

# Director's Report





INFORMATION  
WILL BE  
PROVIDED AT  
THE MEETING.



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ASMFC

# FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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## ***American Lobster Assessment Indicates Record High Abundance for Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank Stock & Record Low Abundance for Southern New England Stock***

The 2015 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report indicates the American lobster resource presents a mixed picture of stock status, with record high stock abundance and recruitment in the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Georges Bank (GBK), and record low abundance and recruitment in Southern New England (SNE). The GOM/GBK stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. GOM and GBK were previously assessed as separate stock units and are now combined into one stock unit due to evidence of seasonal migratory patterns and connectivity between the two areas. Conversely, the SNE stock is severely depleted with poor prospects of recovery, necessitating protection.

### **Stock Status**

#### ***Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank***

GOM/GBK stock abundance has increased since 1979 and at an accelerated pace since 2007. Recruitment and spawning stock abundance have remained high between 2008 and 2013. Current stock abundance is at an all-time high. Exploitation (fishing mortality) declined after 1979 until the mid-1990s and then remained stable with higher exploitation on males than females. Current exploitation rates remain on par with the 2008-2013 average.

#### ***Southern New England***

SNE stock abundance increased from the early 1980s, peaked during the late 1990s, then declined steeply through the early 2000s to a record low in 2013. Both the assessment and peer review support the finding that the SNE stock is severely depleted. Declines in population abundance are most pronounced in the inshore portion of the stock where environmental conditions have remained unfavorable to lobsters since the late 1990s. The stock has collapsed and is undergoing recruitment failure. Despite attrition among the fleet and fewer traps fished for lobster, declines have continued. These declines are largely in response to adverse environmental conditions, including increasing water temperatures over the last 15 years combined with sustained fishing mortality.



*continued, see AMERICAN LOBSTER on page 11*

## Upcoming Meetings

*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 the deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.*

### Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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#### **September 14 - 18**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Beach House Resort, 1 South Forest Beach Drive, Hilton Head Island, SC.

#### **September 16 (10 a.m. - Noon)**

ASMFC Coastal Sharks Technical Committee Conference Call; go to <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/> for more details.

#### **September 17 (1 - 3:30 p.m.)**

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Allocation Working Group Conference Call; go to <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/> for more details.

#### **September 22 (1 - 5 p.m.)**

ASMFC Northern Shrimp Section, Portsmouth Public Library, 175 Parrott Avenue, Portsmouth, NH.

#### **September 29 - October 1**

New England Fishery Management Council, Radisson Hotel, Plymouth Harbor, Plymouth, MA.

#### **October 1 (1 - 3:30 p.m.)**

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Allocation Working Group Conference Call; go to <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/> for more details.

#### **October 6 - 8**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Doubletree Philadelphia Center City, 237 S Broad St., Philadelphia, PA.

#### **October 15 (1 - 3:30 p.m.)**

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Allocation Working Group Conference Call; go to <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/> for more details.

#### **November 2 - 5**

Joint Annual Meeting of the ASMFC & GSMFC, World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort, 500 South Legacy Trail, St. Augustine, FL.

#### **December 1 - 3**

New England Fishery Management Council, Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland, ME.

#### **December 7 - 11**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Doubletree by Hilton Oceanfront Hotel, 2717 W. Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, NC.

#### **December 8 - 10**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Westin Annapolis, 100 Westgate Circle, Annapolis, MD.

### 2016

#### **January 26 - 28**

New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Harborside, Portsmouth, NH.

#### **February 2 - 4**

ASMFC Winter Meeting, The Westin Alexandria, 400 Courthouse Square, Alexandria, VA.

#### **February 9 - 11**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, DoubleTree by Hilton New Bern-Riverfront, New Bern, NC.

#### **March 7 - 11**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Westin Jekyll Island, 110 Ocean Way, Jekyll Island, GA.

#### **April 12 - 14**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Montauk Yacht Club, Montauk, NY.

#### **April 19 - 21**

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, CT.



### Atlantic Striped Bass, America's Most Iconic Saltwater Fish: Sustainable and Good for the Economy

For many recreational anglers, professional chefs, and amateur cooks alike, Atlantic striped bass is the East Coast's most sought after fish. It is just as likely to be spotted at your neighborhood fish market as on the menu of the region's top restaurants. As steward of this iconic fishery since the enactment of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act in 1984, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) takes very seriously its duty to sustainably manage one of America's favorite fish.

Recently, Atlantic striped bass management has come under criticism from a group of "celebrity" chefs. Some have even gone as far as pledging not to serve wild Atlantic striped bass in their restaurants. Atlantic striped bass are not overfished and are not experiencing overfishing. With strong management measures in place, consumers can be confident the Atlantic striped bass they catch and eat are sustainably managed.

As you may know, the United States imports up to 90% of its seafood every year. By buying and eating locally caught seafood like Atlantic striped bass, you are choosing a sustainable, environmentally responsible product that supports American fishermen and fishing communities. In addition, many foreign caught fish are subject to questionable fishing practices, unsustainable management, and health standards that may not meet U.S. guidelines. It is important to know where your seafood comes from, and with Atlantic striped bass, you can be confident it is harvested responsibly.

While the 2013 benchmark stock assessment indicated female spawning stock biomass (SSB) has declined, it remains above the threshold of 127 million pounds. This decline was primarily due to below average year class strength from 2004 to 2009. However, to reverse the downward trend and ensure the fishery remains sustainable, ASMFC initiated coastwide reductions in Atlantic striped bass harvest with a goal of protecting the strong 2011 year class and increasing SSB. In addition, recognizing the importance of forage fish to top predators like Atlantic striped bass, ASMFC is exploring ways to manage these fish (e.g. Atlantic menhaden) to address ecosystem functions, such as predator demands.

Moving forward, the Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board will meet in November to discuss the performance of the new management measures. Early signs indicate the 2015 year class may be above average and the reduction in fishing effort is on track to meet our goals. As we witnessed during the historic comeback of Atlantic striped bass in the 1980s, one or two strong year classes can make a remarkable difference in the overall population.

Even the strictest management measures are ineffective in the face of illegal sales of Atlantic striped bass. ASMFC significantly strengthened coastwide tagging requirements in 2012. A mandatory commercial tagging program for all states and jurisdictions with commercial Atlantic striped bass fisheries was instituted and many states ratcheted up penalties for illegally harvested fish. The tagging program includes standardization of tag type, timely catch reporting, strict accounting of unused tags, and the use of biological metrics for determining state/jurisdiction tag quantity. This action was based on the recommendations of a multi-year, multi-jurisdictional investigation on illegal commercial Atlantic striped bass harvest within Chesapeake Bay, which revealed some control measures for regulating the harvest of Atlantic striped bass were ineffective or inadequately designed to maximize compliance.



Today, all legally caught commercial Atlantic striped bass can be identified with a tag similar to the one shown in the accompanying photo. Chefs, restaurants, and anyone involved with the consumption of commercially-harvested striped bass have a unique opportunity to help reduce this illegal harvest by pledging to purchase only legally harvested fish and advertising this action in support of sustainable fisheries and the U.S. fishing industry.

Since the Atlantic states orchestrated the historic comeback of Atlantic striped bass beginning in 1984, sustainable management has always been goal number one. The public entrusted ASMFC to do the right thing with one of our coast's most valuable resources. ASMFC has responded by making tough choices to ensure Atlantic striped bass will be there for future generations while providing opportunities for today's fishermen and consumers.

## Species Profile: Bluefish

### 2015 Benchmark Assessment Finds Resource Not Overfished and Not Experiencing Overfishing

#### Introduction

Bluefish are one of the most popular sport fish along the Atlantic coast. A highly mobile species, they are renowned for their predatory instinct, razor sharp teeth, and aggressive behavior. In the late 1970s, anglers petitioned the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to develop a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for bluefish to address concerns over population declines. The Bluefish FMP, passed in 1989, was the first management plan developed jointly by an interstate commission and regional fishery management council. Co-management is necessary because the fishery occurs in both state and federal waters.

Roughly a decade later, concern about the continued decline in bluefish abundance once again necessitated joint management action. By this time, a coastwide, collaborative research group had begun studying the dynamics of the coastal bluefish population to aid in management. Amendment 1 (1998) marked the start of a long-term plan to restore bluefish through progressive harvest restrictions. Since then, the bluefish population has slowly rebounded. In 2009, stock biomass exceeded its target level, and the stock was declared rebuilt a year earlier than planned.

In 2012, Addendum I established a coastwide sampling program to improve the quantity and quality of information available for use in future bluefish stock assessments. A benchmark stock assessment was conducted in 2015 which confirmed that bluefish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Today, the Council and the Commission continue to cooperatively manage bluefish.

#### Life History

Bluefish are a migratory, pelagic species found throughout the world in most temperate, coastal regions, excluding the eastern Pacific. Bluefish migrate seasonally, moving north in spring and summer as water temperatures rise and moving south in autumn and winter to the South Atlantic Bight. During the summer, concentrations of bluefish are found in waters from Maine to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. In winter they tend to be found offshore between Cape Hatteras and Florida. Bluefish generally school by size, with schools that can cover tens of square miles of ocean, an area equivalent to around 10,000 football fields.

Bluefish are fast growers and opportunistic predators, feeding voraciously on almost any prey they can capture. Over 70 species of fish have been found in their stomach contents, including butterfish, mackerel, and lobster. Razor sharp teeth and a shearing jaw movement allow bluefish to ingest large parts, which increases the maximum prey size bluefish can catch. Bluefish live up to 12 years and may exceed 39 inches and 31 pounds.

Bluefish reach sexual maturity at age two and spawn offshore from Massachusetts through Florida. This species is iteroparous, meaning a single fish can spawn multiple times throughout its lifetime. Discrete groups spawn at different times and are referred to by the season in which they spawn: the spring-spawned cohort and the summer-spawned cohort. Recent research has also identified a fall-spawned cohort, demonstrating an expanded and prolonged spawning season. The cohorts mix extensively on the fishing grounds and comprise a single genetic stock.

#### Species Snapshot



**Bluefish**  
*Pomatomus saltatrix*

#### Common Names:

Snapper, baby blues, choppers, elf, tailors

#### Interesting Facts:

- Widely distributed around the world in tropical and subtropical waters
- Voracious predators, known to be cannibalistic
- Fish exhibit a feeding behavior called the "bluefish blitz," where large schools of big fish attack bait fish near the surface, churning the water like a washing machine
- As in all extremely active predators, the digestive enzymes of bluefish are powerful and their meat will spoil quickly, so they need to be cooked soon after capture.

**Largest & Oldest Recorded:** 31 lbs., 12 oz.; 12 years old

**Age/Length at Maturity:** 2 years/14.9-20.1"

**Age/Length at Recruitment:** 1 year/9.3 - 11.1"

**Stock Status:** Rebuilt; not overfished and not experiencing overfishing



Photo (c) John McMurray, [www.nyflyfishing.com](http://www.nyflyfishing.com).

## Recreational & Commercial Fisheries

Bluefish support recreational and commercial fisheries along the entire Atlantic coast. The recreational fishery is most popular, accounting for approximately 80% of total removals in recent years. Anglers target bluefish near inlets and shoals that often hold large schools of bait, which attract bluefish into a feeding frenzy. The excitement involved in angling these aggressive fighters makes them the second most harvested species on the Atlantic coast, following Atlantic striped bass. According to the Marine Recreational Information Program, recreational harvest averaged 13.3 million pounds from 2010 to 2014. Catch and release is growing in popularity. From 1981 to 1985 only 18% of catch was released alive, while an average of 62% has been released alive from 2010 to 2014.

Commercial fishermen target bluefish using a variety of gears including trawls, gillnets, haul seines, and pound nets. Commercial harvest peaked in the 1980s, with the highest recorded harvest totaling over 16 million pounds (1981). Since then, landings have ranged from 14.5 - 5 million pounds. Currently, the commercial fishery is managed under a state quota system and yearly landings from 2010-2014 average 5.4 million pounds. Over the past decade, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia have landed the largest percentages of bluefish.

## Status of the Stock

The most recent bluefish stock assessment was conducted in 2015 and peer reviewed by the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Review Committee. Through the monitoring provisions of Addendum I (2012), it was possible to significantly increase the amount and quality of age data, resulting in improved age-length keys and catch-at-age data compared to the last benchmark assessment. The model uses data from 1985-2014, including total catch in weight, catch-at-age, and indices of abundance to estimate fishing mortality, spawning stock biomass, recruitment, and total abundance. The new assessment indicates that bluefish are not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. Fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.157 in 2014, below the mortality threshold of 0.190. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) was projected to be over 190 million pounds, which is 170% of its threshold but slightly under the target of 223 million pounds.

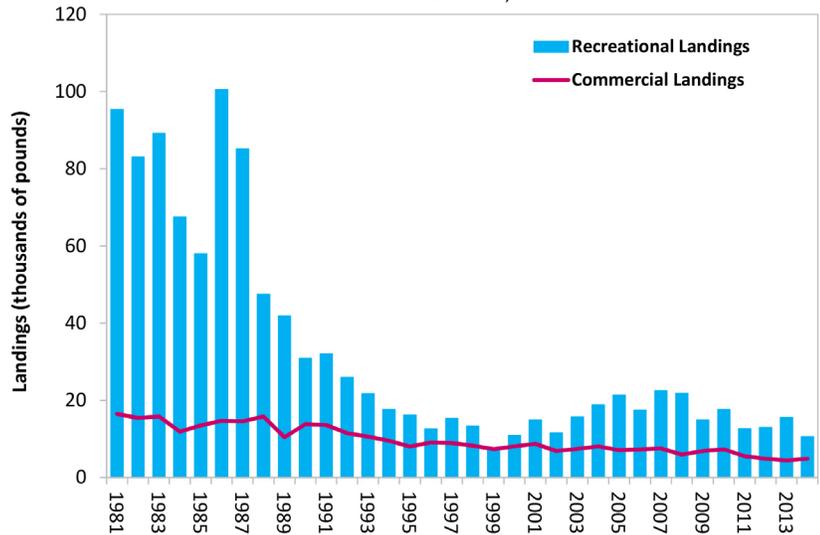
## Atlantic Coastal Management

Bluefish is managed under Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Bluefish and Addendum I. Amendment 1 allocates 83% of the resource to recreational fisheries and 17% to commercial fisheries. However, the commercial quota can be increased up to 10.5 million pounds if the recreational fishery is projected to not land its entire allocation for the upcoming year. The commercial fishery is controlled through state-by-state quotas based on historic landings from 1981-1989, while the recreational fishery is managed using a 15 fish bag limit. A coastwide biological sampling program to improve the quantity and quality of information used in future bluefish stock assessments was implemented in 2012 through Addendum I.

The Commission and Council approved an acceptable biological catch limit of 19.45 million pounds for the 2016 fishing season, an approximate 10% decrease from 2015 levels, in response to the 2015 stock assessment. The 2016 commercial quota and recreational harvest limit will be set once the final recreational harvest estimates for 2015 have been released in 2016. For more information, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, FMP Coordinator, at [krootes-murdy@asmfc.org](mailto:krootes-murdy@asmfc.org) or 703.842.0740.

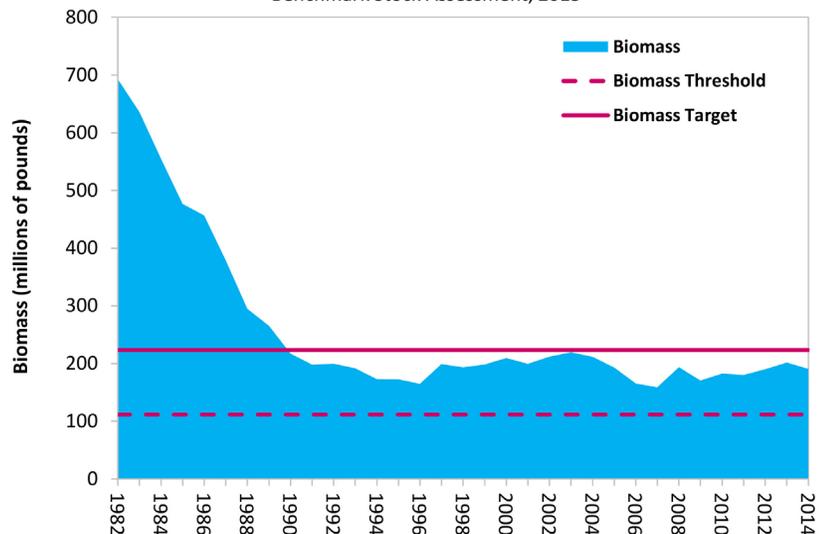
### Bluefish Recreational and Commercial Landings

Source: Northeast Regional SAW/SARC Bluefish Benchmark Stock Assessment, 2015



### Bluefish Biomass

Source: Northeast Regional SAW/SARC Bluefish Benchmark Stock Assessment, 2015



Timeline of Management Actions: FMP ('89); Amendment 1 ('98); Addendum I ('12)



**November 2-5, 2015**

**World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort  
500 South Legacy Trail  
St. Augustine, FL**

## **Preliminary Agenda**

*Please note: The agenda is subject to change. Bulleted items represent the anticipated major issues to be discussed or acted upon at the meeting. The final agenda will include additional items and may revise the bulleted items provided below. The agenda reflects the current estimate of time required for scheduled Board meetings. The Commission may adjust this agenda in accordance with the actual duration of Board meetings. Interested parties should anticipate Boards starting earlier or later than indicated herein.*

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2**

### **8:00 – 10:30 a.m. American Lobster Management Board**

- Discuss Management Response to the 2015 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report
- Report from Subcommittee (Subset of Board, Lobster Conservation Management Team and Technical Committee Members) on the Southern New England Stock
- Technical Committee Report
- Discussion and Initiation of an Addendum to Set Effort Controls for Jonah Crab-only Trap Fishermen
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 American Lobster Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance
- Review and Consider Approval of Advisory Panel Membership

### **10:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Atlantic Herring Section**

- Set Fishery Specifications for 2016-2018
- Review and Consider Approval of Draft Amendment 3 for Public Comment

### **1:45 – 3:45 p.m. Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board**

- Review Wave 4 Data (if available) for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Recreational Harvest and Discuss Potential Implications for 2016 Management
- Consider Continuing the Ad-Hoc Approaches to Regional Management for Black Sea Bass
- Consider Approval of the Terms of Reference for the Black Sea Bass Benchmark Stock Assessment
- Review the 2015/2016 Black Sea Bass Quotas Based on the Outcome of the September 2015 Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Science and Statistical Committee Meeting
- Update Board on Scup Scoping/Public Information Document for Amendment
- Update Board on the Schedule of Assessment Updates for Summer Flounder and Scup

### **2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Executive Committee (A portion of this meeting may be a closed session for Committee members only)**

- Status Report (Program and Committee Updates)
- Independent Program Review Progress

- APAIS Update
- Governance Update
- Executive Committee Membership Standard Operating Procedures
- Recommendations from the Operations and Advisory Committees on Project Funding

**4:00 – 5:30 p.m. ACCSP Coordinating Council**

- Status Report (Program and Committee Updates)
- Independent Program Review Progress
- Governance Update
- Executive Committee Membership Standard Operating Procedures
- Recommendations from the Operations & Advisory Committees on Project Funding
- Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

**6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Welcome Reception**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3**

**8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Executive Committee**  
*(A portion of this meeting may be a closed session for Committee members and Commissioners only)*

- Review Guidance Documents
- Review Fiscal Year 2015 Audit

**8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Habitat Committee**

- Discuss Improvements to Habitat Factsheet Content and Rollout
- Review 2015 Work Plan and Set 2016 Work Plan
- Discuss Progress on Fishery Management Plan Amendments, Habitat Bottlenecks White Paper, and Sciaenid Habitat Source Document

**8:30 a.m. – Noon Joint Meeting of the SEAMAP-SA and GSMFC Crustacean Workgroups**

**10:15 – 11:15 a.m. American Eel Management Board**

- Technical Committee Report on Maine's Life Cycle Survey Proposal
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 American Eel Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance

**11:30 a.m. – Noon Weakfish Management Board**

- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Weakfish Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance
- Update on 2016 Benchmark Stock Assessment

**Noon – 1:30 p.m. Legislators and Governors' Appointees Luncheon**

**1:30 – 3:00 p.m. Winter Flounder Management Board**

- Review the Groundfish Assessment and Review Meeting Stock Assessment Update Results for the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stocks
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Winter Flounder Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance

**3:15 – 5:45 p.m. Atlantic Menhaden Management Board**

- Update on Working Groups' Progress for Ecosystem Management Objectives and Allocation

**Public Comment Guidelines**

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

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

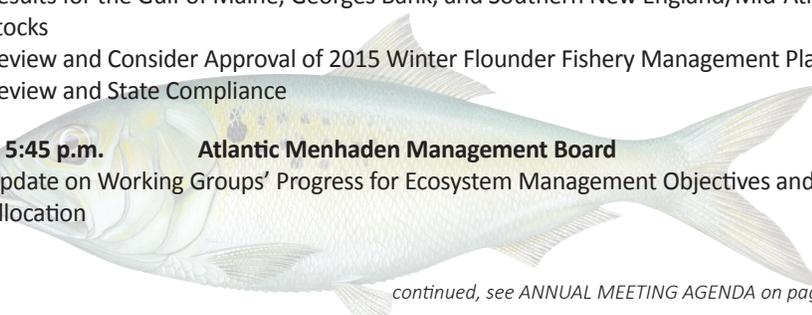
For topics that are on the agenda, but have not gone out for public comment, board chairs will provide limited opportunity for comment, taking into account the time allotted on the agenda for the topic. Chairs will have flexibility in deciding how to allocate comment opportunities; this could include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

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

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

1. Comments received 3 weeks prior to the start of a meeting week will be included with the main meeting materials.
2. Comments received by **5 PM Tuesday, October 27, 2015** will be distributed electronically to Commissioners/Board members prior to the meeting and a limited number of copies will be provided at the meeting.
3. Following the October 27 deadline, the commenter will be responsible for distributing the information to the management board prior to the board meeting or providing enough copies for the management board consideration at the meeting (a minimum of 50 copies).

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



*continued, see ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA on page 15*

# Fishery Management Actions



## Tautog PID Released for Public Comment

The Tautog Management Board is seeking public comment on the Public Information Document (PID) for Draft Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Tautog. The PID responds to the findings of the 2015 benchmark stock assessment which, unlike previous coastwide assessments, evaluated stock status regionally to reflect differences in life history characteristics and harvest patterns. Based on its endorsed regional approach, the assessment also recommended associated biological reference points to guide management at the regional scale. Since tautog are currently managed on a coastwide basis, the Board initiated the PID to consider a new regional management approach.

As the first step in the development of an amendment, the PID seeks to gather information concerning the tautog fishery and to provide an opportunity for the public to identify major issues and alternatives relative to the management of this species. Input received at the start of the amendment development process can have a major influence on the final outcome of the amendment. Issues presented in the PID include FMP goals and objectives, adaptive management, monitoring requirements and illegal fishing of tautog. In addition, in order to streamline the development of the plan amendment, the PID seeks specific input on the selection of regional stock areas for management use. The states of Massachusetts through Virginia have scheduled their hearings to gather public comment on the PID. The details of those hearings follow.

### Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

*September 29 at 6:30 PM*  
Fairfield Inn & Suites  
Vineyard Conference Room  
185 MacArthur Drive  
New Bedford, Massachusetts  
Contact: David Pierce at 617.626.1532

### Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

*September 30 from 6 – 9 PM*  
University of Rhode Island Bay Campus  
Corless Auditorium  
South Ferry Road  
Narragansett Rhode Island  
Contact: Jason McNamee at 401.423.1943

### Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

*September 24 at 7 PM*  
CT DEEP Marine Headquarters  
Boating Education Center (Rear Building)  
333 Ferry Road  
Old Lyme, Connecticut  
Contact: David Simpson at 860.434.6043

### New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

*October 1 at 6 PM*  
Bureau of Marine Resources  
205 North Belle Mead Road  
East Setauket, New York  
Contact: Steve Heins at 631.444.0435

### New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

*September 22 from 6:30 – 9:30 PM*  
Ocean County Administration Building  
Public Hearing Room 119  
101 Hooper Avenue  
Toms River, New Jersey  
Contact: Russ Allen at 609.748.2020

### Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control

*October 8 at 6 PM*  
DNREC Auditorium  
89 Kings Highway  
Dover, Delaware  
Contact: John Clark at 302.739.9914

### Maryland Department of Natural Resources

*October 7 at 5 – 6:30 PM*  
Ocean Pines Library Conference Room  
11107 Cathell Road  
Ocean Pines, Maryland  
Contact: Michael Luisi at 410.260.8341

### Virginia Marine Resources Commission

*October 6 at 6 PM*  
2600 Washington Avenue, Third Floor  
Newport News, Virginia  
Contact: Rob O'Reilly at 757.247.2248

Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the PID,

either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. The PID is available on the Commission website ([www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)) under Public Input. Public comment will be accepted until **5:00 PM (EST) on October 23, 2015** and should be forwarded to Ashton Harp, FMP Coordinator, 1050 N. Highland St, Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201; 703.842.0741 (FAX) or at [aharp@asmfc.org](mailto:aharp@asmfc.org) (Subject line: Tautog PID). For more information, please contact Ashton Harp, at [aharp@asmfc.org](mailto:aharp@asmfc.org) or 703.842.0740.

## Jonah Crab Interstate FMP Approved

In August, the Commission approved the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Jonah Crab. The FMP implements a suite of measures to manage and monitor the Jonah crab resource for the first time along the U.S. Atlantic coast. The Plan limits participation in the trap fishery to only those vessels and permit holders that already hold an American lobster permit or can prove prior participation in the crab fishery. All other harvesters using non-trap gear must obtain an incidental permit. It also establishes a 4.75" coastwide minimum size and requires the landing of whole crabs, except for individuals from New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia who can prove a history of claw landings before the control date of June 2, 2015.



Photo (c) MA DMF

The FMP seeks to cap effort and protect spawning stock biomass in the absence of a range-wide stock assessment. The Plan was initiated in response to concern about increasing targeted fishing pressure for Jonah crab, which has long been considered a bycatch in the American lobster fishery. Since the early 2000s, growing market demand has increased reported landings by more than six-fold. The vast majority of Jonah crab are harvested by lobstermen using lobster traps. With the increase in demand for crab, a mixed crustacean fishery has emerged that can target lobster, crab or both at different times of year based on modifications to the gear and small shifts in the areas in which traps are fished. The mixed nature of the fishery makes it difficult to manage a Jonah crab fishery completely separate from the American lobster fishery without impacting the number of vertical lines and traps in state and federal waters. Furthermore, a lack of universal permitting and reporting requirements makes it difficult to characterize catch and effort to the full extent in order to manage the fishery. In federal waters, the crab resource is not directly regulated but rather is regulated incidentally by the American lobster regulations. Therefore, in the absence of a comprehensive management plan and range-wide stock assessment, increased harvest of Jonah crab may compromise the sustainability of the resource.

