



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

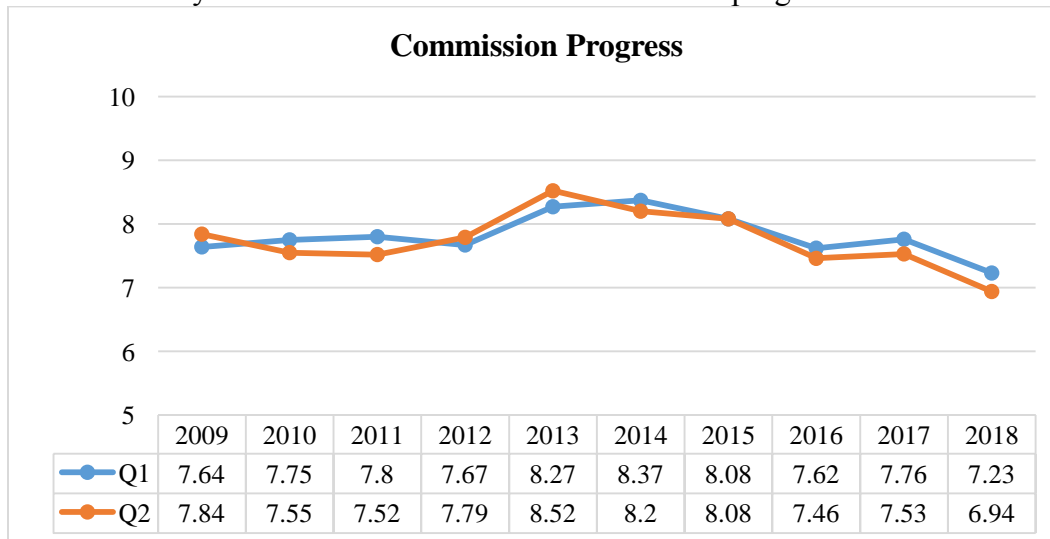
TO: ASMFC Commissioners and Proxies
DATE: January 29, 2019
SUBJECT: 2018 Commissioner Survey Results

31 Commissioners or Proxies completed the 2018 ASMFC Commissioner Survey. The survey reflects our Commissioners' commitment to measure their progress in meeting Commission goals. This is the tenth year a survey has been conducted. Where possible the results are compared to previous years' findings to identify trends (the survey was shortened in 2015). Responses are based on the progress and work completed during 2018.

Questions 1-15 prompted respondents to rate their answer on a scale of 1 to 10. The higher the average, the more positive the response. For each question, the average score by year is presented. The 2009 results were based on a response ranging from 1 through 5, so the value was doubled for comparison to future responses. Questions 7, 8, 14 and 15 were new to the 2014 survey, as the survey was simplified to increase participation.

Commission Progress

1. How comfortable are you that the Commission has a clear and achievable plan to reach the Vision (Sustainably managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries)?
2. How confident are you that the Commission's actions reflect progress toward its Vision?



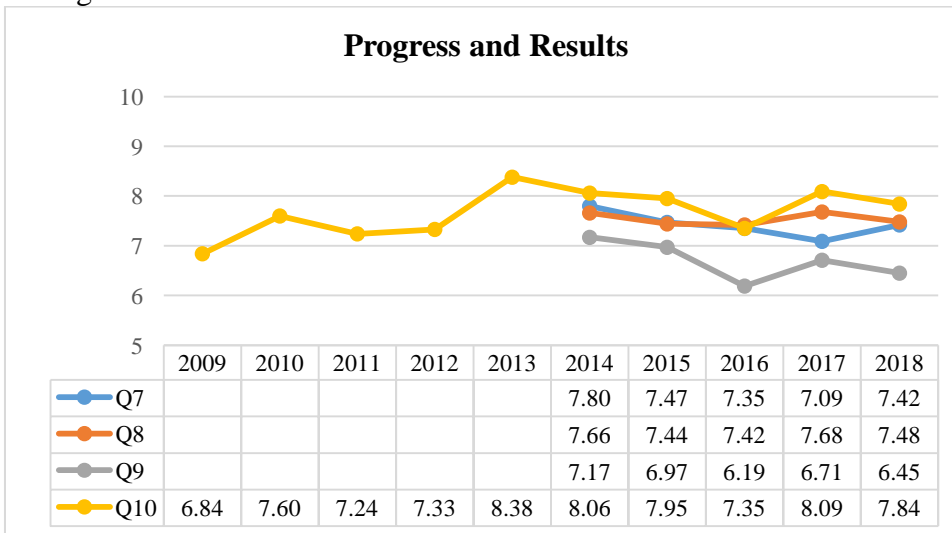
Commission Execution and Results

3. How satisfied are you with the cooperation between Commissioners to achieve the Commission's Vision?
4. How satisfied are you that the Commission has an appropriate level of cooperation with federal partners?
5. How satisfied are you with the Commission's working relationship with our constituent partners (commercial, recreational, and environmental)?
6. How satisfied are you with the Commission's effort and success in securing adequate fiscal resources to support management and science needs?



