Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Management and Science Committee

October 27, 2014
9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Mystic, Connecticut

Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome and Introductions *(J. O'Hop)* 9:00 a.m.
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes from April 14, 2014

4. Stock Assessment Updates/Review Stock Assessment Schedule

    a. N. Shrimp, Tautog *(K. Drew)* 9:15 a.m.
    b. Black Drum, Atlantic Sturgeon *(J. Kipp)* 9:25 a.m.
    c. Spot, Lobster, Black Sea Bass, Menhaden *(G. Nesslage)* 9:35 a.m.

5. Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Reporting (*G. Nesslage*) 9:45 a.m.

6. Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCeMFiS) Presentation *(R. Mann)* 10:00 a.m.

7. Changes to Technical Committee Guidelines on Consensus and Voting 10:30 a.m.

8. Discuss ASMFC/MAFMC Observer Program *(S. Madsen)* 11:00 a.m.

Lunch

9. FishSmart/Barotrauma overview presentation and tools *(P. Perra)* 1:00 p.m.

10. Research Set-Aside Presentations and Discussions

    a. Mid-Atlantic/Northeast RSA Overview *(R. Silva)* 1:30 p.m.
    b. Mid-Atlantic RSA Experience (*J. Gartland*) 2:00 p.m.
    c. Discussion 2:15 p.m.

11. NMFS Climate Change Vulnerability Analysis *(W. Morrison)* 2:30 p.m.

This meeting will be held at the Mystic Hilton.
20 Coogan Boulevard Mystic, Connecticut 06355 Ph: 860.572.0731

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

12. Review of MSC's Role in Peer Review Planning *(P. Campfield)* 3:00 p.m.

13. Updates 3:15 p.m.

a. Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership *(P. Campfield)*
b. Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise *(W. Laney)*
c. SEAMAP *(S. Madsen)*
d. NEAMAP *(J. Gartland)*
e. Coastwide Ageing Activities *(J. Kipp)*

14. Other Business 4:00 p.m.
15. Public comment
16. Adjourn

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Management and Science Committee

April 14th 1 p.m.

Draft Minutes

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome and introductions *(S. Madsen)* 1:00 pm
2. Approval of agenda- Approved
3. Approval of minutes—October 28-29, 2013- Approved

4. MSC Climate Change subctme ISFMP Policy Board presentation 1:10 pm

Jim G said it seems as though the data you would need for those options are similar. It would be beneficial to consider all sources (fisheries independent/dependent, since there are limitations in independent data, especially due to seasonality. Linda M noted that cause/effect scenario B is not tied to stock assessment results but more tied to changes in distribution whereas the second one would be based on stock status. Option B would actually redistribute the stock, whereas if a surplus is not experienced, states that are experiencing an increase in their stock numbers may still not receive that increase. Jim G agreed that management track is different, but the data needed is the same. The same data that would be needed for cause/effect option B would need to go into the stock assessment needed for surplus distribution.

Cheri P said that she thought that surplus distribution addresses both stock expansion or climate shifts. Linda M said that could be a problem if you have a stock that is expanding but not increasing in abundance. Surplus distribution would not address the shift of a stock without a change in abundance. Mike A said we should not be locked into the 50%/50% either. Jim G said scenario B would be less of a boom or bust. If the stock busts, those northern states still don't have a surplus which could be a problem. He agreed that we need to think if we can flex the 50%/50% and have those percentages vary by species as well. Mark A said one thing that could be worrisome is if we created a defined latitude that would translate into a state boundary. Pat C said that a while ago the Center showed abundance trends by state, which could help with defining said latitude. This may be good fodder to show to the Policy Board so we can try to find that plot.

Jim G noted that if we are talking about reallocations, several data sets stop about 6 years ago. We need to use recent data if we're going to doing it. Pat C agreed and noted that we may need to figure out the calibration from the Bigelow to the NEAMAP surveys.