The FMP establishes commercial, recreational, and fishery-dependent monitoring measures for the Jonah crab fishery. In addition to the issues of minimum size, permitting, and crab part retention addressed above, the Plan also establishes a non-trap incidental bycatch limit of 200 crabs per calendar day, or 500 crabs per trip extending longer than one calendar day and prohibits the retention of egg-bearing females. For fishery-dependent sampling, the plan requires 100% harvester reporting and 100% dealer reporting with port and sea sampling. Jurisdictions that currently require less than 100% harvester reporter are required

to, at a minimum, maintain their current programs and extend them to Jonah crab. In the recreational sector, the FMP establishes a possession limit of 50 whole crabs per person per day. Finally, the FMP specifies that states whose commercial landings are less than 1% of the three-year coastwide average may qualify for *de minimis* status. *De minimis* states are not required to implement fishery-independent or port/sea sampling.

Since the fishery primarily occurs within federal waters, the Board has recommended that NOAA Fisheries implement the provisions of the Jonah Crab FMP in federal waters, pursuant to the NOAA's authority under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act. The New England Fishery Management Council, which will meet in the fall to set its management planning activities for 2016, will consider whether the development of a Council Jonah Crab FMP will be one of its priorities. Regardless of its decision, the Commission and its federal partners will continue to work closely on Jonah crab management.

The FMP, which will be implemented by June 1, 2016, will be available by the end of August via the Commission's website, [www.asmf.org](http://www.asmf.org), on the American Lobster page under Fishery Management Plans. Upon recommending the FMP's final approval by the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board, the American Lobster Management Board agreed to move forward on the

development an addendum to identify management measures for crab-only trap fishermen (e.g., trap and landing limits). The Board will discuss the specific measures to be included in the addendum at its next meeting. For more information, please contact Megan Ware, FMP Coordinator, at [mware@asmfc.org](mailto:mware@asmfc.org) or 703.842.0740.

## Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass & Bluefish Annual Specifications Approved

The Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) have established specifications for the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries. The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

### Summer Flounder

For summer flounder, both groups approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit of 16.26 million pounds, an approximate 29% decrease from 2015. After accounting for projected discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries, this ABC is divided into a commercial quota of 8.12

*continued, see FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS on page 10*

**Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Specifications** (2015 values are provided for comparison purposes). Please note specifications for years 2016 and beyond may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

| Species         | Year | Commercial Quota (millions of pounds) | Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL) | Commercial Mesh Size | Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds) |
|-----------------|------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Summer Flounder | 2015 | 11.07                                 | 14"                               | 5.5"                 | 7.38  |
|                 | 2016 | 8.12                                  | 14"                               | 5.5"                 | 5.42  |
|                 | 2017 | 7.91                                  | 14"                               | 5.5"                 | 5.28  |
|                 | 2018 | 7.89                                  | 14"                               | 5.5"                 | 5.26  |
| Scup            | 2015 | 21.23                                 | 9"                                | 5"                   | 6.80  |
|                 | 2016 | 20.47                                 | 9"                                | 5"                   | 6.09  |
|                 | 2017 | 18.38                                 | 9"                                | 5"                   | 5.50  |
|                 | 2018 | 17.34                                 | 9"                                | 5"                   | 5.21  |
| Black Sea Bass  | 2015 | 2.24                                  | 11"                               | 4.5"                 | 2.33  |
|                 | 2016 | 2.24                                  | 11"                               | 4.5"                 | 2.33  |
|                 | 2017 | 2.24                                  | 11"                               | 4.5"                 | 2.33  |

## Fishery Management Actions (continued)

million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 5.42 million pounds for the 2016 fishing year. This decrease in catch and landings limits responds to the findings of the 2015 stock assessment update, which indicates that the summer flounder stock was experiencing overfishing in 2014. The fishing mortality rate in 2014 was estimated to be 16% above the fishing mortality threshold reference point. These results appear to be driven largely by below-average recruitment, as the assessment update indicates that the stock experienced four below average year classes from 2010 to 2013. The update also estimates that recruitment has been overestimated by a range of 22% to 49% for 5 of the last 7 year classes, which has contributed to an overestimation of stock size in recent years. According to the 2015 update, estimated biomass has been trending down since 2010.

Although reported landings have equaled or only slightly exceeded commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits in recent years, there is evidence of substantial illegal harvest in the form of unreported, underreported, or misreported landings. In 2013 and 2014, two separate investigations revealed that large quantities of summer flounder were being taken illegally under the guise of quota acquired through the Council's Research Set-Aside (RSA) program (the Council subsequently suspended the program in order to consider alternative cooperative research options). There may also be substantial non-RSA related illegal/unreported landings, although fewer details are available on the extent of unreported landings outside of the RSA program. While the exact amount of illegally harvested summer flounder is not known, the effect may have resulted in substantial overages of the fishery's annual catch limits (ACLs). For more information on the assessment update and its impacts on harvest limits for 2016, please see the Council's Summer Flounder Catch and Landings Limit Fact Sheet at <http://www.mafmc.org/s/Summer-Flounder-2016-Overview-8-6-15.pdf>.

### Scup

For scup, the Commission and Council approved an ABC of 31.11 million pounds.

After accounting for projected discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries, this ABC is divided into a commercial quota of 20.47 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 6.09 million pounds for the 2016 fishing year. This represents a decrease from 2015 levels due to a slight decrease in spawning stock biomass (SSB) as projected by the 2015 benchmark stock assessment.

### Black Sea Bass

For black sea bass, the Commission and Council approved an ABC of 5.50 million pounds. After accounting for projected discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries, this ABC is divided into a commercial quota of 2.24 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 2.33 million pounds for the 2016 and 2017 fishing years. Catch levels for 2016 and 2017 are unchanged relative to 2015 levels. Both the commercial quota and recreational harvest limit may be changed pending further review by the Council's Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) in September 2015. The next benchmark stock assessment is scheduled to be peer-reviewed through the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee in late fall 2016.

### Bluefish

For the bluefish fishery, the Commission and Council approved an ABC of 19.45 million pounds for the 2016 fishing season, an approximate 10% decrease from 2015 levels. The reduction responds to the findings of the 2015 benchmark stock assessment which lowered both the SSB target level (223 million pounds) and the SSB estimate (191 million pounds in 2014). The 2016 commercial quota and recreational harvest limit will be set once the final recreational harvest estimates for 2015 have been released in 2016.

For all four species, the Commission and Council actions are consistent with the Council's SSC recommendations regarding the level of total removals that cannot be exceeded based on the best available scientific information. For more information about the Commission's actions, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, FMP Coordinator, at [krootes-murdy@asmfc.org](mailto:krootes-murdy@asmfc.org).

## Scup Benchmark Stock Assessment Overview

This summer, the 2015 benchmark stock assessment for scup was peer-reviewed by the 60th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SAW/SARC). The assessment is the latest and best information available on the status of the coastwide scup stock for use in fisheries management.

### What is the Status of the Stock?

In 2014, the scup stock was not overfished or experiencing overfishing relative to the new reference points defined in the 2015 assessment. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) was estimated at 403.6 million pounds, about two times the SSB target of 192.47 million pounds. Fishing mortality on age 3 fish and older in 2014 was estimated at 0.127, below the new fishing mortality threshold of 0.22.

### Recruitment

Since 1984, recruitment (e.g., the number of fish entering the population) estimates have been mainly influenced by the fishery and survey catches-at-age. From 1884-2014, recruitment averaged 109 million fish. The 1999, 2006, and 2007 year classes are estimated to be the largest of the time series at 222, 222, and 218 million age 0 fish, respectively. Below average recruitment occurred in 2012 and 2013. The 2014 year class is estimated to be above average at 112 million age 0 fish.

### Projections

Three-year projections of SSB and fishing mortality were made with the following assumptions: 75% of the acceptable biological catch (ABC) is caught annually (based on recent harvest patterns) and the current fishing mortality rate of 0.220 is maintained during 2016-2018. Under this scenario, the probability of the stock being overfished (SSB less than the SSB threshold) is unlikely.

For more information on the benchmark assessment go to <http://tinyurl.com/q5lpctr>.

AMERICAN LOBSTER continued from page 1

Declines in catch and fishery-independent survey indices in the offshore portion are evident as well; however, they are not as severe. It is believed the offshore area of SNE depends on nearshore larval settlement and offshore migration as the source of recruits (i.e., young of the year lobsters). Therefore, unless fishing effort is curtailed, the offshore component will be in jeopardy in the future when the poor year classes fail to materialize offshore. The Peer Review Panel noted while the SNE stock is not experiencing overfishing based on the current reference points, these reference points were established “without considering the possibility that the stock could be at the lowest abundance level ever and the production of recruits in the inshore area (on which the offshore area depends) could be brought to an extremely low level. It is noted that pre-recruits are not measured in the offshore surveys, so the effects of recruitment failure in the inshore would not be seen in the offshore until years later when the lobsters become available to the fishery and surveys. Hence, by any reasonable standard, it is necessary to protect the offshore component of the stock until increased recruitment can be observed.”

### Peer Review Panel Recommendations

For SNE, the Panel recommends close monitoring of stock status, along with implementing measures to protect the remaining lobster resource in order to promote stock rebuilding. Stock indicators should be updated annually and reported to the Management Board for appropriate action. Given the good condition of the GOM/GBK stock, the Panel recommended stock indicators be monitored prior to the next benchmark assessment to detect signs of changing recruitment or other conditions.

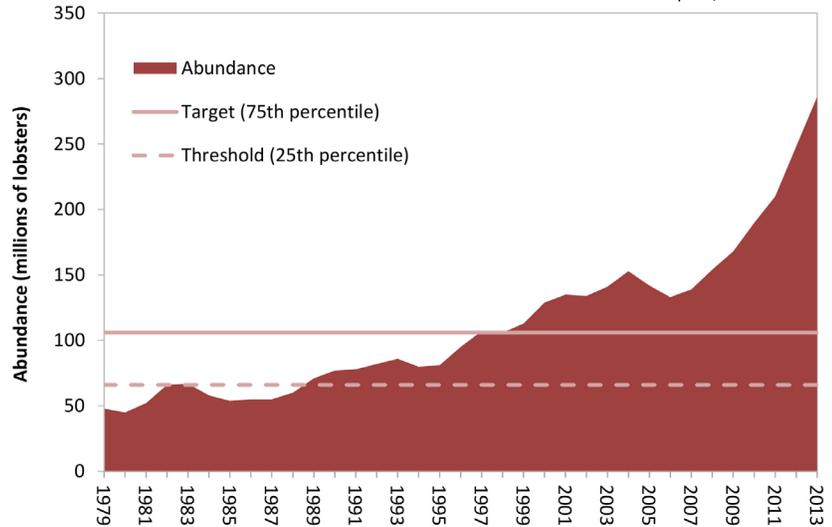
### Landings

Total U.S. landings in the fishery have steadily increased in the past 35 years. Up until the late 1970s, landings were relatively constant at about 30.87 million pounds. However by 2000, landings almost tripled to roughly 86 million pounds and by 2006 grew to 92.61 million pounds. Landings in 2013 were roughly 149.94 million pounds. These landings are primarily comprised of catch from inshore waters (0 to 12 nautical miles). GOM supports the largest fishery, constituting approximately 76% of the U.S. landings between 1981 and 2007 and accounting for approximately 87% of landings since 2002. Landings in the GOM were stable between 1981 and 1989, averaging 32.13 million pounds, and then increased dramatically from 42.34 million pounds (1990) to 141.12 million pounds (2013). Landings averaged 112.46 million pounds from 2008-2013. GBK constitutes a smaller portion of the U.S. fishery, with

continued, see AMERICAN LOBSTER on page 14

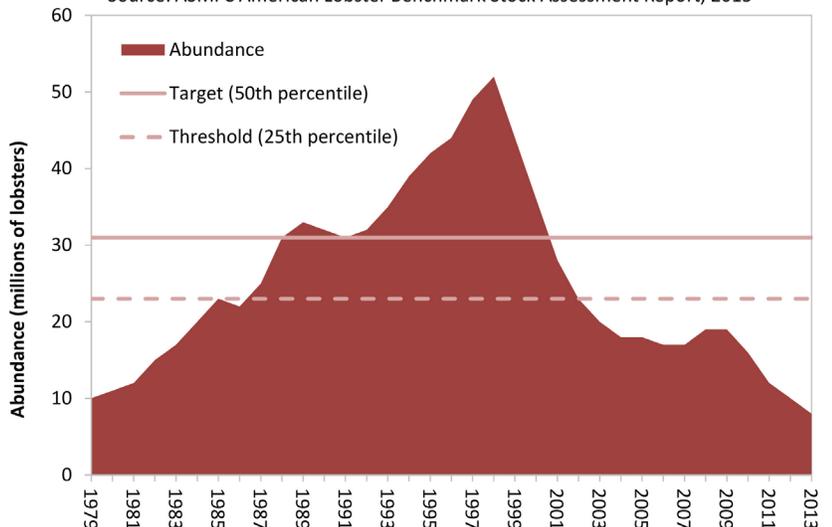
### American Lobster Abundance for the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank Stock Unit

Source: ASMFC American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Report, 2015



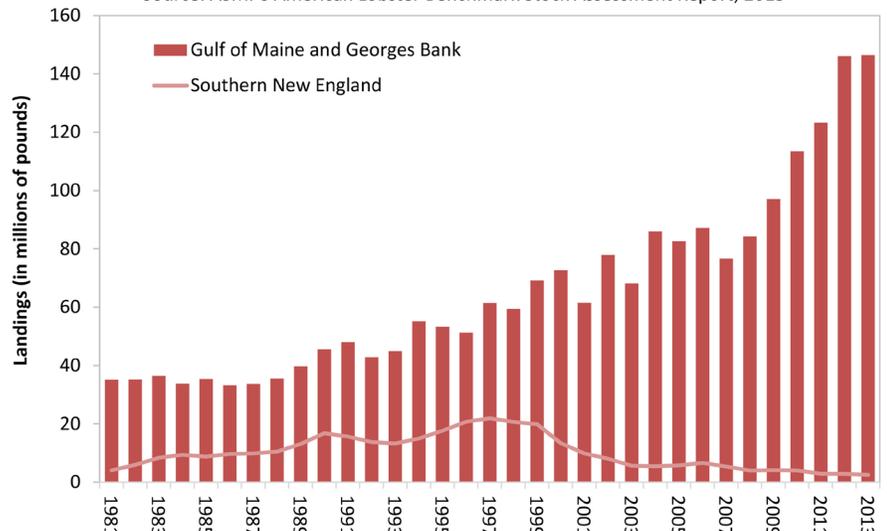
### American Lobster Abundance for the Southern New England Stock Unit

Source: ASMFC American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Report, 2015



### American Lobster Landings by Stock Area

Source: ASMFC American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Report, 2015



# SAFIS Helps Improve Data Quality of RI Dealer Reporting

The Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife (RI DFW) has been a pioneer in improving harvester and dealer data and quota monitoring since 2003. The Rhode Island Fisheries Information System (RIFIS), which was created by the ACCSP staff and tested among a small group of Rhode Island dealers, became eDR (electronic dealer reporting) in 2004. This was the first application of the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS). By 2006, all Rhode Island dealers were reporting trip-level landings data in SAFIS. In the past 15 years, RI DFW has worked diligently to not only increase dealer entry, but also to improve data quality.

In 2010, a dealer report card was implemented to identify needed improvements in the data quality for an individual dealer. The report card is sent quarterly to dealers informing them of their data quality issues and highlighting topics such as timeliness of reporting (late reports), missing prices, missing vessel information, and missing fishermen information. In 2013, the report cards were improved to include grades to further demonstrate to the dealers their specific data quality issues. The report cards have greatly improved dealer reporting and RI DFW continues to utilize them. RI DFW staff also performs weekly checks of vessel and fishermen information in SAFIS to ensure they have the best available data for dealers when they upload purchases. Also, the hardworking staff participate in site visits and community outreach meetings when needed.

The improvements in the quality of data reported to SAFIS have remained constant in September 2013. The lag between purchase

date and entry date remained consistent with an average lag of about four days. RIDFW continues to use SAFIS dealer landings as the primary source for quota monitoring data. This data is used as the basis for changing possession limits and early seasonal closures for quota monitored species. SAFIS landings reports are run daily in order to accurately track quota managed species in Rhode Island. The preliminary landings for select quota monitored species are available on the RI DFW website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/quttrck.htm>. Additionally, data requests of SAFIS dealer reports are processed frequently, with

harvesters, or anglers. Each of these applications function independently, but are kept in the same database and share ACCSP-compliant standards and codes. The applications include:

## **ELECTRONIC DEALER REPORTING (eDR):**

eDR is a web-based application that allows dealers to enter an electronic dealer report. Fields that must be entered for a completed report include fisherman, port, date landed, time landed, date purchased, vessel number, species, disposition, gear, quantity, and price.

## **SINGLE TRIP TICKET DEALER REPORTING**

**(e-1Ticket):** e-1Ticket is a web-based application providing the ability to collect trip/effort/catch data and simultaneously create a dealer report.

## **ELECTRONIC TRIP REPORTING**

**(eTRIPS):** eTRIPS is a web-based application that compiles catch and effort data from fishermen. Trip reports, or log books in some fisheries, provide catch and effort data from a permitted fishing entity (fishermen or a vessel). Trips may be categorized as commercial or party/charter.

## **VOLUNTARY RECREATIONAL LOGBOOKS (eLogbook):**

eLogbook is a web-based application that collects data from private recreational anglers on a voluntary basis. eLogbook formulates summaries of information on all species caught by the angler. This valuable tool is a way to provide narrow strategies for any given set of conditions and is a more efficient way for anglers to review past and current daily entries.

For more information about SAFIS, please visit: <http://www.accsp.org/safis.htm>.



many requests processed in support of ASMFC compliance reports and fisheries management plans, shellfish management, enforcement, and commercial fishing license tracking.

## **What is SAFIS?**

SAFIS is a real-time, web-based reporting system for landings on the Atlantic coast. It has been used to collect over 56 million landings records since first being implemented by Rhode Island in February 2003. Currently, SAFIS has four applications available to dealers,

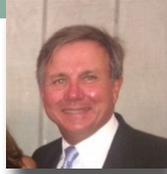
**ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program focused on the design, implementation, and conduct of marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and the integration of those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. It is composed of representatives from natural resource management agencies coastwide, including the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the D.C. Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For further information please visit [www.accsp.org](http://www.accsp.org).**



## COMMISSIONERS

### Doug Brady

In August, North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory appointed Doug Brady to serve as the state's Governor Appointee to the Commission. A lifelong recreational fisherman and past owner and operator of a wholesale commercial seafood business for over 25 years, Mr. Brady has diverse experience in North Carolina's fisheries. His commercial fisheries background includes sales and marketing of seafood products as well as ownership and management of commercial fishing boats and a commercial aquaculture business. He has served on numerous commissions and boards at the county, state, and regional levels, including North Carolina Seafood Aquaculture Study Commission, North Carolina Seafood Industrial Park Commission, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and the Carteret County Economic Development Board, where he served as president. He has served as County Commissioner for 8 years and as Chair for 3 of those years. Currently, he is Vice-Chair of Carteret Health System and owner of a private real estate development and investment company.



Mr. Brady graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in science/food science. Welcome aboard, Mr. Brady!



### Bill Cole

In August, Bill Cole stepped down as North Carolina's Governor Appointee to the ASMFC, having served in that capacity since 2008. For the majority of his 40-year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and into his retirement, Mr. Cole has been an active participant and ardent supporter of the Commission. Over that time, Mr. Cole served as a Commissioner, advisory panel member, and federal agency representative on several species management boards. Mr. Cole is also a charter member and passionate supporter of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program. In 2005, he received the Commission's Annual Award of Excellence for his numerous and outstanding contributions to the Commission's fisheries management and science programs.

Throughout his FWS career, Mr. Cole worked to protect, restore, and conserve fisheries resources and their habitats. In 1986, he helped establish the FWS South Atlantic Fisheries Coordination Office. He and others conceived of the Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise, which conducted its first survey in 1988, and has performed annual field tagging of Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon, spiny dogfish, and other species that aggregate each winter in the coastal waters off Virginia and North Carolina. Its data have been critically important in advancing our understanding of fish survival and growth, habitat preferences, seasonal movements and migrations, and stock boundaries. Mr. Cole served as Chief Scientist for the Cruise for many years. We are grateful for Mr. Cole's contributions to the Commission and wish him only the very best.

### Rep. Bob Steinburg

In August, Representative Bob Steinburg was appointed North Carolina's Legislative Commissioner to the ASMFC. Rep. Steinburg represents District 1, which includes Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Tyrrell Counties. He formerly served three terms as president of the 14-county Albemarle-Pamlico Republican Club and was nominated in 2011 to the North Carolina Republican Party's Hall of Fame for his years of service for conservative causes. He has served three terms as chairman of the Chowan County Republican Party and was honored as a delegate to the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota.



A retired businessman, Rep. Steinburg is devoted to helping others in his community. A committed advocate for North Carolina education, he dedicates himself to help prepare the next generation for the global job market. Rep. Steinburg served four terms as president of Edenton Emergency Aid, a not-for-profit-agency assisting individuals in Chowan County who are experiencing temporary financial hardship. He also co-chaired the 2010 Edenton Historical Commission's Taste of Edenton, which raised funds for the town's historic preservation initiatives. Having spent his entire adult life in business working primarily in sales and marketing for national companies, Rep. Steinburg received an associate's degree in retail business management from Corning Community College and a bachelor's degree from Upper Iowa University, majoring in business administration. Welcome aboard, Rep. Steinburg!

## STAFF



### Kristen Anstead

In August, Kristen Anstead joined the Commission as its new Stock Assessment Scientist. Kristen will be responsible for coordinating the Commission's fish ageing program as well as providing analytical support on upcoming benchmark stock assessments for Atlantic sturgeon, Atlantic croaker, and weakfish. Kristen has a Ph.D. in Oceanography from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia and a Bachelor of Science from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. For her doctoral research project, Kristen evaluated the spatial structure and recruitment of the Atlantic menhaden population using otolith chemistry approaches. Since 2013, Kristen has been the Science Editor for the American Fisheries Society *Fisheries Magazine*. Welcome aboard, Kristen!



### Rachel Foster

In early September, Rachel Foster joined the Commission as its Human Resources Manager. In her new position, Rachel will be

*continued, see COMINGS & GOINGS on page 14*

## Amy Hirrlinger Named Employee of the Quarter

Amy Hirrlinger came to the Commission last summer as an intern but was soon hired as a fulltime employee because of her positive attitude, quality of work, and willingness to contribute to any project. In the year that she has been here, she has improved the accuracy and functionality of our meetings and membership database; assisted in the preparation of species fishery management plan (FMP) reviews, public comment summaries, and newsletter articles; and helped to develop comprehensive standard operating procedures for the Commission's Finance and Administration Department. In recognition of her accomplishments, Amy was named Employee of the Quarter for the third quarter of 2015.

With interests in environmental management and population dynamics, Amy has been a huge asset to the Commission staff. She has assisted FMP Coordinators in the development of FMP reviews and annual compliance reports; helped draft the first interstate FMP for Jonah crab; and summarized hundreds of submitted comment on Atlantic Striped Bass Addendum IV. She has researched and written newsletter articles on the blue catfish invasion and fish passage technologies, and drafted species profiles for Jonah crab, Atlantic menhaden, and bluefish. Working with our IT staff and ACCSP programmers, she has made significant improvements to the Commission's meetings and membership database, which is the foundation for all of the Commission's



meetings, travel authorizations and reimbursements, and communications via email and regular mail. She has sought ways to reduce mailing costs through increased efficiencies and by transitioning recipients to email delivery versus snail mail.

Constantly seeking new challenges and opportunities to grow professionally, Amy volunteered to participate on the Gulf of Maine Northern Shrimp Trawl Survey and has been taking the Commission's Beginner Stock Assessment Training Workshop. She has also begun

working on a couple of outreach related activities, creating short video clips on fisheries management and science topics as well as helping to update the Commission's historical publication *Forging Knowledge into Change*, which was released in honor of the Commission's 50th anniversary and is being revised for our upcoming 75th anniversary.

In all that Amy does, she brings her intelligence, inquisitiveness, sunny disposition, and strong work ethic. She is a great coworker and true pleasure to work with. Amy has a Bachelor of Science in Biology with Ecology focus and a Minor in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Pennsylvania State University. As Employee of the Quarter, she received a cash award, a small gift, and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personnel record. In addition, her name is on the Employee of the Quarter plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Amy!

ASMFC COMINGS & GOINGS continued from page 13

responsible for coordinating the Commission's human resources activities, including ensuring compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. Rachel is currently completing her Master in Business Administration from Virginia Tech and has a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Christopher Newport University in Newport News, VA. Rachel comes to us from General Dynamics, where she assisted in the administration of HR activities for over 500 employees. Welcome aboard, Rachel!

**Atlantic Coast Fisheries News**  
a collection of upcoming meetings, recent news alerts, and articles of interest from Atlantic coast states, regional fishery management councils, and federal agencies

Interested in receiving weekly updates on upcoming meetings, recent news alerts, and articles of interest from ASMFC, ACCSP, Atlantic coast states, regional management councils, and federal agencies? Sign up for *Atlantic Coast Fisheries News* at <http://tinyurl.com/nokysl>.

AMERICAN LOBSTER continued from page 11

landings averaging 4.93 million pounds between 2008 and 2013. Like the GOM, landings were stable in the 1980s and then quickly doubled in the early 2000s to a high of 5.29 million pounds in 2005. Before 2011, SNE was the second largest fishery, accounting for 19% of the U.S. landings between 1981 and 2007; however, a sharp decline in the population has significantly reduced catch. Landings peaked in the 1990s, reaching a high of 21.91 million pounds in 1997. Since this time, landings have precipitously dropped to a low of 3.31 million pounds in 2013.

The Board accepted both the stock assessment and peer review report for management use. In response to the findings regarding the status of the SNE stock, the Board established a working group of Board and Technical Committee members to review the assessment and peer review findings and develop recommendations for Board consideration. The final report is available at [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org) on the American Lobster page under Stock Assessment Reports. For more information, please contact Megan Ware, FMP Coordinator, at [mware@asmfc.org](mailto:mware@asmfc.org).