Measuring the Commission's Progress and Results

7. One of the metrics the Commission uses to measure progress is tracking the number of stocks where overfishing is no longer occurring. Is this a clear metric to measure progress?
8. How satisfied are you with the Commission's progress to end overfishing?
9. Are you satisfied with the Commission's ability to manage rebuilt stocks?
10. How satisfied are you with the Commission's efforts to engage with state legislators and members of Congress?

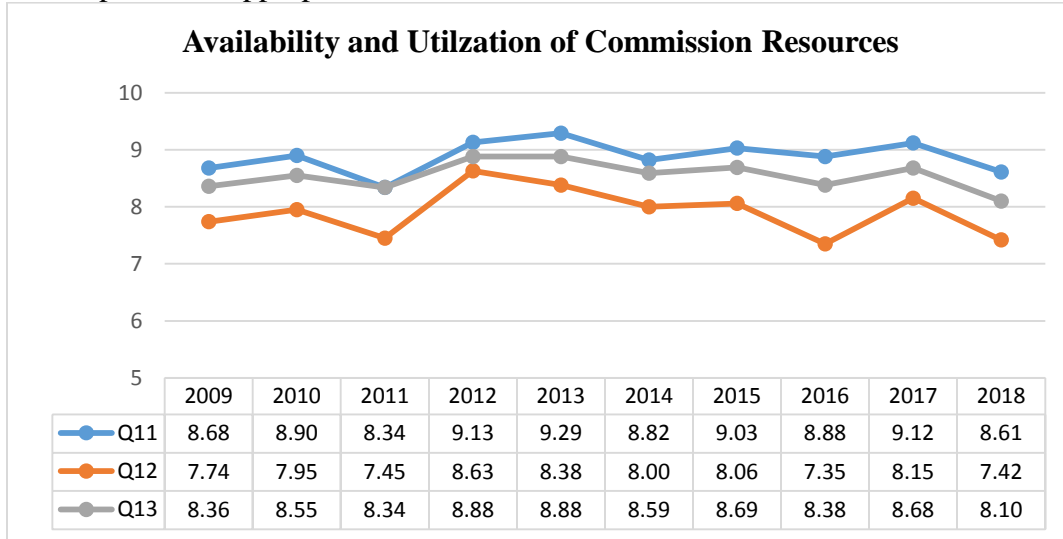


Measuring the Availability and Utilization of Commission Resources

11. How satisfied are you that the Commission efficiently and effectively utilizes available fiscal and human resources?

12. How comfortable are you with the Commission's performance in reacting to new information and adapting accordingly to achieve Commission Goals?

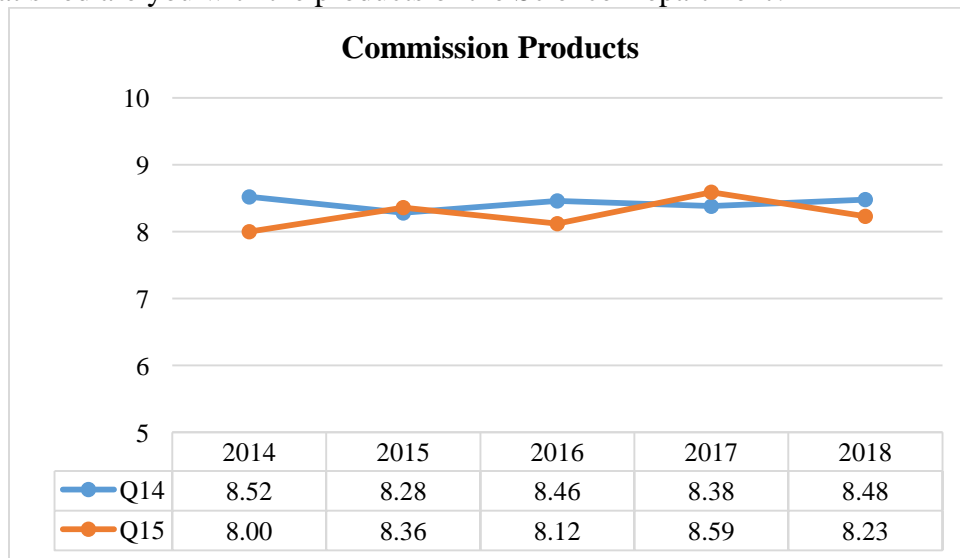
13. The Commission has a limited scope of authority. How comfortable are you that the Commission spends the appropriate amount of resources on issues within its control?