Pat C then said that he recalled from the climate change subctme discussion, that Kathy suggested an example to shake out. Some of the issues with the example were that Board members may get turned off to a reallocation option early. He thought that we might be able to change some of those neutrals if we gave the Board more information on some of these options. Potential indicators for the change in distributions might come from the NE Groundfish Survey, or NEAMAP. We might want the TCs to dig into what data sources are necessary more. Fluke

working group does not have any examples on hand that might be able to help describe this options better to the Board.
Jason M said the fluke working group was looking at a specific but similar task to the climate change subcmte that was focused on rec fisheries. But in the end it was going to take too long and they stopped that work and went with the regional development. Thinking about reallocations is hard to get consensus on since some states could get a larger share and some states may lose quota. The working group tried to develop a science based approach using fisheries independent survey data, but were unable to complete it.
Wilson L said that from a FWS perspective, they are staying out of the allocation politics. But, if there was one option that had a stock benefit to it they would support whatever best managed the stock. He did not know if one of these is more advantageous but they would look for an option that gave the stock either a biological advantage or the states an equitability advantage.

The group then further discussed including an example with the reallocation options.
Katie D noted that if we were to give them an example, it would ultimately need to include multiple examples, with scenarios. We don't want to give them "here is the answer and this is what is going to happen with all of our species". The example needs to be flexible show multiple abundance and distribution shifts. Kathy K said maybe we can ask the Board if they would like an example when we present. If that is something that they would like to have we want we have the time to develop that reasonably. Linda M said that keeping it generic at this point is okay since reallocation is not something we're going to rush into. Cheri P agreed that we're giving the Board what we can from the survey and then we can ask if they want further examples. Pat C said examples would also need to be evaluated at a stock by stock basis.
Cheri P said we should present the results of the survey and ask if the Board would like a TC to develop what our options might look like. Kathy K noted that this was responses from 22 people but they have not yet had the discussion in the Policy Board yet. We should first give them the options and then they can move forward with the discussion so it makes sense then to ask if they want an example.
Wilson L agreed that that made sense, wait to see where the discussion goes and discuss examples based on that.

The group will provide comments on the climate change subctme presentation as well as add thoughts and comments to the "pros and cons list" created for the top 2 reallocation options.

5. Policy Board task-Eel scientific permit criteria 2:10 pm

Wilson L said that the first step here should be to determine if states allow commercial uses under a scientific collecting permits. Linda M said that Maine does not. The only example she can think of is a dive fishery for sea cucumber. That was a limited experimental basis, for commercial use but very limited. Wilson L asked if that was the way experimental fishing permits work through the Councils. He asked if you could sell the animals that are harvested. Pete B responded that yes you could have that situation. Jim G said that all boats that land RSA all fish under experimental fishing permits.
Stew M commented that his sense from reading the document was that the topic may be broader than that, maybe even more encompassing. This could be an issue for multiple species. The motion is specific to eel, but some discussion might have farther reaching consequences.

Wilson L said there was a lot of discussion on the TC level that 750 pounds exceeded the SC fishery. This was deemed somewhat excessive. Steve A asked where the eels were being harvested from or if they were being pulled from any one particular place. Wilson L commented that it was unspecified. There was really no indication of whether that was an appropriate or inappropriate amount. Cheri P said that she looked at the request from the perspective of Maine. Maine harvested 18,000 lbs, they are reducing by 6,327 lbs which drops them to a little under 12,000. We're asking ME to reduce and yet NC wants to take a percentage of that. She did not believe we were in a good place to be opening up new commercial ventures even if it might be in the name of agriculture if others have been asked to reduce their catch. Wilson L asked what sort of limitations we should put on eels. Cheri P said that if she was considering a scientific permit for a commercial venture, she would not allow it, especially when we're asking another states to drop their quota. Wilson L that might be a problem if a certain jurisdiction cannot afford to have a survey conducted and contracts out to a fisherman. A ban on commercial use might prevent a situation like that from happening. Linda M commented that it would depend on what you would be collecting and what the scientific benefit would be.