**3:15 – 5:45 p.m. Atlantic Menhaden Management Board (continued)**

- Discuss Allowance of Cast Nets Under the Bycatch Provision of Amendment 2
- Provide Guidance to Plan Development Team on the Development of the Public Information Document for Draft Amendment 3

**6:30 – 9:30 p.m. Annual Dinner**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

**8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board**

- Review 2015 Stock Assessment Update and Projections on Reaching Coastwide Fishing Mortality Target with Addendum IV Regulations
- Technical Committee Report on Coastwide and Fleet-specific Fishing Mortality Reference Points

**8:30 a.m. – Noon Law Enforcement Committee**

*(A portion of this meeting may be a closed session for Committee members, authorized law enforcement personnel, and LEC Coordinators only)*

- ISFMP Species Board Issues
- Federal and State Agency Reports
- Discussion of Atlantic Striped Bass Compliance Report Needs for 2016
- Review 2015 Action Plan Completion and 2016 Action Plan Items
- Closed Session (as needed, to discuss ongoing enforcement activities)

**10:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Tautog Management Board**

- Review Public Comment on the Public Information Document to Draft Amendment 1
- Provide Guidance to Plan Development Team on the Development of Draft Amendment 1
- Review and Consider Approval of Advisory Panel Membership

**12:15 – 1:45 p.m. ASMFC Captain David H. Hart & GSMFC Lyles-Simpson Awards Luncheon**

**1:45 – 5:45 p.m. Joint Meeting of the ASMFC Law Enforcement and the GSMFC Law Enforcement Advisory Committees**

**1:45 – 2:45 p.m. Business Session**

- Review and Consider Approval of 2016 Annual Action Plan
- Election of Chair and Vice-Chair
- Review Non-compliance Findings (if necessary)

**2:00 – 6:00 p.m. Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) Steering Committee**

- Discuss Outcomes of the Recent Science and Data Committee Meeting and Next Steps for the Steering Committee
- Receive Updates on the Implementation Plan
- Discuss Potential Goals and Objectives for Next Conservation Strategic Plan
- Approve FY2016 Projects for Recommendation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**3:00 – 4:00 p.m. Coastal Sharks Management Board**

- Set 2016 Specifications Based on Federal Quotas (if available)
- Update on NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Amendment 6 Final Rule and Draft Amendment 9
- Review and Consider Approval of 2014 Coastal Sharks Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance

**4:15 – 5:15 p.m. Spiny Dogfish Management Board**

- Set Specifications for Spiny Dogfish
- Review and Consider Approval of 2014 Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance

*continued, see ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA on next page*

**Atlantic States Marine  
Fisheries Commission**

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ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA continued from page 11

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5**

**8:00 – 9:00 a.m. Horseshoe Crab Management Board**

- Horseshoe Crab Technical Committee Report
  - Shorebird and Horseshoe Crab Survey Reports Summary
  - Adaptive Resource Management Framework Harvest Output for 2016
- Set Specifications for the 2016 Delaware Bay Fishery
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance
- Update on the Virginia Tech Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey

**8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. ACFHP Steering Committee (continued)**

**9:15 – 11:15 a.m. Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board**

- Atlantic Sturgeon Stock Assessment Update
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Atlantic Sturgeon Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance Report
- Habitat Committee Report
- Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership Report
- Law Enforcement Committee Report
- Management and Science Committee Report

**11:15 – 11:45 a.m. Business Session (if necessary)**

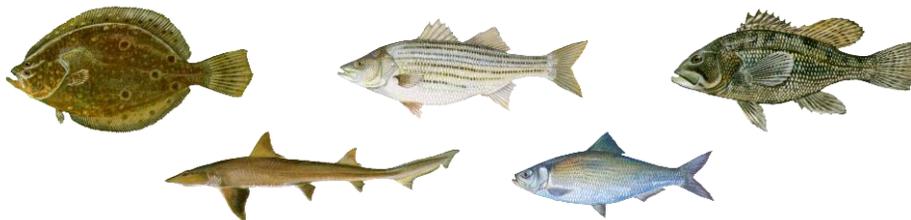
**12:15 – 1:45 p.m. South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board**

- Update on 2015 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance
- Review and Consider Approval of 2015 Spanish Mackerel Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance
- Discuss Black Drum Compliance Report Deadline



# North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries

## Quota Monitoring Landings Report



### North Carolina Quota Monitored Species Reporting

Species currently under a quota monitoring requirement by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) include summer flounder, striped bass, black sea bass North of Cape Hatteras, spiny dogfish, and river herring. Seasons are opened and closed by proclamation as shown in the table below. Landings reports are updated weekly during the proclamation season.

## 2015 North Carolina Quota Monitored Landings

### Updated 10/27/2015

| Species                                | 2015 Total Quota (LBS) | 80% of Quota for Winter Fishery | 2015 Transfer | 2015 Harvest | Quota Remaining | Proclamation | Trip Limit (pounds)                   | Comments                    |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2015 Summer Flounder                   | 3,038,093              | 2,430,474                       | 61,850        | 2,322,048    | 654,195         | FF-22-2015   | 7,500                                 | Closed 09/30/2015 at 6:00pm |
| 2015 Black Sea Bass N of Cape Hatteras | 243,422                |                                 | 509           | 238,833      | 4,080           | FF-45-2015   | 100 trawl, hook & line, fish pot/week | Closed 09/30/2015 at 6:00pm |
| 2014/2015 Spiny Dogfish                | 7,276,052              |                                 |               | 5,198,409    | 2,077,640       | FF-05-2015   | per day: 20,000                       | Closed 04/30/2015 at 6:00pm |
| A.O. Striped Bass                      | 360,360                |                                 |               |              |                 |              |                                       |                             |
| TRAWL                                  | 120,120                |                                 |               | 0            | 120,120         | FF-1-2015    | 100 fish/day                          | Closed 3/31/15              |
| SEINE                                  | 120,120                |                                 |               | 0            | 120,120         | FF-77-2014   | 150 fish/day                          | Closed 3/31/15              |
| GILL NET                               | 120,120                |                                 |               | 0            | 120,120         | FF-91-14     | 50 fish/day                           | Closed 02/14/2015           |
| ASMA Striped Bass                      | 137,500                |                                 |               | 80,843       | 56,657          | FF-15-15     | 20 fish/day                           | Closed 04/30/2015           |
| CSMA Striped Bass                      | 25,000                 |                                 |               | 25,573       | -573            | FF-14-15     | 10 fish/day                           | Closed 03/18/2015           |

\* All figures are in pounds unless otherwise noted

For questions about quota monitoring or to report landings:

| Permitted Species   | FAX          | E-mail Address   | Telephone #  |
|---|--------------|--|--------------|
| Striped Bass, River Herring   | 252-264-3723 | <a href="mailto:LANDINGS@ncdenr.gov">LANDINGS@ncdenr.gov</a> | 800-338-7805 |
| Summer Flounder, Black Sea Bass North of Cape Hatteras, Spiny Dogfish | 252-726-3903 | <a href="mailto:FLOUNDER@ncdenr.gov">FLOUNDER@ncdenr.gov</a> | 800-682-2632 |



## Red Drum Landings 2014-2015

Landings are complete through August 31, 2015

2014 Landings are final; 2015 landings are preliminary

| Year | Month | Species  | Pounds | 2009-2011<br>Average | 2012-2014<br>Average |
|------|-------|----------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 2014 | 9     | Red Drum | 34,775 | 28,991               | 35,471               |
| 2014 | 10    | Red Drum | 36,425 | 43,644               | 59,757               |
| 2014 | 11    | Red Drum | 16,375 | 14,318               | 28,619               |
| 2014 | 12    | Red Drum | 2,995  | 3,428                | 3,401                |
| 2015 | 1     | Red Drum | 1,961  | 5,885                | 1,364                |
| 2015 | 2     | Red Drum | 3,009  | 3,448                | 3,176                |
| 2015 | 3     | Red Drum | 3,913  | 5,699                | 2,957                |
| 2015 | 4     | Red Drum | 12,703 | 7,848                | 3,945                |
| 2015 | 5     | Red Drum | 10,617 | 13,730               | 9,222                |
| 2015 | 6     | Red Drum | 7,640  | 12,681               | 7,432                |
| 2015 | 7     | Red Drum | 5,081  | 13,777               | 15,555               |
| 2015 | 8     | Red Drum | 5,342  | 21,252               | 16,910               |

**Fishing Year (Sept 1, 2014 - Aug 31, 2015) Landings 140,836**

| Year | Month | Species  | Pounds | 2009-2011<br>Average | 2012-2014<br>Average |
|------|-------|----------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 2015 | 9     | Red Drum | 3,927* | 28,991               | 35,471               |
| 2015 | 10    | Red Drum | 741*   | 43,644               | 59,757               |

**Fishing Year (Sept 1, 2015 - Aug 31, 2016) Landings 4,668**

\*partial trip ticket landings only

\*\*\*landings are confidential



| Year | Month | Species           | Pounds  | Dealers | Trips | Average (2007-2009) | Conf |
|------|-------|-------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------------------|------|
| 2013 | 1     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 2,942   | 42      | 276   | 7,713               |      |
| 2013 | 2     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 896     | 37      | 254   | 4,617               |      |
| 2013 | 3     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 4,387   | 57      | 682   | 23,512              |      |
| 2013 | 4     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 16,697  | 93      | 1,177 | 68,389              |      |
| 2013 | 5     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 49,629  | 123     | 1,778 | 122,514             |      |
| 2013 | 6     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 79,203  | 137     | 2,127 | 154,090             |      |
| 2013 | 7     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 119,720 | 150     | 2,839 | 170,387             |      |
| 2013 | 8     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 124,177 | 147     | 2,685 | 201,862             |      |
| 2013 | 9     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 416,097 | 161     | 3,631 | 396,301             |      |
| 2013 | 10    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 883,476 | 172     | 5,512 | 781,717             |      |
| 2013 | 11    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 483,762 | 121     | 2,589 | 392,150             |      |
| 2013 | 12    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 5,288   | 12      | 27    | 37,303              |      |
| 2014 | 1     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 2,978   | 29      | 183   | 7,713               |      |
| 2014 | 2     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 1,823   | 29      | 285   | 4,617               |      |
| 2014 | 3     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 3,430   | 43      | 677   | 23,512              |      |
| 2014 | 4     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 18,997  | 71      | 933   | 68,389              |      |
| 2014 | 5     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 16,001  | 93      | 681   | 122,514             |      |
| 2014 | 6     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 80,142  | 123     | 1,988 | 154,090             |      |
| 2014 | 7     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 84,702  | 141     | 2,148 | 170,387             |      |
| 2014 | 8     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 105,208 | 137     | 2,204 | 201,862             |      |
| 2014 | 9     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 404,143 | 153     | 3,588 | 396,301             |      |
| 2014 | 10    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 634,514 | 146     | 3,436 | 781,717             |      |
| 2014 | 11    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 320,773 | 121     | 1,991 | 392,150             |      |
| 2014 | 12    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 800     | 5       | 7     | 37,303              |      |
| 2015 | 1     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 1,984   | 30      | 237   | 7,713               |      |
| 2015 | 2     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 495     | 21      | 93    | 4,617               |      |
| 2015 | 3     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 10,750  | 62      | 768   | 23,512              |      |
| 2015 | 4     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 20,824  | 88      | 1,074 | 68,389              |      |
| 2015 | 5     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 42,454  | 117     | 1,282 | 122,514             |      |
| 2015 | 6     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 53,845  | 117     | 1,483 | 154,090             |      |
| 2015 | 7     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 42,805  | 106     | 1,144 | 170,387             |      |
| 2015 | 8     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 44,086  | 107     | 1,130 | 201,862             |      |
| 2015 | 9     | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | 218,119 | 71      | 1,927 | 396,301             |      |
| 2015 | 10    | SOUTHERN FLOUNDER | ***     | 2       | 89    | 781,717             |      |

\*\*2015 data are preliminary and only complete through August.

\*\*\*Data are confidential





PAT MCCRORY  
*Governor*

DONALD R. VAN DER VAART  
*Secretary*

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Louis Daniel  
Sammy Corbett

FROM: Chris Batsavage, Protected Resources Section Chief/Special Assistant for  
Councils  
Division of Marine Fisheries, NCDEQ

DATE: October 29, 2015

SUBJECT: Protected Resources Section Update

## OBSERVER PROGRAM

Tables summarizing observer coverage and protected species interactions from January through September 2015 are found in the briefing book. Observer coverage for the large mesh gill net fishery was 6.2% and coverage for the small mesh gill net fishery was 2.5%. Observer coverage estimates are based on the number of gill net trips from prior years because 2015 trip numbers are preliminary.

Also included in the briefing book are tables summarizing the seasonal observer coverage by management unit. Large mesh gill net observer coverage by management unit in the winter ranged from 0% to 18% and from 0% to 7% for small mesh gill nets. The windy weather combined with very cold temperatures this past winter impacted the number of gill net and observer trips. Large mesh gill net observer coverage by management unit in the spring (March-May) ranged from 0% to 24% and from 2% to 10% for small mesh gill nets. Large mesh gill net observer coverage by management unit in the summer season (June-August) ranged from 0% to 22% and from 0% to 4% for small mesh gill nets. Management units A and C closed during the summer season for large and small mesh anchored gill nets and Management Unit B closed for large mesh anchored gill nets. As such, summer observer coverage estimates based on final 2015 trip numbers could be higher than currently estimated. The fall season (September-November) observer coverage estimate is not complete because it only includes trip numbers through September.

A total of 10 sea turtle interactions were observed in large mesh gill nets and 1 in small mesh gill nets during the summer. These interactions occurred in every management unit except for Management Unit D1, which was closed to large mesh anchored gill nets in the summer. No self-reported sea turtle interactions by gill net fishermen occurred during the summer season.

A total of 17 sea turtle interactions were observed in large mesh gill nets and 1 in small mesh gill



nets since September, with all but one occurring in October. These interactions occurred in every management unit except for Management units D1 and D2 with most of the interactions taking place in Management Unit B (13). No self-reported sea turtle interactions by gill net fishermen occurred in the fall season through mid-October.

A total of 2 Atlantic sturgeon interactions were observed in large mesh gill nets and 1 in small mesh gill nets during the summer. These interactions occurred in Management units A, B, and E. No self-reported Atlantic sturgeon interactions by gill net fishermen occurred during the summer season.

A total of 22 Atlantic sturgeon interactions were observed in large mesh gill nets and 0 in small mesh gill nets during the fall. These interactions occurred in Management units A, C, and D with most of the interactions taking place in Management Unit A (16). A total of 5 self-reported Atlantic sturgeon interactions by gill net fishermen occurred with the 1 reported interaction from Management Unit A and 4 from Management Unit C.

## **MANAGEMENT UNIT OPENINGS AND CLOSURES**

Management Unit A west of Alligator River and north of the US Highway 158 Bridge over Currituck Sound opened for all anchored gill nets on September 1, 2015 and the remainder of the management unit opened on September 30, 2015. The entire management unit closed for all anchored gill nets on October 17, 2015 due to sea turtle interactions, but the area west of Laurel and Drummond points and north of the US Highway 158 Bridge in Currituck Sound reopened on October 26, 2015. The portion of the management unit west of the Alligator River and east of Laurel and Drummond points will reopen on November 2, 2015. The remainder of the management unit (eastern Albemarle Sound and Croatan and Roanoke sounds) may reopen later in the fall.

Management Unit B opened for large mesh gill nets on September 30, 2015, but upper Core Sound and eastern Pamlico Sound closed on October 17, 2015 due to numerous sea turtle interactions over an 8-day period. These closed portions will reopen the evening of November 2, 2015.

Management Unit C opened for all anchored gill nets on September 1, 2015 but closed on September 24, 2015 due to the allowed number of live and dead Atlantic sturgeon interactions for the fall season being approached. The closure will remain in effect until December 1, 2015.

Management Unit D1 was scheduled to open for large mesh gill nets on October 15, 2015, but it remained closed due to the large number of sea turtle interactions nearby and the relatively warm water temperatures. The management unit will open the evening of November 2, 2015.

Management Unit E closed for large mesh gill nets on September 1, 2015 to minimize the number of sea turtle interactions. This management unit closed for large mesh gill nets three days after it opened last September due to sea turtle interactions and remained closed until November 2, 2014. Management Unit E reopened on September 30, 2015 and currently remains open.



## INCIDENTAL TAKE PERMITS

### Summer Seasonal Progress Report

Included in the briefing book is the 2015 summer seasonal progress report for the Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit. Based on the number of gill net trips from prior years for large mesh gill nets, the minimum observer coverage was reached or exceeded in all of the management units that were open except Management Unit A. Based on the number of gill net trips from prior years for small mesh gill nets, the minimum observer coverage was exceeded in all of the management units except Management Unit D1. Coverage was not met in Management Unit D1 due to the minimal amount of fishing effort that occurred during the summer season.

### Potential Amendments to the Sea Turtle and Atlantic Sturgeon Incidental Take Permits

The division developed an issue paper exploring potential amendment items to the sea turtle and Atlantic sturgeon incidental take permits to address the commercial fishing industry's concerns over limited allowed sea turtle takes and reduced fishing opportunities under the incidental take permits for sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon and the division's concerns over management unit boundaries for enforcement and clarity to fishermen. The issue paper is found in the briefing book. Modifications and amendments to the incidental take permits are allowed, but an increase in the number of allowed takes and the relocation of takes among management units are not permitted. The potential amendment items addressed were:

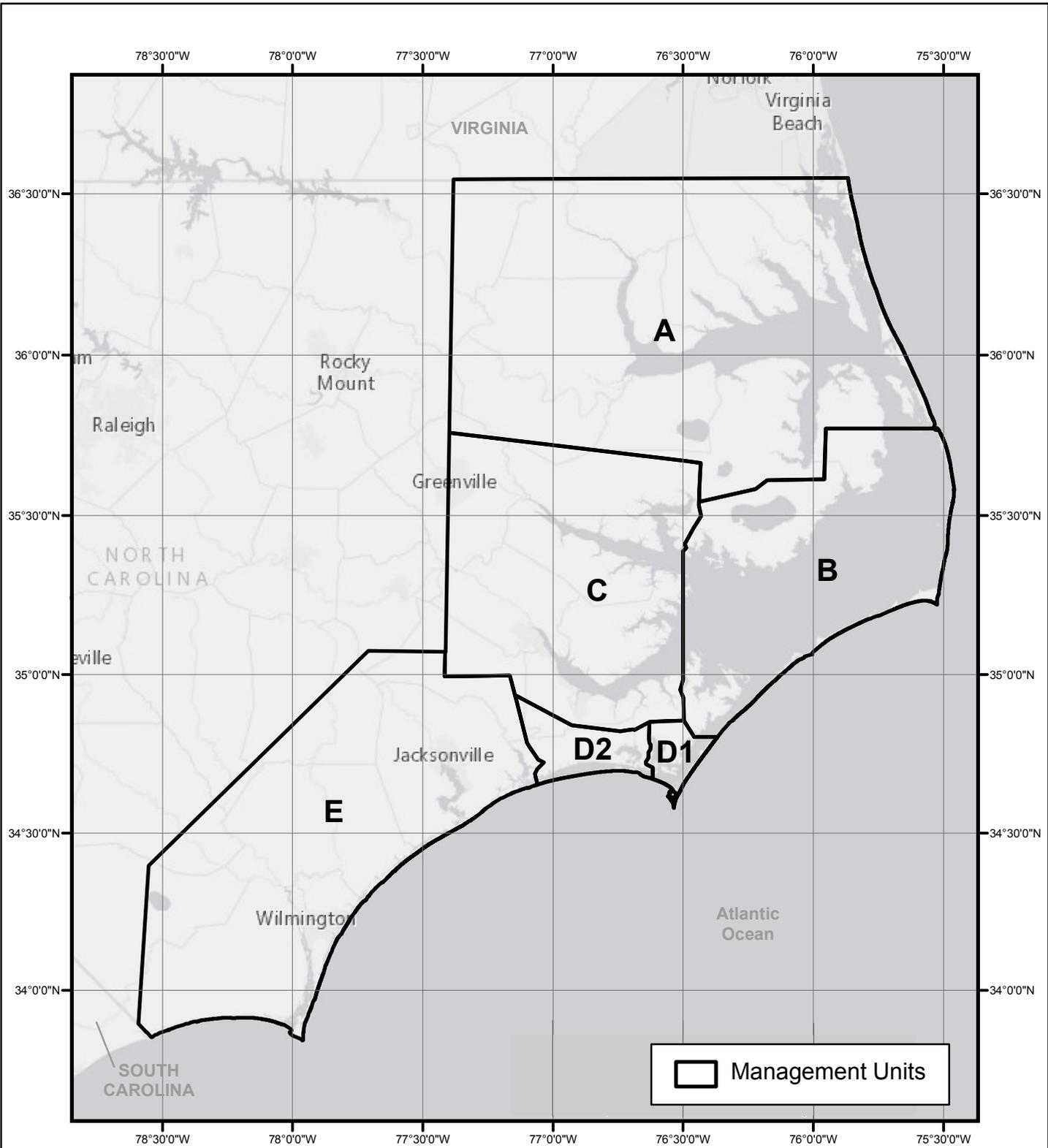
- Modify the boundary between Management units A and B;
- Conditional exemption for low salinity portions of Management Unit A;
- Modify the boundary between Management Units B and C;
- Large mesh gill net exemption in the upper Cape Fear River; and
- Large mesh gill net exemptions in the winter and early spring for Management Unit B.

The division obtained public input by presenting the potential amendment items to the Sea Turtle, Northern Regional, and Southern Regional advisory committees. The meetings were well-attended by the committee members, but public participation was sparse with less than 10 people attending all three meetings. The minutes for these meetings, which are found in the briefing book, summarizes the input received by the committee members and the public.

The division's Management Review Team reviewed the issue paper as well as the input received at the advisory committee meetings and recommended pursuing the large mesh gill net exemption in the upper Cape Fear River as an amendment item for both incidental take permits. There was much discussion about the other items, but the team determined that the risks associated with some of them outweighed the rewards. The team also concluded that the conditional exemption for low salinity portions of Management Unit A could be addressed through the adaptive management process outlined in the incidental take permits.







**NCDMF ESTUARINE GILLNET PERMIT MAP**



April 2015

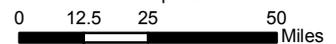




Table 1. Preliminary data collected for large mesh gill nets by month through the NCDMF Observer Program through September 2015.

| Month     | Trips                  |                     | Observer Large Mesh      |       |         |                       | Observed Takes By Species |      |       |      |            |      |         |             |      |   |
|-----------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------|-------|------|------------|------|---------|-------------|------|---|
|           | Estimated <sup>1</sup> | Actual <sup>2</sup> | AP Attempts <sup>3</sup> | Trips | Yards   | Coverage <sup>4</sup> | Kemp's                    |      | Green |      | Loggerhead |      | Unknown | A. Sturgeon |      |   |
|           |                        |                     |                          |       |         |                       | Live                      | Dead | Live  | Dead | Live       | Dead | Live    | Live        | Dead |   |
| January   | 245                    | 371                 | 85                       | 16    | 12,600  | 6.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 2    | 0 |
| February  | 811                    | 383                 | 125                      | 43    | 24,375  | 5.3                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0    | 0 |
| March     | 1,871                  | 2,142               | 135                      | 157   | 110,740 | 8.4                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 9    | 0 |
| April     | 1,227                  | 1,324               | 140                      | 84    | 55,458  | 6.8                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 2    | 0 |
| May       | 952                    | 805                 | 123                      | 101   | 80,890  | 10.6                  | 1                         | 0    | 3     | 3    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 5    | 0 |
| June      | 1,429                  | 743                 | 105                      | 99    | 57,330  | 6.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 4     | 2    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 1    | 0 |
| July      | 1,429                  | 381                 | 116                      | 50    | 20,700  | 3.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 3     | 0    | 1          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 1    | 0 |
| August    | 1,747                  | 296                 | 113                      | 34    | 8,856   | 1.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0    | 0 |
| September | 2,404                  | 1,162               | 81                       | 170   | 155,063 | 7.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 19   | 1 |
| Total     | 12,115                 | 7,607               | 1,023                    | 754   | 526,012 | 6.2                   | 1                         | 0    | 12    | 5    | 1          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 39   | 1 |

<sup>1</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2011-2014

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary trip ticket data for 2015

<sup>3</sup> Alternative Platform trips where no fishing activity was found

<sup>4</sup> Based on estimated trips and observer large mesh trips



Table 2. Preliminary data collected for large mesh gill nets by season and management unit through the NCDMF Observer Program through September 2015.

| Season | Unit | Trips                  |                     | Observer Large Mesh      |       |         |                       | Observed Takes By Species |      |       |      |            |      |         |            |      |
|--------|------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------|-------|------|------------|------|---------|------------|------|
|        |      | Estimated <sup>1</sup> | Actual <sup>2</sup> | AP Attempts <sup>3</sup> | Trips | Yards   | Coverage <sup>4</sup> | Kemp's                    |      | Green |      | Loggerhead |      | Unknown | A.Sturgeon |      |
|        |      |                        |                     |                          |       |         |                       | Live                      | Dead | Live  | Dead | Live       | Dead | Live    | Live       | Dead |
| Winter | A    | 765                    | 632                 | 56                       | 38    | 27,800  | 5.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 2          | 0    |
|        | B    | 94                     | 54                  | 37                       | 0     | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | C    | 159                    | 47                  | 49                       | 13    | 7,800   | 8.2                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | D1   | 0                      | 0                   | 0                        | 0     | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | D2   | 1                      | 5                   | 17                       | 1     | 200     | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
| Spring | E    | 38                     | 16                  | 51                       | 7     | 1,175   | 18.3                  | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | A    | 2,254                  | 2,369               | 110                      | 158   | 153,925 | 7.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 14         | 0    |
|        | B    | 614                    | 383                 | 79                       | 44    | 31,700  | 7.2                   | 1                         | 0    | 4     | 3    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | C    | 839                    | 1,033               | 57                       | 72    | 36,318  | 8.6                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | D1   | 30                     | 5                   | 5                        | 0     | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
| Summer | D2   | 61                     | 92                  | 26                       | 7     | 5,900   | 11.4                  | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | E    | 251                    | 389                 | 121                      | 61    | 19,245  | 24.3                  | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 2          | 0    |
|        | A    | 1,751                  | 115                 | 76                       | 12    | 11,140  | 0.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 2     | 1    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 1          | 0    |
|        | B    | 1,515                  | 117                 | 42                       | 16    | 4,450   | 1.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 1    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | C    | 735                    | 392                 | 61                       | 40    | 27,940  | 5.4                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
| Fall   | D1   | 34                     | 0                   | 10                       | 0     | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | D2   | 125                    | 196                 | 34                       | 17    | 8,410   | 13.6                  | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | E    | 446                    | 600                 | 111                      | 98    | 34,946  | 22.0                  | 0                         | 0    | 2     | 0    | 1          | 0    | 0       | 1          | 0    |
|        | A    | 2,804                  | 902                 | 14                       | 140   | 111,238 | 5.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 14         | 0    |
|        | B    | 1,712                  | 16                  | 12                       | 46    | 3,000   | 2.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
| Total  | C    | 918                    | 154                 | 17                       | 58    | 36,695  | 6.3                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 4          | 1    |
|        | D1   | 60                     | 0                   | 7                        | 0     | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
|        | D2   | 288                    | 90                  | 12                       | 17    | 4,030   | 5.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 1          | 0    |
|        | E    | 446                    | 0                   | 19                       | 11    | 100     | 2.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    |
| Total  |      | 15,939                 | 7,607               | 1,023                    | 856   | 526,012 | 5.4                   | 1                         | 0    | 12    | 5    | 1          | 0    | 0       | 39         | 1    |