Commission Products

14. How satisfied are you with the products of the ISFMP Department?

15. How satisfied are you with the products of the Science Department?



Discussion Questions

Q16 What is the single biggest obstacle to the Commission's success in rebuilding stocks?

1. Commitment to make difficult decisions
2. Environment or competing state's interests

3. Holding on to the past and not managing based upon the current status of a fishery
4. Environmental factors such as warming waters and uncertain data regarding magnitude of discards and misreporting in commercial fisheries. MRIP estimates of recreational catch are still uncertain and changing with our not knowing consequences to mortality and stock size.
5. Joint Council-ASMFC management of key stocks is an impediment to the rebuilding time. In these cases Magnuson authority complicates the ASMFC process
6. Local state politics
7. Cooperation
8. Competition for allocation among jurisdictions and user groups.
9. Public resistance to making the sometimes hard choices needed to manage stocks in need of re-building. Recently there have been examples of federal administrative resistance to ASMFC management decisions.
10. climate change
11. Changing environmental conditions
12. cooperation and climate change
13. The desire and efforts of each state to obtain beneficial measures for its own fishing community. 2. Balancing the needs of the fishing community with the need to constrain fishing effort. (I realize these are not a single obstacle, but they loom large for me.)
14. allocation of fishery resources, both commercial and recreational
15. stakeholder buy in
16. As quotas decline and state concerns about their individual state quotas increase, it becomes more difficult to make common sense coast-wide decisions. Unfortunately, under the pressure of declining quotas and a vociferous fishing public, much management seems to be seen as 'zero sum game' in which states are afraid to change any allocation formula, no matter how outdated, because state delegations don't want to be seen as having 'lost' any part of their state's quota.
17. There are many factors other than fishing mortality that affect stock rebuilding such as changing ocean conditions. Many cannot be directly affected by Commission action.
18. Challenge of cooperatively addressing shifts in resource distribution and attendant need to re-visit long-standing resource allocations. Quota allocations should not be viewed as permanent or inflexible.
19. Political pressure that usurps science
20. POOR DATA PROVIDES POOR SCIENCE
21. I think one of the biggest obstacles is actually knowing the true status of our marine resources. We need to do a better job of using multiple sources of information and risk assessment to understand what the true status of our resources are.
22. Lack of will to make difficult decisions
23. The unwillingness to reallocate stocks. Some species are still based on 1970's data. Hard to say the ASMFC has moved into the 21st century to our shareholders.
24. Cooperation between Commissioners
25. Developing and implementing effective Ecological Reference Points to analyze fish populations
26. Climate change, antiquated systems of allocations
27. Lack of cooperation among-st the states, "the haves and have no's"

28. Non-fishing factors, i.e. - changing environmental conditions, pollution, offshore development

Q17 What are the most useful products the Commission produces for you?

1. Meeting week and opportunities to problem-solve
2. Statistics for populations and crafting the development of FMP's
3. Briefing materials for preparation for quarterly meetings.
4. Very detailed summaries of meetings and very timely news releases (detailed and accurate)
5. The technical and stock assessment subcommittees are a major component of the management board process.
6. Science data
7. Stock assessment
8. Updates and analysis on FMP progress and stock assessments
9. Annual status of the stocks reports and stock assessment summaries.
10. scientific information
11. FMP reviews
12. meeting materials
13. ISFMP; Providing opportunities to confer with other states on fishing issues (useful and valuable, not always successful);
14. stock assessments and associated information
15. stock assessments, FMP's
16. Must commend ASMFC again on a very useful website. The species pages do a great job of summarizing status and management. The FMP archives are useful for tracking mgmt. history and having the Assessment Reports handy is a big help.
17. Stock assessments and fishery management plans (and amendments and addenda). Fisheries Focus and legislative updates.
18. FMP Reviews, meeting summaries
19. data summaries and outreach to commissioners
20. PRESS RELEASES
21. Science program training opportunities are extremely valuable and will help bolster the ranks of the state folks who can help with technical analyses.
22. Annual fishery report
23. travel info.
24. Science products
25. FMP's news clippings and fisheries focus
26. Quarterly meetings, public hearings and publications; also, the availability of staff to answer questions by either phone or email.
27. Stock status reports

Q18 What additional products could the Commission create to make your job easier?

