



ASMFC

# FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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## ASMFC Winter Meeting Webinar

February 1-4, 2021

### Preliminary Agenda

*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. The final agenda and meeting materials will be posted to <http://www.asmfc.org/home/2021-winter-meeting-webinar> by January 20<sup>th</sup>.*

#### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

#### Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)

- Review and Consider Approval of State Recreational Measures for 2021 Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fisheries
- Review and Consider Approval of Addendum XXXIII and MAFMC Black sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment

Noon – 1:00 p.m.

#### Lunch Break

#### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2

8:30 – 11:30 a.m.

#### American Lobster Management Board

- Consider Management Response to 2020 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment
- Discuss Development of Draft Addendum XXVII on Gulf of Maine Resiliency
- Discuss Potential for Conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation for the American Lobster Fishery
- Elect Vice-Chair

11:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

#### Lunch Break

12:45 – 1:30 p.m.

#### Winter Flounder Management Board

- Consider Specifications for the 2021 Fishing Year
- Review Technical Committee and Advisory Panel Reports Regarding Specification Recommendations

1:45 – 3:00 p.m.

#### Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

- Review Recent Fishery Performance Relative to Commercial Allocations

*continued, see WINTER MEETING WEBINAR on page 7*

## 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

Patrick C. Keliher (ME), *Chair*  
A.G. "Spud" Woodward (GA), *Vice-Chair*

Robert E. Beal,  
*Executive Director*

Patrick A. Campfield,  
*Science Director*

Toni Kerns,  
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#### **January 5 (1 - 3 PM)**

ASMFC Red Drum Assessment Approach Workgroup; visit <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/1/2021/-Red-Drum-Assessment-Approach-Workgroup/1660> for more information

#### **January 11 (Noon - 4 PM)**

NEFSC Haddock Working Group; visit <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/haddock-working-group> for more information

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

New England Fishery Management Council Webinar; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/january-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **February 1 - 4**

ASMFC 2021 Winter Meeting Webinar; see pages 1 and 7 for more information

#### **February 9 (begins 9 AM) - 11 (ends at 1 PM)**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Durham Convention Center, 301 West Morgan Street Durham, NC; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2021/february-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **March 1 - 5**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting, Jekyll Island, GA

#### **April 6 (begins at 9 AM) - 8 (ends at 1 PM)**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Seaview: a Dolce Hotel, 401 South New York Road, Galloway, NJ; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2021/april-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **April 13 - 15**

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, CT; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/april-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **May 3 - 6**

ASMFC Spring Meeting, The Westin Crystal City, 1800 S. Eads Street, Arlington, VA; visit <https://www.asmfc.org/calendar/5/2021/ASMFC-2021-SpringMeeting/1482> for more information

#### **June 8 - 10**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, 3001 Atlantic Avenue Virginia Beach, VA; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2021/june-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **June 14-18**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting, Ponte Vedra, FL

#### **June 22 - 24**

New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Sable Oaks, South Portland, ME; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/june-2021-council-meeting> for more information

#### **August 3 - 5**

ASMFC Summer Meeting, The Westin Crystal City, 1800 S. Eads Street, Arlington, VA; visit <http://www.asmfc.org/calendar/8/2021/ASMFC-2021-Summer-Meeting/1483> for more information

#### **August 10 - 12**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Notary Hotel, 21 North Juniper Street Philadelphia, PA; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2021/august-2021-council-meeting> for more information

## From the Executive Director's Desk



**Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success. - Henry Ford**

As we head into the holiday season of a very challenging year, I am mindful of all that I have to be grateful for, not just in my personal life but also as Executive Director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. I am grateful for a dedicated staff, who have worked hard to succeed from a distance in spite of the personal and professional obstacles they have faced during the pandemic. Through their efforts and those of our state members and federal partners, we accomplished quite a lot this past year. This includes completing five benchmark stock assessments, advancing management programs for more than a dozen species, continuing to improve the efficiency of data collection and access through ACCSP, as well as promoting fish habitat conservation through outreach on the effects of aquaculture and, in the case of ACFHP, prioritization maps to guide habitat restoration. Staff also played an important role in aiding in the efficient and timely distribution of millions of dollars of CARES Act funds to those in the fishing industry who are struggling to stay afloat. I would be remiss if I did not recognize that much of what we accomplished could not have been done without the strong guidance and leadership provided by our program directors.

I am indebted to our Commissioners and their proxies for their patience and support over the past year as we moved to virtual meetings to make important fisheries management decisions. Administrative Commissioners worked tirelessly to ensure their respective staffs were given the tools and support to continue their work while safeguarding their health and safety. They've had to make difficult decisions regarding fishery-dependent and -independent monitoring programs during the pandemic, as well as wrestle with challenging budget forecasts. Now more than ever, Legislative and Governor Appointee (LGAs) Commissioners had to find new ways to seek a balance between their personal and professional lives. While travel time to attend meetings was eliminated, the frequency of meetings increased, placing greater demands on their time. Most LGAs serve without compensation and forgo their own work responsibilities to serve on the Commission. I know that I speak for our Chair and Vice-chair as well as our Administrative Commissioners when I say that we are not only grateful for your individual sacrifices but for the wealth of knowledge and expertise you bring to our management process. We are a better informed organization because of you.

Personally, I am grateful for the skilled leadership and great friendship of our Chair and Vice-chair, Pat Keliher and Spud Woodward, respectively. I have joked, "I can't think of two better people to weather a pandemic with." They made themselves available at any time of day to help guide the

Commission through the constant change of this past year. Unfortunately, 2020 didn't come with a set of instructions, so Pat and Spud helped us all figure it out on the fly.

Fundamental to the Commission's success is our collaborative relationships with the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils; NOAA Fisheries (from headquarters to its regional offices and science centers); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and, in recent years, the U.S. Geological Survey. Through these relationships, we cooperatively manage and assess the status of our shared marine resources, conduct critical fisheries science and research, and ensure the consistent and standardized collection of fishery-dependent and -independent data. Regional and federal representatives are an integral part of the Commission, ranging from their involvement on management boards, technical committees, and stock assessment subcommittees, and overarching committees such as the ISFMP Policy Board, Habitat Committee, Assessment Science Committee, Management Science Committee, and Law Enforcement Committee. We are a stronger organization because of their dedication and expertise.

Lastly, I remain grateful to Congress, the Administration, our Governors, and our state legislators for their continued support of the Commission. Many of our accomplishments would not have been possible without their trust and confidence.