<sup>1</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2011-2014

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary trip ticket data for 2015

<sup>3</sup> Alternative Platform trips where no fishing activity was found

<sup>4</sup> Based on estimated trips and observer large mesh trips



Table 3. Preliminary data collected for small mesh gill nets by month through the NCDMF Observer Program through September 2015.

| Month     | Trips                  |                     | Observer Small Mesh |         |                       | Observed Takes By Species |      |          |          |            |      |         |             |          |          |
|-----------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------|----------|----------|------------|------|---------|-------------|----------|----------|
|           | Estimated <sup>1</sup> | Actual <sup>2</sup> | Trips               | Yards   | Coverage <sup>3</sup> | Kemp's                    |      | Green    |          | Loggerhead |      | Unknown | A. Sturgeon |          |          |
|           |                        |                     |                     |         |                       | Live                      | Dead | Live     | Dead     | Live       | Dead | Live    | Live        | Dead     |          |
| January   | 712                    | 574                 | 15                  | 9,440   | 2.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| February  | 819                    | 359                 | 30                  | 16,205  | 3.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| March     | 953                    | 875                 | 43                  | 24,290  | 4.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| April     | 1,407                  | 1,219               | 41                  | 27,242  | 2.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | <b>1</b> | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | <b>7</b> | <b>2</b> |
| May       | 988                    | 663                 | 24                  | 8,725   | 2.4                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| June      | 817                    | 545                 | 14                  | 6,506   | 1.7                   | 0                         | 0    | <b>1</b> | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| July      | 686                    | 526                 | 10                  | 5,600   | 1.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| August    | 854                    | 346                 | 9                   | 7,500   | 1.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | <b>1</b> | 0        |
| September | 917                    | 239                 | 19                  | 4,985   | 2.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 0        | 0        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 0        | 0        |
| Total     | 8,151                  | 5,346               | 205                 | 110,493 | 2.5                   | 0                         | 0    | 1        | 1        | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0           | 8        | 2        |

<sup>1</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2013-2014

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary trip ticket data for 2015

<sup>3</sup> Based on estimated trips and observer small mesh trips



Table 4. Preliminary data collected for small mesh gill nets by season and management unit through the NCDMF Observer Program through September 2015.

| Season | Unit | Trips                  |                     | Observer Small Mesh |         |                       | Observed Takes By Species |      |       |      |            |      |         |            |      |   |
|--------|------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------|-------|------|------------|------|---------|------------|------|---|
|        |      | Estimated <sup>1</sup> | Actual <sup>2</sup> | Trips               | Yards   | Coverage <sup>3</sup> | Kemp's                    |      | Green |      | Loggerhead |      | Unknown | A.Sturgeon |      |   |
|        |      |                        |                     |                     |         |                       | Live                      | Dead | Live  | Dead | Live       | Dead | Live    | Live       | Dead |   |
| Winter | A    | 1,327                  | 538                 | 27                  | 17,945  | 2.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | B    | 483                    | 164                 | 4                   | 4,050   | 0.8                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | C    | 152                    | 154                 | 10                  | 2,350   | 6.6                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D1   | 7                      | 0                   | 0                   | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D2   | 64                     | 55                  | 0                   | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
| Spring | E    | 76                     | 22                  | 4                   | 1,300   | 5.3                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | A    | 1,436                  | 1,062               | 52                  | 24,425  | 3.6                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 2    | 0 |
|        | B    | 1,337                  | 1,210               | 23                  | 20,880  | 1.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 1    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 1 |
|        | C    | 276                    | 235                 | 12                  | 5,900   | 4.4                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D1   | 49                     | 21                  | 5                   | 4,650   | 10.3                  | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 5    | 1 |
| Summer | D2   | 42                     | 44                  | 2                   | 600     | 4.8                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | E    | 209                    | 185                 | 14                  | 3,802   | 6.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | A    | 448                    | 139                 | 3                   | 700     | 0.7                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | B    | 1,104                  | 839                 | 12                  | 10,800  | 1.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 1    | 0 |
|        | C    | 454                    | 109                 | 6                   | 2,000   | 1.3                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
| Fall   | D1   | 15                     | 5                   | 0                   | 0       | 0.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D2   | 44                     | 42                  | 1                   | 100     | 2.3                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | E    | 292                    | 283                 | 11                  | 6,006   | 3.8                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | A    | 478                    | 16                  | 5                   | 1,360   | 1.0                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | B    | 1,234                  | 130                 | 7                   | 575     | 0.6                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
| Total  | C    | 314                    | 31                  | 6                   | 1,100   | 1.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D1   | 77                     | 6                   | 3                   | 520     | 3.9                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | D2   | 263                    | 21                  | 16                  | 1,430   | 6.1                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
|        | E    | 563                    | 35                  | 10                  | 0       | 1.8                   | 0                         | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 0    | 0 |
| Total  |      | 10,736                 | 5,346               | 233                 | 110,493 | 2.2                   | 0                         | 0    | 1     | 1    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0          | 8    | 2 |

<sup>1</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2013-2014

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary trip ticket data for 2015

<sup>3</sup> Based on estimated trips and observer large mesh trips



# Potential Amendments to the Sea Turtle and Atlantic Sturgeon Incidental Take Permits

August 25, 2015

## I. ISSUE

To address the commercial fishing industry's concerns over limited allowed sea turtle takes and reduced fishing opportunities under the Incidental Take Permits (ITP) for sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon and the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) concerns over management unit boundaries for enforcement and clarity to fishermen.

## II. ORIGINATION

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries NCDMF Protected Species Advisory Team (PSAT) and Management Review Team (MRT)

## III. BACKGROUND

The NCDMF received ITPs from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under Section 10 (1) (b) of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) for sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon (NMFS 2013a; NMFS 2014a). The Sea Turtle ITP was received in September 2013 and the Atlantic sturgeon ITP was received in July 2014. The NCDMF applied for the Sea Turtle ITP as part of the Settlement Agreement with the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Hospital for the lawsuit over unauthorized sea turtle takes from large mesh gill nets in internal coastal waters. The NCDMF applied for the Atlantic sturgeon ITP to authorize incidental takes in the anchored gill net fishery in internal coastal waters due to the listing of Atlantic sturgeon as endangered in April 2012.

The ITPs allow for limited takes of sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon in anchored gill nets fished in internal coastal waters by commercial and recreational fishermen, and these takes are allocated for each ITP fishing year (September 1-August 31) by species, disposition (alive or dead), gear type (large or small mesh gill net), and management unit (Figure 1). The Atlantic sturgeon ITP also allocates takes for each management unit by season with the exception of management units D and E, which are allocated by fishing year. The allowed sea turtle takes for the management units were too low to allocate by season. The management units and seasons account for variations in interaction rates and fishing effort. Management units are delineated based on the similarity of fisheries and management, extent of known protected species interactions in commercial gill net fisheries and fishery-independent gill net surveys, and NCDMF's ability to monitor reported fishing effort from the North Carolina Trip Ticket Program. The management units close for either the season or fishing year (depending on ITP and management unit) once the allowed takes are either approached or reached for any given species, disposition, or gear type. In addition, both ITPs require restrictions on gill net gear, the times the gear can be fished, minimum observer coverage to monitor takes, self-reporting of takes by fishermen (when no observer is present), a permit system for fishermen fishing under the ITPs, and adequate funding by NCDMF to meet these requirements. As part of the Settlement Agreement with the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Hospital, the gill net gear restrictions that were designated in the ITPs were to be patterned after the restrictions in the Settlement Agreement with limits set based on not being any less restrictive than the Settlement Agreement allowed. Implementing Agreements (IA) were also developed and administered for both ITPs to better define both the NCDMF's and NMFS' roles and responsibilities for the ITPs such as providing a common understanding of actions that will be undertaken to minimize and mitigate the effect of sea turtle and sturgeon interactions in the anchored gill-net fisheries. Both ITPs and IAs are in effect for 10 years with annual reviews by NMFS.

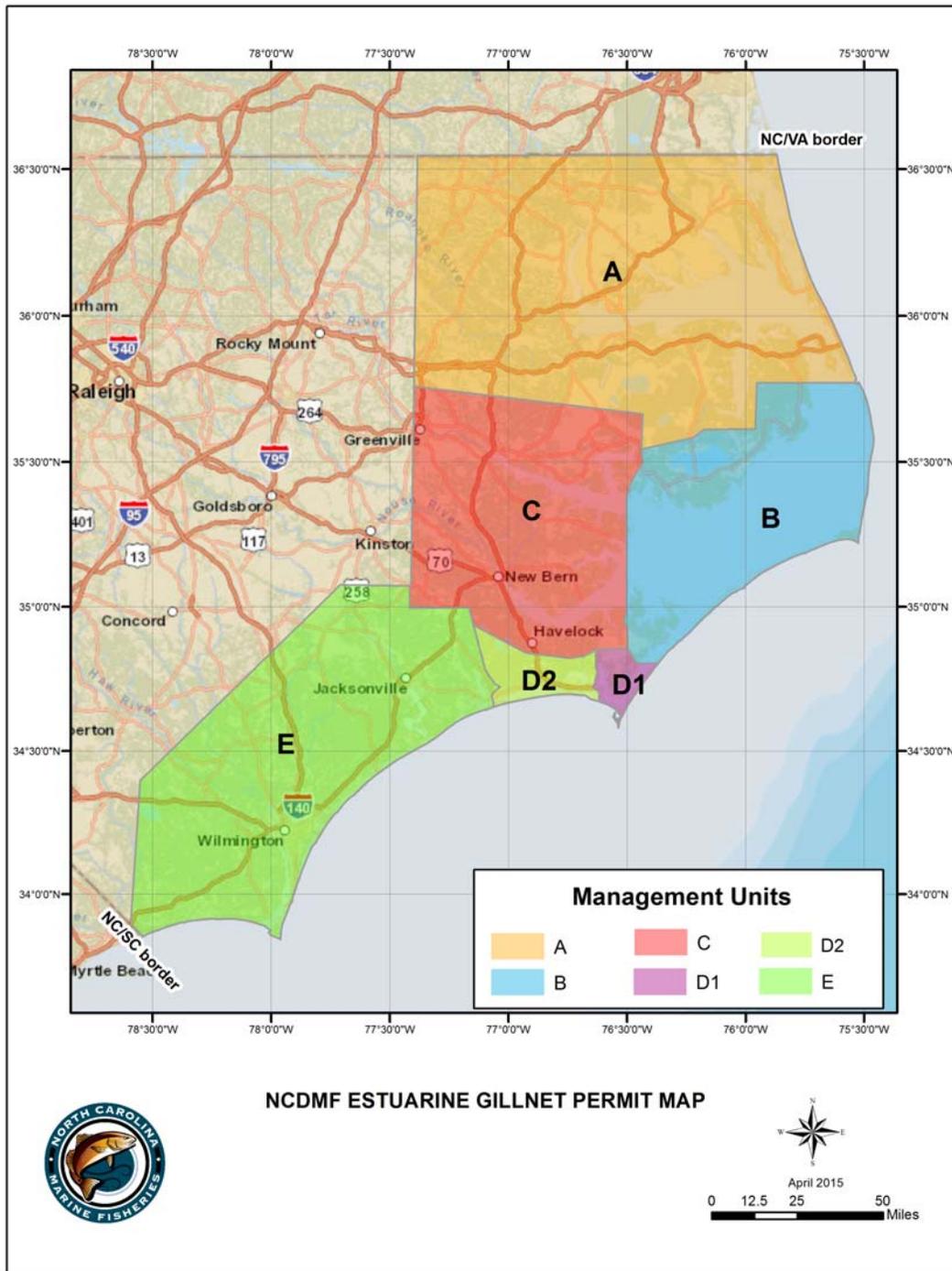


Figure 1. Sea Turtle ITP management units. The Atlantic Sturgeon ITP management units are similar except Management Unit A is subdivided into Management units A1 (Albemarle Sound), A2 (Currituck Sound) and A3 (Croatan and Roanoke sounds), and Management Unit D is a single management unit.

Modifications and amendments to the ITPs are allowed and the IAs for each ITP explain the process for making these changes as well as the parameters of the ITPs that can be amended or modified (NMFS 2013b; NMFS 2014b). However, an increase in the number of allowed takes and the relocation of takes among management units are not permitted. Minor modifications include typographical or editing errors that do not change the intended meaning, corrections to maps or figures, and minor changes to survey, monitoring or reporting protocols. Minor modifications can be implemented within 60 days of receipt and shall include the reason for the proposed modification and an analysis of its environmental effects. An ITP amendment is required for changes that are beyond the scope of a minor modification as determined by NMFS. An amendment shall include the reason for the amendment and analysis of its effects on the environment, the species covered under the ITP and the ITP's requirements (e.g., revising the environmental assessment and reinitiating consultation under Section 7 of the ESA) (NMFS 2013b; NMFS 2014b; Kristy Long, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, personal communication). NMFS is also required to make the amendment available for public comment, and the approval of the amendment by NMFS is not made until public comment and the analysis of impacts are considered. As such, the amendment process generally takes about one year, but the time period depends on the number of requested amendment items and their complexity. The analysis, public comment, and approval is limited to the amendment items unless the amendment items significantly change the mitigation measures in the permit and baseline assumptions. In this case, NMFS treats the amendment the same way a new application is treated. NMFS also considers past performance of ITP compliance when deciding whether or not to approve amendment items (Kristy Long, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, personal communication). This issue paper addresses potential amendment items instead of minor modifications because the amendment process is most appropriate for management options that address the commercial fishing industry's concerns and the NCDMF's concerns over management unit boundaries for enforcement and clarity to fishermen.

#### **IV. AUTHORITY**

##### N.C. General Statutes

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 113-134     | Rules   |
| 113-182     | Regulation of fishing and fisheries                                     |
| 113-189     | Protection of sea turtles, marine mammals, migratory birds, and finfish |
| 113-221.1   | Proclamations; emergency review   |
| 143B-289.52 | Marine Fisheries Commission – Powers and Duties                         |

##### N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rules May 1, 2015 (15A NCAC)

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 03I .0107 | ENDANGERED OR THREATENED SPECIES         |
| 03M .0508 | STURGEON                                 |
| 03M .0512 | COMPLIANCE WITH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS |

#### **V. DISCUSSION**

The NCDMF has identified five potential amendment items for consideration that are described and analyzed in this section. Any amendments approved by NMFS should apply to both ITPs in order to minimize confusion and to ensure consistency of management measures. Public input is sought for these options before they are submitted to NMFS.

### Modify the Boundary between Management Units A and B

The Sea Turtle ITP originally allocated four sea turtle takes (observed) per fishing year to Management Unit A while the Atlantic sturgeon ITP allocates over 2,800 Atlantic sturgeon estimated takes per year to this management unit (Figure 1) (NMFS 2013a; NMFS 2014a). The NCDMF and NMFS agreed to a minor modification to the Sea Turtle ITP on July 21, 2015 that combines the allowed sea turtle takes for Management units A (n = 4) and C (n = 4) to provide the NCDMF more flexibility in managing the fishery and to reduce the chance of allowed takes being exceeded for either management unit. Management Unit A is relatively large and consists of fresh or brackish water throughout most of the area with higher salinity water found in the southeastern portion. Most of the sea turtle takes in Management Unit A documented in the NCDMF Observer Program and the fishery-independent surveys were from the southeast portion of the management unit. The four allowed sea turtle takes originally allocated to Management Unit resulted in a large mesh gill net closure in October 2014 (Proclamation M-33-2014) and a closure of all anchored gill nets on June 12, 2015 (Proclamation M-11-2015) until the end of the ITP fishing year (August 31) due to exceeding the allowable takes (n = 6).

The Sea Turtle ITP allocates over 400 estimated and observed sea turtle takes per fishing year to Management Unit B while the Atlantic sturgeon ITP allocates 50 Atlantic sturgeon observed takes per year to this management unit (Figure 1) (NMFS 2013a; NMFS 2014a). Management Unit B is an extensive management unit, covering all of Pamlico Sound and upper Core Sound, and consisting of low and high salinity waters. Although sea turtle interactions documented in the NCDMF Observer Program and the fishery-independent surveys often occur in the eastern and southeastern portion of the management unit, sea turtle interactions have occurred throughout the management unit.

Moving the boundary line north would remove the higher salinity waters where sea turtle interactions are more likely to occur in Management Unit A. Sea turtle and Atlantic sturgeon takes occurring south of the new boundary line would count against the allowed takes in Management Unit B. An important consideration for potential boundary changes is the small number of Atlantic sturgeon takes in Management Unit B compared to the relative abundance of Atlantic sturgeon in Management Unit A. Another important consideration is moving the boundary line north increases the area where sea turtle interactions could occur in Management Unit B. Although Management Unit B has the most allowed sea turtle takes of all the management units, the unit closed for large mesh gill nets on June 8, 2015 (Proclamation M-10-2015) for the remainder of the ITP fishing year due to approaching the allowed takes of both live and dead green sea turtles. Management Unit B has also closed temporarily since the inception of the ITP and with previous ITPs for the Pamlico Sound Gill Net Restricted Area (PSGNRA) to avoid long term closures when sea turtle abundance is high (See <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations> for a full list of proclamations).

A potential boundary line for consideration is the new US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Croatan Sound and the US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Roanoke Sound (Figure 2). This moves the boundary line approximately 10 miles north of the current boundary line. This would move much of the higher salinity portions of Management Unit A to Management Unit B. During the 2014-2015 ITP fishing year, four of the six sea turtle takes observed in Management Unit A occurred below these bridges, but closures resulting from sea turtle takes could still occur due to the small number allocated to this management unit. The chance of Atlantic sturgeon takes closing Management Unit B increases because much of the observed Atlantic sturgeon interactions occurred just south of this boundary line at the US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Croatan Sound (Figure 2). In addition, most of these interactions occurred in the winter and spring seasons when allowed observed Atlantic sturgeon takes are minimal (winter n = 2 and spring n = 2 for large mesh gill nets; winter n = 2 and spring n = 7 for small mesh gill nets), which increases the chance of exceeding the allowed seasonal Atlantic sturgeon takes in Management Unit B (NMFS 2014a). Two additional sets of potential boundaries were also analyzed, but the distribution of

Atlantic sturgeon interactions in Croatan Sound and the low number of allowed Atlantic sturgeon takes in Management Unit B preclude the consideration of any boundary lines north of these bridges (Figure 2).

Moving the boundary line to the new US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Croatan Sound and the US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Roanoke Sound divides two water body designations used by the North Carolina Trip Ticket Program between Management units A and B. Anchored gill net fishing trip data from the Trip Ticket Program are used to calculate observer coverage in the management units, so splitting water bodies between two management units makes it difficult to determine how much gill net fishing effort occurred in each management unit. A similar situation occurs in Core Sound, which is divided between Management units B and D1. A ratio of anchored gill net fishing trips in the Management Unit B portion of Core Sound and the Management Unit D1 portion of Core Sound was developed from the division's commercial estuarine gill net sampling program. A similar ratio could be developed for Croatan and Roanoke sounds if the boundary line is moved.

If a boundary line change is not feasible due to the increased chance of closures in Management Unit B, then adaptive management measures outlined in the ITPs could be used to minimize sea turtle-related closures in Management Unit A (i.e., temporary area closures, gear modifications). For example, temporary area closures were implemented in portions of Management units A and B in 2014 to prevent longer closures for the entire management unit (Proclamations M-32-2014, M-36-2014, and M-37-2014).

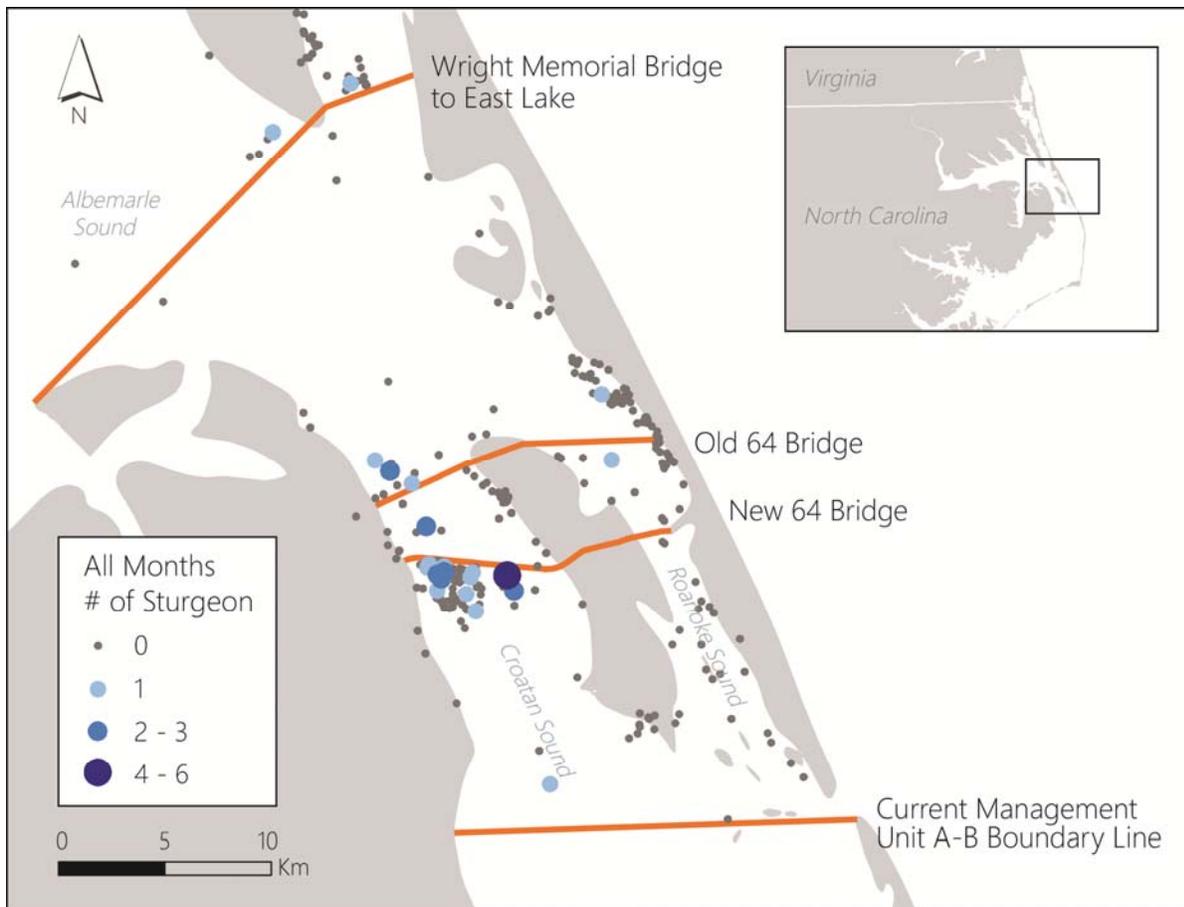


Figure 2. Existing and potential boundary lines between Management units A and B and the distribution of Atlantic sturgeon interactions from 2003 through 2014.

### Conditional Exemption for Low Salinity Portions of Management Unit A

The Sea Turtle and Atlantic Sturgeon ITPs require the entire management unit to close when the allowed takes are either approached or reached. Portions of Management Unit A such as upper Currituck Sound and the Chowan River are mostly freshwater and the NCDMF has never documented sea turtle interactions there. In addition, there have been no sea turtle strandings documented by the NC Sea Turtle Stranding Network in these water bodies

(<http://www.seaturtle.org/strand/summary/gmap.shtml?program=1&year=All&species=>; accessed on July 8, 2015).

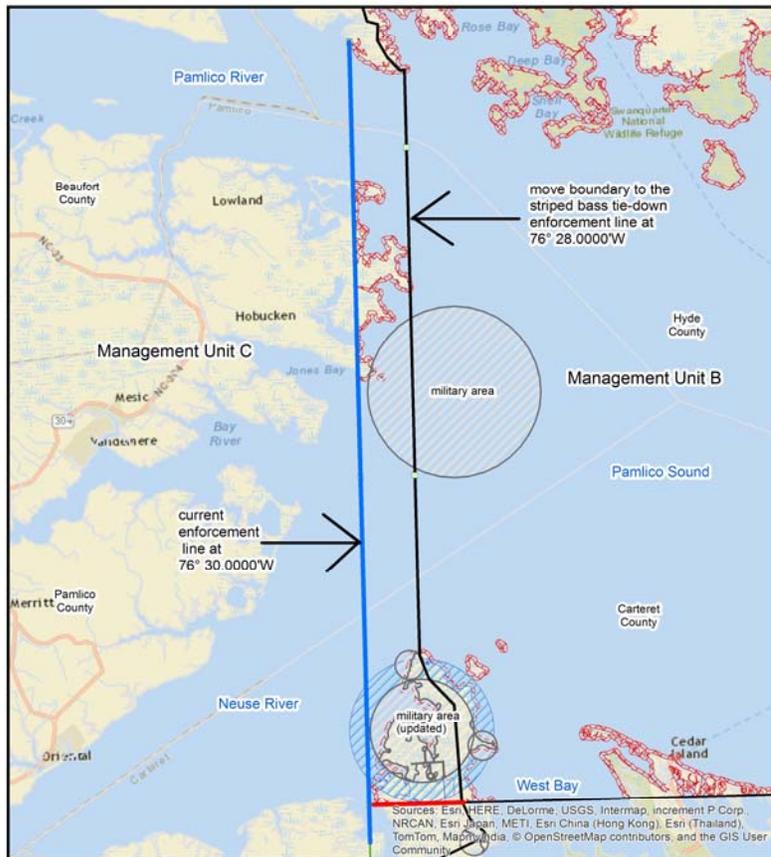
A potential option that could avoid closing these water bodies when Management Unit A closes due to sea turtle takes is to conditionally exempt water bodies where sea turtle interactions are very unlikely. The use of anchored gill nets would still be allowed in these locations as long as no sea turtle interactions occurred here. These locations would not be exempt to closures due to Atlantic sturgeon interactions and these locations would be subject to observer coverage and gill net management measures required by the ITPs. A potential drawback to this option is a sea turtle interaction occurring in the exempted locations after Management Unit A closed would exceed the allowed takes for that management unit. Exceeding the allowed takes would put the NCDMF out of compliance with the ITP. Therefore, any exempted locations must be where a sea turtle interaction is very unlikely. Another potential drawback to this option is it could result in more fishing effort shifting to the exempted areas, which could result in more Atlantic sturgeon interactions. Potential locations for a conditional exemption could include upper Currituck Sound and the Chowan River. Although other locations in Management Unit A also have a low likelihood of a sea turtle interaction, caution should be taken to minimize the risk of exceeding the allowed sea turtle takes in this management unit. Management and enforcement of exempted areas must be taken into consideration as well.

