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

Horseshoe Crab Board Extends Addendum V Provisions to Fall 2010

The Commission's Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved extending the provisions of Addendum V to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab for an additional year as it awaits the results of the upcoming peer-reviewed stock assessment.


Photo: Sheila Eyler, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Addendum V's measures include a delayed, male-only harvest in New Jersey and Delaware, prohibiting the harvest and landing of male and female horseshoe crabs from January 1 through June 7 in the Delaware Bay, and restricting the annual harvest to 100,000 males per state from June 8 through December 31. As with all Commission plans, states can implement more conservative management measures. In the case of New Jersey, it currently maintains a moratorium on the harvest and landing of horseshoe crab.

The Addendum also requires a delayed harvest in Maryland, prohibiting horseshoe crab harvest and landings from January 1 through June 7 and prohibits landing of horseshoe crabs in Virginia from waters outside the Bay from January 1 through June 7. No more than forty percent of Virginia's quota may be landed from ocean waters and those landings must be comprised of a minimum male to female ratio of 2:1.

The Addendum's measures seek to address the needs of the migratory shorebirds, particularly the red knot, while allowing a limited commercial bait fishery. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Shorebird Technical Committee has indicated that the red knot, one of many shorebird species that feed upon horseshoe crab eggs, remains stable at very low population levels. Red knots have shown no sign of recovery, despite a nearly 70 percent reduction in horseshoe crab landings since 1998.

Based on the most recent surveys of horseshoe crabs, management measures over the last several years have resulted in increased juvenile abundance and no trend in adult abundance in the Delaware Bay region. A horseshoe crab trawl survey administered by Virginia Tech shows no significant trend across all horseshoe crab ages and sexes over the past six years. However, the Virginia Tech coastal survey and a Delaware Bay survey continue to show increased recruitment of juvenile crabs. A survey of spawning crabs on the beaches of Delaware Bay indicates stable female and male spawning activity over the past nine years.

Inside This Issue

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and 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.

Upcoming Meetings

9/28 (9:30 AM):
ASMFC Weakfish Management Board Conference Call. Call 1-866-931-7845 to join the conference call (Code: 126951). Public comments will be taken as time permits. For more information, please contact Nichola Meserve.

9/29 (10 AM - 5 PM):
ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel, Hilton Norfolk Airport Hotel, 1500 North Military Highway, Norfolk, Virginia.

10/1:
ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Technical, Holiday Inn - Inner Harbor, 301 West Lombard Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

10/2:
Joint meeting of the ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Technical Committee and the USFWS Shorebird Technical Committee, Holiday Inn - Inner Harbor, 301 West Lombard Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

10/5 - 9:
ASMFC Basic Stock Assessment Workshop (Part 1), Cavalier Oceanfront Hotel, Oceanfront at 42nd Street, Virginia Beach, Virginia. For more information, please contact Dr. Genevieve Nesslage at gnesslage@asmfc.org.

10/8 (10 AM - 4 PM):
ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel, Holiday Inn BWI Airport Conference Center, 890 Elkridge Landing Road, Linthicum Heights, Maryland.

10/13 - 15:
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Princess Royale, 9100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, Maryland; (410) 524-7777.

10/29 (1 - 4 PM):
ASMFC Northern Shrimp Section, Gulf of Maine Research Institute, 350 Commercial Street, Portland, Maine.

11/2 - 5:
ASMFC 68th Annual Meeting, Hyatt Regency Newport Hotel and Spa, 1 Goat Island, Newport, Rhode Island; (401) 851-1234.

11/9 - 13:
ASMFC Basic Stock Assessment Workshop (Part 2), Cavalier Oceanfront Hotel, Oceanfront at 42nd Street, Virginia Beach, Virginia. For more information, please contact Dr. Genevieve Nesslage at gnesslage@asmfc.org.

Learning from Others

Anyone who has gone fishing has probably come back to the dock empty handed and seen others busy at work cleaning their full limit. The first reaction is to admire the catch and congratulate them on their good luck. When it is the same group each weekend at the cleaning station, the reaction changes to thinking that something more than luck might be involved. There is much to be learned from watching others who are successful. The same applies to looking at the best practices of fisheries managers from other regions. Here is a short list from one council[1].

Following Scientific Advice – In its 30 year history this council has never authorized harvests larger than the limits recommended by its scientific advisors. Within the region there is a political and cultural acceptance of the crucial role of science. Fishing industry leaders regard science as the foundation of sound fishery regulations. The strong flow of scientific information making such management possible rests on political support from fishermen, coastal communities, and government leaders who understand the importance of science to successful fisheries management.