Wilson L said that another thing to think about was de minimis standards in place, and that's in 1% of the coastwide catch. There is a very low level that sets the standard of de minimis so if we're going to define the amount that would be one approach we could take. Linda M said that it seems to her that a scientific collecting permit does not work for a commercial venture. Steve A said the stocking of raised eels was supposed to be a sweetener to the pot. The TC brought up the fact that restocking in a small area would ruin the sex ratio and there was no assurance of the stocking success. They need to address that component. Another aspect is disease. If you have a farm with high density of eels, you might put in a massive level of eggs you might inject disease burden into that area.
Katie D commented that the Board probably wants this to be a different discussion. They are trying to avoid states using the scientific permit process to subvert the intent of the stock assessment and TC. They are looking for guidance on language to stop issues like these. Wilson L said our task was to define criteria. For number one, commercial use would not be a criteria that we would agree to. For the section about max/min amount without Board approval we'd need to come up with a number. Genny N said that the issue is if the TC is struggling to come up with a number, it will be harder for us to.
Jim G commented that they want to put guidance in the addendum. If you say no commercial permits, then RSA would not be possible, so there would have to be exceptions. Trish M said there is a spot in our rule that the Director can allow some sale on a case by case basis. Steve A commented that there is a section in SC regulations that also may allow it.
Genny N asked Wilson to clarify the use of the "*de minimis"* standard as a spring board. She wanted to know if "*de minimis*" means 1% of the coastwide catch or of the statewide catch. Wilson L said generally it's one percent of the coastwide catch, but he had not thought of it that way. Mark A commented that 1% of a state's catch could be the upper limit for all scientific permits collected by that state. Stew M noted that concept of a "*de minimis*" status at a statewide level scientific permitting would be a good idea as long as it does not exceed your landings by life stage.

Group agreed that 1% of a state's total catch (by life stage) would be an acceptable place to start when crafting language for scientific permitting regulations. Shanna will follow-up with Kate Taylor and eel TC.

6. Stock assessment timing (Spot, HSC, black sea bass, lobster) 2:40 pm

The group agreed with the updated assessment schedule.

7. Updates 3:00 pm

- Coast-wide ageing activities *(J. Kipp)*

Jeff K said that for 2014 scup and fluke will be run as a joint ageing workshop. There will be an exchange of scales and otoliths to provide baseline info on where labs are at on precision and bias. There have been several past workshops for summer flounder but this will be a follow-up to those. The ageing workshops should determine how much ageing error exists between labs and should help establish some level of consistency. The subcommittee that has been working on the ageing manual for ASMFC wants to merge it with the Gulf States Commission manual into something that will work for both coasts. They currently have chapters for 13 species and there are 5 species that there were already chapters of overlap for both Commissions. Feedback from labs due June 1st and the Gulf States contacted their subcmte for feedback. They will follow up with Gulf States and how to merge into one overall manual.
Wilson L asked if eel is included. Jeff K replied that yes, but there is not a lot of production ageing along the coast. They are looking for feedback from the labs that are actually doing that ageing.

- Peer-review planning (*P. Campfield*)

Jim Gartland, Trish Murphey, and Mike Armstrong will be assisting Pat with black drum and tautog peer-reviewer search.