1. None come to mind
2. No comment
3. Staff presentations are often provided in too hasty a manner. That is a reflection of meeting agendas that are too extensive.
4. Gear information and by catch

5. Produce graphs and tables in Commission reports that can be copied and incorporated easily into other Power Point talks by just clicking on them. Define all acronyms and scientific jargon repeatedly if necessary.
6. More on performance review of past measures enacted
7. Can't say at this time.
8. primer on newer stock assessment modeling.
9. not sure
10. I wish I could get to the Meeting Archives page through a single link on the home page. The Archives are a great help as there is often material presented at the meetings that isn't readily available elsewhere.
11. Products (documents, webpages, presentations) that could aid in describing the Commission management process to the public. Geared towards a layperson with no experience/familiarity with policy, fisheries management, or fisheries science.
12. none at the moment
13. CONDENSED READERS DIGEST VERSIONS OF MATERIALS
14. Looking for more opportunities to use the Commissions position to push for more research money being sent to the states would be a valuable area to help with. Things such as support for modernizing licensing and data collection systems, and for collecting and updating fundamental biological information for Commission species would be helpful.
15. How large or small actual fish sample sizes are that may be taken to be used when modeling. Where did they come from and when were they taken. Or is the model just a numeric equation lacking actual catch data.
16. Provide information regarding options used by our counterparts (Gulf of Mexico and Pacific Coast) that may have validity for Atlantic coast stocks. - Provide economic and ecological results from various reasonable proposals from ASMFC and cooperating agencies (e.g. Chesapeake Bay Foundation).
17. ??

Q19 What issue(s) should the Commission focus more attention/time on?

1. Re-allocation Getting Administration to better support ACFCMA
2. Reallocation of state quotas based on fish distribution changes in response to warming waters. Need effective ways to change allocations resisted by those states not wanting to give up quota regardless of evidence of redistribution.
3. The pace of the ASMFC meetings could be slowed down. There is always a large volume of material that never is highlighted during the meetings because of time elements.
4. Highest dollar value fisheries should be stock assessed more frequently than lesser.
5. Migratory patterns and shifts in spawning
6. What can be done to restore depleted stocks where overfishing has not been identified as the cause.
7. how to address allocation so states do not go out of compliance
8. Focus more on the fisheries, better outreach to the commercial and recreational sectors
9. changes in management to address impacts from changing ocean conditions
10. Not sure at this time.
11. Coordination of Law Enforcement with management strategies.
12. maintain and keep improving science based information

13. How do we get away from state by state allocations? Our regionalization has been a good start, but it still much more difficult on the commercial side than the recreational. How do we manage stocks that will not likely recover? For example, do we restrict harvest on the SNE Lobster population to almost nothing in the hope it will recover, which is looking increasingly unlikely, or do we allow it to be fished until the population hits a low that makes it economically infeasible.
14. Improvement in recreational catch and effort data.
15. Developing management frameworks for ecosystem management (hard to do in context of single species management boards and FMPs), strategic planning geared towards making management more adaptive (to deal with things like species distribution shifts and resulting need to re-allocate resource amongst states)
16. maintain and create outcomes that are useable and enforceable
17. BEING MORE CREATIVE IN FINDING NEW MANAGEMENT MEASURES
18. We need to make a full court press on developing dynamic allocation systems. Without an ability to allow access to resources as they move hurts our credibility and exacerbates the disconnect between on the water observations and management. A second important topic is offshore energy development. This is severely impacting New England and will make its way in to the Mid Atlantic soon. We need scientific information with which to make good informed decisions, but there is a strong push to get these developments constructed. We need to be vigilant and use our leverage to make sure we can get the science done to protect our resources and our fishermen. The cumulative effects of all of the projects could have the potential to severely impact our marine resources and no one is investigating this yet. There are like-minded developers out there, we need to support and work with them and push back against developers that are looking to steamroll forward without information.
19. We have poor working relationship with COUNCILS witness winter flounder rebuilding program. We should develop a new way of working with COUNCIL partners that involves fewer participants and a more efficient process
20. Each and every State has a set of it's own challenges. What is fleshed out to be a State's primary issue should be recognized and dealt with in order to create a cohesive connection within the ASFMC. If the primary issues are not recognized then the chain of connectivity is then and always broken.
21. Finding a way to link habitat improvement to management
22. Ecological Reference points - Rebuild Menhaden populations to approximate 1950 level - Rebuild the Striped Bass population to the level experienced in the year 2000
23. ?
24. Reallocation of coastal species in a fair and equitable management plan!

Q20 Additional comments?