Some of the positives I've taken away from these past many months is that I have great confidence in our ability to effectively adapt to change, that we remain committed to working with each other despite the challenges of not being face-to-face, and that through our individual and collective efforts we can achieve great things. No doubt, 2021 will be another transitional year as the nation makes progress in combatting and recovering from the pandemic. In the meantime, I will continue to work with my program directors to find ways to keep our staff energized and productive, our Commissioners engaged and effective, and our stakeholders informed and involved. I opened with a quote from Henry Ford because I believe it is particularly relevant now. The pandemic has challenged us to find new ways of coming together, keeping together, and working together toward a common vision of Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries. I can think of no greater success during these difficult times.

During this holiday season and into the New Year, I hope you stay safe and healthy, and find ways to connect to those you hold dear.

# Species Profile: Atlantic Cobia

## Managers Adjust Commercial/Recreational Allocation to Reflect Recent Fisheries Trends

### Introduction

Avidly pursued by recreational anglers as ready biters and fierce fighters, Atlantic migratory group cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*) support recreational fisheries throughout the South Atlantic and into the Mid-Atlantic region. A fast growing, moderately lived species, they occur most abundantly from Chesapeake Bay through the Gulf of Mexico, preferring to stay close to structure to feed and find shelter from predation. The benchmark stock assessment was completed in 2019 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process and approved for management use in 2020. The assessment indicates overfishing is not occurring and the stock is not overfished, though spawning stock biomass has experienced a consistent decline since 2002.

Once jointly regulated by the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils, the species is now managed by the Commission under Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan and its associated Addendum. Addendum 1, approved in October 2020, adjusts the quota allocations between the recreational and commercial sectors to better reflect recent trends in the fisheries.

### Life History

Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*) are distributed worldwide in tropical and warm temperature waters. They occur along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Argentina, and are most abundant in U.S. waters from Chesapeake Bay south through the Gulf of Mexico. Currently, two stocks are recognized in US waters: the Gulf of Mexico stock and the Atlantic stock.

Male cobia typically reach sexual maturity by 2 years (generally 2 feet long), while females are sexually mature by 2-3 years (generally 3 feet long). Females grow to be larger than males, and may reach 6 feet and weigh up to 100 pounds. An extended spawning season occurs from late June to mid-August along the Southeastern U.S., and from late summer to early fall in the Gulf of Mexico. Cobia are broadcast spawners; a single female may spawn many times each season. Cobia make seasonal migrations, wintering in the south and moving north for the summer months. They are drawn to structure to feed and find shelter from predation. Juveniles and adults are often found around live bottom, wrecks, and buoys, as well as flotsam and seaweed mats. Their diet consists primarily of fish and crustaceans.

### Recreational & Commercial Fisheries

Enthusiastically pursued by recreational anglers, Atlantic cobia support an important recreational fishery throughout the South Atlantic and into the Mid-Atlantic region. Primary methods include bottom fishing with natural bait as well as sight-casting, which has gained popularity in recent years. The annual recreational harvest of Atlantic cobia, found along the US Atlantic coast from New York to Georgia, has varied widely with little trend since 2003, ranging from 880,000 to 3.6 million pounds. Landings have increased over the past two years. In 2018 and 2019, recreational anglers landed approximately 3.1 million and 1.9 million pounds of Atlantic cobia, respectively. Landings in 2018 were the second highest value in the time series, which extends back to 1981. High landings, however, have resulted in federal fishery closures in the past several years.

The commercial fishery is on a much smaller scale, but has remained fairly steady from 2015 to 2019. Primarily a bycatch fishery, it has been associated with the snapper/grouper hook and line fishery and troll fisheries for many South Atlantic species, although more directed fisheries have recently developed in some areas. Commercial restrictions are consistent throughout the range, with a 2 fish per person possession limit, 6 fish

## Species Snapshot



### Atlantic Cobia *Rachycentron canadum*

#### Management Unit

New York to Georgia

#### Common Names

Black kingfish, black salmon, ling, lemonfish, crabeater, prodigal son, black bonito, sergeantfish, yew, cubby

#### Family

Rachycentridae - The name originates from the Greek words 'rhachis' (spine) and 'kentron' (sting), and was inspired by the dorsal spines that make up the first dorsal fin

#### Interesting Facts

- Cobia is the only species in the family Rachycentridae.
- They are a close relative of remoras, suckerfish known for attaching to large marine mammals, sharks, and ships using a suction disk on top of their heads.
- They migrate seasonally, wintering in the Gulf of Mexico and moving up the coast as far as Massachusetts in the summer.
- Cobia feed primarily on crabs, squid, and fish, but will also follow large animals (sharks, turtles, manta rays) to scavenge what they leave behind.
- They are one of the best candidates for warm, open-water marine fish aquaculture due to their fast growth rate and the high quality of their flesh.

#### Maximum Size

- 6.5 feet, 172 pounds

#### Life Span

- 14 years old

#### Stock Status

- Not overfished nor experiencing overfishing

vessel limit, and a 33" fork length minimum size limit. The two greatest commercial harvests in the time series, which extends back to 1950, occurred in 2015 (83,000 pounds) and 2016 (84,000 pounds).

### Status of the Stock

Two cobia stocks are found off the U.S. Atlantic coast: Atlantic cobia and Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group (Gulf cobia). Gulf cobia occur throughout the Gulf of Mexico and extend to Florida's east coast, while Atlantic cobia occur from Georgia north. These stock boundaries were confirmed in a 2018 Stock Identification Workshop, but stock structure continues to be investigated through ongoing tagging and genetic studies to further identify and describe potential subcomponents of these populations.

The 2020 Atlantic Cobia Benchmark Stock Assessment found the stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Stock status was determined by comparing spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality rate (F) to reference point values based on F40%, or the fishing mortality rate that results in 40% of the stock's maximum reproductive potential in the absence of fishing.

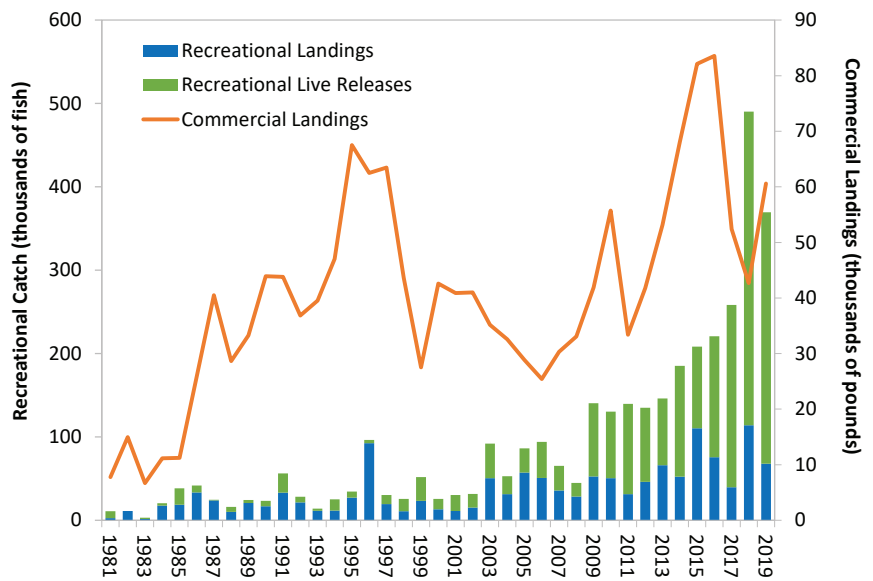
Atlantic cobia biomass has shown a pattern of rapid increase in strong recruitment years followed by years of decline. These strong year classes have maintained the stock above the overfished threshold through subsequent periods of biomass decline since the 1980s. Data from the assessment identified several of these notably strong year classes, the most recent of which occurred in 2010.

