

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS



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MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Catherine Blum, Fishery Management Plan and Rulemaking Coordinator
Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Fishery Management Plan Update

Issue

Update the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) on the status of ongoing North Carolina fishery management plans (FMPs).

Overview

This memo provides an overview on the status of the North Carolina FMPs for the May 2020 MFC business meeting.

At the MFC's August 2019 business meeting, staff provided an update on changes being implemented designed to achieve efficiencies in the FMP process. Changes include the timing of the steps in initial development of draft FMPs, how the division works with the FMP advisory committee and how the committee operates, and what the FMP documents look like. Before the initial development of a draft FMP, a scoping period will be held to notice the public that the review of the FMP is underway, inform the public of the stock status (if applicable), solicit input from the public on the list of potential management strategies to be developed, and recruit advisers to serve on the FMP advisory committee. These changes are being incorporated beginning with Amendment 3 to the Southern Flounder FMP and Amendment 2 to the Shrimp FMP.

Blue Crab FMP

The MFC approved measures to end overfishing and achieve sustainable harvest with the adoption of the Blue Crab FMP Amendment 3 at its February 2020 meeting. Management measures are being implemented by proclamation and include a closed season, five-inch minimum size limit for mature female hard crabs, removing all cull ring exempted areas, and expanding and establishing crab spawning sanctuaries, among other management measures.

An additional management measure is to use the framework approved in Amendment 3 for designating Diamondback Terrapin Management Areas (DTMAs) where use of an approved

terrapin excluder device will be required in crab pots. As set forth in the framework, division staff gave a presentation to the Southern Regional Advisory Committee April 8 regarding two proposed DTMA's in the southern coastal area of the state. The framework also includes final approval of any DTMA by the MFC. Staff will give a presentation to the MFC at the May meeting about this action item. For more information, please refer to the Blue Crab FMP section of the briefing materials.

Southern Flounder FMP

The MFC adopted Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder FMP at its August 2019 business meeting. Amendment 2 moved quickly through the process of development and adoption to address the overfished and overfishing status of the southern flounder stock as determined by the 2019 coast-wide stock assessment. Proclamations were issued that closed the commercial and recreational seasons on Sept. 4, 2019. A separate proclamation was issued for the fall commercial flounder season per Amendment 2. The commercial fishery will reopen by proclamation on a date in 2020 not yet determined. The 2020 recreational flounder season for hook and line and gigs will be Aug. 16 through Sept. 30 for internal and ocean waters of the state. The minimum size limit will remain at 15 inches total length, and the creel limit will remain at four fish per person per day during the open recreational season. Since all species of flounder are managed under the same recreational regulations, the recreational season applies to all recreational flounder fishing.

The season closures implemented under the authority of Amendment 2 were deemed critical to the successful rebuilding of the southern flounder stock, while other, more comprehensive, long-term management strategies are examined and developed in Amendment 3. The primary management strategy for Amendment 3 is long-term sustainable harvest in the southern flounder fishery. Consistent with changes being implemented designed to achieve efficiencies in the FMP process, a scoping document outlining the potential management strategies was developed for the public. Fisheries stakeholders provided comments at three scoping meetings that were held in December 2019, through an online form, and by mail. At its February 2020 meeting, the MFC received a summary of the public comments received, received an overview of the potential management strategies and the FMP timeline, and approved the goal and objectives for Amendment 3. Staff is continuing to develop the first draft of Amendment 3 and will work with the Southern Flounder FMP Advisory Committee to further develop the draft plan later this year.

Shrimp FMP

The 2019 N.C. FMP Review Schedule shows the review of the Shrimp FMP is underway. To begin the development of the Shrimp FMP Amendment 2, the division is examining management strategies to further reduce bycatch of non-target species in the shrimp trawl fishery and potential changes to existing shrimp management strategies adopted in the 2006 FMP, 2015 Amendment 1, and 2018 Revision to Amendment 1. The division also took into consideration input received from the MFC through motions passed at its August 2018 and February 2019 meetings regarding general areas of focus and possible goals and objectives for Amendment 2. Consistent with changes being implemented designed to achieve efficiencies in the FMP process, a scoping document outlining the potential management strategies was developed for the public. Fisheries stakeholders provided comments at three scoping meetings that were held in January 2020, through an online form, and by mail. At its February 2020 meeting, the MFC received a summary of the public comments received, received an overview of the potential management

strategies and the FMP timeline, and approved the goal and objectives for Amendment 2. Staff is continuing to develop the first draft of Amendment 2. The Shrimp FMP Advisory Committee will be appointed later this year to work with the division to further develop the draft plan.

Estuarine Striped Bass FMP

For the review of the Estuarine Striped Bass FMP, the assessment of the Central Southern Management Area (CSMA) stocks (Tar-Pamlico, Neuse, and Cape Fear rivers) and the Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River (A-R) stock that began in 2017 is continuing. The Peer Review Workshop for the A-R stock assessment was held Dec. 2-5, 2019 in New Bern. The peer reviewers felt there was too much uncertainty in stock status determination to recommend the current version of the stock assessment in its existing form for management use at this time. They provided areas of focus to improve the stability of the model. While staff was working on the recommended follow-up tasks, an error in the data was discovered that is also being addressed and evaluated for its overall effect on the model. A new base run of the A-R assessment will be presented to the peer reviewers via desktop review and WebEx meetings in May 2020.

After reviewing available data, life history information, and stock assessment techniques, the Estuarine Striped Bass FMP Plan Development Team determined traditional stock assessment methods would not be appropriate for CSMA stocks because of the high hatchery contribution and lack of natural recruitment in these systems. The plan development team has completed the final draft of the CSMA Assessment Report for internal review, including an evaluation of the stocks using a matrix model for the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers and a tagging model for the Cape Fear River. The assessment of all the estuarine stocks will inform the review of the FMP and development of Amendment 2. This is a joint FMP with the Wildlife Resources Commission, so all updates and reviews are joint efforts by both agencies.

Spotted Seatrout FMP

A benchmark stock assessment for spotted seatrout is underway coinciding with the scheduled Spotted Seatrout FMP review. The prior stock assessment from 2014 indicated that the stock is not overfished and is not experiencing overfishing. The Spotted Seatrout FMP Plan Development Team met in June 2019 for the stock assessment Planning Workshop and in September 2019 for the Data Workshop. The plan development team is completing the working papers from the spotted seatrout Data Workshop and preparing to incorporate data through 2019 to be more reflective of recent fishing activity, as soon as the data are verified and available. A second Data Workshop will be held following this effort.

Action Needed

For informational purposes only; **no action is needed at this time.**

NORTH CAROLINA FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS
May 2020