### Modify the Boundary between Management Units B and C

The current boundary between Management units B and C is at 76°30.0000' W, which is the western boundary for the annual federal closure in Pamlico Sound from September 1 through December 15 for large mesh gill nets that are defined as 4 ¼ inches stretched mesh and greater (67 FR 56931, September 6, 2002) (Figure 3). The shallow water portions of the federal closure area in Pamlico Sound remain open under the ITPs. Approximately 2 miles east of this boundary at 76°28.000' is the boundary line for mandatory tie-downs for large mesh gill nets when the commercial striped bass season in the Central Southern Management Area (CSMA) is closed. Management units B and C have different large mesh gill net regulations under the ITPs, but the mandatory tie-down requirement for large mesh gill nets currently extends into the extreme western portion of Management Unit B. The overlap of the tie-down requirement combined with the different large mesh gill net regulations for these management units creates confusion for the gill net fishermen in this region and poses enforcement problems for Marine Patrol officers in the area.

Moving the boundary between Management units B and C to the boundary line for mandatory tie-downs for large mesh gill nets when the commercial striped bass season in the Central Southern Management Area (CSMA) is closed (76°28.000' W) would alleviate the confusion for gill net fishermen in this region as well as facilitate enforcement due to regulations that are easier to understand. However, this would result in the western boundary for the federal closure in Pamlico Sound for gill nets of 4 ¼ inches stretched mesh and greater from September 1 through December 15 to occur in Management Unit C. This option would also increase the size of Management Unit C, which could increase the potential of this management unit closing early because of sea turtle and Atlantic sturgeon interactions. The Sea Turtle ITP allocates eight observed sea turtle takes per fishing year to Management unit A and C combined. The Atlantic sturgeon ITP allocates 15 observed takes per year (divided into seasons) to the large mesh gill net

fishery and eight observed takes per year (divided into seasons) to the small mesh fishery to Management Unit C (NMFS 2014a). However, gill net fishing effort in this region is low compared to other areas of the management unit.



**NC DMF GILLNET  
MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

**Amendment #2**

**map 2**

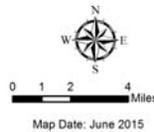


Figure 3. Existing boundary line (blue line at 76°30.0000' W) between Management units B and C and mandatory large mesh gill net tie-down boundary line (black line at 76°28.000' W).

Large Mesh Gill Net Exemption in the Upper Cape Fear River

An amendment to the Sea Turtle Lawsuit Settlement Agreement exempted the upper Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers from the large mesh gill net regulations in place for Management Unit E during the commercial shad season (Figure 4). Gill net fishermen were required to fish their anchored gill nets at least twice a day with an unattended soak time of no longer than 12 hours, and the exemption ends once the water temperature reached 55 degrees Fahrenheit. The water temperature in these rivers often reach 55 degrees Fahrenheit before the commercial American shad season ends (by rule, the commercial harvest of American and hickory shad can occur no earlier than January 1 and no later than

April 14). The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) requires a Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan for the commercial and recreational harvest of American shad to occur in a river system (ASMFC 2010). The 2015 commercial shad season for the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers in the North Carolina Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan was from February 20 through April 11, which was shorter in duration than the maximum harvest period allowed by rule. The water temperature threshold could result in an even shorter season for fishermen targeting American shad with anchored gill nets.

An option that could alleviate this issue is to remove the water temperature threshold and have the exemptions for large mesh gill net regulations end when the commercial shad season ends on the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers or on April 14, whichever occurs first. This option will not likely increase the chance for sea turtle interactions closing the management unit early because no sea turtles have ever been observed in this mostly freshwater portion of the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers, and this exemption occurs when sea turtle abundance in North Carolina's estuaries is relatively low. Atlantic sturgeon are found in this portion of the river and the NCDMF's Observer Program has observed them here during the commercial shad season. This option could increase the chance of Management Unit E closing early due to Atlantic sturgeon takes because only eight takes are allowed for large mesh gill nets during the ITP fishing year.



**Location of Potential Gillnet lines for the Cape Fear River**

Figure 4. Proposed boundary lines for areas exempted from the ITP gill net management measures on the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers.

Large Mesh Gill Net Exemptions in the Winter and Early Spring for Management Unit B

An amendment to the Sea Turtle Lawsuit Settlement Agreement exempted Pamlico Sound and the Neuse, Pamlico, Pungo, New, and Cape Fear rivers from the large mesh gill net regulations during the commercial shad season. A later amendment to the Sea Turtle Lawsuit Settlement Agreement exempted the Neuse, Pamlico, and Pungo rivers from the large mesh gill net regulations throughout the year. Fishermen setting gill nets in Pamlico and Core sounds (Management Unit B) have requested the NCDMF to explore the possibility of amending the ITPs so they can participate again in the commercial shad gill net fishery.

Potential options for this amendment item are to allow fishermen to set large mesh gill nets longer than one hour before sunset to one hour after sunrise during the commercial shad season, allow fishermen to set large mesh gill nets that do not comply with the ITP management measures during the commercial shad season, or both. Although sea turtle abundance in Management Unit B is relatively low in the winter and early spring, these options would increase the risk of cold-stunned sea turtles interacting with a gill net. These options also increase the risk for early closures in the winter and spring due to the low allowed takes of Atlantic sturgeon in large mesh gill nets for this management unit (winter n = 2; spring n = 2).

## VI. MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

(+ potential positive impact of action)

(- potential negative impact of action)

- 1) Status Quo—No amendments to the ITPs
  - + Maintains regulations and requirements for the ITPs
  - Does not address concerns over limited allowed sea turtle takes and limited fishing opportunities
  - Does not address the NCDMF's concerns over management unit boundaries for enforcement and clarity for fishermen
  
- 2) Move the boundary line between Management units A and B to the US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Croatan Sound and the US Highway 64/264 Bridge over Roanoke Sound
  - + Helps resolve the low allowed sea turtle takes in Management Unit A by moving the area where sea turtle interactions often in occur in Management Unit A to Management Unit B
  - + Easier boundary to enforce
  - Increased chance for Atlantic sturgeon and sea turtle interactions either closing Management Unit B or exceeding allowable takes in Management Unit B
  - Divides Croatan and Roanoke sounds into two management units, which complicates determining how much gill net fishing effort occurred in each management unit for observer coverage purposes
  
- 3) Conditional exemption for low salinity portions of Management Unit A
  - + Allows anchored gill net fishing to continue after a closure due to sea turtles
  - + Conditional exemption only allowed if no sea turtle interactions occurred in the exempted locations
  - Risk of exceeding allowed sea turtle takes if an interaction occurs in the exempted locations after the allowed sea turtle takes are reached for the management unit
  - Effort shift to the exempted locations could increase the chance for sturgeon interactions
  
- 4) Move the boundary line between Management units B and C from 76°30.0000' W to 76°28.000' W
  - + More consistent large mesh gill net regulations for each management unit
  - + Less confusion for gill net fishermen in this region
  - + Facilitates enforcement due to regulations that are easier to understand
  - Western boundary for the federal closure in Pamlico Sound for gill nets of 4 ¼ inches stretched mesh and greater from September 1 through December 15 would move to Management Unit C
  - Increased chance for sea turtle and Atlantic sturgeon interactions in Management Unit C
  
- 5) Exempt large mesh gill nets in the upper Cape Fear River from ITP regulations during the commercial shad season
  - + Provide anchored gill net fishermen more opportunities to fish for American shad during the open season
  - + Easier to monitor without a water temperature threshold

- + Sea turtle interactions very unlikely in this area and time of year
  - Increased chance for Atlantic sturgeon interactions
- 6) Large mesh gill net exemptions in Management Unit B during the commercial shad season
- + Provide anchored gill net fishermen more opportunities to fish for American shad during the open season
  - Increased chance for Atlantic sturgeon and sea turtle interactions either closing Management Unit B or exceeding allowable takes in Management Unit B

## **VIII. RECOMMENDATION**

## **IX. LITERATURE CITED**

ASMFC (Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission) 2010. Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Shad and River Herring (American Shad Management). Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Washington, DC. 158 p.

NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). 2013a. Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit # 16230 National Marine Fisheries Service, Silver Spring, MD. 13 p.

NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). 2013b. Implementing Agreement for Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit # 16230. National Marine Fisheries Service, Silver Spring, MD. 18 p.

NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). 2014a. Atlantic Sturgeon Incidental Take Permit # 18102. National Marine Fisheries Service, Silver Spring, MD. 13 p.

NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service). 2014b. Implementing Agreement for Atlantic Sturgeon Incidental Take Permit # 18102. National Marine Fisheries Service, Silver Spring, MD. 17 p.

Prepared by Chris Batsavage  
August 25, 2015





Summer 2015 Seasonal Progress Report  
Incidental Take Permit No. 16230  
June 1 – August 31, 2015

Jacob Boyd  
Protected Species Biologist  
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries

September 23, 2015

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## Summary

The summer season for anchored large and small mesh gill nets in North Carolina is June through August for Incidental Take Permit (ITP) Year 2015 (September 1, 2014 – August 31, 2015) as defined in ITP No. 16230. The Division closed anchored large mesh gill nets via proclamation M-10-2015 on June 8, 2015 in management unit B through the end of ITP Year 2015 (August 31, 2015) due to approaching allowable sea turtle interactions. The Division closed anchored large and small mesh gill nets via proclamation M-11-2015 on June 12, 2015 in management unit A through the end of ITP Year 2015 due to reaching allowable sea turtle interactions. The Division closed anchored large and small mesh gill nets via proclamation M-12-2015 on June 23, 2015 in management unit C through the end of ITP Year 2015 due to reaching allowable sea turtle interactions after a minor modification combined the authorized sea turtle interactions in management units A and C (Table 1). Management unit D1 remained closed to anchored large mesh gill nets through the summer season as part of the annual closure outlined in the ITP (May 8 – October 14). All other management units remained open for the duration of the summer season.

Observer coverage was calculated for the summer 2015 season in each management unit by estimating fishing trips using an average of the previous four year's trip ticket data (2011-2014) for anchored large mesh gill nets and the average of the previous two year's (2013-2014) trip ticket data for anchored small mesh gill nets compared to the observer trips completed throughout the summer season. The average was used when estimating fishing trips to account for the fluctuation of fishing effort over the previous four years due to closures and other regulations put in place throughout the time series. The Observer Program achieved an estimated 14.5% overall anchored large mesh gill-net coverage for the summer 2015 season meeting the minimum requirement ( $n = 7.0\%$ ) in all management units except management unit A (Table 2). Coverage was not met in management unit A due to the minimal amount of fishing effort that occurred prior to the closure of 80 days in the management unit. The Observer Program achieved an estimated 1.9% anchored small mesh gill-net coverage for the summer 2015 season meeting the minimum requirement ( $n = 1.0\%$ ) in each management unit except for D1 where very little fishing effort occurred (Table 3).

There were 11 observed sea turtle interactions from anchored large mesh gill nets and 1 observed from anchored small mesh gill nets in the summer 2015 season (Table 4). The species composition was made up of primarily green sea turtles ( $n = 8$  alive;  $n = 2$  dead), with 2 alive loggerhead sea turtles (Table 4). There were two Marine Patrol reported sea turtle interactions during this time period from illegally set gill net (Table 5). The cumulative estimated and/or observed takes for anchored large and small mesh gill nets through the summer 2015 season for ITP Year 2015 are in Tables 6 and 7. The estimated takes for September through November 2014 are based on finalized trip ticket data.

Marine Patrol made 309 gill net checks for the summer 2015 season. Of these 309 gill net checks, there were 36 citations written (Table 8).

As per the ITP, the Division established a permit in September 2014 to register all fishermen participating in the anchored large and small mesh gill-net fisheries (Estuarine Gill Net Permit – EGNP). This multifaceted permit allows the Division to closely monitor for compliance with the permit system the Division already has in place. As of September 8, 2015 there have been 2,678 EGNPs issued for Fiscal Year (FY) 15 and 2,319 EGNPs issued for FY 16. Permits are renewed on an annual basis, based on FY (July 1 – June 30) for licenses. During the summer 2015 season there were 0 Notice of Violations (NOV) issued for the EGNP.

The Observer Program has various ways to contact fishermen to set up trips. Due to limited resources and fishermen leaving from their residence or private ramps, the most efficient and common way to contact fishermen is by phone. One of the many checks the Program has is a contact log which is filled out for every contact that is made when attempting to obtain a trip. Each contact is put into a specific category and other information is gathered (Table 9). The contact log was analyzed by month and category to determine what percentage of contacts (n = 815) resulted in positive observer trips (Table 10). Of the 815 contacts that were made, 50.7% were categorized as 1, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 14 which inclusively represent not being able to get in touch with fishermen or fishermen refusing trips. Observers made few contacts in the summer 2015 season due to the extended closures of multiple management units.

## Tables

Table 1. Openings and closings of management units by date and regulation change from the summer 2015 season (June - August) for anchored large and small mesh gill nets for ITP Year 2015.

| Year | Date(s) | Regulation change   |
|------|---------|---|
| 2015 | June 8  | Closed management unit B to anchored large mesh gill nets due to approaching allowable sea turtle interactions (M-10-2015).   |
| 2015 | June 12 | Closed management unit A to anchored large and small mesh gill nets due to reaching allowable sea turtle interactions (M-11-2015).  |
| 2015 | July 23 | Closed management unit C to anchored large and small mesh gill nets due to reaching allowable sea turtle interactions. The division requested a minor modification to the Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit that combines the authorized takes for management units A and C to provide more flexibility in managing the fishery and ensure that authorized take levels are not exceeded during the Incidental Take Permit year. For management units A and C the number of allowable takes had been reached (n=8; M-12-2015). |

Table 2. Observer coverage calculated from an average of the previous four year's trip ticket data and observer data from the summer 2015 season (June - August) by management unit for anchored large mesh gill nets for ITP Year 2015.

| Management Unit <sup>1,2</sup> | Trips                              |          | Coverage (%) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
|                                | Estimated (2011-2014) <sup>3</sup> | Observed |              |
| A                              | 228                                | 12       | 5.3          |
| B                              | 117                                | 16       | 13.7         |
| C                              | 184                                | 40       | 21.7         |
| D1                             | 0                                  | 0        | 0.0          |
| D2                             | 125                                | 17       | 13.6         |
| E                              | 446                                | 75       | 16.8         |
| Total                          | 1,100                              | 160      | 14.5         |

<sup>1</sup> Management unit D1 was closed to anchored large mesh gill nets during the summer 2015 season

<sup>2</sup> Management units A, B, and C were closed to anchored large mesh gill nets during the majority of the summer 2015 season

<sup>3</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2011-2014

Table 3. Observer coverage calculated from an average of the previous two year's trip ticket data and observer data from the summer 2015 season (June - August) by management unit for anchored small mesh gill nets for ITP Year 2015.

| Management Unit <sup>1</sup> | Trips                              |          | Coverage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
|                              | Estimated (2013-2014) <sup>2</sup> | Observed |              |
| A                            | 58                                 | 3        | 5.2          |
| B                            | 1,104                              | 12       | 1.1          |
| C                            | 114                                | 6        | 5.3          |
| D1                           | 15                                 | 0        | 0.0          |
| D2                           | 44                                 | 1        | 2.3          |
| E                            | 292                                | 9        | 3.1          |
| Total                        | 1,627                              | 31       | 1.9          |

<sup>1</sup> Management units A and C were closed to anchored small mesh gill nets during the majority of the summer 2015 season

<sup>2</sup> Finalized trip ticket data averaged from 2013-2014

Table 4. Summary of observed sea turtle interactions in anchored large and small mesh gill nets from the summer 2015 season (June - August) for ITP Year 2015.

| Date      | Management Unit | Latitude | Longitude | Species            | Disposition | Tag              |         | Curved Carapace (mm) |       |
|-----------|-----------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|------------------|---------|----------------------|-------|
|           |                 |          |           |                    |             | PIT              | Inconel | Length               | Width |
| 6/2/2015  | C               | 3519.423 | 7632.507  | green <sup>1</sup> | alive       | 989.001001951915 | n/a     | 240                  | 210   |
| 6/5/2015  | B               | 3508.589 | 7555.541  | green              | alive       | n/a              | n/a     | 298                  | 255   |
| 6/5/2015  | B               | 3508.575 | 7555.604  | green              | dead        | n/a              | n/a     | 271                  | 239   |
| 6/10/2015 | A               | 3550.834 | 7535.639  | green              | alive       | 982.000364297009 | n/a     | 275                  | 235   |
| 6/10/2015 | A               | 3550.579 | 7535.419  | green              | alive       | 982.000364299962 | n/a     | 277                  | 246   |
| 6/11/2015 | C               | 3511.202 | 7639.629  | green              | alive       | n/a              | n/a     | n/a                  | n/a   |
| 6/12/2015 | A               | 3550.876 | 7537.263  | green              | dead        | n/a              | n/a     | 260                  | 230   |
| 7/1/2015  | E               | 3434.889 | 7725.502  | green              | alive       | n/a              | n/a     | n/a                  | n/a   |
| 7/2/2015  | E               | 3424.650 | 7735.031  | green              | alive       | n/a              | n/a     | n/a                  | n/a   |
| 7/7/2015  | E               | 3435.420 | 7722.167  | loggerhead         | alive       | 989.001001951676 | EEU660  | 457                  | 340   |
| 7/15/2015 | D2              | 3443.559 | 7642.855  | green              | alive       | 989.001001951746 | n/a     | 361                  | 323   |
| 8/27/2015 | D2              | 34.68745 | 76.97218  | loggerhead         | alive       | n/a              | n/a     | n/a                  | n/a   |

<sup>1</sup>Indicates small mesh gear

Table 5. Summary of reported sea turtle interactions in anchored large and small mesh gill nets from the summer 2015 season (June - August) for ITP Year 2015.

| Date <sup>1</sup> | Management Unit | Latitude | Longitude | Species      | Disposition | Curved Carapace (mm) |       |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|-------|
|                   |                 |          |           |              |             | Length               | Width |
| 6/23/2015         | A               | 3553.947 | 7537.567  | Kemps ridley | dead        | 300                  | 320   |
| 6/25/2015         | B               | 3521.549 | 7530.886  | Kemps ridley | alive       | n/a                  | n/a   |

<sup>1</sup> Both reported sea turtle interactions were from illegally set large mesh gill nets and were reported by Marine Patrol

Table 6. Summary of estimated and/or observed cumulative sea turtle interactions through the summer 2015 season (June - August) by management unit for anchored large mesh gill nets for ITP Year 2015.

| Management Unit | Green |       | Kemp's ridley |      | Loggerhead |      | Unknown |      |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------------|------|------------|------|---------|------|
|                 | Alive | Dead  | Alive         | Dead | Alive      | Dead | Alive   | Dead |
| A               | *3    | *1    | *1            | 0    | 0          | 0    | *1      | 0    |
| B               | 180.3 | 99.1  | 27.0          | 6.9  | *1         | 0    | *1      | 0    |
| C               | *1    | 0     | 0             | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0    |
| D1              | 2.0   | 0     | 0             | 0    | 0          | 0    | 0       | 0    |
| D2              | *1    | 0     | 0             | 0    | *1         | 0    | 0       | 0    |
| E               | 9.3   | 0     | 7.5           | 0    | *2         | 0    | 0       | 0    |
| Total           | 196.6 | 100.1 | 35.5          | 6.9  | 4          | 0    | 2       | 0    |

\*Indicates observed takes

Table 7. Summary of observed cumulative sea turtle interactions through the summer 2015 season (June - August) by management unit for anchored small mesh gill nets for ITP Year 2015.

| Management Unit | Green |      |
|-----------------|-------|------|
|                 | Alive | Dead |
| A               | 0     | 0    |
| B               | 0     | *1   |
| C               | *1    | 0    |
| D1              | 0     | 0    |
| D2              | 0     | 0    |
| E               | *1    | 0    |
| Total           | *2    | *1   |

\*Indicates observed takes

Table 8. Citations written by Marine Patrol for large and small mesh gill nets by date and violation code during the summer 2015 season (June - August) for ITP Year 2015.

| Violation |        |  |
|-----------|--------|--|
| Date      | Code   | Description  |
| 6/2/2015  | NETG46 | Set or retrieve large mesh gill nets later than one hour after sunrise on Tuesday through Friday |
| 6/8/2015  | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 6/14/2015 | NETG10 | Gill net with illegal mesh size  |
| 6/24/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 6/24/2015 | NETG04 | Leave gill net in waters when could not be legally fished  |
| 7/3/2015  | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 7/4/2015  | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 7/16/2015 | NETG46 | Set or retrieve large mesh gill nets later than one hour after sunrise on Tuesday through Friday |
| 7/21/2015 | NETG01 | Leave gill net in coastal waters unattended  |
| 7/21/2015 | NETG04 | Leave gill net in waters when could not be legally fished  |
| 7/21/2015 | NETG29 | RCGL gear without proper buoys   |
| 7/22/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 7/22/2015 | NETG04 | Leave gill net in waters when could not be legally fished  |
| 7/22/2015 | NETG30 | Leave RCGL gill net unattended   |
| 7/22/2015 | NETG39 | Use large mesh gill nets more than 15 meshes in height and w/out lead core or leaded bottom      |
| 7/30/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 8/5/2015  | NETG29 | RCGL gear without proper buoys   |
| 8/8/2015  | NETG12 | Net in middle third of marked navigational channel   |
| 8/10/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 8/10/2015 | NETG16 | Use an unattended gill net in a restricted area  |
| 8/10/2015 | NETG37 | Leave small mesh gill nets unattended  |
| 8/13/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 8/14/2015 | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 8/14/2015 | NETG30 | Leave RCGL gill net unattended   |
| 8/15/2015 | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 8/15/2015 | NETG29 | RCGL gear without proper buoys   |
| 8/15/2015 | NETG46 | Set or retrieve large mesh gill nets later than one hour after sunrise on Tuesday through Friday |
| 8/19/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 8/19/2015 | NETG10 | Gill net with illegal mesh size  |
| 8/19/2015 | NETG22 | Improperly set gill net  |
| 8/19/2015 | NETG46 | Set or retrieve large mesh gill nets later than one hour after sunrise on Tuesday through Friday |
| 8/20/2015 | NETG30 | Leave RCGL gill net unattended   |
| 8/23/2015 | NETG03 | Using gill net with improper buoys or identification   |
| 8/23/2015 | NETG04 | Leave gill net in waters when could not be legally fished  |
| 8/28/2015 | NETG04 | Leave gill net in waters when could not be legally fished  |
| 8/28/2015 | NETG29 | RCGL gear without proper buoys   |

Table 9. Categories and descriptions for the Observer Program's contact logs used for analysis.

| Categories | Category description                  |
|------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1          | Left message with someone else        |
| 2          | Not fishing general                   |
| 3          | Fishing other gear                    |
| 4          | Not fishing because of weather        |
| 5          | Not fishing because of boat issues    |
| 6          | Not fishing because of medical issues |
| 7          | Booked trip                           |
| 8          | Hung up, got angry, trip refused      |
| 9          | Call back later time/date             |
| 10         | Saw in person                         |
| 11         | Disconnected                          |
| 12         | Wrong number                          |
| 13         | No answer                             |
| 14         | No answer, left voicemail             |

Table 10. The percent of contacts (n = 815) made by the observers trying to set up trips by month categorized by contact type (0-14) and defined in table 9 for the summer 2015 season (June - August) for ITP Year 2015.

|        | Categories (%) |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      | Total |
|--------|----------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-------|
|        | 1              | 2    | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13   | 14   |       |
| June   | 4.5            | 21.2 | 9.0 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 2.0 | 5.2 | 0.4 | 6.5 | 0.7 | 3.2 | 1.8 | 10.8 | 27.4 | 94.8  |
| July   | 0.0            | 0.9  | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.5  | 1.1  | 3.8   |
| August | 0.0            | 0.5  | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0  | 0.5  | 1.3   |
| Total  | 4.5            | 22.6 | 9.1 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 2.1 | 5.5 | 0.4 | 7.0 | 0.9 | 3.6 | 2.0 | 11.3 | 29.0 | 100.0 |

## August 2015 Council Meeting Report

**August 10 – 13, 2015**

*New York, New York*

The following summary highlights Council actions and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's August 2015 meeting in New York, New York. Presentations, briefing materials, and audio recordings are available at [www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2015](http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2015).

### Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Specifications

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) to establish specifications for the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. The Council's recommendations apply to federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) and will be forwarded to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for approval. The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The table below summarizes the recommended commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass (2015 values are provided for comparison purposes). Please note that specifications may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

|                            |                             | <i>Current<br/>2015</i>   | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                            |                             | <i>millions of pounds</i> |             |             |             |
| <b>Summer<br/>Flounder</b> | Acceptable Biological Catch | 22.77                     | 16.26       | 15.86       | 15.68       |
|                            | Commercial Quota            | 11.07                     | 8.12        | 7.91        | 7.89        |
|                            | Recreational Harvest Limit  | 7.38                      | 5.42        | 5.28        | 5.26        |
| <b>Scup</b>                | Acceptable Biological Catch | 33.77                     | 31.11       | 28.40       | 27.05       |
|                            | Commercial Quota            | 21.23                     | 20.47       | 18.38       | 17.34       |
|                            | Recreational Harvest Limit  | 6.80                      | 6.09        | 5.50        | 5.21        |
| <b>Black Sea Bass</b>      | Acceptable Biological Catch | 5.50                      | 5.50        |             |             |
|                            | Commercial Quota            | 2.24                      | 2.24        |             |             |
|                            | Recreational Harvest Limit  | 2.33                      | 2.33        |             |             |

#### ***Summer Flounder***

For summer flounder, the Council and Board established multi-year specifications for the 2016-2018 fishing years. The Council and Commission approved an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limit of 16.26 million pounds for 2016, resulting in a commercial quota of 8.12 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 5.42 million pounds. The recommended 2016 ABC is an approximate 29% decrease relative to the 2015 ABC. This reduction is based on the findings of the 2015 stock assessment update, which indicates that the summer flounder stock was experiencing overfishing in 2014. The fishing mortality rate in 2014 was estimated to be 16% above the fishing mortality threshold reference point. Under the Council's normal risk policy, this would entail reducing commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits by about 43% in 2016. However, recognizing that a reduction of this magnitude could have severe social and economic impacts, the Council recommended that the reductions be phased in over a three year period. For more information on the assessment update and its impacts on harvest limits for 2016, please see the Council's [Summer Flounder Catch and Landings Limit Fact Sheet](#). The Council and Board also established ABCs of 15.86 million pounds for 2017 and 15.68 million pounds for 2018. These recommendations will be reviewed each year, along with any new scientific information, to determine if adjustments are warranted.