8. Other Business
9. Adjourn 3:30 pm

Long-Term Benchmark Assessment and Peer Review Schedule

Approved August 2014

Species	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	SA Staff
American Eel	ASMFC							ASMFC						x		GN
American Shad			ASMFC					x								KD
American Lobster	ASMFC				ASMFC							ASMFC				GN
Atlantic Croaker						SEDAR 20							x			KD
Atlantic Menhaden		Update				SEDAR		Update			SEDAR			Update		GN
Atlantic Sea Herring		TRAC			Update			SARC 54								KD
Atlantic Striped Bass	Update		SARC-Fall		Update		Update		SARC 57			Update		Update		KD
Atlantic Sturgeon														ASMFC		KD, JK
Black Drum												ASMFC				JK
Black Sea Bass		SARC-Spring		DataPoor Wkshp	Update	Update	SARC-Fall	Update	Update		Update	Update	ASMFC	Update	Update	GN
Bluefish	SARC-Spring	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update		Update	*SARC-Spring*	Update	Update	Update	KD
Horseshoe Crab					ASMFC				Update				Update			KD
Multispecies VPA	SARC-Fall				Update			Update			Update					GN, KD
Northern Shrimp	Update	Update	SARC-Spring	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update		*SARC-Spring*	Update	Update	x	Update	KD
Red Drum					SEDAR							SEDAR				JK
River Herring								ASMFC						x		KD
Scup				DataPoor Wkshp	Update	Update	Update	Update	Update (x)		Update	*SARC-Spring*	Update	Update	Update	GN
Spanish Mackerel				SEDAR				SEDAR 28								KD
Spiny Dogfish	Update	SARC-Spring	Update	Update	Update	TRAC	Update	Update	Update		Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	GN
Large Coastal Sharks		SEDAR					SEDAR									GN
Small Coastal Sharks			SEDAR				SEDAR		SEDAR							GN
Spot													x			GN
Spotted Seatrout																KD
Summer Flounder	SARC-Spring	Update	Update	SARC-Spring	Update	Update	Update	Update	SARC 57		Update	Update	Update	Update	Update	GN
Tautog	ASMFC	Update					Update				ASMFC					KD
Weakfish		ASMFC		DataPoor Wkshp	SARC-Spring							ASMFC				KD
Winter Flounder	Update			SARC-Spring			SARC 52						x			KD

SEDAR External Review

ASMFC External Review

Fall SARC Review

Spring SARC Review

x = 5 year trigger date or potential review

Completed

Italics = under consideration, but not officially scheduled

2013 marks transitioning to the new NE Stock Assessment Process

Please note that all species scheduled for review must be prioritized by management boards and Policy Board for the type of review.

Additional Notes:

Black Sea Bass	Delayed to 2016 for new model development; was scheduled for Fall 2014 SARC
Horseshoe Crab	Update underway in 2013; TC recommends update in 2016.
Large Coastal Sharks	SEDAR 21-Sandbar (was LCS, now research); LCS-Dusky (prohibited); SCS-Blacknose (quota); DW Jun; AW Sep-Mar; RW Apr 2011
Small Coastal Sharks	SEDAR 34-HMS bonnethead and Atlantic sharpnose 2013
Spot	PRT annually reviews; recommended for assessment 2016
Spotted Seatrout	States conducting individual assessments

ASMFC Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Process Guidelines

Excerpts of proposed changes to Guidelines related to committee voting

6.0 MEETING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

For the purpose of this section 6 and 7 a meeting can be an in-person, conference call or webinar unless specified.

6.3 Roles of Chair and Vice-chair at Meetings

It is the responsibility of the chair of the technical support group to conduct and facilitate meetings. Chairs will lead committees through agenda items in consultation with staff, including items requiring specific action. The TC chair should assist in clarifying the details of any tasks assigned to the TC by the board/section. Assistance should also be provided in the development of the written charge, including all specific tasks, the deliverable expected, and a timeline for presentation of results and/or recommendations to the board/section. The chair should attend all board/section meetings and should be in frequent contact with the appropriate ISFMP staff. It is also the responsibility of the chair of the technical support group to provide presentations to the relevant oversight committee on all findings and advice. All formal presentations should be conducted in a manner consistent with the guidance provided in 7.4.5.

The committee chair is also responsible for clarifying the majority and/or minority opinions, where possible. **The overall goal of all technical support groups is to develop recommendations through consensus.** The chair is responsible for facilitating committee discussion toward reaching a consensus recommendation for board/section consideration. If consensus cannot be reached, the committee shall vote on the issue. The majority opinion shall be presented to the board/section as the recommendation, defined as a simple majority, including a record of number of votes in favor and against. The committee will also present the minority opinion, prepared by a committee member(s) that voted in the minority, to the board/section. **Voting should be used only as a last resort when full consensus cannot be reached.** The Commission will periodically conduct meetings management and consensus-building seminars for all chairs and vice-chairs of technical support groups, and others as appropriate. Chairs and vice-chairs should attend these seminars in order to improve their ability to conduct efficient meetings, objectively facilitate discussions and develop consensus recommendations, and objectively represent opposing viewpoints.