### Atlantic Coastal Management

Cooperative management of Atlantic cobia with the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils began in 2017 when the Commission approved the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia. In 2019, the Commission approved Amendment 1 to the FMP, which transitioned the FMP from complementary management with the Councils to sole management by the Commission. The Amendment established management measures for the transition, including processes for the Commission to set harvest quotas and sector allocations, defining stock status criteria, and recommending management measures to be implemented by NOAA Fisheries in federal waters. Amendment 1 also transitioned responsibilities of monitoring and closing (if necessary) commercial harvest to the Commission. The Amendment established a *de minimis* status for the commercial sector that exempts states with small commercial harvests from in-season monitoring requirements. States were

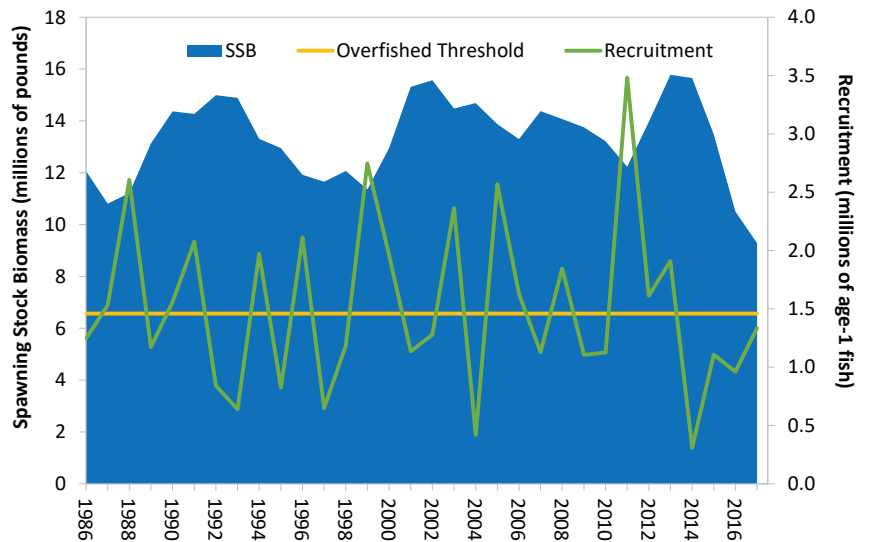
### Atlantic Cobia Recreational Catch and Commercial Landings

Source: NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division, 2020; ACCSP Data Warehouse, 2020



### Atlantic Cobia Spawning Stock Biomass & Recruitment

Source: Atlantic Cobia Benchmark Stock Assessment, SEDAR 58, 2020



required to implement measures of Amendment 1 by July 1, 2020.

The harvest specification outlined in the Amendment allows the Coastal Pelagics Board to specify a limited set of management measures for up to 3 years. One of the measures that may be set through this process is a coastwide harvest quota for both recreational and commercial fisheries. Percent allocations are based on states' percentages of coastwide historical landings in numbers of fish, derived as 50% of the 10-year average landings from 2006-2015 and 50% of the 5-year average landings from 2011-2015.

*continued, see ATLANTIC COBIA on page 10*

## ASMFC Seeks Proposals for Regional Pilot Projects in Support of Sustainable Aquaculture: Proposals Due January 15, 2021

The Commission, in partnership with the NOAA Fisheries Office of Aquaculture, is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP), seeking marine aquaculture pilot projects focused on sustainable aquatic farming techniques and regional business practices to grow U.S. domestic seafood. The geographic scope of the proposed projects is the U.S. East Coast states from Maine to Florida. The primary location of the proposed projects must be in the marine/estuarine environment. Examples of the types of pilot projects being sought through the RFP follow:

- Research and development related to the production and distribution of shellfish seed stock.
- Finfish, shellfish (other than oyster\*), and seaweed farming systems, especially for those species new to aquaculture in the region or that use novel production systems.
- Identification and development of Aquaculture Development Zones with pre-planning and pre-permitting for a range of aquaculture activities.
- Resolution of issues (e.g., enforcement, water quality, public trust concerns

or impacts) related to open water finfish farming in state waters.

- Business incubators
- Regional market and economic impact studies

\*Note: Proposals for oyster projects were already requested in a separate RFP (2019 Regional Oyster Aquaculture Research Consortia)

NOAA Fisheries, through the Commission, is making available \$675,000 for the funding period of July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Individual proposals should not exceed \$200,000 or be less than \$75,000. It is anticipated that approximately 4-6 projects will be funded. Eligible applicants include researchers at U.S. academic institutions, research laboratories, for-profit companies/firms, nonprofits, and state agencies. Proposals from foreign entities are not eligible. Proposals involving multiple investigators are welcome. U.S. federal government agencies, including Regional Fishery Management Councils, are not eligible to receive funding through this solicitation. Federal staff may be collaborators on proposed projects, as long as they



Transferring fish from in-tank grader to small grader.  
Photo (c) Wade Watanabe, UNCW

are not compensated for their contribution to the project.

Applicants seeking to apply to the RFP must submit, as a single file, an electronic proposal by email no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on January 15, 2021. Please see the RFP for complete proposal details, qualifying requirements, and submission instructions. The RFP is available at [http://www.asmfc.org/files/RFPs/ASMFC2021PilotAquacultureRFP\\_Nov2020.pdf](http://www.asmfc.org/files/RFPs/ASMFC2021PilotAquacultureRFP_Nov2020.pdf). For more information, please contact Dr. Louis Daniel at [ldaniel@asmfc.org](mailto:ldaniel@asmfc.org) or 252.342.1478.

## ASMFC & MAFMC Maintain Status Quo Management Measures for 2021 Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Recreational Fisheries

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and Bluefish Management Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to develop recreational management measures for 2021 summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries.