### **Scup**

For scup, the Council and Board established multi-year specifications for the 2016-2018 fishing years. For 2016, the Council and Commission approved an ABC of 31.11 million pounds. After accounting for projected discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries, this ABC is divided into a commercial quota of 20.47 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 6.09 million pounds for the 2016 fishing year. This represents a decrease from 2015 levels due to a slight decrease in spawning stock biomass (SSB) as projected by the 2015 benchmark stock assessment. The Council and Board also established an ABC of 28.40 million pounds for 2017 and 27.05 million pounds for 2018. These recommendations will be reviewed each year to determine whether any adjustments are warranted.

### **Black Sea Bass**

For black sea bass, the Council and Board established multi-year specifications for the 2016 and 2017 fishing years. The Council and Board approved an ABCs of 5.50 million pounds for both 2016 and 2017. After accounting for projected discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries, this ABC is divided into a commercial quota of 2.24 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 2.33 million pounds for each year. These recommendations are unchanged relative to 2015 catch and landings limits. However, both the commercial quota and recreational harvest limit may be changed pending further review by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in September 2015.

### **Bluefish Specifications**

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Board to establish multi-year bluefish specifications for the 2016-2018 fishing years. The Council recommended an ABC of 19.45 million pounds for 2016, 20.64 million pounds for 2017, and 21.81 million pounds for 2018. These ABCs represent a 10 percent and 5 percent decrease in 2016 and 2017, respectively, when compared to the current 2015 ABC (21.64 million pounds). The ABC for 2018 is slightly above (1 percent) the 2015 ABC. The Council and Board recommended these reductions based on the findings of the most recent benchmark stock assessment for bluefish (SAW-60). Although the assessment concluded that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, it lowered both the SSB target level (223 million pounds) and the SSB estimate (191 million pounds in 2014). The Stock Assessment Review Committee also recommended basing stock status determination on spawning stock biomass, as opposed to the previously recommended method of using total biomass. Expected recreational harvest limits for upcoming years will be used to estimate potential transfers from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery and will be based on realized recreational landings for the terminal year. NMFS will transfer the maximum amount allowable from the recreational fishery to the commercial fishery without exceeding the recreational harvest limits.

### **Summer Flounder Amendment**

The Council and Commission received an update on the Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment and discussed the development of revised FMP goals and objectives as one component of the amendment. The Council has engaged the Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum (Fisheries Forum) to coordinate a three-part process designed to provide additional information and context in support of this initiative. Over the next few months, the Fisheries Forum will conduct interviews with Council and Board members to gather in-depth feedback on the content and structure of the revised FMP goals and objectives. The input provided during these interviews will be synthesized for Council and Board discussion at a workshop tentatively scheduled for December 2015.

### **Scup Amendment**

The Council discussed options for moving forward with the Scup Allocation Amendment. In August 2012 the Council and Board passed a motion to initiate an amendment to address scup allocation issues. Since that time, landings limits have been high relative to pre-2011 levels, and both the commercial and recreational sectors have under-harvested their landings limits. This substantial under-harvest has effectively precluded the need to

reconsider allocations. However, the Council and Board agreed to initiate a scoping process before the end of the year given the potential for reduced landings limits to become constraining and to address other issues in the fishery.

## Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee

The Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee considered the development of draft policy on anthropogenic (human) activities that impact fish habitat. This is one part of the Council's Habitat Pilot Project, which is focused on improving how the Council addresses fish habitat issues. The Project Oversight Team has worked with the Fisheries Leadership and Sustainability Forum to prepare documents focused on the six anthropogenic activities: liquefied natural gas, offshore wind, offshore oil, marine transport, coastal development, and fishing. The development of these policies will allow the Council to comment more quickly and effectively on activities that may affect fish habitat. After reviewing input provided by the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Advisory Panel (AP), the Council suggested revision of the draft policy documents and agreed to continue development of these policies on two parallel tracks for fishing impacts and non-fishing impacts. Additional AP input will be solicited at a meeting in September, to support continued development.

## Industry-Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

The Council reviewed progress on development of the Industry-Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment, which considers options to increase monitoring of the Atlantic mackerel fishery with industry funding. The Council clarified that the need for this action relates to (1) accurately estimating the catch of incidental species for which catch caps apply and (2) developing an effective and affordable monitoring program for the fishery. The Council endorsed a range of alternatives for further analysis and plans to review and approve a draft Environmental Assessment for further public comment at the October 2015 meeting.

## Blueline Tilefish Action

The Council reviewed comments and voted to proceed with an Amendment to the Golden Tilefish Fishery Management Plan to address blueline tilefish management issues. In October 2015 the Council will review and approve a range of specific measures to be included for consideration regarding blueline tilefish management.

## Other Business

**Electronic For-Hire Vessel Trip Reporting:** The Council received a presentation from Andy Loftus on electronic vessel trip reporting options for for-hire vessels in the Mid-Atlantic.

**Swearing in of New and Reappointed Council Members:** Three new and one reappointed Council members were sworn in: Sara Winslow (North Carolina), Peter DeFur (Virginia), Adam Nowalsky (New Jersey), and Tony DiLernia (New York, reappointed).

**Election of Officers:** The Council reelected Rick Robins as Chairman and Lee Anderson as Vice-Chairman. The Council also voted to establish a new leadership position of Second Vice-Chairman and elected Mike Luisi to serve in this role.

**Special Awards:** Departing Council member Chris Zeman (New Jersey) was recognized for his service on the Council. The Council also presented an award to Scott Doyle, a recently-retired NOAA law enforcement agent, for his exceptional efforts in protecting living marine resources in the Mid-Atlantic.

## Next Meeting

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**October 6-8, 2010: Philadelphia, PA**

Doubletree Philadelphia Center City, 237 S Broad St Philadelphia, PA, 19107

Telephone: 215-893-1600





## October 2015 Council Meeting Report

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**October 6 – 8, 2015**

*Philadelphia, PA*

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's October 2015 meeting in Philadelphia, PA. Presentations, briefing materials, and audio recordings are available on the Council's website at [www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2015](http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2015).

### **Spiny Dogfish – 2016 Specifications**

The Council adopted an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 37.0 million pounds for spiny dogfish in 2016. After accounting for management uncertainty, projected discards, Canadian landings, and recreational landings, this ABC translates to a commercial quota of 25.3 million pounds. These specifications are consistent with the advice from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Because the spiny dogfish fishery is managed jointly, the New England Fishery Management Council must also make recommendations for spiny dogfish specifications at its upcoming meeting in December. If approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the new measure will go into effect May 1, 2016.

The recommended commercial quota is a 50% reduction from the 2015 commercial quota of 50.6 million pounds. This reduction was driven by the recent spiny dogfish stock assessment update, which estimated the stock's biomass to be at 87% of the rebuilt target in 2015. Although the stock was found to be neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, the new estimate of stock biomass was a marked decrease from the 2013 update, which indicated that the stock's biomass was at 135% of the target. Given that the survey data from 2014 was not included in the 2015 update due to a mechanical breakdown in the NEFSC trawl survey, the Council also requested that the SSC determine an overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC for 2016 using averaged data to fill in the missing 2014 data point. The SSC will meet later this year to consider this request.

### **Black Sea Bass Acceptable Biological Catch**

The Council revisited its previous black sea bass ABC recommendations for 2016-2017. Based on updated advice from the SSC, the Council voted to increase the ABC to 6.67 million pounds for 2016 and 2017, resulting in a commercial quota of 2.71 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 2.82 million pounds. This represents a 21% increase from the previously-recommended 5.50 million pound ABC, which has been in place since 2010 under a "constant catch" approach. The SSC's revised ABC recommendation was informed by a white paper by Jason McNamee (RI F&W), Gavin Fay (UMass Dartmouth), and Steve Cadrin (UMass Dartmouth), which analyzed a range of data limited methods for black sea bass.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board will consider the revised ABC recommendations at the Commission's Annual Meeting in November. The SSC will revisit the 2017 ABC next summer based on updated analysis.

### **Research Plan**

#### ***Comprehensive Research Plan***

Staff presented a draft Comprehensive Five Year (2016-2020) Research Plan for Council review and discussion. Developed in consultation with the SSC, the plan includes general and species-specific research needs that have been identified in stock assessments, amendment and framework documents, and by the SSC. The Council is scheduled to review and approve a revised research plan at its upcoming meeting in December.

### **Collaborative Research Priorities**

The Council reviewed and provided feedback on a draft list of research priorities for the Council's upcoming short-term collaborative research funding opportunity. Staff will revise the list of priorities for further development and completion by the Collaborative Research Committee later this year.

*Note: At the recommendation of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), the Council has agreed to use the term "Collaborative Research" instead of "Cooperative Research" to avoid confusion with the NEFSC's Cooperative Research Program.*

### **Blueline Tilefish**

The Council reviewed a preliminary set of alternatives for blueline tilefish management and endorsed development of a range of alternatives in a full Environmental Assessment to be reviewed at a future Council meeting.

Although the range of alternatives in this action does not include limited access, the Council passed a motion requesting that NMFS publish a control date notice for all sectors (commercial and recreational) of the blueline tilefish fishery. Publication of a control date does not affect participants at this time, but the Council could use it as a reference point if it considers ways to limit the number of participants in the blueline tilefish fishery in the future. The intent of a control date is to discourage speculative entry and investment into the blueline tilefish fishery. Participants are advised to find and keep all documents associated with blueline tilefish fishing, including dealer slips/receipts and logbook pages. Vessels (commercial and recreational) are also reminded that northeast/GARFO golden tilefish federal permits are currently required to retain blueline tilefish north of North Carolina, and any vessel with any Federal northeast/GARFO commercial or party/charter permit should be documenting all landings and discards of any species that they catch.

### **NEFMC Clam Dredge Framework**

Michelle Bachman, from the New England Fishery Management Council staff, gave a presentation on a framework under development by the New England Council to allow hydraulic clam dredge access within two habitat management areas approved in the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2. The NEFMC intends through this action to identify areas within the Great South Channel and Georges Shoal Habitat Management Areas that are currently fished or contain high energy sand and gravel that could be suitable for a hydraulic clam dredging exemption. The Mid-Atlantic Council expressed its support and passed a motion requesting that the NEFMC prioritize the framework.

### **Unmanaged Forage**

Staff presented a summary of scoping comments on an action to address unmanaged forage species in the Mid-Atlantic. After considering recommendations from the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT), the Council voted to initiate an omnibus amendment to add unmanaged forage species as Ecosystem Component (EC) species to the relevant Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for Council-managed stocks. The amendment will consider options to prohibit the development of new, and expansion of existing, directed commercial and recreational fisheries for unmanaged forage species in Mid-Atlantic federal waters. The Council has not yet determined which forage species will be addressed through this action or which FMPs will be affected. Although a motion was proposed to include state waters in the amendment, the Council voted to limit the amendment's geographic scope to federal waters.

### **Joint Industry Funded Monitoring (IFM) Omnibus Amendment**

The Council received an update on New England Council activities relative to the joint Industry-Funded Monitoring (IFM) Omnibus Amendment. After reviewing analyses of the economic impacts of additional monitoring coverage for the Atlantic mackerel fishery, the Council voted to task the amendment development team with refinement of the electronic monitoring cost assumptions and economic analysis of mackerel coverage target alternatives. The Council also requested the development of provisions for a monitoring set-aside. The Council expects to review a revised amendment again at its February meeting.

## Habitat Workshop

On the first day of the meeting, the Council hosted a workshop on Ecosystem-Level Habitat Considerations. This was the fourth in a series of workshops that the Council has held to support the development of an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) guidance document. The workshop focused on three overarching themes: (1) habitat science and research; (2) using habitat information to improve fisheries management; and (3) integrating habitat considerations into EAFM. Presentations and recordings from the workshop are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/workshop/2015/eafm-habitat-considerations>.

## Other Business

**Safety and Law Enforcement:** LCDR Patricia Bennett noted that the Coast Guard continues chasing false alerts from EPIRBS, which draws resources away from other critical search and rescue (SAR) and enforcement efforts, as well as putting SAR responders in harm's way unnecessarily. Proper registration, battery maintenance, and decommissioning help to ensure effective operation and to avoid false alerts – details are available at [http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov/ELTS,%20EPIRBS,%20and%20PLBs\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov/ELTS,%20EPIRBS,%20and%20PLBs_lowres.pdf). NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Officer Wynn Carney also noted that there will be an enforcement push in Mid-Atlantic federal waters this fall for several fishery compliance issues.

**NMFS Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Policy:** Heather Sagar, from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, presented NMFS' Draft Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Policy. To view the policy and submit comments, go to: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/ecosystems/ebfm/creating-an-ebfm-management-policy>. The deadline for submitting comments is December 16, 2015.

**BOEM Update:** Brian Hooker, from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), provided an update on offshore renewable energy activities in the Atlantic and presented the results of a recent socio-economic project conducted with NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Their research utilized data from Vessel Trip Reports (VTR) and seafood dealer reports to develop "revenue maps" that characterize the range of socio-economic impacts that offshore wind development could have on different fisheries within each wind energy area.

**Summer Flounder Sex-Specific Model:** Dr. Patrick Sullivan, from Cornell University, presented an overview of his ongoing work to develop a sex-specific model for summer flounder.

## Next Meeting

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**December 7 – 10, 2015: Annapolis, MD**  
Westin Annapolis Hotel  
100 Westgate Circle, Annapolis, MD 21401  
Telephone: 410-972-4300





# South Atlantic Update

Published for fishermen and others interested in marine resource conservation issues Summer 2015

## Public Input Continues on Proposed Spawning Special Management Zones

*Eleven candidate sites being considered to protect unique habitat and spawning fish*

The Council received a variety of responses to proposed Spawning Special Management Zones (SMZs) during a second round of public hearings held in August from North Carolina to the Florida Keys. A total of 11 candidate sites are being considered for designation as Spawning SMZs to protect important spawning habitat and associated species within the snapper grouper management complex. Fishing for snapper grouper species would be prohibited within the proposed Spawning SMZs, but trolling for pelagic species such as tuna, dolphin and billfish would be allowed. Anchoring would also be prohibited. The designation would help protect spawning fish, promote recruitment and reduce bycatch mortality of snapper grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper, two species extremely vulnerable to overfishing and designated as "Species of Concern" by NOAA Fisheries.

Like many of the species in the snapper grouper management complex, speckled hind and warsaw grouper are long-lived, slow growing protogynous hermaphrodites, meaning they are all born as females and only transform to males upon maturity, at about six to nine years of age. When most of the larger, older males have been removed by fishing, the species can't reproduce to healthy numbers. Warsaw grouper can reach seven feet and 450 pounds, while speckled hind can grow to three and a half feet and weigh up to 65 pounds. Although harvest is prohibited, they are caught by fishermen targeting other species and have a high mortality rate when released.

During its June meeting in Key West, Council members considered input from the first round of hearings held in April along with recommendations from its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. The advisory panel supports the use of Spawning SMZs and provided recommendations for individual sites. The Council decided to move forward with a second round of public hearings without choosing any preferred alternatives for size or location of the candidate sites.



A fishery biologist holds a juvenile speckled hind collected during a cooperative research cruise approximately 55 miles off the coast of South Carolina. Speckled hind, sometimes known as "kitty mitchell" or calico grouper, are yellow in color when younger and turn dark redish-brown as they grow. They spawn offshore and can live for up to 25 years. The sample was collected in an area known locally as the "Georgetown Hole" for the coastal town nearby. The Council is considering designating a portion of the area as a Spawning SMZ to help protect the unique habitat and species vulnerable to overfishing such as speckled hind that spawn there.

### Why Spawning Special Management Zones?

Despite being prohibited from harvest in federal waters in the South Atlantic since 1994, speckled hind and warsaw grouper are two deepwater species that remain vulnerable to overfishing. Petitions have been filed in the past to list them as endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.

Previously, in an effort to provide further protection to speckled hind and warsaw grouper, the Council approved prohibiting harvest of six other deepwater species (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper,

*(Continued page 6)*



**September 14-18, 2015**  
**Council Meeting**  
**Hilton Head, SC**

See page 11 for detail

**Formal Public Comment**  
**Wednesday, September 16**  
**at 5:30 PM**

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# SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

**Robert K. Mahood**  
Executive Director

**Gregg T. Waugh**  
Deputy Director

### VOTING MEMBERS

#### Designated State Officials

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Dr. Michelle Duval</b> - Vice Chair<br>Morehead City, NC<br>(252) 808-8011 | <b>Jessica McCawley</b><br>Tallahassee, FL<br>(850) 487-0580 |
|---|--|

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Doug Haymans</b><br>Brunswick, GA<br>(912) 264-7218 | <b>Mel Bell</b><br>Charleston, SC<br>(843) 953-9007 |
|--|---|

#### Appointed Obligatory Members

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Ben Hartig</b> - Chair<br>Hobe Sound, FL<br>(772) 546-1542 | <b>Jack Cox</b><br>Morehead City, NC<br>(252) 728-9548 |
|---|--|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Zack Bowen</b><br>Savannah, GA<br>(912) 398-3733 | <b>Chris Conklin</b><br>Murrells Inlet, SC<br>843/643-3833 |
|---|--|

#### Appointed At-Large Members

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>W. Chester Brewer</b><br>West Palm Beach, FL<br>(561) 655-4777 | <b>Charlie Phillips</b><br>Townsend, GA<br>(912) 832-3149 |
|---|---|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Mark Brown</b><br>Mt. Pleasant, SC<br>(843) 881-9735 | <b>Anna Barrios Beckwith</b><br>Morehead City, NC<br>(252) 671-3474 |
|---|---|

#### NMFS Regional Administrator

**Roy Crabtree**  
St. Petersburg, FL  
(727) 824-5301

#### Non-Voting Members

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>ASMFC</b><br>Washington, DC<br>(202) 289-6400 | <b>U. S. Fish &amp; Wildlife</b><br>Atlanta, GA<br>(404) 331-3588 |
|--|---|

|   |   |
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| <b>U. S. Coast Guard</b><br>Miami, FL<br>(305) 415-6778 | <b>State Department</b><br>Washington, DC<br>(202) 647-2883 |
|---|---|

### *Editor's Note*

The South Atlantic Update is published by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Its purpose is to report developments in fisheries management that would be of interest to its readers. Please credit the Council when reprinting articles used in this newsletter. Anyone wishing to submit information or articles pertaining to fishing or fisheries management, or letters to the editor on a pertinent issue, is invited and encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Kim Iverson, Editor, *South Atlantic Update*, 4055 Faber Place Dr., Suite 201, N. Charleston, SC 29405, or may be sent via the internet; Email address: kim.iverson@safmc.net.

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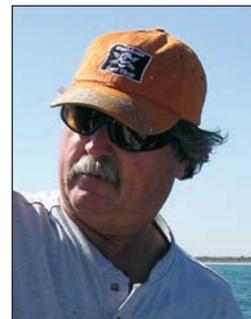


## Chairman's Perspective

*Ben Hartig, Council Chair*

### Changing Leadership

*New Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected in September; reflections*



At our September meeting the Council will appoint new leadership, electing a new Chair and Vice-Chair to serve for the next two years. In most circumstances, the current Vice-Chair will move into the Chair position. Dr. Michelle Duval, the state designee from North Carolina currently serving as Vice-Chair, will likely become your next Chair. Our leadership relationship has evolved over time and Michelle has taken responsibility over several key issues during the past year and is ready to assume her leadership role.

Michelle is also much better at dealing with the top brass at NOAA than I ever was, and recently lead a Council Coordination Sub-Committee developing a document that laid out a framework for allocation decisions. She has already developed relationships at the Regional Council level that will serve us well in the future.

It has been an honor to serve as your Chair. As Council Chairman, I often reflect on how the council process can work to develop leadership roles for council members. It has been a long road for me as a commercial fisherman -- first serving as an advisory panel member, then becoming a Council member, and ultimately serving at the top leadership position. I think the original framers of the Magnuson-Stevens Act would be proud to know that the management system they developed can work in this fashion.

While I am stepping down from the top management position, the powers that be have allowed me to serve three more years as a Council member. There are exciting new initiatives like our "Visioning" process and "Citizen Science" data collection programs that I want to help develop for the future. I look forward to working with you on these and other management actions that will foster sustainable fisheries and fishermen, and the infrastructure they support.

I hope that in some small way that these "Chairman Perspectives" have helped you better understand some of our management actions while also sowing the seeds for thought on other issues within our fisheries. The last thing I need to do is to acknowledge Kim Iverson our Public Information Officer who has spent an inordinate amount of time editing my ramblings and who has also worked tirelessly on producing a first class newsletter that keeps you informed on Council activities and actions. So if I don't see you in the halls of management, the dock, or on the rip, I would like to say thanks for the opportunity, it has been a good ride!

**Ben Hartig**  
mackattackben@att.net

*Council Chairman Ben Hartig is a full-time commercial fisherman and marine biologist from Hobe Sound, Florida.*

## In the News:

### NOAA Study Finds Bait and Tackle Retailers Generate \$2.3 Billion in U.S.

Independent marine recreational bait and tackle retail stores provide a big boost to the U.S. economy, a NOAA study has found. According to the study, the first economic study of its kind, in 2013, the most recent year for which data are available, these retailers contribute approximately \$2.3 billion across the broader U.S. economy, including \$795 million in income. In addition, the industry supports nearly 16,000 jobs across the nation.

NOAA Fisheries surveyed 3,500 independent, primary small businesses for the study. Read more and access the report at: [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/mediacenter/2015/07/15\\_07\\_bait\\_tackle.html](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/mediacenter/2015/07/15_07_bait_tackle.html).

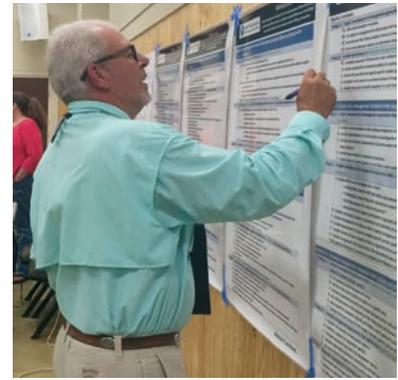


## Council Continues to Solicit Input on Draft Vision Blueprint

*Focusing on long-term management of the snapper grouper fishery*

The Council hosted a series of informal webinars and public comment stations in July to solicit input on the draft Vision Blueprint for the snapper grouper fishery and gathered additional input at public hearings held in August. The draft Vision Blueprint will help guide management of the snapper grouper fishery over the next five years and will be a flexible document that will allow for changes to the vision over time as the fishery evolves.

The draft Vision Blueprint is a result of the 2014 port meetings held throughout the region as part of the Council's Visioning Project. The draft Blueprint consists of proposed objectives and actions under the four broad goals of: 1) Science; 2) Management; 3) Communication; and 4) Governance. Fishermen and others interested in the draft Blueprint were asked to review action items and provide feedback. Additional information, including an online comment form, is available at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).



Wayne Mershon, a seafood dealer and member of the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel marks preferences for various actions proposed in the Draft Vision Blueprint during a recent round of public hearings. After compiling public input, the actions proposed under each goal of the Draft Blueprint will be separated into short-term and long-term items. Short-term action items will be prioritized and developed into an amendment to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan in 2016.

## Council Increases Deepwater Coral Protected Areas

*Amendment 8 to the Coral Fishery Management Plan expands Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern*



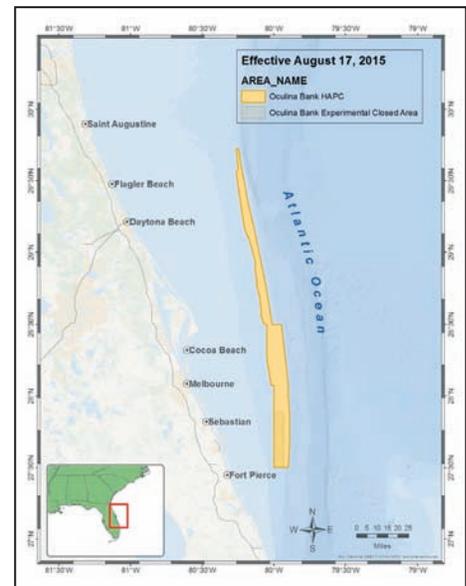
Photo Credit: NOAA

Deepwater corals such as *Oculina varicosa* provide important habitat and are susceptible to damage by fishing gear.

Areas designated for the protection of deepwater corals were expanded effective August 17, 2015 with the implementation of Amendment 8 to the Coral Fishery Management Plan. The amendment extends three of five existing Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, including the Oculina Bank HAPC, and allows transit through the Oculina Bank HAPC by fishing vessels with rock shrimp on board. The HAPC designation protects deepwater coral habitat by prohibiting the use of bottom gear including longline, bottom trawl, traps and pots, as well as anchoring within the areas.

The Council's Coral Advisory Panel recommended the expansions in 2011 based on new scientific research that observed deepwater coral and hard bottom habitat outside the boundaries of the existing HAPCs. The areas include the slow-growing deepwater ivory tree coral *Oculina varicosa* that provides important habitat for invertebrates such as rock shrimp and many economically important species of fish. The Council approved the amendment in September 2013 after receiving input from its Coral, Deepwater Shrimp, and Law Enforcement Advisory Panels and public comment.

In 2010, the Council designated five Deepwater Coral HAPCs encompassing more than 23,000 square miles of deepwater coral and hard bottom habitat ranging from South Florida to deepwater mounds off the coast of North Carolina. Amendment 8 expands the boundaries of the Stetson-Miami Terrace and Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs. Additional information is available from the "Managed Areas" section of the Council's website at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)



**Implementation of Coral Amendment 8 expands the northern boundary of Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern and more than doubles its size to encompass a total of 632 square miles. Coral and hard bottom habitat are protected through bottom gear restrictions. Anchoring is also prohibited within the HAPCs.**

**The amendment also allows for rock shrimp vessels with shrimp on board to transit the Oculina Bank HAPC with specified restrictions. Vessel Monitoring Systems have been required for federally permitted rock shrimp vessels since 2003.**

# Snapper Grouper Regulations Snap Shot



## Shallow-Water Grouper

### Annual Spawning Season Closure January 1st - April 30th

Both commercial and recreational fisheries - includes gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper.