Precautionary Catch Limits – Besides adhering to the science, catch limits are crafted with a risk-adverse approach. Risk and uncertainty are carefully considered in setting quotas. Fishing is limited by multiple measures that hedge against the chance of overestimating the resource and underestimating the effects of fishing. Scientists determine acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for each species. Managers set the final limits or total allowable catch at levels below that. They close fisheries as necessary to ensure actual catch does not exceed the ABCs. Additional buffers are used to provide for marine predators and to accommodate the risks associated with scientific uncertainty. Managers cut quotas at the first hint of bad news and go up slowly on good news.

Habitat Protection – Extensive bottom trawl and other fishing closures have been established to protect vulnerable habitat and nontarget species. These represent nearly half of the area within the jurisdiction of the council, and resulted from extensive efforts to identify areas vulnerable to the impacts of fishing gear.

Bycatch Reduction – Fleet-wide caps are established for groundfish fisheries and are used to shut down fisheries or close large areas when bycatch limits are reached. Time and area closures are used to protect species especially vulnerable to trawling. Individual vessel quotas have been established for some fisheries enabling boats to move off high bycatch areas without having to rush to grab their share of the total catch. Collectively, these measures have resulted in voluntary sharing of bycatch data by fishermen allowing them to identify "hot spots" and avoid them.

Monitoring Removals of Target and Incidentally Caught Species – All groundfish vessels longer than 60 feet are required to carry observers at least 30% of the time. Larger vessels and shore plants are required to have 100% coverage. The largest vessels must carry two observers. At sea-observers collect and report data on both catch and discards. Plant observers report on all species landed.

Rigorous Enforcement of Catch – Catch reporting is mandatory for all vessels. Catch, bycatch, and closed area regulations are strictly enforced and electronic vessel monitoring systems are mandatory in many fisheries. Penalties are heavy and range into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, especially for the larger vessels.

Transparent and Inclusive Public Discourse in Fishery Management – The council, its advisory panel, and its scientific and statistical committee all operate in open meetings, drawing input from other organizations, scientists, and stakeholders. The council believes successful management involves gathering broad perspectives, multiple views, and ideas from other disciplines and competing stakeholders. It realizes that support for its science-based management approach is strengthened by policies that allow all interested parties to review the data and analytical methods used by the scientists.

These approaches have succeeded in rebuilding a number of stocks and resulted in an enviable portfolio of healthy and abundant stocks, accounting for more than half of the total U.S. catch. Participants will readily admit that these results have come through hard work, great angst, and sacrifice.

The goal of learning from others should not be to imitate their methods as much as it should be to replicate their results. The North Pacific is obviously not the North Atlantic. However, the best argument for other approaches is show they produce the same or better results. We will know we have arrived when others start to adopt our methods as their best practices.

[1]Taken from Sea Change, a report commissioned by the University of Alaska and the Marine Conservation Alliance (www.marineconservationalliance.org/news/sea_change07.pdf).

Weakfish
Cynoscion regalis

Interesting Facts:
*** The name weakfish refers to the tender, easily torn membrane of the fish's mouth, rather than its fighting ability.**
*** Delaware declared weakfish its state fish in 1981.**

Largest Recorded: 38 inches, 19 lbs and 2 oz. (Delaware Bay, 1989)

Maximum Age: 17 years

Age at Maturity: 90% mature at age 1, 100% mature at age 2

Stock Status: Depleted, overfishing is not occurring

Species Profile: Weakfish
Board Initiates Addendum to Address All Time Low in Weakfish Biomass

Introduction

Weakfish have been one of the most important components of a mixed-stock fishery on the Atlantic coast since the 1800s. Over the past decade, however, weakfish biomass has declined to an all time low. Analyses recently approved for management use indicate that fishing mortality is not the cause of this decline, but that natural mortality has increased substantially since the late 1990s from such possible factors as predation, competition, and environmental stressors. As a consequence of current stock size, recent total fishery removals (landings and dead discards combined) represent a significant proportion of the remaining biomass, and are unsustainable. In response, management revisions are under consideration that would reduce harvest, including a harvest moratorium as the most stringent option. Rebuilding the stock will also require a reduction in natural mortality, which managers have limited ability to influence.

Life History

Weakfish occur along the Atlantic coast of North America from Nova Scotia to southeastern Florida, but are more common from New York to North Carolina. Warming of coastal waters in the spring prompts an inshore and northerly migration of adults from their offshore wintering grounds between Chesapeake Bay and Cape Lookout, North Carolina to nearshore sounds, bays, and estuaries. Spawning occurs shortly afterwards, peaking from April to June, with some geographical variation in timing. Females continuously produce eggs during the spawning season and release them over a period of time rather than once. In the fall, an offshore and southerly migration of adults coincides with declining water temperatures.