During the meeting, the Boards and Council discussed the impact of COVID-19 on recreational data collection and fisheries management. In a typical year, preliminary data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for waves 1-4 (Jan-

uary through August) are used to project catch and harvest through the rest of the year. These projections are then compared to the recreational harvest limit (RHL) for the upcoming year to evaluate how harvest may need to be adjusted to prevent RHL overages. However, this year, recreational data collection was severely limited by restrictions related to COVID-19. As a result, projections of 2020 harvest could not be generated for any recreational species.

### **Scup and Black Sea Bass**

The Board and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management

measures for scup and black sea bass in state and federal waters in 2021. For scup, federal waters measures include a 9-inch total length minimum fish size, a 50 fish possession limit, and an open season of January 1 - December 31. For black sea bass, federal waters measures include a minimum size limit of 12.5 inches, a 15 fish possession limit, and open seasons of Feb 1-28 and May 15-Dec 31. The Board and Council discussed the lack of preliminary 2020 recreational catch and harvest esti-

*continued, see RECREATIONAL MEASURES on page 13*

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2

### 3:15 – 5:15 p.m. Atlantic Herring Management Board

- Set Area 1A Sub-Annual Catch Limit for 2021-2023 Fishing Season (Pending Approval of Final Rule by NOAA Fisheries)
- Update on Amendment 8 and Consider Impacts to the Area 1A Fishery
- Update on New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and Commission Coordination Discussions
- Consider Postponed Motion on Addendum III (Pending Outcome of Council/Commission Leadership Discussions and NOAA Fisheries Approval of Amendment 8)

## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

### 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Executive Committee

- CARES Act Update
- Legislative and Appropriations Update
- Annual Meeting Update

### 10:15 – 11:00 a.m. Coastal Sharks Management Board

- Review NOAA Fisheries Cooperative Shark Tagging Program
- NOAA Highly Migratory Species Management Update

### 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Coordinating Council

- Program Funding Update

### 12:15 – 1:45 p.m. Lunch Break

### 1:45 – 3:45 p.m. Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board

- Review Sensitivity Analysis of Different Recreational Release Mortality Rate Estimates in Stock Assessment
- Consider Draft Amendment 7 Public Information Document for Public Comment
- Consider Revisions to the Stock Assessment Update Schedule

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4

### 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. Shad and River Herring Management Board

- Consider Management Response to 2020 Shad Benchmark Stock Assessment
- Review Technical Committee Recommendations on Improvements to Amendments 2 & 3
- Consider Shad Habitat Plan Updates
- Review and Populate Advisory Panel Membership

### 11:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Lunch Break

### 12:45 – 1:30 p.m. Bluefish Management Board

- Consider Draft Addendum II for Public Comment

### 1:45 – 4:15 p.m. Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board

- Consider Approval of the Risk and Uncertainty Policy
- Review Commissioner Survey Results
- Discuss Recreational Reform Timeline and Process
- Review State Membership on Species Management Boards
- Consider Approval of Artificial Reef State Profiles
- Consider Approval of Living Shorelines Impacts to Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Policy
- Review Noncompliance Findings (if necessary)

### 4:15 – 4:30 p.m. Business Session

- Consider Noncompliance Recommendations (if necessary)

## Public Comment Guidelines

To provide a fair opportunity for public input, the ISFMP Policy Board approved the following guidelines for use at management board meetings. Please note these guidelines have been modified to adapt to meetings via webinar:

**For issues that are not on the agenda,** management boards will continue to provide an opportunity to the public to bring matters of concern to the board's attention at the start of each board meeting. Board chairs will ask members of the public to raise their hands to let the chair know they would like to speak. Depending upon the number of commenters, the board chair will decide 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 the webinar (January 11) will be included in the briefing materials.
2. Comments received by 5:00 PM on Tuesday, January 26 will be included in the supplemental materials.
3. Comments received by 10:00 AM on Friday, January 29 will be distributed electronically to Commissioners/Board members prior to the meeting.

Comments should be submitted via email at [comments@asmfc.org](mailto:comments@asmfc.org). All comments must clearly indicate the commenter's expectation from the ASMFC staff regarding distribution.

### Current and Future Distributions of Atlantic Cobia

Fish movements and distributions are determined by several factors, many dynamic in nature, like temperature. Understanding the relationships between factors such as temperature and fish distribution can aid us in predicting where species may be in the future. In turn, predictive relationships may allow fisheries agencies to manage more dynamically in space and time. Understanding current and future distributions could assist management in defining stock structure, assigning quota allocations, designating closed areas, reducing bycatch, and proactively adapting to climate change.

The first step is establishing the relationship between fish and their environment. This can be done using several research methods, such as tagging, physiological experiments, and habitat modeling. Fish tagging can determine the locations and environments fish prefer in the wild. Physiological experiments in the laboratory can be used to understand why a fish may prefer or avoid a specific environment, as well as test how a species may respond to new environmental conditions (i.e., identify the species' tolerance). Habitat modeling that incorporates physiology and/or tagging results can be used to statistically examine relationships and predict species distributions over specific time periods and areas. Combining these techniques provides a powerful approach to understanding how the environment affects fish in order to estimate their distributions today and tomorrow.

Cobia are energetically pursued by recreational anglers and support fisheries in the South and Mid-Atlantic. Atlantic cobia migrate to inshore waters to spawn and feed in Chesapeake Bay as well as other bays and estuaries in North and South Carolina during the warmer months of the year, when they are targeted by recreational anglers. The migratory nature of Atlantic cobia make them particularly sensitive to changing ocean conditions because migrations are often cued by temperature. For example, warming conditions could change the timing of migration, as well as the general distribution of Atlantic cobia, particularly as marine heatwaves become more common and the ocean in general warms.

From 2016-2019 researchers from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) at the College of William and Mary set out to define relationships between environmental factors and Atlantic cobia distributions, and project where they may be in the future. Working with recreational anglers, Atlantic cobia were caught and brought to the VIMS laboratory, where a series of manipulative experiments were conducted to identify the warmest water and lowest oxygen concentration Atlantic cobia could tolerate (Figure 1). The experiments also identified how intense exercise and stress conditions (e.g., catch and release fishing) affect cobia survival. In addition, over 50 cobia, primarily caught in Chesapeake Bay by recreational anglers, were fitted with a series of tags. They included acoustic tags to determine movement patterns of fish, and internal archival tags and popoff satellite archival tags (PSATs) to identify habitats the fish are using (Figure 2). Researchers then used tagging and lab experiment data to generate habitat models