8.0 STOCK ASSESSMENTS

8.5 Committee Process

The overall goal of all technical support groups is to develop recommendations through consensus. The chair is responsible for facilitating committee discussion toward reaching a consensus recommendation for board/section consideration. If consensus cannot be reached, the committee shall vote on the issue. The majority opinion shall be presented to the board/section as the recommendation, defined as a simple majority, including a record of number of votes in favor and against. The committee will also present the minority opinion, prepared by a committee member(s) that voted in the minority, to the board/section. **Voting should be used only as a last resort when full consensus cannot be reached.**

8.7.2 Assessment Workshop

The objectives of the assessment workshop are to rigorously evaluate the methods and stock assessment models developed, to ensure appropriate use of the data in models, and to determine the status of the fishery examined. Assessment workshop participants shall include the SAS, TC chair, and Commission ASMFC staff. All Commission meetings are open to the public. However, all participants will be responsible for abiding by confidentiality agreements for data used at the assessment workshop and those without confidential access to data being presented may be asked to temporarily leave the room.

…

The SAS will then conduct final model runs, sensitivity analyses, uncertainty estimation, and any other tasks as needed to finalize modeling efforts. The SAS will develop its ~~consensus~~ recommendation on stock status in terms of the appropriate reference points and compose the final sections of the draft stock assessment report. The SAS will also review and prioritize research recommendations according to the terms of reference. The SAS will assign tasks with due dates needed to finalize the stock assessment report.

Executive Summary
Research and Development Phase of the FishSmart Angler Engagement Initiative

FishSmart is a program led by the sportfishing community involving state and federal agencies, recreational anglers, sport fishing businesses and others to improve the survival of fish released by recreational anglers. Over the four years (2010-2014) of activity covered under the first phase of *FishSmart*, the program has been taken from a concept on paper to operational. Development of a scientifically-based Best Practices and laying the foundation for integrating those into anglers' behavior will provide substantial conservation benefits for decades to come. The purpose of this project was to develop Best Practices as a guideline for anglers, integrate the sport fishing industry in addressing released fish survival, develop a foundation for a communications program, and conduct a gap analysis of the state of knowledge on released fish mortality in marine recreational fisheries. These have been accomplished through:

- One national and four regional workshops bringing together anglers, scientists, managers, and businesses to address core issues related to released fish survival.
- Comprehensive analysis of recreational release mortality being used in fishery management councils' fishery management plans.
- Assessment of messages being sent to anglers by state and federal marine agencies used as a basis for Best Practices.
- Establishment of the industry's FishSmart Tackle Program.
- Establishment of a recognized brand identity for *FishSmart*.
- Development of a programmatic web site at www.fishsmart.org.
- Development of a consumer oriented web presence and integration into the conservation media of takemefishing.org which attracts more than 7 million visits per year and growing.
- Development of a professionally produced consumer video on Best Practices and secondarily raising awareness of *FishSmart* program.
- Development of a Best Practices brochure for use in co-logo partnerships with manufacturers, retailers, agencies, and like-minded conservation programs.
- Increased awareness of release mortality issue (particularly barotrauma) in marine fisheries across the U.S.
- Information dissemination to anglers, industry, and fisheries management bodies.

A paramount accomplishment, is the development of an extensive network of partners, ranging from individual anglers and charter boat operators to corporations, associations, conservation groups, and government agencies working together to address a single conservation issue. NOAA investments of $595,975 have been matched directly by more than $150,000 from the sport fishing community. A portion of these matching contributions originate from the Sport Fish Restoration Program (Wallop-Breaux), meaning that America's anglers and boaters have a vested stake in FishSmart and its outcomes. This twenty-five percent monetary input does not capture the undefinable indirect investments resulting from time, extensions of communication, dedication, support of conservation ethics and other services that these partners have provided.

Full report details can be found at www.fishsmart.org/materials.