Feeding on microscopic animals, larval weakfish journey from spawning areas to nursery areas, located in deeper portions of coastal rivers, bays, sounds, and estuaries. They remain in these areas until October to December of their first year, after which the juveniles migrate to the coast. Growth in weakfish is especially rapid in the first year and they mature at a young age. Size at age-1 is variable but most fish are 10 to 11 inches long. As adults, weakfish are often found near the periphery of eelgrass beds, perhaps because weakfish feed primarily on shrimp, other crustaceans, and small fish that are found near these grass beds.

Recreational & Commercial Fisheries

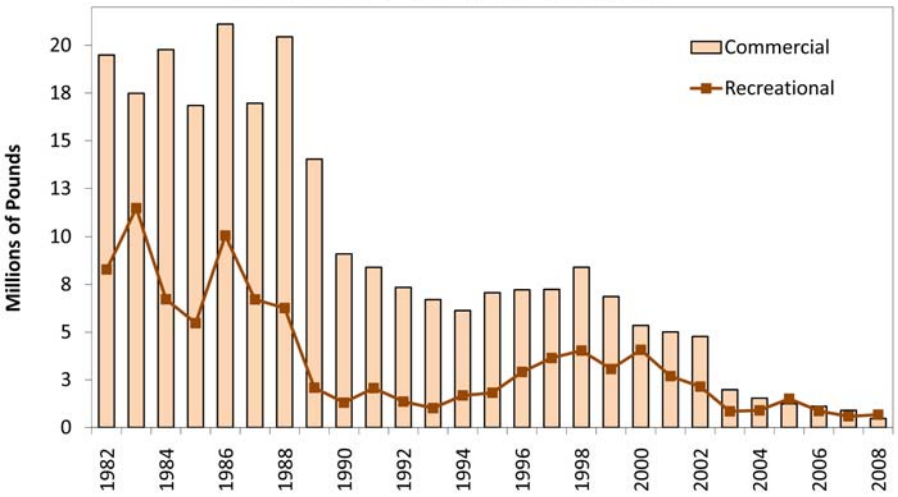
Weakfish have supported fisheries along the Atlantic coast since at least the 1800s. Recently, however, fishermen have had increasing difficulty landing weakfish. From 1950 to 1970, commercial landings fluctuated without trend, ranging from three to nine million pounds. The early 1970s began a period of tremendous growth in the fishery, with landings peaking at 36 million pounds in 1980. The commercial fishery declined steadily throughout the 1980s, dropping to a low of six million pounds in 1994. Following an increase in abundance due to management measures, commercial harvest increased slowly through 1998. Beginning in 1999, commercial landings began to decline again, and by 2008, were reduced to an historic low of less than 500,000 pounds. The primary commercial gears for weakfish are trawls and

Photo: John McMurray, nyflyfishing.com

gillnets, although weakfish are also landed using pound nets and haul seines.

Recreational landings have followed a similar trend to that of commercial landings. After several harvests above 10 million pounds in the early 1980s, landings decreased to two million pounds by 1989, and hovered between one and two million pounds through the early 1990s. Harvest then increased to over four million pounds by the late 1990s, before exhibiting a decline like that in the commercial fishery. The 2008 recreational harvest is also at an historic low of below 700,000 pounds.

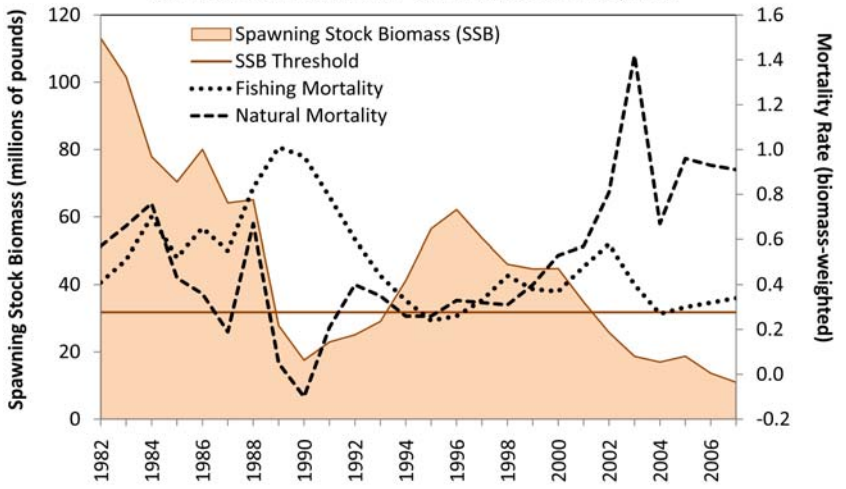
Figure 1. Commercial and Recreational Weakfish Harvest
Source: NMFS & ASMFC State Reports, 2009