1. Need to put more effort into new Commissioner orientation so there is better understanding of roles and responsibilities.
2. thank you for the opportunity to respond.
3. Strategic Goal #6 might include a specific strategy to collaborate/communicate closely with AFWA. AFWA represents the broad fish & wildlife interests of the states and, I believe, they have resources and the ability to deploy them in ways that the ASMFC can not.

4. Not at this time.
5. Maintain a high-level approach for aquaculture. State public trust doctrine may not be well suited for cooperative management through the Commission as these issues fall clearly with state legislatures outside of federal CSMA consistency . Research and involvement should be focused on wild stock impacts, disease threats, etc. and not on the use of state public trust waters.
6. ASMFC does a good job and I appreciate all the efforts.
7. ASMFC faces serious management problems, but I want to again commend ASMFC leadership and staff for doing a great job in difficult times. Executive Director Bob Beal continues to impress with his low-key but firm leadership. The ASMFC staff are unfailingly helpful and polite, and unflagging in their efforts to get the job done on time.
8. The federal management councils have a "New Council Member" training that is excellent. Consider developing something similar for the Commission.
9. The commission and its commissioners do their best to use the information available to them to create educated outcomes. Increasing stakeholder engagement with outside entities has caused undo influences that tend to hamstring our actions. Engaged commissioners feel that, in order to maintain their seats, politics and not science must drive the final outcomes to the advantage of individual stakeholders and ignore the greater good. This is counterproductive but perhaps a fact of (commission) life. Other than setting terms for appointment length, this is a hurdle that will be hard to overcome. Commissioners should not fear being removed should one outcome be ill received "at home".
10. STAFF IS GREAT
11. Understanding that there is a balance in this comment between not giving enough and giving too much, I feel that we are overwhelming Board members with too much information, and I have a sense that due to this many are coming to meetings unprepared as they do not know which material to focus on for the meeting. Perhaps partitioning the material into "Need to read for the meeting" and "Background" would be a way to let the Board members know what they need to read and if they have time they could dig in to the background material. This issue is not unique to the ASMFC but is also a problem with the regional councils.
12. None

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Draft Five-Year Strategic Plan 2019-2023 for Consideration and Approval by the Business Session



*The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources
as assets which it must turn over to the next generation
increased and not impaired in value.*

Theodore Roosevelt

Introduction

Each state has a fundamental responsibility to safeguard the public trust with respect to its natural resources. Fishery managers are faced with many challenges in carrying out that responsibility. Living marine resources inhabit ecosystems that cross state and federal jurisdictions. Thus, no state, by itself, can effectively protect the interests of its citizens. Each state must work with its sister states and the federal government to conserve and manage natural resources.

Beginning in the late 1930s, the 15 Atlantic coastal states from Maine to Florida took steps to develop cooperative mechanisms to define and achieve their mutual interests in coastal fisheries. The most notable of these was their commitment to form the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) in 1942, and to work together through the Commission to promote the conservation and management of shared marine fishery resources. Over the years, the Commission has remained an effective forum for fishery managers to pursue concerted management actions. Through the Commission, states cooperate in a broad range of programs including interstate fisheries management, fisheries science, habitat conservation, and law enforcement.

Congress has long recognized the critical role of the states and the need to support their mutual efforts. Most notably, it enacted the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) in 1993, which built on the success of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act of 1984. Acknowledging that no single governmental entity has exclusive management authority for Atlantic coastal fishery resources, the Atlantic Coastal Act recognizes the states' responsibility for cooperative fisheries management through the Commission. The Atlantic Coastal Act charges all Atlantic states with implementing coastal fishery management plans that will safeguard the future of Atlantic coastal fisheries in the interest of both fishermen and the nation.

Accepting these challenges and maintaining their mutual commitment to success, the Atlantic coastal states have adopted this five-year Strategic Plan. The states recognize circumstances today make the work of the Commission more important than ever before. The Strategic Plan articulates the mission, vision, goals, and strategies needed to accomplish the Commission's mission. It serves as the basis for annual action planning, whereby Commissioners identify the highest priority issues and activities to be addressed in the upcoming year. With 27 species currently managed by the Commission, finite staff time, Commissioner time and funding, as well as a myriad of other factors impacting marine resources (e.g., changing ocean conditions, protected species interactions, offshore energy, and aquaculture), Commissioners recognize the absolute need to prioritize activities, dedicating staff time and resources where they are needed most and addressing less pressing issues as resources allow. Efforts will be made to streamline management by using multi-year specifications where possible and increase stability/predictability in fisheries management through less frequent regulatory changes. A

key to prioritizing issues and maximizing efficiencies will be working closely with the three East Coast Regional Management Councils and NOAA Fisheries.

