Appointees Chair will continue to be New Hampshire's Steve Driscoll, assisted by his Vice Chair, Damon Tatem from North Carolina.

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

1999 Northern Shrimp Season to be Reduced by 15 Percent

On November 4, 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission decided to reduce the fishing season for northern shrimp in 1999 by almost 15 percent in order to conserve the resource. The Commission's Northern Shrimp Section voted unanimously to set a net season of 90 total days from the months of December, 1998, through May, 1999.

"Everybody agrees that this is a resource that is in trouble," said Board Chair John Nelson of New Hampshire. "The question is how much should be done to avoid having the kind of stock collapse that we saw in the 1970s, and at the same time allow the industry some type of fishery."

The Northern Shrimp Section's decision was a compromise between the 40 days recommended by its Technical Committee and the 105 days recommended by its industry Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel was in line with the season length that governed the 1998 fishery. The Section defeated amendments that would have both opened up the fishery in line with the Advisory Panel recommendation, and restricted the fishery even further.

The northern shrimp fishery is jointly regulated by the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Northern Shrimp Section. The cooperative management program has been in place since 1972. The resource is subject to natural fluctuations, and for the past three years it has been recognized that poor recruitment in the northern shrimp resource would lead to trouble in the fishery. In 1998 the season was limited to 105 days, and landings dropped by 40 percent to approximately 4,000 metric tons. The stock assessment conducted in recent months indicated that the resource was falling further, and that greater conservation would be needed.

The Advisory Panel recommendation was based on a belief that landings would decrease this year in any event because of market issues and anticipated poor winter weather. However, the Northern Shrimp Section determined that a reduction in the fishing season was necessary, striking a compromise between the recommendations of the Technical Committee and Advisory Panel. The 1999 season for net fisheries was set for December 15 – 23, January 4 – 26, February 1 – 23, March 1 – 16, April 1 – 28, and May 3 – 25, for a total of 90 days. In addition, no fishing for or landing of northern shrimp will be allowed on weekends. The trap season was set for January 10 through March 10, with no weekend closures.

The Section held a public hearing, during which most members of the industry favored adopting the Advisory Panel recommendation. The northern shrimp fishing industry, mostly trawlers, is under severe pressures from groundfish fishing restrictions and sees northern shrimp as a necessary alternative during the winter months. However, Section member Phil Coates argued that the stock was in very poor condition, and that the fishery may be facing a collapse of the

resource similar to conditions that lead to a total closure of the fishery in 1978, and severely restricted fisheries for some years thereafter. Section member Bill Adler of Massachusetts warned, "Everybody better be ready that if this does not work, we'll have to come back next year and take action that will be drastic." Technical Committee Chair Dan Schick of Maine reported that under the 90-day season, fishing mortality will continue to be high and the stock will continue to decline.

For more information, please contact: Amy Schick, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 317.

ASMFC Comings & Goings

Catherine Davenport – On October 15, 1998 Catherine Davenport was sworn in as Virginia's new Governor's Appointee to the Commission. Catherine has worked within the commercial fisheries industry for nearly 22 years. She is the owner of Dyer Creek Seafood, a wholesale seafood dealer she also owns and operates a marine railway boat repair facility. Catherine has served on the Commission's Striped Bass Advisory Committee since January 1997. Currently, Catherine is Chair of the Finfish Management Advisory Committee at Virginia Marine Resources Commission and is serving on the Virginia Marine Product Board. The Governors Environmental Stewardship committee is one in which she has also served diligently and she regularly attended public hearings on fisheries matters. The Commission would like to welcome Catherine Davenport as the newest Governor's Appointee.

Najih Lazar – On October 30, 1998, Najih resigned his position with the Commission and will be working with Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). Najih began working with the Commission in August 1994 as a Marine Fisheries Assessment Biologist, during which he worked on Commission stock assessments for tautog, winter flounder, and bluefish. He also conducted stock assessment training workshops. Najih has accepted a position working with RIDEM as a Fisheries Supervising Biologist. In his new position, Najih will be conducting applied research and management on marine resources in Rhode Island and will supervise and assist other staff scientist with the design and execution of their research. He will be responsible for fish stock assessment work on important recreational and commercial fisheries. Najih will represent the State on scientific committees of the Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service and regional fishery management councils. Good luck Najih! You will be missed.