Stock Status

The last weakfish stock assessment was conducted and peer reviewed in 2009. The resulting stock status for weakfish is depleted, with overfishing not occurring. Between 1982 and 1990, annual spawning stock biomass (SSB), as of January 1, declined drastically from 113.1 million pounds to 17.6 million pounds, with high fishing mortality rates driving the decline. Implementation of management measures in the early to mid-1990s reduced fishing mortality and resulted in an increase in SSB to a peak of 62.1 million pounds in 1996. After a slight decline through 2000, the stock began another drastic decline to the time-series low of 11 million pounds in 2007. The recent decline in biomass is not attributed to fishing mortality, which has remained relatively low and stable. Rather, natural mortality has increased to be two to four times the level of fishing mortality in recent years.

Figure 2. Estimates of January 1 Weakfish Spawning Stock Biomass, and Fishing and Natural Mortality Rates
Source: ASMFC Weakfish Technical Committee, 2009



Note: F estimates are not comparable to the F target and threshold in Amendment 4 due to changes in the stock assessment methodology.

Atlantic Coast Management Considerations

In 1985, as a result of population declines and limited biological information, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission developed an Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish. While the goals of the plan and its two subsequent amendments were well intentioned, rebuilding of the stocks did not occur until the mid-1990s when the states implemented more restrictive regulations, first voluntarily, and then for compliance purposes once the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act enabled implementation of a mandatory plan (Amendment 3). A subsequent stock assessment showed a weakfish resource that had experienced modest growth, which prompted the development of Amendment 4 to build upon these gains. Amendment 4 was implemented in 2003 to establish appropriate biological reference points, set a rebuilding schedule if limits were exceeded, revise the reference period on which recreational management options were based, increase the bycatch allowance, and establish a biological sampling program. Two subsequent addenda in 2005 and 2007 replaced Amendment 4's biological sampling program and bycatch reduction device certification requirements for the southern penaeid shrimp trawl fishery.

Despite the gains seen in the late 1990s, a stock assessment following the implementation of Amendment 4 depicted falling biomass after 1999. However, that stock assessment could not technically be used as a basis for management action, seeing as a review panel did not endorse the methods employed. Recognizing that fishing mortality was not the cause for

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ASMFC Proposed Management Actions

This fall, Atlantic coast states will be conducting hearings on a number of proposed management actions effecting several species management programs. Following is a brief overview of the issues addressed for each species.

Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the proposed measures by either attending public hearings or providing written comments. The opposite page provides a listing of state hearings. Visit www.asmfc.org (Breaking News) to obtain copies of the public comment documents and to find out more about the hearing details.

American Lobster Draft Addendum XV to Amendment 3

Draft Addendum XV proposes changes to the Lobster Conservation Management Area 1 (LCMA 1 - Gulf of Maine) permit process in federal waters in response to increasing lobster fishing effort in that area since 2000 (highest on record since 1981). While lobster abundance in the Gulf of Maine is relatively high there is concern that high levels of fishing effort in the area are not likely to be sustainable if abundance returns to long-term median levels. Further, limited access programs in other lobster management areas and recent constraints on traditional trawl fisheries have the potential to shift trap gear fishing effort to LCMA 1 where there is open access.

The Draft Addendum proposes to maintain the historic level of trap fishing effort (2004 – 2008) and curtail a potential influx of new federal lobster vessels in LCMA 1 federal waters fishery (3 – 200 miles from shore). It also proposes limiting entry of vessels which have not fished with traps in LCMA 1 in the past from fishing in Area 1 with traps in the future. Ultimately, whatever actions are approved as part of the final addendum would be in the form of recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service for action in the federal waters portion of LCMA 1.

Public comment will be accepted until 5:00 PM EST on October 9, 2009.

Atlantic Menhaden Draft Addendum IV to Amendment 1

Draft Addendum IV proposes extending the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery harvest cap, established through Addendum III, for an additional three years (2011 – 2013). Under the proposed Addendum, the Board would annually review measures to determine if they are appropriate given the most recent information available about the stock and fishery.

The addendum's initiation was requested by the Commonwealth of Virginia in order to accommodate its legislative process as well as ensure that the current management program is extended while menhaden research efforts continue. Virginia's legislature, which meets January through March each year, is responsible for regulating the menhaden reduction fishery in state waters. With a new Addendum in place this year, Virginia state administrators can work with the legislature in early 2010 to amend Virginia law to extend the harvest cap without the current cap expiring.