Mission

The Commission's mission, as stated in its 1942 Compact, is:

To promote the better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell and anadromous, of the Atlantic seaboard by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries, and by the prevention of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.

The mission grounds the Commission in history. It reminds every one of the Commission's sense of purpose that has been in place for over 77 years. The constantly changing physical, political, social, and economic environments led the Commission to restate the mission in more modern terms:

To promote cooperative management of marine, shell and diadromous fisheries of the Atlantic coast of the United States by the protection and enhancement of such fisheries, and by the avoidance of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.

The mission and nature of the Commission as a mutual interstate body incorporate several guiding principles. They include:

- States are sovereign entities, each having its own laws and responsibilities for managing fishery resources within its jurisdiction
- States serve the broad public interest and represent the common good
- Multi-state resource management is complex and dependent upon cooperative efforts by all states involved
- The Commission provides a critical sounding board on issues requiring cross-jurisdictional action, coordinating cooperation, and collaboration among the states and federal government

Vision

The long-term vision of the Commission is:

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

OR

Cooperative Management of Sustainable Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Driving Forces

The Commission and its actions are influenced by a multitude of factors. These factors are constantly evolving and will most likely change over the time period of this Strategic Plan. However, the most pressing factors affecting the Commission today are changing ocean conditions, resource allocation, the quality and quantity of scientific information, competing ocean uses, a growing demand to address ecosystem functions, and interactions between fisheries and protected species. The Strategic Plan, through its goals and broad objectives, will seek to address each of these issues over the next five years.

Changing Ocean Conditions

Changes in ocean temperature, currents, acidification, and sea level rise are affecting nearly every facet of fisheries resources and management at the state, interstate, and federal levels. Potential impacts to marine species include prey and habitat availability, water quality, susceptibility to disease, and spawning and reproductive potential. The distribution and productivity of fishery stocks are often changing at a rate faster than fisheries science and management can keep pace with. Several Commission species, such as northern shrimp, Southern New England lobster, Atlantic cobia, black sea bass, and summer flounder are already responding to changes in the ocean. In the case of northern shrimp and Southern New England lobster, warming ocean waters have created inhospitable environments for species reproduction and survivability. For cobia, black sea bass, and summer flounder, changing ocean conditions have shifted species distributions, with the species moving into deeper and/or more northern waters to stay within preferred temperature ranges. Where shifts are occurring, the Commission will need to reconsider state-by-state allocation schemes and make adjustments to our fishery management plans. For other species depleted due to factors other than fishing mortality (e.g., habitat degradation and availability, predation), the states will need to explore steps that can be taken to aid in species recovery. And, if a stock's viability is compromised, Commission resources and efforts should be shifted to other species that can be recovered or maintained as a rebuilt stock.

Allocation

As noted above, resource allocation among the states and between various user groups will continue to be an important issue over the next five years. Many of the Commission FMPs divvy up the available harvestable resource through various types of allocation schemes, such as by state, region, season, or gear type. The changing distribution of many species has further complicated the issue of resource allocation with traditional allocation schemes being challenged and a finite amount of fishery resources to be shared. Discussion may be difficult and divisive, with some states (and their stakeholders) wanting to maintain their historic (traditional) allocations, while others are seeking a greater share of the resource given increased abundance and availability in their waters. States will need to seek innovative ways to reallocate species so that collectively all states feel their needs are met. What will be required to successfully navigate these discussions and decisions is the commitment of the states to work through the issues with honesty, integrity, and fairness, seeking outcomes that balance

the needs of the states and their stakeholders with the ever changing realities of shifting resource abundance and availability.

Science as the Foundation

Accurate and timely scientific information form the basis of the Commission's fisheries management decision-making. Continued investments in the collection and management of fishery-dependent and -independent data remain a high priority for the Commission and its member states. The challenge will be to maintain and expand data collection efforts in the face of shrinking state and federal budgets. Past and current investments by state, regional and federal partners of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) have established the program as the principal source of marine fishery statistics for the Atlantic coast. State and regional fishery-independent data collection programs, in combination with fishery statistics, provide the scientific foundation for stock assessments. Many data collection programs will continue to be strained by budget restrictions, scientists' workload capacities, and competing priorities. The Commission remains committed to pursuing long-term support for research surveys and monitoring programs that are critical to informing management decisions and resource sustainability.