Useful Resources

FishSmart is designed to enhance, not replace, many successful programs in place to help anglers reduce the mortality of fish that they catch.

The first stop that any angler should make is to the web page or angling guides of their states' natural resources agency. In coastal and Great Lakes areas, the national Sea Grant programs also offer advice on improving the survival of released fish. Here are some useful links to programs that offer additional information:

www.catchandrelease.org

www.takemefishing.org/fishsmart

Rockfish barotrauma video:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c0CN_1veT0

Additional Links and Resources at:

www.fishsmart.org

What is *FishSmart*?

Recreational anglers have always been on the leading edge of conservation in the U.S.. *FishSmart* is a program fostered by the sport fishing community, with the cooperation of state and local government fisheries agencies, to continue this tradition by taking a science-based approach to reducing the mortality of fish where high numbers of released fish is a problem.

Elements of *FishSmart* include:

- **FishSmart Tackle** program to recognize innovation in designing gear for the safe release of fish.
- **Research** with anglers, industry, scientists and managers to determine the state of knowledge of released fish survival.
- **Outreach** to get the information into the hands of anglers where they can make a difference.

Supporters include:

- American Sportfishing Association
- NOAA Fisheries
- Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
- Keep America Fishing
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Florida Sea Grant

FishSmart

… For the Future of Fishing

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Best Practices for the Safe Release of your Fish

www.fishsmart.org

Why "Best Practices" for the Release of Fish?

It's ok to keep fish that you are allowed to retain under fishing regulations. However, at some point all anglers will be faced with returning fish to the water that they are not allowed to keep – due to size, season, or creel limits – or if they are voluntarily practicing catch-and-release.

Nearly ½ billion saltwater fish are caught each year with 59% of those being returned to the water. Improving survival of these fish by even 1% will save 3 million fish annually! In freshwater 84% of anglers *voluntarily* release fish that they could have legally kept.

Implementing "Best Practices" for releasing fish in is the right thing to do and will help ensure sound fisheries in the future. Live release in many fisheries (bass and trout for example) has contributed to healthy and sustainable fishery resources.

FishSmart….for the future of fishing.

FishSmart

Best Practices for Releasing Fish

Plan Ahead - Expect to release fish on any given trip and prepare the equipment necessary to do so.

Avoidance - Develop skills to target the size and species you desire.

Appropriate Gear - Use gear suited to the size of fish that you are trying to catch. Use circle hooks where recommended and be aware that fishing techniques are different from "J" style hooks.

Landing Fish -Don't play fish to exhaustion.

Handling Fish-Use knotless rubberized landing nets and rubberized gloves, to avoid removing the slime layer from their body.

- Keep the fish horizontal; support the body when lifting large fish.
- **DON'T DROP THE FISH** onto hard surfaces or long distances!

Releasing Fish- If needed, use a release tool (dehookers, recompression tools) to minimize handling.

Time is of the essence!
Release fish as soon as practical and do not keep them out of the water longer than necessary.

Deep Water Release

Saltwater fish caught in deep water may be suffering from "barotrauma," a buildup of swim bladder gases that makes it difficult to go back down. Generally, fish caught deeper than 30 feet will suffer some effects. Follow these basic tips:

Assess condition while reeling in fish - Signs of barotrauma include:

- Sluggish swimming.
- Eyes bulging ("pop eye").
- Stomach protruding from mouth.
- Bloated mid section.

If the fish appears normal release it without removing it from the water.

Recompression - Rapidly returning fish to depth is the method of choice for returning barotrauma affected fish. A variety of tools are on the market, including descender devices, release weights & baskets, etc.

Return to Depth -Return fish to the depth of capture. If catching fish deep, return them as far as possible to improve survival.

Venting- If rapid descent is not possible, venting is another option. Use established guidelines for venting such as found at http://catchandrelease.org.

Note that the fish's stomach may protrude from its mouth. Do NOT puncture the stomach.

What are Fish Descending Devices?