Addendum III established the current annual cap of 109,020 metric tons on reduction fishery harvests in Chesapeake Bay as a precautionary measure while research was conducted to address the question of menhaden abundance in the Bay. The cap has been in place since 2006 and will extend through 2010. Harvest for reduction purposes is prohibited in the Chesapeake Bay when 100% of the cap is landed. Overharvest in any given year would be deducted from the next year's quota. Addendum III also includes a provision allowing under-harvest in one year to be credited only to the following year's cap, not to exceed 122,740 metric tons. Since Addendum III was implemented, reduction landings of menhaden from Chesapeake Bay has not exceeded the cap.

Public comment will be accepted until 5:00 PM EST on October 1, 2009.

Scup and Black Sea Bass Draft Addendum XX to the FMP

Draft Addendum XX proposes changes to the transfer provisions for the commercial fisheries for both black sea bass and scup summer period (May 1-October 31) managed under the Commission's plans.

The fishery management plan (FMP) does not provide adequate guidance for Commission-only state-by-state quota management. As a practical matter, states routinely under harvest or slightly overharvest their state-specific allocations due to delays in reporting,

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Atlantic Coast States Schedule Public Hearings

Maine Dept. of Marine Resources
September 21; 6 PM
Rockland, Maine
Issue: American Lobster

October 5; 6 PM
Freeport, Maine
Issues: Atlantic Menhaden, Shad, and Striped Bass

October 6; 6 PM
Portland, Maine
Issue: American Lobster

October 7; 6 PM
Ellsworth, Maine
Issue: American Lobster

New Hampshire Fish and Game
October 8; 6:30 PM
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Issues: Lobster (6:30 PM), Striped Bass (7 PM), and Shad (7:30 PM)

Massachusetts Div. of Marine Fisheries
September 30; 4:30 PM
Gloucester, Massachusetts
Issues: Lobster, Scup & Black Sea Bass

September 30; 7 PM
Gloucester, Massachusetts
Issues: Shad and Striped Bass

Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife
October 1; 6:00 PM
Narragansett, Rhode Island
Issues: Scup & Black Sea Bass, Shad, and Striped Bass

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
October 6; 7 PM
Old Lyme, Connecticut
Issues: Scup & Black Sea Bass, Striped Bass, and Shad

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
September 24; 7 - 9 PM
East Setauket, New York
Issues: Scup & Black Sea Bass, and Striped Bass

September 28; 7 PM
East Greenbush, New York
Issue: Shad

October 5; 7 PM
East Setauket, New York
Issue: Weakfish

New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife
October 5; 7 - 8 PM
Port Republic , New Jersey
Issues: Scup & Black Sea Bass (7 PM) and Shad (8 PM)

October 6; 7 - 8 PM
Toms River, New Jersey
Issues: Striped Bass (7 PM) and Weakfish (8 PM)

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
September 29; 7 PM
New Town, Pennsylvania
Issues: Shad and Striped Bass

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
October 7; 6 PM
Dover, Delaware
Issues: Striped Bass (6 PM), Weakfish (6:30 PM), and Shad (7:30 PM)

Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources,
October 6; 5:30 - 9 PM
Annapolis, Maryland
Issues: Atlantic Menhaden, Shad and Striped Bass

October 13; 5:30 - 9 PM
Annapolis, Maryland
Issues: Scup & Black Sea Bass and Weakfish

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
September 28; 6 PM
Newport News, Virginia
Issues: Shad, Scup & Black Sea Bass, Striped Bass

September 29; 6 PM
Newport News, Virginia
Issue: Atlantic Menhaden

October 7; 6 PM
Newport News, Virginia
Issue: Weakfish

North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries
September 24; 6 - 8 PM
Atlantic Beach, North Carolina
Issue: Weakfish and Striped Bass

September 30; 6 - 8 PM
Elizabeth City, North Carolina
Issue: Shad

October 14; 6 - 7 PM
Manteo, North Carolina
Issues: Striped Bass and Weakfish

South Carolina Dept. of Natural Resources
September 29; 7 PM
Georgetown, South Carolina
Issue: Shad

October 7; 7 PM
Walterboro, South Carolina
Issue: Shad

October 14; 7 PM
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
Issue: Weakfish

Georgia Coastal Resources Division
September 24; 6:30 PM
Midway, Georgia
Issue: Shad

October 6; 6:30 PM
Midway, Georgia
Issue: Weakfish

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
October 15; 6 PM
Jacksonville, Florida
Issue: Weakfish

inconsistencies in the data collection processes, unanticipated changes in catch rates, and implementation delays in trip limit changes or fishery closures. The FMP requires that each state deduct overages from the following year's quota when they occur. The Draft Addendum proposes a process to reconcile quotas to address states unintended minor overages.

Specifically, the Draft Addendum proposes to establish clear policies and administrative protocols to guide the allocation of transfers from states with underages to states with overages. It also proposes to automatically reconcile a state's overage in its entirety in a year where the coastwide quota or fishing period (e.g. scup summer period) quota was not exceeded. The proposed options would allow Commission staff to streamline and coordinate the transfers of quota as well as allow for quota transfers to reconcile overages after year's end.

Public comment will be accepted until 5:00 PM (EST) on October 14, 2009.

Shad Draft Amendment 3

Draft Amendment 2 proposes a suite of monitoring and management measures to protect, enhance, and restore American shad stocks to sustainable levels.

The Draft Amendment was developed in response to the findings of the 2007 benchmark stock assessment for American shad, which indicates that American shad stocks are currently at all-time lows and do not appear to be recovering. It identified the primary causes for the continued stock declines as a combination of excessive total mortality, habitat loss and degradation, and migration and habitat access impediments. Although improvement has been seen in a few stocks, many remain severely depressed compared to historic levels.

The Draft Amendment proposes modification to current coastwide commercial and recreational management measures. Commercial management options include reducing harvest, closing fisheries with exceptions for systems with a sustainable fishery, closing fisheries on mixed stocks, and a coastwide moratorium. Recreational fisheries management options include reducing harvest, implementing a licensing or permitting program, closing fisheries with exceptions for fisheries with a sustainable system, allowing a catch and release fishery only, and a coastwide moratorium.

To improve data collection, the Draft Amendment proposes increased fisheries-independent and dependent monitoring. This includes monitoring of juvenile and adult American shad stocks; hatchery production; and commercial, recreational, and bycatch fisheries. Additionally, the Draft Amendment proposes increased coordination of monitoring activities for river systems under shared jurisdiction, as well as between freshwater and marine agencies.

Public comment will be accepted until 5:00 PM on October 16, 2009.

Striped Bass Draft Addendum II to Amendment 6

Draft Addendum II proposes to allow unused coastal commercial quota of striped bass to be rolled over from one year to the next. Options include state eligibility and the amount of unused quota that may be carried over. The Draft Addendum also outlines procedures for implementing and monitoring quota roll over. Under the Draft Addendum, roll over would be prohibited if the fishing mortality rate exceeds the Plan's target or if the spawning stock biomass is below the Plan's target.

The existing management program addresses coastal commercial quota overages, requiring payback of an overage in the subsequent year, yet it is silent on coastal commercial quota underages. Since the implementation of Amendment 6, coastal commercial quota underages have been more common than overages. While avoiding a quota overage signifies managerial success, a quota underage represents lost opportunity to commercial harvesters. Quota underages may result from changes in fish abundance or distribution, environmental factors, fishing effort, and regulatory measures.

The Draft Addendum presents a hypothetical situation to analyze the potential effect of allowing roll over. Had all unused coastal commercial quota in 2003 through 2007 been rolled over and then harvested in 2004 through 2008, the average increase in the total coastal commercial quota would have been less than 15 percent and the average increase in the total coastwide harvest less than two percent. An analysis by the Technical Committee indicated that a 15 percent increase in the coastal commercial quotas would have a limited effect on the fishing mortality rate, and that large fluctuations in recreational harvest, which is not regulated by quota, present a greater level of risk of exceeding the fishing mortality target or threshold. However, the Technical Committee also noted that the potential effect of roll over on the stock increases if quota underages occur due to population decline. Other concerns included the two to three year lag in reporting the fishing mortality rate estimate for any given year and that allowing roll over could provide an incentive to under report harvest.

Public comment will be accepted until 5:00 PM (EST) on October 16, 2009.

Weakfish Draft Addendum IV to Amendment 4

Draft Addendum IV will propose a range of options to reduce fishing mortality, including complete harvest mora-

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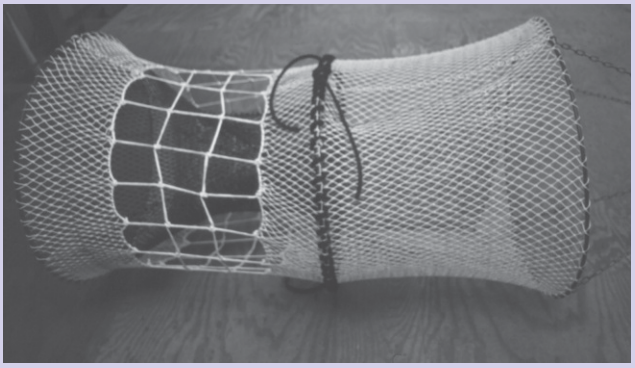
Science Highlight: Reducing the Environmental Impact of Fishing Gear through Gear Improvements

Anyone who's dropped a line into the ocean knows that when it comes to fishing, you don't always get what you want. Fishing gear can catch a lot of animals other than the intended target: juvenile fish that are too small to keep, protected species like dolphins, sea turtles, and sturgeon, and unwanted species that are targeted by other fisheries. Fishing gear can also cause habitat damage, and even continue to kill fish after the gear has been lost in the ocean. Inefficient fishing gear is bad for the fish and the environment, but it's also bad for the fishermen. It's a waste of time, energy, and net space to have to sort out the valuable catch from the worthless catch, and different fisheries can end up conflicting with each other when the gear catches juveniles or unwanted adults that other fisheries are targeting. Making the gear more efficient means people can fish smarter, not less.

The Commission's Fishing Gear Technology Work Group (FGTWG) was formed to review and report on the research and testing that has been done on fishing gear improvements, and determine if there are new gear improvements that are ready to be implemented in the management process. The FGTWG prioritized 30 fisheries on the basis of their environmental impact and the size of the fishery, and then chose the top 10 ranked fisheries to review. These included trawl fisheries for flounder, scup, croaker, northern and southern shrimp, and Atlantic herring; the Atlantic menhaden purse seine fishery; the lobster pot fishery; gillnet fisheries for coastal sharks, spiny dogfish, and striped bass; and the recreational striped bass fishery. The final report was presented to the ISFMP Policy Board at the Summer Meeting.

The report evaluated a number of gear technology improvements. Probably the most well-known gear improvement is the turtle excluder device (TED), a trap-door-like device installed in trawl nets that is pushed open by the weight of a captured turtle, allowing the turtle to escape before it drowns. Research continues to make these devices more even more efficient and effective.

There were other success stories like the Nordmøre grate, a device that is fitted into shrimp trawls that filters out finfish and lets shrimp pass through into the net to be captured. This is good for the juvenile cod, haddock and other groundfish that were caught as bycatch in this fishery, and good for the fishermen, who get a cleaner catch of shrimp in their nets.



BRD/TED Combination Gear

The report highlighted bycatch reduction panels (BRPs) for the Chesapeake Bay pound net fisheries as a gear improvement that should be implemented more widely in management. These panels significantly reduced the capture of weakfish, summer flounder, croaker, and bluefish that were too small for fishers to keep, but right now these panels are only used in the Potomac River and only voluntarily.

Recreational fishers can do their part, too, by choosing circle hooks when they practice catch and release angling. Circle hooks are designed to set only in the corner of a fish's mouth, and have been proven to reduce injuries like gut hooking that can kill released fish.

But there is still plenty of work to be done. Scientist and fishers are working on new gear designs, like the topless shrimp trawl, and gear improvements, like flexible bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) and lobster pot escape vents, that need to be researched and tested before they can be a part of the management process. The FGTWG recommended that the Commission encourage gear technology research to make our fisheries cleaner, more efficient, and more ecologically sound. For more information, please contact Katie Drew, Stock Assessment Scientist, at (202) 289-6400 or kdrew@asmfc.org.

Enhancements for SAFIS Data

ACCSP Presents at 139th Annual AFS Meeting

Enhancements for SAFIS Data

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) often performs data quality checks to ensure consistency between the various views of the commercial landings data. In July 2009, these checks resulted in an improvement in the way dealer reports in the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information Systems (SAFIS) are presented in the Data Warehouse.

Modifications now include those records submitted with incomplete fields. Incomplete fields can include dealer participant (dealer or fisher), area, port, gear or disposition. For those receiving daily e-mail updates about the records, it should be noted that all records were previously included in the nightly audits and are in the primary SAFIS tables.

The changes apply only to the copy of the data presented in SAFIS workbooks in the Data Warehouse. This modification resulted in the ability to view an additional 75 thousand records from 2004-2009. These records represent 1.45% of the total 5.19 million records. (Earlier years account for most of the differences less than 150 records were added to 2008 and less than 50 records were added to 2009).

ACCSP Presents at 139th Annual AFS Meeting

ACCSP was very proud to again present at the Annual American Fisheries Society Meeting held August 30th-September 3rd in Nashville, TN. The theme of this year's conference was "Diversity, the foundation of fisheries and the AFS: are we gaining ground?" More than 1,200 agency directors, fisheries scientists, administrators, educators, consultants, and field biologists participated in the event. Julie Defilippi, Data Coordinator, gave two presentations, "The sea change of marine fisheries data collection on the Atlantic coast" and "A global lobster look: a comparison of lobster management regimes in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand".

The mission of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) is to improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries and aquatic science and promoting the development of fisheries professionals.

About 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 coast wide, 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 and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For more information, please visit www.accsp.org or call (202) 216-5690.

ASMFC Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Shark Board Approves Addendum I to the Interstate Shark FMP

In August, the Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Sharks Management Board approved Addendum I to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Coastal Sharks. Addendum I modifies the finning and identification provision for the commercial smooth dogfish fishery and removes both the smooth dogfish recreational possession limits and 2-hour net check requirement for commercial large mesh gillnet.

The FMP originally required that the fins of all sharks harvested in the commercial fishery have fins attached naturally to the carcass through landing. The commercial smooth dogfish fishery is high volume, labor intensive, and requires an extremely fresh product in relation to other commercial shark fisheries. Requiring commercial fishermen to partially cut the fins at sea (necessary to properly bleed each fish) and then finish processing them back at the dock was considered unnecessary and overly burdensome. To address this, Addendum I allows commercial fishermen to remove all fins, with a fin to carcass ratio of 5% to 95%, from March through June. Fishermen are required to leave the dorsal fins attached to smooth dogfish carcasses though landing from July through February. This seasonal exemption is likely to minimize interactions between smooth dogfish and depleted shark species based on an analysis conducted by North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources. The analysis showed that the majority of smooth dogfish landings usually occur from March through June while the majority of sandbars are landed from July through February. The Board required that dorsal fins must remain attached from July through February to make identification easier during the seasons when smooth dogfish and sandbar are found in the same areas.

Addendum I removes smooth dogfish recreational possession limits because there is no evidence that possession limits are necessary for a sustainable fishery. The two-hour net check requirement for large mesh gillnets was removed following recommendations of the Law Enforcement Committee that such a measure is unenforceable and also concern that the requirement would impact several state water gillnet fisheries.

Copies of the Addendum I are available via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News.

ASMFC Proposed Management Actions (continued from page 8)

toria and limited bycatch only fisheries. It was developed in response to the findings of the 2009 weakfish stock assessment which shows weakfish stocks at an all time low and current fishery removals unsustainable under existing stock conditions. Specifically, the assessment indicated that weakfish abundance has declined markedly, total mortality is high, non-fishing mortality has recently increased, and the stock is currently in a depleted state. The assessment report was reviewed and approved for management use by an independent panel of fisheries scientists.

The Board has placed the Draft Addendum on a faster timeline than standard addenda. Staff and the Plan Development Team will prepare a draft for Board review and consideration on September 28th. If approved, the draft will then be made available for public review and comment shortly thereafter. The Board will meet again in November to consider public comment and take final action on the Draft Addendum. Under Commission procedures, the Board may opt to implement the Addendum under emergency action, with approved measures taking effect immediately upon Board action.

Copies of Draft Addendum IV will be available shortly after September 28th via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News. Public comment will be accepted until late October (final deadline to be set upon the Draft Addendum's release).

Visit www.asmfc.org (Breaking News) on or after September 22nd to view the preliminary agenda and register online. Note: all meetings are open to the public free of charge. Full registration fee includes social events and meeting materials.

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

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Species Profile: Weakfish (continued from page 5)

biomass decline, but that low fishing morality would be required for a timely recovery if natural mortality declines, the Weakfish Management Board approved several management options under Addendum II aimed at controlling expansion of the fishery when stock status improves. The Addendum reduced most states' recreational creel limits, reduced the bycatch allowance, and established several management triggers to facilitate prompt response to a change in landings.

Now with a favorably peer reviewed stock assessment available, the Weakfish Management Board has initiated the development of an addendum to respond to the assessment's results and scientific advice. The Review Panel agreed with the assessment's findings, concluding that stock rebuilding can only occur if total mortality (fishing plus natural) is reduced. While mangers have limited ability to influence natural mortality under single species management, the Draft Addendum will consider options to reduce fishing mortality, ranging from reduced harvest to complete harvest moratoria. Revised biological reference points will also be proposed given the change in assessment methodologies as well as stock conditions. Other aspects of the management plan may also need to be revised, such as the biological monitoring requirements, if a moratorium or bycatch only fisheries are implemented. Draft Addendum IV will be available for public comment in October, and the Management Board will consider final action on the options in early November.

ASMFC Comings & Goings

<u>Staff</u>

In August Meredith Wilson joined the Commission as Assistant to the Executive Director. Meredith has a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology from Texas A&M University at Galveston. Following graduation she worked as an instructor at a marine biology day camp for elementary students called Sea Campus Kids. At the end of the camp season, Meredith moved to Seoul, South Korea where she worked as a Kindergarten teacher at a private English Academy for a year and a half. While the time she spent overseas was a great learning experience, Meredith is excited to be back in the United States and working of marine resource issues again! Welcome aboard, Meredith.