## Recreational

### Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit

- 3 grouper per person/day includes: black, gag, misty, red, scamp, snowy, yellowedge, yellowfin, yellowmouth grouper, and also includes-golden tilefish, sand tilefish, coney, graysby, red hind and rock hind.
- No more than 1 may be a gag or black grouper - each 24" Total Length (TL)
  - Snowy grouper-1 fish per vessel per day
  - Wreckfish -1 per vessel per day. Season open July 1 - August 31
  - Blueline tilefish -1 per vessel per day. Season open May 1- August 31
  - Golden tilefish closed effective 8/11/15, will reopen 1/1/16
  - Snowy grouper closes 9/1/15, will reopen 5/1/16.

### Aggregate Snapper Bag Limit

- Aggregate bag limit of 10 snapper (excluding vermilion snapper) per person/day
- Red snapper - Closed to harvest
- Hogfish - closed effective 8/24/15; will reopen 1/1/16
- Maximum of 2 cubera snapper per person (not to exceed 2 per vessel) for fish 30" TL or larger off of Florida. These are not included in the 10 snapper bag limit. Cubera less than 30" TL are included in the 10 fish bag limit.

### In addition, fishermen may also retain:

- 1 greater amberjack per person/day (in April, for-hire/charter vessels limited to 1 per person/day or 1 per person/trip)
- 5 black sea bass per person/day - 13" TL
- 3 red porgy per person/day or 3 per person/trip, whichever is more restrictive - 14" TL
- 5 vermilion snapper per person/day - 12" TL

There is an aggregate bag limit of 20 fish per person inclusive of all fish in the snapper grouper management unit currently *not under the bag limit*, excluding tomtate and blue runner. You may catch your bag limits and in addition retain up to 20 other fish for which there are no individual bag limits.

## Commercial

### Commercial Closures in 2015

Golden tilefish longline (effective 2/19); Blueline tilefish (effective 4/7), Jacks Complex (effective 6/23); Dolphin (effective 6/24)

Red snapper - Closed to harvest

### Other commercial limits:

Black sea bass - pot fishery and hook/line - 1,000 lb. (gw) or 1,180 lb. (ww)  
Gray triggerfish - New split commercial season, 1,000 lb. (ww) trip limit  
Snowy grouper - New trip limit - 200 lb. (gw)

## Other Regulations

- Dehooking tools are required
- The sale of bag limit snapper grouper is prohibited
- The following are closed year-round to harvest or possession: goliath grouper, Nassau grouper, speckled hind, and warsaw grouper.
- Non-stainless steel circle hooks are required for both commercial and recreational fishermen targeting snapper grouper species north of 28 degrees N. latitude when fishing with natural baits.

Visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> for the latest information on the status of annual catch limits

**NOTE: Regulations are subject to change.**  
For the latest updates, download the *SA Fishing Regulations App* or visit [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).

# Stock Assessment for Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish Continues

## SEDAR 41 Benchmark Assessment

The announcement from NOAA Fisheries that a red snapper season would not occur in 2015 has peaked interest in the latest benchmark stock assessment being conducted through the Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment program. As the red snapper stock continues to rebuild, the estimated

harvest of red snapper in 2014 combined with the estimated dead discards exceeded the annual catch limit of 22,576 fish for the recreational sector and 50,994 pounds (gutted weight) for the commercial fishery.

The new stock assessment is scheduled for completion next Spring in time for review by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee when it convenes in April 2016. The Council will review the assessment at its June meeting.



Scientists, field biologists, data collectors, and fishermen gathered for three days in August to determine data to be used in the SEDAR 41 stock assessment for red snapper and gray triggerfish. For more information visit [www.sedar.org](http://www.sedar.org).

## New Regulations for Gray Triggerfish

New size limits, commercial trip limits and other management



Photo Credit: Miss Judy Charters

measures were implemented for gray triggerfish in the South Atlantic region beginning in June through Snapper Grouper Amendment 29:

- New Minimum Size Limit in NC, SC and GA - 12" Fork Length
- Increased Minimum Size Limit off the East Coast of Florida from 12" Fork Length to 14" Fork Length
- A split commercial season, January 1 through June 30 and July 1 through December 31
- A 1,000 pound (whole weight) commercial trip limit

The split season for the commercial fishery is designed to help reduce regulatory discards of gray triggerfish by aligning the season similar to that of vermilion snapper. The two species co-occur and are often targeted together by fishermen.

# Recreational Closure of Hogfish in South Atlantic Sparks Concerns

*Recreational harvest prohibited effective August 24, 2015 after annual catch limit is exceeded*



Photo Credit: Joey Wood

A recreational diver in North Carolina shows off his catch of the day. Although found throughout the region, hogfish are popular among recreational spearfishermen in South Florida and the Florida Keys, where the majority of harvest occurs. The recreational fishery was closed in federal waters from NC to the east coast of Florida in August for the first time ever. The fishery remains open in Florida State waters and the Gulf of Mexico. New management measures are being proposed for hogfish.

Fishery managers were taken by surprise when the most recent estimates of recreational hogfish harvest showed that landings had exceeded the annual catch limit by over three times what was allowed. The recreational ACL is 85,355 pounds (whole weight). According to NOAA Fisheries, over 227,000 pounds of hogfish were harvested from January through April. The numbers are calculated through NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program.

## Proposed Changes

A 2014 benchmark stock assessment for hogfish conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission identified three separate stocks for hogfish - one for the Gulf of Mexico and the other two in the South Atlantic. The "Florida Keys/East Florida" stock is identified as undergoing overfishing and overfished. The stock status for the "GA/NC stock" could not

be determined through the initial assessment. The majority of hogfish landings in the Florida Keys occur in the Atlantic.

During their joint meeting in June, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils discussed options for managing the three stocks, including changing the management boundaries. The South Atlantic Council is moving forward with options to specify two stocks in the South Atlantic and to end overfishing and rebuild the FL Keys/East Florida stock.

## Options Proposed for Hogfish Management (Snapper Grouper Amendment 37)

- Specify two separate hogfish stocks for management by the South Atlantic Council: (1) a GA through NC (GA/NC) stock; and (2) a Florida Keys/East Florida stock from the Florida/Georgia state line to a designated boundary. The Council's preferred boundary is Shark Point on Florida's southwest coast (Due west from 25° 23' North latitude).
- Specify management parameters (Maximum Sustainable Yield, Acceptable Biological Catch, Annual Catch limits) for both stocks.
- Establish a rebuilding plan for the FL Keys/East FL Stock.
- Increase the minimum size limit, decrease the recreational bag limit, and establish commercial trip limits for both stocks.
- Establish Accountability Measures for each stock.

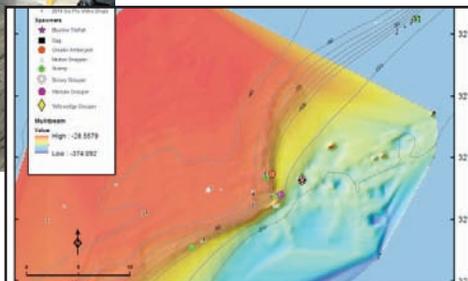
The Council held a scoping meeting via webinar in August to solicit public input on options for hogfish in draft Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. Comments received during scoping will be reviewed by the Council during its September meeting, and public hearings on management alternatives are currently scheduled for January 2016.



Dr. Will Heyman with LGL Ecological Associates, Inc. is working collaboratively with commercial fishermen

## Cooperative Research and Citizen Science

Ensuring adequate science to support fisheries management programs despite inadequate resources (e.g. funding) is a consistent challenge. The Council is supportive of cooperative research, including a recent project between scientists and commercial fishermen being conducted to help document spawning activity in specific areas. The Council is also moving forward to develop a framework for a comprehensive Citizen Science Program, with a workshop scheduled for January 2016. We'll take a closer look at these efforts in the next issue of the *SA Update* newsletter as the series "Connecting the Dots in Federal Fisheries Management" continues.



to document spawning activity at various sites off the South Atlantic coast during their fishing trips. The research sites include an area off the coast of South Carolina known locally as Georgetown Hole, where species in spawning condition have recently been collected.

## Candidate Sites for Spawning Special Management Zones

### North Carolina

#### Malchase Wreck

Location: 33 miles from Ocracoke Inlet

Depths: 171 – 246 feet

Alternatives: range in size from 1 sq. mile to 2.47 sq. miles

#### 780 Bottom

Location: 41 miles from Ocracoke Inlet

Depths: 197 – 328 feet

Alternatives: range from 3 to 4 sq. miles

#### NC Deep Wreck

Location: 32 miles from Ocracoke Inlet

Depth: 295-525 feet

Alternative: 3 sq. miles

#### South Cape Lookout

Location: 64 miles from South Inlet

Depth: 246-453 feet

Alternative: 5 sq. miles

### South Carolina

#### Devil's Hole (Georgetown Hole)

Location: 55 miles from Georgetown

Depth: 148 - 804 feet

Alternatives: range in size from 1 to 15.2 sq. miles

#### Areas 51 and 53

Research areas designated by SCDNR  
2.98 sq. miles each

#### SC South

Location: 68 miles from Georgetown

Depths: 591-705

Alternative: 8 sq. miles

### Georgia

#### St. Simon's

Location: 77 miles off of Sapelo Sound

Depth: 138 – 230 feet

Alternatives: range in size from 4 to 14 sq. miles

### Florida

#### Daytona Steeples

Location: 38 miles from Ponce De Leon Inlet

Depths: 230 – 312 feet

Alternatives: range in size from 6 to 12 square miles

#### Warsaw Hole

Location: 35 miles from Key West

Depths: 187 – 443 feet

Alternatives: range in size from 1 to 4 sq. miles

queen snapper and silk snapper) in waters greater than 240 feet. Known as the '240 Closure', the restrictions were implemented in January of 2011 and closed an area approximately 150,000 square miles in size to the harvest of the deepwater species. The closure was removed in May of 2012 after public comment and analysis by NOAA Fisheries showed the prohibition was not effective and had higher economic costs to fishermen than originally anticipated.

With the removal of the 240 Closure, the Council focused on other options for protecting speckled hind and warsaw grouper, including additional marine protected areas. Based on input from the Council's MPA Expert Workgroup, Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, and public comment, the Council chose to reduce the size of the area and to target spawning habitat through the designation of Spawning SMZs to further refine the focus of providing protection to key habitat and spawning populations while minimizing impacts to fishermen.

The response to the Spawning SMZs, proposed in Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan has been mixed thus far. Some fishermen expressed support for protecting habitat where fish are most likely to spawn. Others are skeptical of the need to increase the number of protected areas where fishing for snapper grouper species is restricted, citing existing marine protected areas, a four month spawning season closure, and other measures as sufficient. Environmental organizations are supportive of the Council's efforts while pointing to the need for research and monitoring along with enforcement. Local municipalities have also weighed in – asking the Council to proceed "cautiously" because of potential economic impacts to coastal communities.



Fishermen and other members of the public attended a hearing in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina that focused on proposed alternatives for establishing Spawning SMZs in an area known locally as the "Georgetown Hole". The area, popular with both commercial and recreational fishermen, includes a distinct elbow-shaped bottom contour and other features that attract spawning fish.

### New Sunset Provision

Amendment 36 includes alternatives to prohibit anchoring and allow transit for vessels with snapper grouper species onboard within any established Spawning SMZ. During its June meeting, the Council also added an alternative to establish a Sunset Provision that would require a periodic review of the Spawning SMZs to document proof of spawning within each site. The Spawning SMZ designation would "sunset" or be removed 10 years after implementation if not reauthorized.

The Council is developing a System Management Plan as part of the amendment to address research and monitoring needs, outreach, law enforcement and resource protection, and administrative/financial needs for the Spawning SMZs. The amendment also includes an action to modify the current boundary of the South Carolina Deepwater MPA in order to accommodate a recently deployed artificial reef in the area.

### What's Next

- Council will review public comments, hold a public hearing and choose preferred alternatives during its September meeting.
- The amendment is scheduled for approval during the Council's December meeting.
- Any approved Spawning SMZs could be designated by mid-2016.

Additional information is available from the 'Public Hearing and Scoping Meeting' page at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).

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## SAFMC Meeting Dates and Locations 2015 Schedule

**March 2-6, 2015**  
King and Prince Resort  
201 Arnold Road  
St. Simons Island, GA 31522  
Phone: 912/638-3631

**September 14-18, 2015**  
The Beach House Resort  
1 S. Forest Beach Drive  
Hilton Head, SC 29928  
Phone: 843/785-5126

**June 8-12, 2015**  
Doubletree Grand Key  
3990 S. Roosevelt Blvd.  
Key West, FL 33040  
Phone: 305/293-1818

**December 7-11, 2015**  
Doubletree Oceanfront  
2717 W. Ft. Macon Rd.  
Atlantic Beach, NC 28512  
Phone: 252/240-1155

## South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting



### September 14-18, 2015

The Beach House Resort  
1 South Forest Beach Drive  
Hilton Head, SC 29928  
Phone: 843/785-5126

A detailed agenda is posted on the Council's website at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or contact the Council office toll free at 1-866/SAFMC-10 or 843/571-4366.

### Acronyms

**ABC** - Allowable Biological Catch  
**ACCSP** - Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program  
**ACL** - Annual Catch Limit  
**AM** - Accountability Measure  
**ACT** - Annual Catch Target  
**AP** - Advisory Panel  
**ASMFC** - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
**BRD** - Bycatch Reduction Device  
**EEZ** - Exclusive Economic Zone  
**EFH** - Essential Fish Habitat  
**EFH/HAPC** - Essential Fish Habitat/Habitat Area of Particular Concern  
**FMP** - Fishery Management Plan  
**HMS** - Highly Migratory Species  
**ITQ** - Individual Transferable Quota  
**MSA** - Magnuson-Stevens Act  
**MSY** - Maximum Sustainable Yield  
**MRIP** - Marine Recreational Information Program  
**NMFS** - National Marine Fisheries Service  
**OY** - Optimum Yield  
**SEDAR** - Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (stock assessment process)  
**SSC** - Scientific & Statistical Committee  
**TAC** - Total Allowable Catch  
**VMS** - Vessel Monitoring System

### MEETING AGENDA

|                  |                      |   |
|------------------|----------------------|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | <b>8:30 - 12:00</b>  | <b>Council Visioning Workshop</b>                             |
|                  | <b>1:30 - 2:30</b>   | <b>Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Mgmt. Committee</b> |
|                  | <b>2:30 - 3:30</b>   | <b>Protected Resources Committee</b>                          |
|                  | <b>3:30 - 5:30</b>   | <b>Dolphin Wahoo Committee</b>                                |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | <b>8:00 - 9:00</b>   | <b>Personnel Committee (Closed Session)</b>                   |
|                  | <b>9:00 - 10:00</b>  | <b>AP Selection Committee (Closed Session)</b>                |
|                  | <b>10:00 - 11:00</b> | <b>SEDAR Committee (Partially Closed)</b>                     |
|                  | <b>11:00 - 12:00</b> | <b>Mackerel Committee</b>                                     |
|                  | <b>1:30 - 5:30</b>   | <b>Snapper Grouper Committee</b>                              |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | <b>8:30 - 5:00</b>   | <b>Snapper Grouper Committee (continued)</b>                  |
|                  | <b>5:30</b>          | <b>Formal Public Comment</b>                                  |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | <b>8:30 - 11:00</b>  | <b>Data Collection Committee</b>                              |
|                  | <b>11:00 - 12:00</b> | <b>Law Enforcement Committee</b>                              |
|                  | <b>1:30 - 3:00</b>   | <b>Executive Finance Committee</b>                            |
|                  | <b>3:30 - 5:30</b>   | <b>- Council Session -</b>                                    |
| <b>Friday</b>    | <b>8:30 - 12:00</b>  | <b>- Council Session -</b>                                    |

**Note!** Follow the Council meeting live online

Watch the Council meeting via webinar from Hilton Head, SC. Registration information is available from the [September 2015 Meeting Information](http://www.safmc.net) page at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).



[www.facebook.com/SouthAtlanticCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/SouthAtlanticCouncil)

## Mark your calendar...

**Sept 9**      **SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting (webinar)**

webinar for blueline tilefish    [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)

**Sept 22-24**    **Marine Resources Education Program SE Mgmt. Workshop**

Tampa, FL    [www.gmri.org](http://www.gmri.org)

**Oct 5-9**      **Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting**

Galveston, TX    [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org)

**Oct 6-8**      **Mid-Atlantic Fishery Mangement Council Meeting**

Philadelphia, PA    [www.mafmc.org](http://www.mafmc.org)

**Oct 14-15**    **SAFMC Council Member Visioning Workshop**

N. Charleston, SC    [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)

**Oct 20-22**    **SAFMC Scientific and Statical Committee Meeting**

Charleston, SC    [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)

**Nov 2-5**      **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting**

St. Augustine, FL    [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)

**Nov 17-20**    **SEDAR 41 Assessment Workshop (red snapper and gray triggerfish)**

Morehead City, NC    [sedarweb.org](http://sedarweb.org)

South Atlantic Fishery  
Management Council  
Meeting  
**September 14-18, 2015**  
Hilton Head, SC



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## MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Michelle Duval  
Division of Marine Fisheries, DEQ

DATE: Oct. 31, 2015

SUBJECT: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting (Sept. 14-18, 2015)

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Hilton Head, South Carolina. The following is a summary of actions taken by the Council. The next meeting will be held in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, Dec. 7-11, 2015. The next set of public hearings and webinars are scheduled for early November (see <http://safmc.net/meetings/public-hearing-and-scoping-meeting-schedule>), with a listening station webinar in Manteo on Nov. 12 at 6 p.m.

### **Snapper Grouper Visioning Workshop**

The Council continued its work developing a vision for the future of the snapper grouper fishery. The Council reviewed public input received on the draft Vision Blueprint during a series of 11 local comment stations that also allowed for public participation via live webinar. Overall, the response to this approach was positive, as it allowed the Council members to facilitate public input in smaller communities, while stakeholders throughout the region could listen and participate on the webinar run by staff. New ideas submitted under each of the four focus areas (Management, Science, Communication, Governance) were discussed, as well as alternatives for soliciting public input on prioritizing actions once the Vision Blueprint is adopted, such as online surveys and targeted mailings.

The Council also had a planning discussion for its Council Member Visioning Workshop, held Oct. 13-15, 2015. The goals of the workshop were to review in detail all public input received, prioritize items to be included in the final Vision Blueprint, and to develop an implementation and evaluation plan. The Council will review the list of short, medium and long-term prioritized items and adopt the final Vision Blueprint at its December 2015 meeting in Atlantic Beach.

### **Ecosystem/Habitat Committee**

The Council received an update the development of a South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Suite, designed to support the revision of the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan, as well as a progress report on the associated workgroup efforts. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan is scheduled to be completed in July 2016.

### **Protected Resources Committee**

The Council received updates on the status of the following items: proposed listing of Warsaw grouper as threatened under the Endangered Species Act; development of proposed critical habitat for Atlantic sturgeon; expected publication of a final rule for north Atlantic right whale critical habitat; and a proposed rule to list green sea turtles as eight separate Distinct Population Segments (rather than a range-wide population). The Council also received a presentation from NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources staff on the non-jeopardy Biological Opinion



for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics fishery (mackerels and cobia) that was release in August. The opinion was initiated in response to the listing of Atlantic sturgeon as endangered, and found that no new actions were required of the Council.

Council staff reviewed an updated draft Endangered Species Act/Magnuson-Stevens Act integration agreement, which outlines a tiered approach for the Council’s involvement in the formal consultation process. The agreement specifies the responsibilities of Council staff and NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Protected Resources staff with regard to communications standards, the role of Protected Resources staff in the fishery management plan amendment process, and status updates for the Council’s Protected Resources Committee. The Council is scheduled to approve a final version of the agreement in December.

### **Dolphin Wahoo Committee**

The Council received an update on the status of commercial and recreational landings for dolphin and wahoo, and then discussed the closure of the commercial dolphin fishery on June 30, for which there has never been a closure previously. The Council received a report on the tracking of annual catch limits and trends in landings, which showed an increase in commercial longline landings in 2014 and 2015. They also discussed the delay in the revision to the commercial/recreational sector allocation, which will result in an increase in the commercial annual catch limit and a shift in the sector allocations from 7.5 percent commercial/92.5 percent recreational to 10 percent commercial/90 percent recreational. The impact of environmental factors and regulatory changes for Highly Migratory Species on the early commercial closure were reviewed, and previously considered commercial trip limit options were discussed.

Based on public input from Highly Migratory Species “distant water fleet” industry representatives, the Council directed staff to develop a regulatory amendment that considers options for a “trigger point” approach to implementing a commercial trip limit. Alternatives include establishing a trip limit once commercial landings have reach 65, 70 or 75 percent of the annual catch limit, with trip limit options ranging from 1,000 to 4,000 pounds. Webinar and listening station public hearings are being held in November, with final approval of the amendment in December so that actions will be effective by spring 2016.

The Council also discussed a longer term comprehensive amendment for the fishery, including items such as consideration of the following: limited entry, a “common pool” allocation available to both commercial and recreational sectors, commercial sub-sector allocations (hook-and-line and longline), and circle hook requirements.

### **Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) Committee**

This is the name of the stock assessment process in the southeast, and each Southeast, Data, Assessment and Review, or “SEDAR” is given a number. The Council received updates on the following stock assessment activities:

- The current schedule includes completion of an update to the red grouper stock assessment by January 2017 and updates to the vermilion snapper and greater amberjack assessments by spring 2018.
- The Council requested that a standard assessment, rather than an update, be considered for blueline tilefish so that additional fishery-independent data currently being collected through a cooperative effort with industry can be incorporated. The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee has recommended a new benchmark assessment, which will be considered by the SEDAR Steering Committee.
- The Council approved modifications to the structure of its annual research plan and included items from its draft System Management Plans for spawning Special Management Zones and existing deep water Marine Protected Areas.



### **Snapper Grouper Committee**

The committee received updates on the status of the following amendments under review:

- **Comprehensive Accountability Measures/Dolphin-Wahoo Amendment 8:** This amendment would standardize the Council's accountability measures across its managed species. It also establishes a 10 percent commercial/90 percent recreational allocation of the Annual Catch Limit for dolphin. The proposed rule published July 14 and comments were due by Sept. 14, 2015.
- **Regulatory Amendment 22 (gag and wreckfish):** This amendment updates the annual catch limits for both gag and wreckfish based on recent stock assessment updates. The final rule published Aug. 12 and regulations were effective for wreckfish on Aug. 12 and for gag on Sept. 11.
- **Snapper Grouper Amendment 33/Dolphin-Wahoo Amendment 7:** This amendment extends an exemption currently allowed in the snapper grouper fishery to the dolphin-wahoo fishery that allows fish legally harvested in the Bahamas to be transported aboard a recreational fishing vessel as fillets. It also closes loopholes in the existing snapper grouper exemption and establishes consistent rules across both fisheries. The proposed rule published Oct. 7 with a comment deadline of Nov. 6, 2015.
- **Amendment 35 (removal of species and golden tilefish longline endorsement):** This amendment removes mahogany snapper, dog snapper, black snapper and schoolmaster snapper from the fishery management unit and closes a loophole in the regulations regarding golden tilefish commercial longline endorsement holders fishing on the golden tilefish commercial hook-and-line quota. The amendment was submitted to NOAA Fisheries on Sept. 11, 2015.

**Blueline Tilefish:** The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended that the future catch projections for blueline tilefish be recalculated as they are no longer considered best scientific information given the significant increases in harvest both within and outside the Council's jurisdiction since the stock assessment was completed. The chair of the Scientific and Statistical Committee provided an update from the Committee's Sept. 9 webinar, during which the Committee deliberated regarding an appropriate method and level for a catch recommendation. Ultimately, the Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended an Allowable Biological Catch of 224,100 pounds whole weight, which is the equilibrium yield when fishing at 75 percent of the maximum allowed fishing mortality rate. They stressed that this catch level should only be in place for 2015 and 2016.

Mr. Tony DiLernia, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council liaison, indicated that the Mid-Atlantic Council is in the process of adding blueline tilefish to their Golden Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and intends to manage it primarily as a recreational fishery. There is currently an emergency rule in place to restrict harvest in that region.

**Regulatory Amendment 25 (blueline tilefish annual catch limit, black sea bass recreational bag limit, yellowtail snapper fishing year):** Based on the catch level recommendations for blueline tilefish from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (above), the Council directed staff to prepare a regulatory amendment to update the annual catch limit from the existing 35,000 pounds, as well as consider modifications to the commercial trip limit and recreational bag limit (currently 100 pounds and 1 fish/vessel/day, respectively). The amendment also includes an action originally in Regulatory Amendment 23 to consider an increase in the black sea bass recreational bag limit from five fish/person/day to six to ten fish/person/day, as well as a new action to modify the start date of the fishing year for yellowtail snapper. Public comment sessions and webinars are being held in early November, and the Council will take final action at its December meeting.

**Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure):** This amendment contains a range of alternatives to modify the existing November through April prohibition on the use of black sea bass pots due to concerns regarding risk to right whales. The Council was required to implement this closure in late 2013 in order to double the annual catch limit based on a stock assessment update. The Council reviewed input from July public hearings, and selected a preferred alternative that modifies the closure to apply in depths 25 meters and shallower from



Nov. 1-30 and April 1-30, and in depths 30 meters and shallower from Dec. 1-March 30. The amendment also includes actions to enhance the existing gear-marking, weak link and line breaking-strength requirements of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The Council will approve the amendment for formal review at its December meeting.

*Amendment 36 (spawning Special Management Zones (SMZs))*: The Council reviewed the draft amendment and selected preferred alternatives to establish spawning Special Management Zones off North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida. The site off North Carolina is well south of the Big Rock and is five square miles (referred to as 'South Cape Lookout'). Two artificial reef sites, as well as a 3.1 square mile site around Devil's Hole were selected off South Carolina, and a one square mile site around Warsaw Hole was selected off the Florida Keys. Modifications to the transit provision as well the sunset clause were approved. The Council is scheduled to approve this amendment for formal secretarial review at its March 2016 meeting in Georgia.

*Amendment 37 (hogfish)*: This amendment contains actions related to hogfish in response to the recent stock assessment (2014) that determined there were two hogfish stocks: one from Georgia through North Carolina, and a second along the east coast of Florida through the Florida Keys. The amendment includes actions to establish maximum sustainable yield, annual catch limits and accountability measures for each stock. It also includes actions to modify the minimum size limit and establish a recreational bag limit and commercial trip limit for each stock. It also establishes a rebuilding plan for the East Florida/Florida Keys stock.

The Council reviewed public comments received during scoping, modified alternatives under several actions based on public input, and added an alternative to consider a recreational season for each stock. Preferred alternatives were selected for minimum size limits for each stock (15 inches fork length for the East Florida/Florida Keys stock, and 20 inches fork length for the GA-NC stock), as well as for annual catch limits, annual catch targets and a rebuilding plan for the East Florida/Florida Keys stock. The Council will select preferred alternatives for the remaining actions in December and approve for public hearing to be held in late January 2016.

The Council also voted to send a letter to NOAA Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program, requesting that the 2015 hogfish recreational catch estimates be re-evaluated. This is the first year that hogfish has closed recreationally, due to expansion of catch estimates based on several Florida dockside intercepts. The Council is also concerned that the majority of the recreational effort, which comes from spear-fishing, may not be sufficiently captured by the existing effort survey particularly if these trips are occurring on dive boats.

*Regulatory Amendment 23 (golden tilefish hook-and-line fishing year; black sea bass bag limit; jacks complex commercial trip limit)*: As noted previously, the action regarding the black sea bass recreational bag limit was moved to Regulatory Amendment 25, so the actions remaining in this amendment are a modification of the fishing year start date for the hook-and-line component of the commercial golden tilefish fishery (currently Jan. 1), and a commercial trip limit for the jacks complex (almaco jack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish). The Council will consider whether to group these remaining items in with priority items from the Vision Blueprint.

### **Mackerel Committee**

*Amendment 26 (king mackerel annual catch limits and stock boundary)*: This amendment would adjust the king mackerel annual catch limits based on the SEDAR 38 stock assessment. It includes actions to adjust the boundary between Gulf and South Atlantic stocks; allow for sale of king mackerel incidentally caught in the shark gill net fishery; maintain a Florida east coast commercial sub-zone, but adjust the boundaries of sub-zone; and establish a quota and trip limits for the Florida east coast subzone. The Council reviewed the document in September, approved modifications to the alternatives and will review the document again in December, with the intent to approve for public hearings to occur in late January.



The Council also received an update from the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel meeting, where Florida mackerel fishermen requested a bycatch allowance of sharpnose, bonnethead and finetooth sharks when the small coastal shark fishery is closed, due to the annual catch limit of blacknose sharks being met. This has resulted in discards of non-blacknose small coastal sharks during a productive time of the year for Spanish mackerel gillnet fishermen. NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division may consider changes to small coastal shark management to reduce discards of non-blacknose small coastal sharks.

#### **Data Collection Committee**

*Commercial Electronic Reporting:* The Council received an update on the development of an electronic version of the existing commercial logbook form that fishermen could voluntarily use to submit catch information. The system should be available by late 2015. Additionally, the commercial electronic logbook pilot program has been completed, with several commercial fishermen in North Carolina participating in the testing of weatherproof tablets and laptops for recording commercial harvest and discard data onboard vessels. The data are being reviewed and an update is expected in December.

*Joint Gulf/South Atlantic Charterboat Electronic Reporting:* The Council reviewed the actions and alternatives in the draft amendment in a joint session with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The South Atlantic Council is interested in implementing electronic charter vessel reporting on the same schedule as headboats, applying the same standards, reporting mechanism and data elements, while the Gulf Council is interested in having charter vessels reporting each trip electronically prior to arriving at the dock. Based on the difficulty in completing the analyses for such disparate preferred alternatives, both Councils elected to separate the amendment so that each can proceed in a timely fashion. The Council will review the revised amendment in December and approve for public hearings to be held in late January.







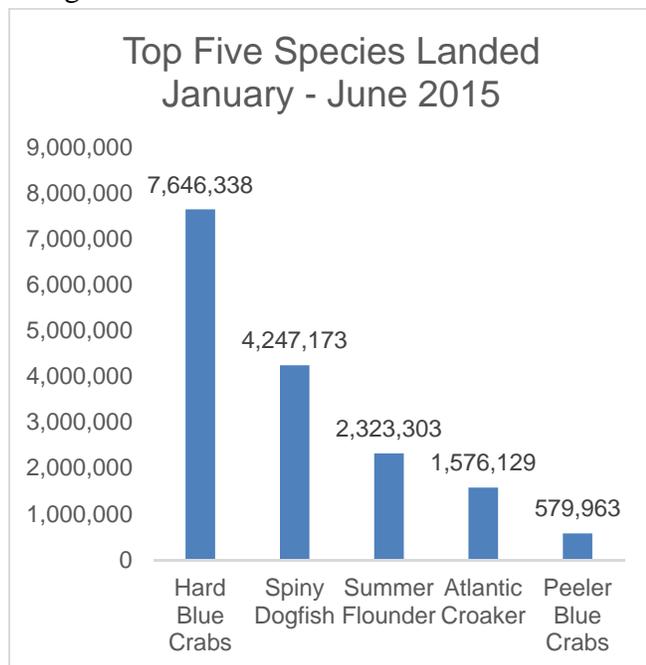
# Fish Dealer Report

License & Statistics Section, PO Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557

October 2015

## JANUARY TO JUNE 2015 PRELIMINARY COMMERCIAL LANDINGS REVIEW

According to the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Program, North Carolina fishermen landed 24.7 million pounds of seafood in the first half of 2015. These landings represent a 6 percent decline from the first half of last year, and a 6 percent decline from the previous five year average.



The top five species landed accounted for 66 percent of the total landings, which is the same percentage as the first half of last year, but comprises different species. The top five species landed included: hard blue crabs (7.6 million pounds), spiny dogfish (4.2 million pounds), summer flounder (2.3 million pounds), Atlantic croaker (1.6 million pounds), and peeler blue crabs (580 thousand pounds). Hard blue crabs are up 9.8 percent from last year, and peeler blue crabs are up 12.6 percent. Other notable increases

included Atlantic menhaden (54 percent), sea scallops (563 percent), and sea mullet (62 percent). Landings of Atlantic croaker and bluefish decreased 23 percent and 69 percent respectively.

The total number of trips reported by North Carolina dealers was up 6 percent from last year. The largest increases were seen in runaround gill nets (53 percent) and pound nets (56 percent).

## REMINDER FOR STRIPED BASS TAGS

As a result of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's striped bass tagging addendum, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries was required to change its tagging and reporting procedures. A copy of Addendum III is on the division website at:

<http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/fmp-atlantic-states-marine-fisheries-commission-proposals>

The new tags issued for the 2015-2016 season will be marked with the year, minimum size limit for the location of harvest, and unique tag numbers. Fish dealers with a Striped Bass Dealers Permit for Quota Monitoring must contact one of the following division offices and speak with a Marine Patrol officer to obtain harvest tags.

Morehead City: 252-726-7021 or 1-800-682-2632  
 Manteo: 252-473-5734 or 1-800-405-7774  
 Wilmington: 910-395-3900 or 1-800-248-4536

For more information, or to obtain more logs, contact your quota monitoring liaison.

Striped Bass:  
Kim Hewitt: 1-800-338-7805  
Or 252-264-3911

Atlantic Ocean flounder, spiny dogfish, and black sea bass north of Cape Hatteras:  
Grace Kemp: 1-800-682-2632  
Or 252-808-8101

Tags may be picked up at division offices, or, if given 48 hours' notice, a Marine Patrol officer will deliver the tags. Tags will be signed for and given out in numerical sequences for tracking purposes.

### **ESTUARINE GILL NET PERMIT**

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On Sept. 1, 2014 the state began requiring an Estuarine Gill Net Permit for the use of any anchored small or large-mesh gill net in internal coastal waters. The permit is a requirement of the federal incidental take permits for sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon. A condition of the incidental take permits is to maintain certain levels of observer coverage statewide. The Estuarine Gill Net Permit requires fishermen to record an active phone number where they can be reached so that the division can schedule observer trips and maintain the coverage needed to stay in compliance. For fiscal year 2016, there have been 2,492 permits issued. Fishermen can obtain or renew their annual permit when they renew their license at any division office or via mail.

### **PROGRAM UPDATES AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES**

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#### **Name Change**

North Carolina's environmental agency has undergone several changes recently, including transferring the zoo, aquariums, state parks, and the Museum of Natural Sciences to the newly named Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The remaining divisions, including the Division of Marine Fisheries, have been rebranded under the Department of Environmental Quality. Future communications

from the division will reflect these changes.

### **Landings Data**

Dealers are reminded that they can request their landings data from the division by submitting a data request to: [Alan.Bianchi@ncdenr.gov](mailto:Alan.Bianchi@ncdenr.gov)

This data is also available online, in an anonymous form, through the License-Statistics Annual Report by visiting:

<http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/commercial-fishing-annual-reports>

The 2015 annual report will be available before the Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting in November.

### **New Trip Ticket Codes**

Due to some recent changes in gear usage and species landings, the Trip Ticket Program will implement new codes for trammel nets (530) and ribbed mussels (986-989). These codes will soon be available for use on paper tickets and the electronic reporting program.

### **2015 LICENSE SALES**

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Below is a list of licenses sold for fiscal year 2015 (April 15, 2014 to June 30, 2015) by license type. The list includes active licenses only. Totals do not include transfers, voids or replacements.

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Standard Commercial Fishing License          | 5,404         |
| Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License  | 1,231         |
| Commercial Fishing Vessel Registration       | 8,103         |
| License to Land Flounder from Atlantic Ocean | 157           |
| Land or Sell License                         | 114           |
| NC Resident Shellfish License Without SCFL   | 1,319         |
| Fish Dealer License                          | 737           |
| Ocean Pier License                           | 20            |
| Recreational Fishing Tournament License      | 17            |
| <b>Recreational Commercial Gear License</b>  | <b>2,791</b>  |
| <b>Total Licenses For All License Types</b>  | <b>19,893</b> |



# Preliminary

## North Carolina Commercial Landings

### January-June, 2011-2015

Issued by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, Department of Environmental Quality.

For additional information, contact the Commercial Statistics Coordinator, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557 / (252) 726-7021.

Date Issued: November 2015

|                                       | January – June (Pounds – rounded) |           |           |           |           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                       | 2011                              | 2012      | 2013      | 2014      | 2015      |
| <b>FINFISH</b>                        |                                   |           |           |           |           |
| Amberjacks                            | 31,423                            | 101,716   | 49,509    | 80,311    | 77,568    |
| Anglerfish (Monkfish & Monklivers)    | 38,820                            | 19,073    | 5,329     | 61,814    | 99,945    |
| Bluefish                              | 1,508,822                         | 327,499   | 722,850   | 1,514,841 | 472,082   |
| Bonito                                | 8,905                             | 7,677     | 8,543     | 6,468     | 18,467    |
| Butterfish                            | 24,353                            | 77,345    | 40,379    | 18,992    | 35,257    |
| Carp                                  | 22,089                            | 5,803     | 10,839    | 15,342    | 35,271    |
| Catfishes                             | 309,312                           | 309,311   | 277,558   | 308,044   | 474,148   |
| Cobia                                 | 13,437                            | 14,499    | 19,824    | 20,686    | 18,697    |
| Croaker, Atlantic                     | 4,294,170                         | 2,553,504 | 1,291,520 | 2,054,885 | 1,576,129 |
| Cutlassfish, Atlantic                 | 352                               | 1,554     | 22,445    | 132,155   | 166,469   |
| Dolphinfish                           | 73,754                            | 231,596   | 153,655   | 405,823   | 324,357   |
| Drum, Black                           | 9,811                             | 23,980    | 44,251    | 6,289     | 24,596    |
| Drum, Red                             | 20,024                            | 27,875    | 41,037    | 19        | 39,843    |
| Eel, American                         | 10,223                            | 5,381     | 3,506     | 1,824     | 2,723     |
| Flounder, Southern                    | 168,108                           | 224,626   | 153,754   | 123,370   | 130,344   |
| Flounder, Summer                      | 2,817,978                         | 893,630   | 160,645   | 2,405,107 | 2,323,303 |
| Flounders, Other                      | *                                 | 0         | *         | 2,638     | 964       |
| Garfish                               | 25,872                            | 17,279    | 5,159     | 4,196     | 35,679    |
| Grouper, Gag                          | 51,429                            | 97,246    | 44,127    | 41,529    | 41,346    |
| Grouper, Red                          | 79,362                            | 60,856    | 37,281    | 28,008    | 22,772    |
| Grouper, Scamp                        | 16,927                            | 29,226    | 20,374    | 21,654    | 24,047    |
| Grouper, Snowy                        | 4,873                             | 13,070    | 13,999    | 23,155    | 22,191    |
| Groupers, Other                       | 2,981                             | 4,404     | 5,170     | 6,336     | 3,594     |
| Grunts                                | 11,297                            | 17,938    | 14,887    | 14,411    | 13,870    |
| Hakes                                 | 827                               | 166       | 455       | 622       | 1,262     |
| Harvestfish (Starbutters)             | 54,007                            | 73,034    | 130,239   | 89,348    | 114,842   |
| Herring, River (Alewife and Blueback) | 1,611                             | 678       | 743       | 989       | 0         |
| Hogfish (Hog Snapper)                 | 2,080                             | 3,227     | 3,812     | 4,971     | 3,851     |
| Jacks (Crevalle and Blue Runner)      | 346                               | 434       | 190       | 1,129     | 448       |
| Mackerel, Atlantic (Boston)           | 6,328                             | 1,251     | 19        | 555       | 1,338     |
| Mackerel, King                        | 55,993                            | 91,759    | 62,789    | 97,663    | 32,295    |
| Mackerel, Spanish                     | 449,709                           | 314,005   | 139,875   | 137,529   | 187,252   |
| Menhaden, Atlantic                    | 3,387,486                         | 365,106   | 213,942   | 598,814   | 559,820   |
| Mullet, Sea (Kingfishes)              | 201,749                           | 386,065   | 229,057   | 227,647   | 369,303   |
| Mullet, Striped                       | 404,882                           | 256,645   | 193,182   | 206,085   | 235,352   |
| Perch, White                          | 209,839                           | 168,014   | 253,118   | 149,196   | 121,004   |
| Perch, Yellow                         | 26,429                            | 19,934    | 29,810    | 64,326    | 40,574    |
| Pigfish                               | 10,233                            | 2,954     | 8,430     | 8,853     | 6,253     |
| Pinfish                               | 278                               | 35        | 23        | 7         | 34        |
| Pompano                               | 4,889                             | 1,272     | 1,424     | 1,128     | 1,266     |
| Porgies                               | 38,094                            | 32,020    | 21,763    | 44,952    | 20,227    |
| Pufferfish                            | 1,112                             | 826       | 3,260     | 189       | 807       |
| Sharks                                | 256,132                           | 386,978   | 333,999   | 683,740   | 362,088   |
| Sharks, Dogfish, Smooth               | 1,150,876                         | 887,006   | 658,882   | 455,409   | 209,485   |
| Sharks, Dogfish, Spiny                | 2,549,277                         | 2,720,243 | 3,006,857 | 4,558,556 | 4,247,173 |

|   | January – June (Pounds – rounded) |                   |                   |                   |                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|   | 2011                              | 2012              | 2013              | 2014              | 2015              |
| Scup                                    | 308,482                           | 3,846             | 5,240             | 145,917           | 210,156           |
| Sea Basses                              | 211,025                           | 44,375            | 92,013            | 390,216           | 382,873           |
| Seatrou, Spotted                        | 11,151                            | 46,814            | 191,509           | 67,989            | 87,530            |
| Shad, American                          | 204,022                           | 235,853           | 256,598           | 192,982           | 97,678            |
| Shad, Gizzard                           | 95,587                            | 103,656           | 87,996            | 83,837            | 53,556            |
| Shad, Hickory                           | 85,039                            | 65,252            | 71,227            | 109,106           | 148,236           |
| Sheepshead                              | 16,912                            | 18,113            | 16,107            | 15,152            | 20,407            |
| Skates                                  | 18,105                            | 5,481             | 2,186             | 16,925            | 43,216            |
| Skippers                                | 20,626                            | 17,701            | 10,777            | 15,315            | 10,166            |
| Snapper, Vermilion (Beeliner)           | 82,288                            | 94,920            | 69,519            | 101,450           | 75,026            |
| Snappers, Other                         | 881                               | 1,924             | 2,357             | 2,676             | 4,118             |
| Snapper, Red                            | 0                                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Spadefish                               | 15,986                            | 13,927            | 5,143             | 13,121            | 6,307             |
| Spot                                    | 78,490                            | 40,416            | 56,449            | 123,811           | 30,769            |
| Striped Bass                            | 387,376                           | 133,662           | 83,672            | 72,118            | 110,408           |
| Swordfish                               | 601,143                           | 743,999           | 885,331           | 555,153           | 448,499           |
| Tilefish                                | 17,254                            | 213,421           | 97,311            | 84,972            | 30,880            |
| Triggerfish                             | 82,196                            | 102,396           | 110,628           | 116,492           | 81,324            |
| Tuna, Bigeye                            | 49,070                            | 75,365            | 54,918            | 80,283            | 95,502            |
| Tuna, Bluefin                           | 46,563                            | 130,496           | 105,832           | 80,178            | 85,423            |
| Tuna, Yellowfin                         | 84,467                            | 334,423           | 301,568           | 311,926           | 264,770           |
| Tunas, Other                            | 56,873                            | 63,392            | 67,271            | 125,874           | 110,465           |
| Tunny, Little (False Albacore)          | 64,810                            | 68,644            | 85,684            | 92,881            | 31,646            |
| Wahoo                                   | 5,763                             | 10,296            | 6,891             | 7,312             | 8,450             |
| Weakfish (Grey Trout)                   | 38,532                            | 38,489            | 52,967            | 37,760            | 24,636            |
| Unclassified for Industrial Use or Bait | 48,714                            | 29,481            | 19,369            | 21,753            | 34,548            |
| Unclassified Fish for Food              | 84,123                            | 68,661            | 66,145            | 64,356            | 86,865            |
| <b>TOTAL FINFISH</b>                    | <b>21,072,291</b>                 | <b>13,481,743</b> | <b>11,243,285</b> | <b>17,559,160</b> | <b>15,081,790</b> |
| <b>SHELLFISH</b>                        |                                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Blue Crabs, Hard                        | 11,330,599                        | 11,427,106        | 5,947,780         | 6,962,482         | 7,646,338         |
| Blue Crabs, Peeler                      | 581,599                           | 419,762           | 336,436           | 515,197           | 579,963           |
| Blue Crabs, Soft                        | 437,993                           | 315,644           | 284,130           | 332,286           | 332,333           |
| Clams, Hard (Meats)                     | 155,117                           | 234,654           | 165,637           | 224,555           | 214,381           |
| Clams, Hard ( <i>Numbers</i> )          | <i>7,901,841</i>                  | <i>11,664,297</i> | <i>8,503,146</i>  | <i>11,691,611</i> | <i>10,897,765</i> |
| Octopus                                 | 182                               | *                 | *                 | 86                | 59                |
| Oysters (Meats)                         | 427,742                           | 185,409           | 188,289           | 327,260           | 266,998           |
| Oysters ( <i>Bushels</i> )              | <i>80,859</i>                     | <i>35,049</i>     | <i>35,593</i>     | <i>61,864</i>     | <i>50,472</i>     |
| Scallops, Bay (Meats)                   | 0                                 | 0                 | 1,337             | 0                 | 0                 |
| Scallops, Sea (Meats)                   | 50,545                            | 29,921            | 1,491             | 15,830            | 104,894           |
| Shrimp <sup>2</sup> (Heads On)          | 458,330                           | 1,063,804         | 449,361           | 338,654           | 351,589           |
| Stone Crabs                             | 3,842                             | 2,244             | 1,853             | 2,759             | 2,831             |
| Squid                                   | 284,650                           | 5,301             | 1,557             | 9,203             | 15,462            |
| Unclassified Shellfish                  | 82,685                            | 58,588            | 72,962            | 61,594            | 80,119            |
| Whelks/Conchs (Meats)                   | 25,274                            | 25,898            | 36,631            | 43,375            | 59,217            |
| <b>TOTAL SHELLFISH</b>                  | <b>13,838,558</b>                 | <b>13,768,331</b> | <b>7,487,464</b>  | <b>8,833,281</b>  | <b>9,654,184</b>  |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>                      | <b>34,910,849</b>                 | <b>27,250,074</b> | <b>18,730,749</b> | <b>26,392,441</b> | <b>24,735,974</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Includes species from genus *Seriola* (greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish.)

<sup>2</sup> Includes brown, pink, white, and rock shrimp.

\* Units not shown to avoid disclosure of private enterprise.

NOTE: Landings collected by North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket Program (October 2015).



PAT MCCRORY  
*Governor*

DONALD R. VAN DER VAART  
*Secretary*

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Louis B. Daniel III, Division of Marine Fisheries Director  
Sammy Corbett, Marine Fisheries Commission Chairman

FROM: Randy Gregory  
Division of Marine Fisheries, NCDEQ

DATE: October 29, 2015

SUBJECT: Highly Migratory Species Update

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel's fall meeting was held September 9 - 10, 2015 in Silver Spring, Maryland. The Advisory Panel discussed shark management measures contained in Final Amendment 6, proposed rule to implement draft Amendment 5b and Amendment 9 to the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Division staff discussed the status of current bluefin tuna management measures implemented in Amendment 7.

### Sharks

Amendment 6 included a number of management measures for the commercial shark fisheries including: increases the large coastal shark retention limit for shark directed limited access permit holders to a maximum of 55 large coastal shark other than sandbar sharks per trip with a default of 45 large coastal shark other than sandbar sharks per trip; establishes a management boundary in the Atlantic region along 34° 00' N. latitude (approximately at Wilmington, North Carolina) for the small coastal shark fishery; maintains the non-blacknose small coastal shark quota linkage with the blacknose shark quota south of the 34° 00' N. latitude; and prohibits the retention and landings of blacknose sharks north of the 34° 00' N. latitude (Figure1). Amendment 6 established a non-blacknose small coastal shark Total Allowable Catch of 489.3 metric tons dressed weight and increases the small coastal shark commercial quota to 264.1 metric tons dressed weight (582,333 pounds). The increase in the small coastal shark commercial quota and the end of the blacknose quota linkage allowed the small coastal shark fishery to reopen north of the 34° 00' N. latitude on August 18, 2015 (proclamation FF-42-2015).

Amendment 9 considers management measures for smoothhound sharks (e.g., smooth dogfish, Florida smoothhound, and Gulf smoothhound) and fishermen who fish for sharks with gillnet gear. The Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Division expects the final rule to be published by the end of 2015.



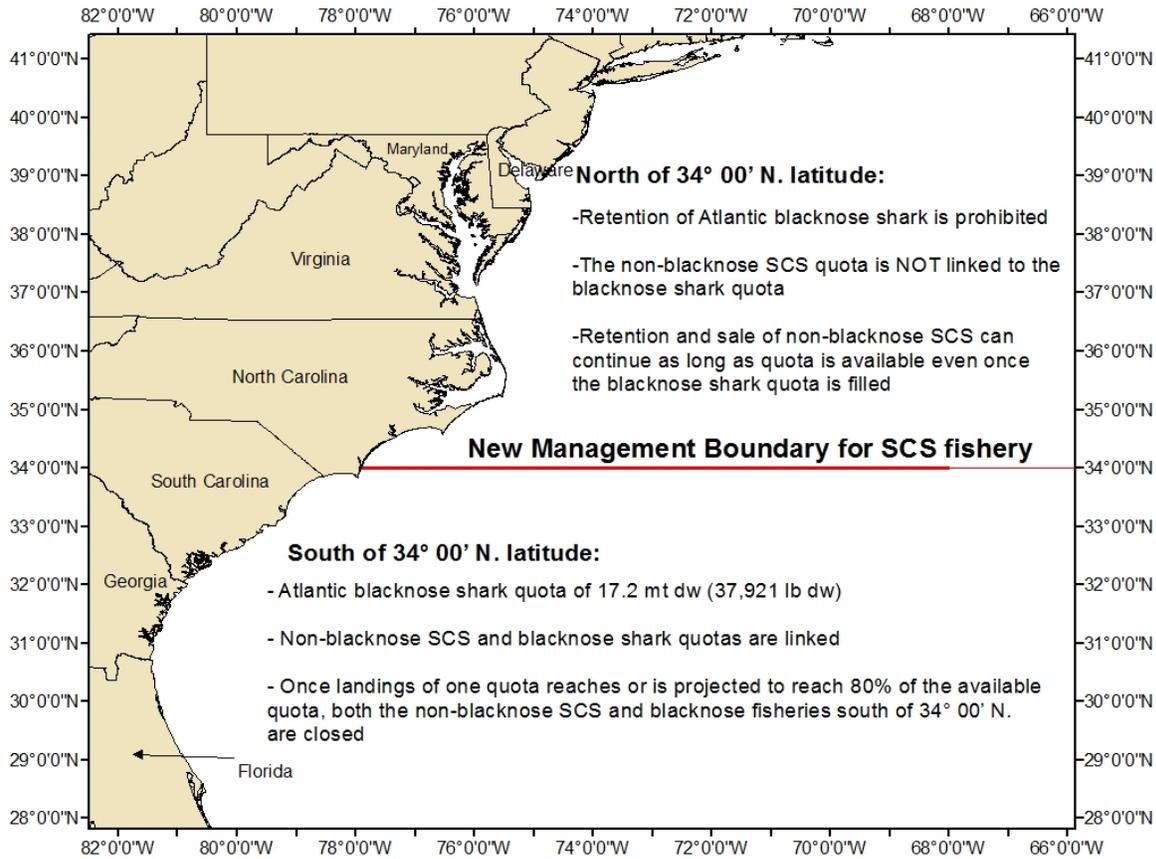


Figure 1: Map depicting the modifications to the quota linkages for the non-blacknose SCS and blacknose quotas along the new management boundary in the Atlantic region

### Bluefin Tuna

In August, the Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Division modified the baseline annual U.S. quota and subquotas for Atlantic bluefin tuna. The rule increased the baseline annual U.S. Atlantic bluefin tuna quota from the 923.7 metric ton level by 135 metric tons to 1,058.79 metric tons, as recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas for 2015 and 2016. The agency adjusted and codified the baseline annual subquotas for the domestic fishing categories consistent with the process established in Amendment 7 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan.

On October 29, 2015, the General category Atlantic bluefin tuna quota was adjusted by transferring 35 metric tons from the Harpoon category and 65 metric ton from the Reserve category. This transfer results in adjusted 2015 quotas of 566.7 metric ton, 43.6 metric ton and 82.1 metric ton for the General, Harpoon, and Reserve categories, respectively. The 2015 General category fishery will close when the adjusted General category quota of 566.7 metric ton has been reached, or it will close automatically on December 31, 2015. As of October 28, 2015, preliminary commercial landings for General category were 472.1 metric ton.