Florida Sea Grant begins project to increase survival of deep-water released fish

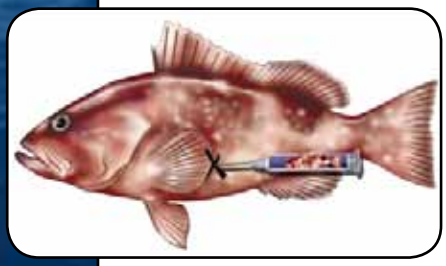
Experienced deep-sea anglers are all too familiar with the problems of releasing fish (either undersized or out of season) caught in deep water. Fish retrieved from such depths (generally deeper than 60–80 ft.) experience problems caused by the rapid change in pressure. Gas in their swim bladders (used to control their buoyancy) expands and ruptures the bladder, releasing gas into the fish's body cavity.

When this happens the fish appears bloated and cannot swim back down to the bottom, resulting in almost certain mortality. In severe cases, the gas trapped in the body everts the stomach, causing it to protrude from the mouth. It is a common misconception by anglers that this is the swim bladder, but it is the stomach.

Obviously, fishery management regulations that require release of fish will be ineffective if the released fish do not survive. One practice anglers can use to help fish return to depth and have an increased chance of survival is venting. Venting involves using a sharp hollow instrument to puncture the body cavity wall to release the expanded gases. However, it is not perfect. Venting can increase the survival of some, but not all, fish species and obviously results in some additional injury to the fish.

Until recently, regulations in the federal waters of the Gulf required anglers to vent fish that were unable to swim back to the bottom, but as of September 3, 2013, those anglers are no longer required to have onboard and use venting tools. The use of venting tools is still required in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico (within nine miles of shore).

Distended stomach of fish caught in deep-water. This is not the swim bladder. Photo: Bryan Fluech



Proper position for venting fish. Photo: Florida Sea Grant

New on the horizon

Fish Descending Devices

The problem of increasing survival of fish caught in deep water is not unique to southwest Florida, Gulf and Atlantic. In fact, it is fair to say it is a worldwide problem. Similar problems are encountered on the U.S. west coast for a group of bottom fish commonly referred to as rockfish. Along the U.S. west coast water as deep as 200-450 feet is easily in sight of land. Recent research has shown that many species of rockfish can survive if they are quickly returned to the bottom. A number of ingenious anglers have developed a variety of devices that can be used to accomplish this with minimum injury to the fish. Some of these devices have just come on the market in the past six to nine months.

Sea Grant Florida

Here is just a sampling of some of the new devices. There are more constantly being developed and some anglers are coming up with homemade devices.

Inverted Utility Crate: The Fish Elevator

This device can either be purchased or homemade. It consists of a weighted utility crate that can be filled with fish and then lowered until they swim free.

Photo courtesy of Steve Theberge

Releasing four red grouper at one time

Fish Descenders

Device attached to fish, rod and reel used to lower fish.
Strong jerk on line releases fish.

Ace Calloway Fish Descender
(also called Blacktip)
www.git-r-down.com
Photo: Capt. Ralph Allen

Roklees Fish Descender
www.ecoleeser.com
Photo: Bryan Fluech

Seaqualizer

This device can be set to release fish at
predetermined depth (ie. 50, 100, 150 feet).

http://www.theseaqualizer.com/
SeaQualizer_-_Official_Website/Welcome.html

Photo: John Stevely

Florida Sea Grant In Action

Florida Sea Grant Extension agents are now conducting field trials to develop expertise in the use of these devices. Furthermore, we are conducting field trials with volunteer anglers to evaluate if these devices are practical and whether anglers will be willing to use them. The hope is that eventually fishery managers will be able to provide anglers with options on how best to get fish back down to the bottom to maximize their chances for survival. We must stress this work is experimental at this time and more research will be needed and is being planned.

RULE CHANGE: As of September 3, 2013, anglers in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico may now use all types of venting/descending gear to help fish suffering from barotrauma.

Use of all types of venting/descending gear is currently permissible in the Atlantic.

Stay Tuned for More Developments!

For more info, contact:

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Visit the Florida Sea Grant fisheries outreach website at
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