Ecosystem Functions

Nationally, there has been a growing demand for fisheries managers to address broader ecosystem functions such as predator-prey interactions and environmental factors during their fisheries management planning. Ecosystem science has improved in recent years, though the challenges of comprehensive data collection continue. A majority of the Commission's species are managed and assessed on a single species basis. When ecosystem information is available, the Commission has managed accordingly to provide ecosystem services. The Commission remains committed to seeking ecological sustainability over the long-term through continuing its work on multispecies assessment modeling and the development of ecosystem-based reference points in its fisheries management planning process.

Competing Ocean Uses

Marine spatial planning has become an increasingly popular method of balancing the growing demands on valuable ocean resources. More specifically, the competing interests of commercial and recreational fishing, renewable energy development, aquaculture, marine transportation, offshore oil exploration and drilling, military needs, and habitat restoration are all components that must be integrated into successful ocean use policies. The Commission has always emphasized cooperative management with our federal partners; however, the states' authorities in their marine jurisdictions must be preserved and respected. The Commission will continue to prioritize the successful operation of its fisheries, but it will be imperative to work closely with federal, state, and local governments on emerging ocean use conflicts as they diversify into the future.

Protected Species

Like coastal fishery resources, protected species, such as marine mammals, sea turtles, and listed and candidate fish species, traverse both state and federal waters. The protections

afforded these species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act can play a significant role in the management and prosecution of Atlantic coastal fisheries. The Commission and the states have a long history of supporting our federal partners to minimize interactions with and bycatch of marine mammals and sea turtles. The listing of Atlantic sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act has added a whole new level of complexity in the ability of the Commission and its member states to carry out their stewardship responsibilities for these important diadromous species. The species spends the majority of its life in state waters and depend on estuarine and riverine habitat for their survival. Listing has the potential to jeopardize the states' ability to effectively monitor and assess stock condition, as well as impact fisheries that may encounter listed species. It is incumbent upon the Commission and its federal partners to work jointly to assess stock health, identify threats, and implement effective rebuilding programs for listed and candidate species.

More recently, the depleted status of the Northern right whale population and the potential impacts to this population by entanglement in fishing gear, particularly lobster and crab gear, has heightened concern for both whales and the lobster industry.

Increased Cooperation and Collaboration among the States and between the States and Our Federal Partners

Demands for ecosystem-based fisheries management, competing and often conflicting ocean uses, and legislative mandates to protect marine mammals and other protected species, further complicate fisheries management and require quality scientific information to help guide management decisions. There is a growing concern among fishery managers that some "control" over fisheries decisions and status has been diminished due to political intervention and our inability to effect changing ocean conditions and other environmental factors that impact marine resources. Fisheries management has never been more complex or politically charged. State members are pulled between what is best for their stakeholders versus what is best for the resource and the states as a whole.

While the issues may seem daunting, they are not insurmountable. In order for the Commission to be successful, the states must recommit to their collective vision of "Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries," recognizing that their strength lies in working together to address the fisheries issues that lie ahead. Given today's political and environmental realities, the need for cooperation among the states has never been more important. It is also critical the states and their federal partners seek to strengthen their cooperation and working relationships, providing for efficient and effective fisheries management across all agencies. No one state or federal agency has the resources, authority, or ability to do it alone.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The Commission will pursue the following eight goals and their related strategies during the five-year planning period, from 2019 through 2023. It will pursue these goals through specific

objectives, targets, and milestones outlined in an annual Action Plan, which is adopted each year at the Commission's Annual Meeting to guide the subsequent year's activities. Throughout the year, the Commission and its staff will monitor progress in meeting the Commission's goals, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. While committed to the objectives included in this plan, the Commission is ready to adopt additional objectives to take advantage of new opportunities and address emerging issues as they arise.

Goal 1 - Rebuild, maintain, fairly allocate, and promote Atlantic coastal fisheries

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests and needs of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources benefit stakeholders. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socio-economic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well-defined fishery management plans. Fishery management plans will also address fair allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding changing ocean conditions and their impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Successful management under changing ocean conditions will depend not only on adjusting management strategies, but also in reevaluating and revising, as necessary, the underlying conservation goals and objectives of fishery management plans. Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to ending overfishing and working to rebuild overfished or depleted Atlantic coast fish stocks, while promoting sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Manage interstate resources that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries using sound science
- Strengthen state and federal partnerships to improve comprehensive management of shared fishery resources
- Adapt management to address emerging issues
- Practice efficient, transparent, and accountable management processes
- Evaluate progress towards rebuilding fisheries
- Strengthen interactions and input among stakeholders, technical, advisory, and management groups

Goal 2 – Provide sound, actionable science to support informed management actions