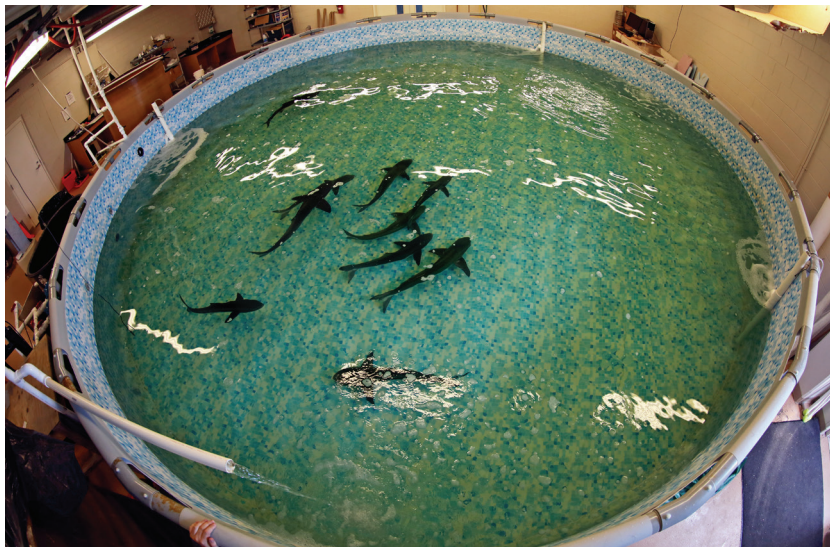


Figure 1. Working with recreational anglers, cobia were caught and brought to the VIMS laboratory, where a series of manipulative experiments were conducted to identify the warmest water and lowest oxygen concentration Atlantic cobia could tolerate. Photo (c) Aileen Devlin, Virginia Sea Grant

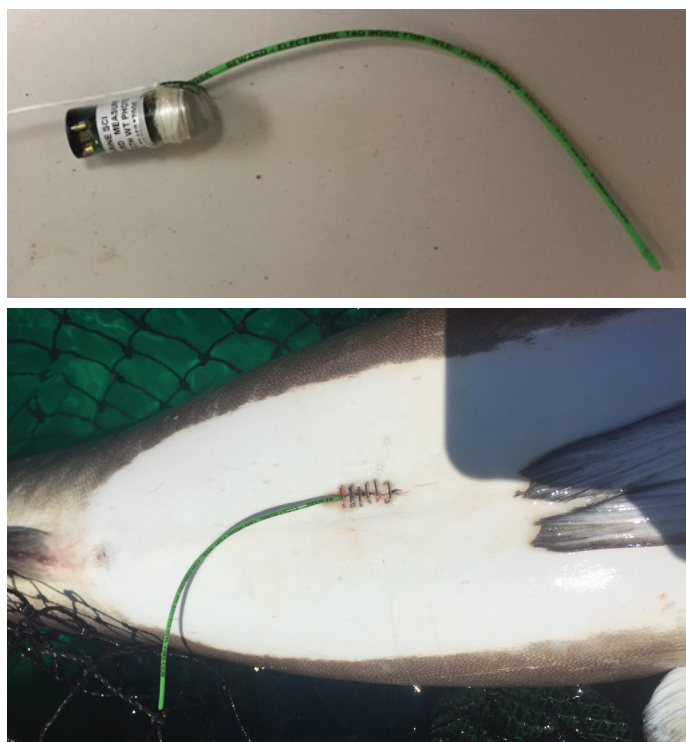


Figure 2. Internal archival tag before (top image) and after (bottom image) being surgically implanted into Atlantic cobia. Photos (c) Dan Crear



for estimating the current and future distributions of Atlantic cobia along the U.S. shelf and inside Chesapeake Bay, and estimate how migrations may change as waters warm.

From the lab experiments, it appears Atlantic cobia can withstand temperatures as warm as 90°F and low oxygen concentrations, broad tolerance ranges for a migratory coastal pelagic species. It is important to note, however, that when exercised to exhaustion and then exposed to warmer temperatures (>82°F), 20% of the Atlantic cobia died. If temperatures increase in bays and estuaries, rates of post-release mortality are likely to increase.

Using the tagging data and habitat modeling results, researchers found large differences in the distribution of suitable cobia habitat along the U.S. shelf among different years and time periods. For example, during an average year in September, it was estimated that 8% of Atlantic cobia's suitable habitat over the U.S. shelf occurred in waters off of New Jersey. However, during a warm year (e.g., 2012), 27% of cobia's suitable habitat was estimated to occur in waters off of New Jersey. This highlights the interannual variability in Atlantic cobia distributions as a result of temperature changes. When projecting into the future, it appears that during summer months the percentage of suitable cobia habitat will increase in waters north of Virginia and decrease in waters south of Virginia. Researchers predict in summers 40 years from now, waters off of New Jersey will have the most suitable cobia habitat of any state along the East Coast. Suitable habitat is not estimated to decline in Chesapeake Bay until the end of the century.

Finally, when projecting Atlantic cobia migrations into the future, researchers suggest Atlantic cobia will migrate into Chesapeake Bay earlier in the year and leave later as a result of warming waters. By mid-century, Atlantic cobia could extend their amount of time spent in the Bay by over 30 days.

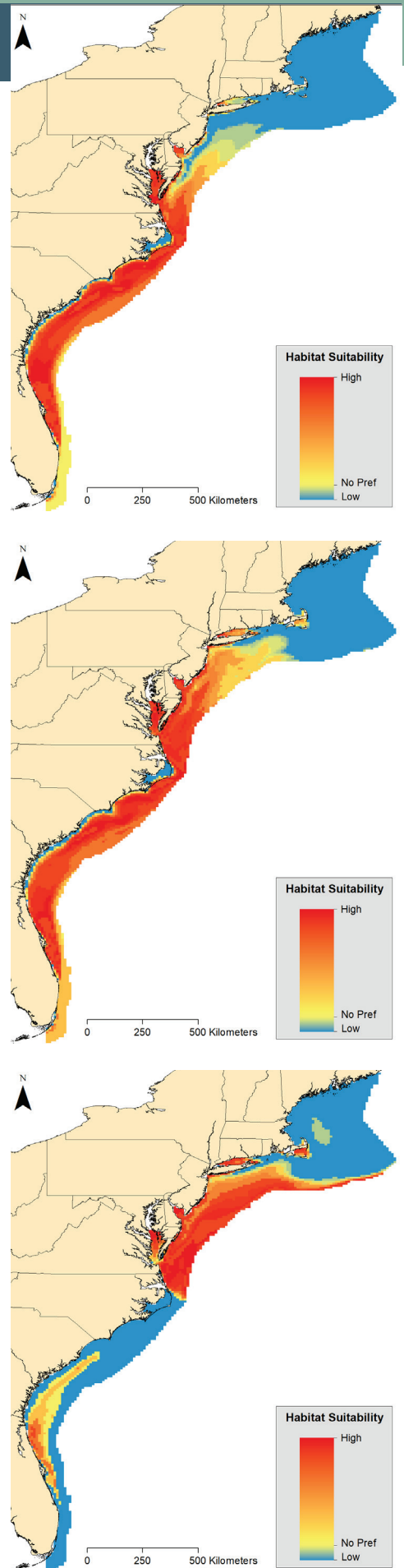
The new research suggests Atlantic cobia's broad environmental tolerances will provide resiliency to climate change in the near future. However, because they respond closely to temperature changes and thresholds, Atlantic cobia distribution along the East Coast will likely change on an annual basis. This makes Atlantic cobia a suitable species for using a more dynamic approach to fisheries management. For example, if scientists can provide estimates of Atlantic cobia distribution six months in advance of the fishing season, managers could set quota allocations among states that reflect the predicted distributions.

Researchers at VIMS would like to thank the many fishermen who contributed to collecting and tagging Atlantic cobia. Without them the study would not have been possible. For more information on the Atlantic cobia research study, please contact Dr. Dan Crear at [dcrear8@gmail.com](mailto:dcrear8@gmail.com). Dr. Crear completed the study as part of his Ph.D. work at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary.

For scientific journal publications describing additional study results, please visit: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rsos.200049>  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ddi.13079>  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2020.579135/full>

Two science communication products were also developed by Dr. Crear. An interactive StoryMap at <https://arcg.is/1Gem8X> provides images, videos, and further descriptions of the cobia study. The infographic (on page 10) was created to understand the impacts of climate change on fish and fisheries. The Commission thanks Dr. Crear for contributing this article.

*Figure 3 (to the right). Atlantic cobia suitable habitat projections along the U.S. shelf for July during an average year (top image), warm year (middle image), and 60-80 years in the future (bottom image). No pref on the legend represents a value of 1 meaning no difference than random. Above No pref represents habitat that is suitable whereas below indicates unsuitable habitat.*



In 2019, in response to concerns regarding recreational and commercial sector quota allocations, the Board initiated Addendum I. Approved for management use in October 2020, the Addendum modifies the allocation of the resource between the commercial and recreational sectors, updates the methodology to calculate the commercial trigger for in-season closures, and adjusts commercial and recreational *de minimis* measures.

The current management program manages the recreational fishery with a 1 fish bag limit and a minimum size limit of 36" fork length or 40" total length. Season restrictions and vessel limits are determined by individual states, but may not exceed 6 fish per vessel. Recreational harvest of state-specific allocations are evaluated over three-year time periods, and, if states exceed their soft harvest targets, states must adjust management measures to achieve the soft harvest target in the subsequent three-year period. The coastwide recreational harvest target for 2021-2023 fishing seasons is 76,908 fish and results in the following state-specific soft targets:

- Georgia - 7,229 fish
- South Carolina - 9,306 fish
- North Carolina - 29,302 fish
- Virginia - 30,302 fish
- *De minimis* - 769 fish

The commercial fishery has a coastwide commercial quota of 73,116 pounds annually for the 2021-2023 fishing seasons. The current management measures for the commercial fishery include a 33" FL minimum size limit and 2 fish limit per person, with a 6 fish maximum vessel limit. The commercial Atlantic cobia fishery will close once the commercial quota is projected to be reached. For more information, please contact Savannah Lewis, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [slewis@asmfc.org](mailto:slewis@asmfc.org).

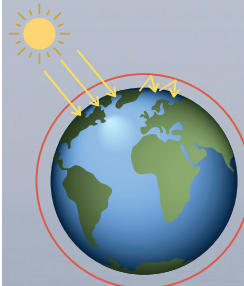


Photo (c) Alex Aspinwall, VMRC

# FISH ON THE MOVE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

## FOSSIL FUELS...

- Like oil, coal, and natural gas make up ~80% of U.S. total energy consumption
- Contribute to the increase in heat trapping gases like CO2 in our atmosphere

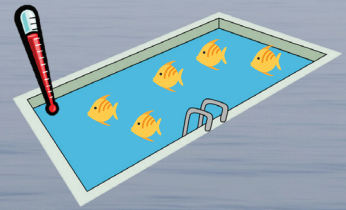


## HEAT TRAPPING GASES...

- Build up in our atmosphere and act like a blanket that traps heat
- Like CO2, have an annual increase today 100x faster than past natural increases
- Contributed to a 1.6°F increase of the earth's surface temperature

## OCEANS ARE CHANGING...

- Because they absorb 90% of excess heat in the climate
- With some regions warming as much as 4°F since 1901
- With U.S. East Coast waters projected to warm 5-11°F by 2060-2080 if we continue business-as-usual



## FISH MOVE TO...

- Find food
- Avoid getting eaten
- Reproduce
- Select better water temperature, salinity or oxygen

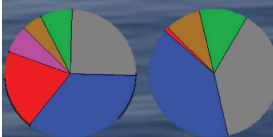
## FISH ARE RESPONDING BY...



## WE CAN RESPOND BY...

### State Allocation

Warm Year      Average Year



- Managing fisheries more dynamically in space and time
- Adjusting fishery management units
- Making allocation changes
- Shifting fishing season timing



Created by Dan Crear  
More info at [fish.vims.edu](http://fish.vims.edu)



## U.S. Congress Approves 2021 Omnibus Spending Bill, Second Round of Fisheries Disaster Assistance

On December 21, 2020, the U.S. Congress approved a \$2.3 trillion spending bill that combines a \$1.4 trillion Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Omnibus Appropriations Bill with \$900 billion in COVID relief/stimulus.

### 2021 Omnibus Spending Bill

The FY 2021 Omnibus Appropriations Bill funds the federal government through September 30, 2021 and provides detailed instructions on how lump-sum amounts provided by Congress may be used. Some specific provisions of the Omnibus that may be of interest to *Fisheries Focus* readers are highlighted below.

- \$750,000 is provided to establish a pilot cooperative offshore lobster enforcement program with commercial vessels capable of hauling deep-set gear but not currently participating in the lobster fishery.
- NOAA Fisheries is directed to continue the Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey in 2021.
- The Omnibus includes elements of Rep. Cunningham’s (D-SC) Climate-Ready Fisheries Act, which will examine efforts by NOAA Fisheries, ASMFC, and the regional fishery management councils to prepare and adapt fisheries management for the impacts of climate change.
- \$300,000 is provided for the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation’s Lobster and Jonah Crab Research Fleet, a cooperative research program to collect biological, fishery, and environmental data aboard commercial vessels.
- The Omnibus includes dedicated funding for North Atlantic

right whale research, pilots and monitoring, as well as instructions to NOAA Fisheries for rulemaking on risk reduction targets.

- \$13 million is provided for NOAA Fisheries’ Cooperative Research Program, prioritizing trawl surveys designed and conducted cooperatively with industry and states to provide empirical measures of fish stock abundance.
- \$3.5 million is provided to improve recreational fishery data collection, as articulated S.1520 – the Modern Fish Act.
- The Omnibus provides \$9 million for NOAA’s Marine Debris program and \$33 million for its Coral Reef Program.
- State-Federal Joint Enforcement Agreements, Sea Grant, and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System are all funded, contrary to the President’s Budget Request to Congress.

### Round Two: Fisheries Disaster Assistance

The Omnibus served as the legislative vehicle for additional COVID relief legislation that includes \$300 million for “Fisheries Disaster Assistance.” These funds will be allocated similarly to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Section 12005 “Assistance to Fishery Participants.” Congress has stipulated that each coastal state/territory shall receive a minimum of 1% of the new funds and maintained the 35% revenue loss threshold.

Below is a table comparing select line items enacted for FY 2020 and FY 2021.

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (in \$ thousands)

	FY20 Enacted	FY21 Omnibus
<b>Fisheries Science and Management</b>		
<i>Fisheries and Ecosystem Science Programs and Services</i>	\$146,427	\$146,927
<i>Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys and Assessments</i>	\$173,709	\$175,927
<i>Observers and Training</i>	\$54,968	\$55,468
<i>Fisheries Management Programs and Services</i>	\$123,836	\$123,836
<i>Aquaculture</i>	\$15,250	\$17,500
<i>Salmon Management Activities</i>	\$58,043	\$62,050
<i>Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions</i>	\$40,247	\$41,500
<i>Interjurisdictional Fisheries Grants</i>	\$3,365	\$3,365
<i>Total, Fisheries Science and Management</i>	\$615,845	\$626,573
<i>Enforcement</i>	\$74,023	\$75,000
<i>Habitat Conservation and Restoration</i>	\$57,125	\$57,625
<i>Total, National Marine Fisheries Service</i>	\$947,657	\$964,862
<b>Other Line Items of Interest</b>		
<i>National Sea Grant College Program</i>	\$74,000	\$75,000
<i>Marine Aquaculture Program (Sea Grant)</i>	\$13,000	\$13,000
<i>Coastal Zone Management Grants</i>	\$77,000	\$78,500
<i>Coral Reef Program</i>	\$29,500	\$33,000
<i>Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas/National Marine Sanctuaries</i>	\$55,500	\$56,500
<i>National Estuarine Research Reserve System</i>	\$27,500	\$28,500
<i>increase to FY19 amount, &gt;10% change</i>		

### SAFIS eTRIPS Modernization for the New Year

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, a significant milestone will be achieved with the release of eTRIPS/online-REDESIGN. The redesign is the culmination of four years of work with many individuals' input. ACCSP is pleased to have had coordination from partners and looks forward to the future of electronic trip reporting.

SAFIS eTRIPS/online allows fishermen to create and submit commercial, for-hire, or recreational trip reports via an internet connected web browser.

SAFIS eTRIPS/online-REDESIGN features include:

- The addition of partner managed attributes for trips, efforts, catches, dispositions, and gears. These attributes are standard questions that can be added to the application and will be managed through the SAFIS Management System (SMS).
- Provision for fisherman to add/update favorites for additional attributes making the application easier to use after initial setup.
- Behind-the-scenes use of a single code base designed for use with online, mobile, upload to simplify future enhancements.
- Interactive reports allow users to search their own history of catch and effort.

SAFIS eTRIPS/mobile continues to provide the ability to capture catch and effort data while at sea, independent of a full-time internet connection. The application is available on Windows 10 (PC/tablet), Apple and Android phone/tablet platforms. New features of eTRIPS/mobile include:

- Live Southeast For-Hire Reporting
- New questions added for fixed gear to fulfill the reporting requirements associated with American Lobster Addendum XXVI
- Multiple-permitted vessels will see questions from the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, the Southeast Regional Office and the Division of Highly Migratory Species (HMS), as appropriate based on permit and species caught, to fulfill the reporting requirements for all federal agencies with a single report

The development of the eTRIPS/online-REDESIGN and the eTRIPS/mobile updates were made possible by the feedback and ideas provided by ACCSP partners. New questions and features were developed related to the Atlantic HMS, American Lobster Addendum XXVI, the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting, and alignment between the online and mobile versions of eTRIPS.

Guidance for captains, including an interactive fishing area map and help videos can be found on the ACCSP User Help page <https://www.accsp.org/what-we-do/safis/etrips-mobile-instructions/>.

Supporting partner reporting is a core part of the ACCSP mission. Improved data collection and reporting along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts results in numerous benefits. Collaborating with partners and working on the development of these updates and new features helps to make data more accessible and timely for management and science and streamlines the reporting process, reducing the burden on industry.



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).



### SARAH MURRAY

For the final quarter of 2020, Sarah Murray, Fisheries Science Coordinator, was awarded Employee of the Quarter for her notable contributions to several high profile Commission projects. Since joining the Commission in April 2018, Sarah has brought to her position exceptional collaborative skills, the ambition to take on new projects, and a strong rapport with ASMFC science committees. These qualities exemplify those of the award, namely - teamwork, initiative, responsibility, positive attitude, and results.

As Fisheries Science Coordinator, Sarah has aided in the success of a variety of the Commission's committees and work groups. In coordination with SEAMAP scientists and regional coordinators from the Atlantic, Gulf, and Caribbean, Sarah led the development of the SEAMAP 5-Year Plan ahead of schedule despite significant content and structural changes. She also supported NEAMAP growth through productive annual meetings and maturity staging workshops, and promoting collaboration among surveys. Due to a number of assessment-related issues resulting from the pandemic, Sarah organized and facilitated several virtual meetings of the Assessment Science Committee to address challenging assessment scheduling, methodology, and training issues.

Sarah also played a crucial role in coordinating the Ecological Reference Point (ERP) Work Group for Atlantic menhaden to ensure the completion of the ERP assessment. She helped edit the multi-author report and exhibited strong communication skills in explaining the results to stakeholders, including the development of new outreach products, including an ERP Story Map.

Working with a diverse Work Group of Commissioners, Technical Committee members, and socioeconomic experts, Sarah assisted in drafting a Commission Risk and Uncertainty Policy to better inform management decisions. She also worked closely with the members of the Management and Science Committee to develop recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement in the Commission's decision making process. Sarah consistently exhibits a dedicated work ethic, impressive multi-tasking skills, and resourcefulness. As Employee of the Quarter (EOQ), Sarah received a cash award and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personal record. In addition, her name is on the EOQ plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Sarah!

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*RECREATIONAL MEASURES, continued from page 6*

mates as well as the ongoing challenges with incorporating the new MRIP estimates into management. Some members of both bodies voiced concerns regarding the potential to exceed the RHL for these species; however, they ultimately agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to keep status quo measures given the data uncertainties related to COVID-19. The Board and Council emphasized that, similar to last year, this is a short-term approach to address a unique situation and allow for more time to consider how management should adapt to the revised recreational harvest estimates from MRIP. They agreed that it is essential to continue to make progress on the Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment for these species as well as actions associated with the Recreational Reform Initiative to ensure that recreational catch is appropriately constrained to meaningful catch limits.

#### **Summer Flounder**

The Board and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management measures for summer flounder in 2021 to achieve, but not exceed, the 2021 RHL of 8.32 million pounds. This includes the use of regional conservation equivalency with the same regions used in 2020. Conservation equivalency allows individual states or multi-state regions to develop customized measures that, in combination, will achieve but not exceed the coastwide RHL. Regional measures under conservation equivalency in 2021

will be the same as in 2020, with the exception of possible minor adjustments to season start and end dates in some states. While the RHL increased by 8% between 2020 and 2021, the Council and Board agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to keep status quo measures given uncertainty associated with the lack of 2020 recreational data.

The Council and Board also maintained the status quo non-preferred coastwide measures, which will be waived in favor of state regulations once conservation equivalency is approved by NOAA Fisheries. These measures include a 4-fish possession limit, a 19-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of May 15 – September 15. The Council and Board also made no changes to the current precautionary default measures (i.e., a 2-fish possession limit, a 20-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of July 1 – August 31) which would be implemented in any state or region that does not adopt measures consistent with the conservation equivalency guidelines.

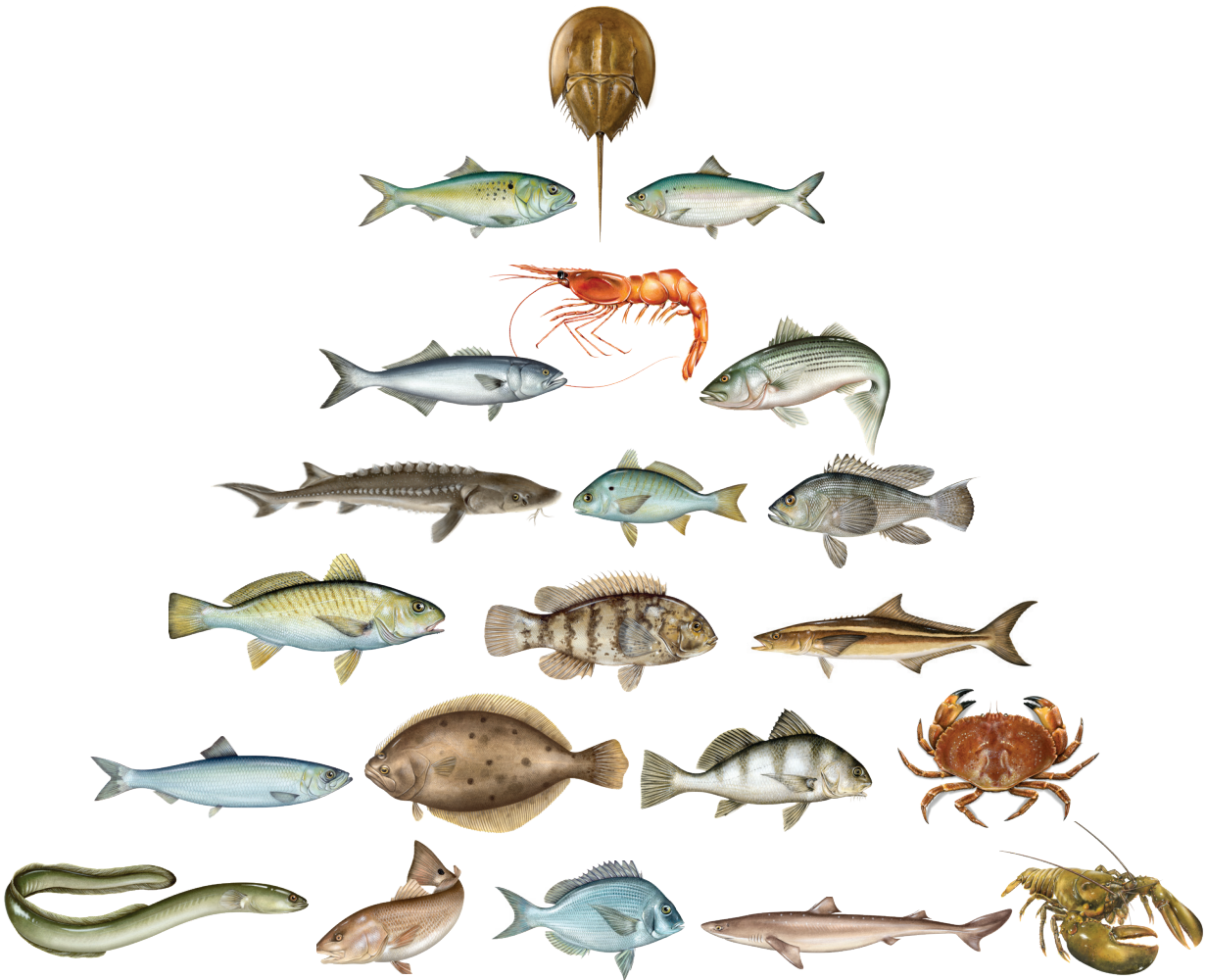
#### **Bluefish**

The Board and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management measures for bluefish in state and federal waters in

*continued, see RECREATIONAL MEASURES on page 14*

2021. These measures include a coastwide 3-fish and 5-fish bag limit for the private and for-hire anglers, respectively. The Council and Bluefish Board discussed the lack of preliminary 2020 recreational catch and harvest estimates, the timing of when the current bag limits went into effect (mid-2020), as well as the ongoing issues surrounding incorporating the new MRIP estimates into management. Additionally, the Council and Bluefish Board acknowledged that bluefish is entering a rebuilding plan and is scheduled for a management track assessment in June 2021. Given these uncertainties and future bluefish developments, the Council and Bluefish Board agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to maintain status quo measures for 2021.

For more information on the Commission's actions related to black sea bass, please contact Savannah Lewis at [slewis@asmfc.org](mailto:slewis@asmfc.org), and contact Dustin Colson Leaning at [dleaning@asmfc.org](mailto:dleaning@asmfc.org) for information on bluefish, summer flounder and scup.



# HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