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a

broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed by a broad network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. The goal encompasses the development of new, innovative scientific research and methodology, and the enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure sound science is available to serve as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Conduct stock assessments based on comprehensive data sources and rigorous technical analysis
- Provide training to enhance the expertise and involvement of state and staff scientists in the development of stock assessments
- Streamline data assimilation within individual states, and among states and ASMFC
- Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs and collaborative research projects, including stakeholder involvement
- Explore the use of new technologies to improve surveys, monitoring, and the timeliness of scientific products
- Promote effective communication with stakeholders to ensure on-the-water observations and science are consistent
- Utilize ecosystem and climate science products to inform fisheries management decisions

Goal 3 - Produce dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries

Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data and fishery-independent data to inform stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. While Goal 2 of this Action Plan focuses on providing sound, actionable science and fishery-independent data to support fisheries management, Goal 3 focuses on providing timely, accurate catch and effort data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries.

Goal 3 seeks to accomplish this through the activities of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a cooperative state-federal program that designs, implements, and conducts marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and integrates those data into data management systems that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. ACCSP partners include the 15 Atlantic coast state fishery agencies, the three Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Focus on activities that maximize benefits, are responsive and accountable to partner and end-user needs, and are based on available resources.
- Cooperatively develop, implement, and maintain coastwide data standards through cooperation with all program partners
- Provide electronic applications that improve partner data collection
- Integrate and provide access to partner data via a coastwide repository
- Facilitate fisheries data access through an on-line, user-friendly, system while protecting confidentiality
- Support technological innovation

Goal 4 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education

Goal 4 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The Commission’s Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat under limited regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. Much of the work to address habitat is conducted through the Commission’s Habitat and Artificial Reef Committees. In order to identify fish habitats of concern for Commission managed species, each year the Habitat Committee reviews existing reference documents for Commission-managed species to identify gaps or updates needed to describe important habitat types and review and revise species habitat factsheets. The Habitat Committee also publishes an annual issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, highlighting topical issues that affect all the states.

The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership, and will continue to work cooperatively with the partnership to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes. As part of this goal, the Commission will continue to provide support for ACFHP, under the direction of the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Identify fish habitats of concerns through fisheries management programs and partnerships
- Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- Better integrate habitat information and data into fishery management plans and stock assessments
- Engage local state, and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs
- Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage scientific, regulatory, political, and financial support
- Work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals

Goal 5 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast fisheries

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with fishery management plans. This requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission’s fishery management plans.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Develop practical compliance requirements that foster stakeholder buy-in
- Evaluate the enforceability of management measures and the effectiveness of law enforcement programs
- Promote coordination and expand existing partnerships with state and federal natural resource law enforcement agencies
- Enhance stakeholder awareness of management measures through education and outreach
- Use emerging communication platforms to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations

Goal 6 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making processes. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and

its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Increase public understanding and support of activities through expanded outreach at the local, state, and federal levels
- Clearly define Commission processes to facilitate stakeholder participation, as well as transparency and accountability
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions
- Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission's activities and actions

Goal 7 – Advance Commission and member states' priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda

Although states are positioned to achieve many of the national goals for marine fisheries through cooperative efforts, state fisheries interests are often underrepresented at the national level. This is due, in part, to the fact that policy formulation is often disconnected from the processes that provide the support, organization, and resources necessary to implement the policies. The capabilities and input of the states are an important aspect of developing national fisheries policy, and the goal seeks to increase the states' role in national policy formulation. Additionally, the goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress in all phases of policy formulation. Several important fishery-related laws will be reauthorized over the next couple of years (i.e., Atlantic Coastal Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act). The Commission will be vigilant in advancing the states' interests to Congress as these laws are reauthorized and other fishery-related pieces of legislation are considered.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Increase the Commission's profile and support in the U.S. Congress by developing relationships between Members and their staff and Commissioners, the Executive Director, and Commission staff
- Maintain or increase long term funding for Commission programs through the federal appropriations process and other available sources.
- Engage Congress on fishery-related legislation affecting the Atlantic coast

- Promote member states' collective interests at the regional and national levels
- Promote economic benefits of the Commission's actions (return on investment)

Goal 8 – Ensure the fiscal stability & efficient administration of the Commission

Goal 8 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission's management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage its resources. The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners and Commission staff to maintain and increase the institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Conservatively manage the Commission's operations and budgets to ensure fiscal stability
- Utilize new information technology to improve meeting and workload efficiencies, and enhance communications
- Refine strategies to recruit professional staff, and enhance growth and learning opportunities for Commission and state personnel
- Fully engage new Commissioners in the Commission process and document institutional knowledge.
- Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary.