ASMFC
FISHERIES focus
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Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission • 1444 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C.

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

ASMFC Winter Meeting

January 29 - February 1, 2007
Radisson Hotel
901 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Please note: The preliminary agenda is subject to change. The agenda reflects the current estimate of time required for scheduled meetings. The Commission may adjust this agenda in accordance with the actual duration of meetings. Interested parties should anticipate meetings starting earlier or later than indicated herein. The detailed final agenda and meeting materials will be available on the Commission website (ww.asmfc.org) one week prior to the meeting.

Monday, January 29, 2007

12:30 - 2:00 PM	Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board
2:15 - 6:15 PM	American Lobster Management Board

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

8:00 – 10:30 AM	Tautog Management Board
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM	Committee on Economics and Social Sciences
10:45 AM – 12:15 PM	Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Sharks Management Board
1:30 – 2:30 PM	Sturgeon Management Board
2:45 - 4:45 PM	American Eel Management Board
5:00 - 6:00 PM	Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

8:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Commissioner Workshop on Meetings Management
1:30 - 2:30 PM	Shad & River Herring Management Board
2:45 - 5:45 PM	Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board

Thursday, February 1, 2007

8:00 – 9:00 AM	Winter Flounder Management Board
9:15 – 11:45 AM	Weakfish Management Board
Noon – 3:00 PM	ISFMP Policy Board
3:00 – 3:30 PM	Business Session

Inside This Issue

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 a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous 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.

Upcoming Meetings

2007

1/10 - 11:
ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee, Holiday Inn Brownstone, 1707 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh, North Carolina.

1/17 (all day) & 18 (until noon):
ACCSP Biological Review Panel, Alden Beach Resort, 5900 Gulf Boulevard, St. Petersburg, Florida.

1/18 (1:00 PM - 5:00 PM) & 19 (all day):
ACCSP Bycatch Prioritization Committee, Alden Beach Resort, 5900 Gulf Boulevard, St. Petersburg, Florida.

1/29 - 2/1:
ASMFC Winter Meeting Week, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333 (see preliminary agenda on page 1).

2/6 - 8:
New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Harborside, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

2/13 - 15:
AIFRB 50th Anniversary Symposium: "Future of Fishery Science in North America," Seatlle, Washington.

2/20 & 21:
ACCSP Operations Committee, Embassy Suites Historic Charleston, 337 Meeting Street, Charleston, South Carolina.

3/26 - 30:
ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, location to be determined.

4/10 - 12:
New England Fishery Management Council, Mystic Hilton, Mystic, Connecticut.

5/7 - 10:
ASMFC Spring Meeting Week, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333.

6/19 - 21:
New England Fishery Management Council, Eastland Park Hotel, Portland, Maine.

6/25 - 29:
ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, location to be determined.

From the Executive Director's Desk

In a few weeks winter will be officially upon us. For coastal New England that conjures up images of empty moorings, boats blocked up under tarps, snow covered docks and houses, and traces of blue smoke coming from fireplaces and woodstoves. December is the time for holiday preparations, family gatherings, and celebration. It is also a time to reflect on the challenges and activities of the past year and take stock of our accomplishments.

Looking back, 2006 has been a busy and productive year for the Commission. With regard to the fisheries resources under their stewardship, Commissioners initiated development of new management measures for tautog and coastal sharks. Although there has been little change in tautog biomass in the past few years, stocks are at a fraction of their historical abundance. Restoration will generate greater benefits to both recreational anglers and for-hire operators. The new coastal shark plan is being developed to ensure alignment between state management of sharks and the new federal coastal sharks plan.

Commissioners also took action to refine the precautionary cap implemented on the harvest of menhaden from the Chesapeake Bay by the reduction fishery. The latest scientific advisory indicates that on a coastwide basis the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. While the cap is in place, scientists will gather data on the impacts of the Bay menhaden fishery. To the great credit of all, Virginia has enlisted the cooperation of harvesters in this research effort.

On another contentious issue involving fishermen and shorebird conservationists, Commissioners took action to limit the harvest of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay region. The measures respond to concerns raised by migratory bird scientists and advocates that the red knot population may be at risk due to decreased availability of horseshoe crab eggs, a key food source for the birds during their migratory flights. The new measures restrict the times and level of horseshoe crab harvests.

With regard to process, Commissioners approved specific measures to encourage states to promptly implement Commission management plans. Although the full Commission approved the policy a few years ago, deciding on specific steps has been difficult. The new measures were crafted specifically for the Summer Flounder, Black Sea Bass, and Scup Plan, and will serve as a model for other plans. The measures should end previous inequities imposed when some states implemented management actions while others did not.

The Commission continued to invest in our staff and the staffs of our states through sponsorship of several basic and advanced stock assessment training workshops. This training reflects our Commissioners' commitment to enhancing the skill and expertise of our scientific advisors to ensure they are knowledgeable about the latest and best methodologies for assessing fishing populations. These investments will pay dividends in the form of sound scientific advice for years to come.

There were also important personnel transitions for the Commission this past year. We said good-bye to some long serving Commissioners, proxies, federal partners, and scientific advisors, such as Bill Pruitt, David Cupka, Doc Gunther, Bruce Freeman, Anne Lange, Dan Schick, John Merriner, Bryon Young, and others. Collectively, they have served faithfully and tirelessly for many decades. We owe them all our thanks.

We have also had some important transitions on our staff, as some of our veterans have moved on to bigger and greater opportunities. They continue to be of great help to us by strengthening communications between their agencies, our staff, and Commissioners. We are finishing the year with one of our strongest staffs ever. There are new faces, bringing energy, enthusiasm, and passion to their jobs, qualities that will benefit the states we serve and inspire us all. I am thankful for the talents and dedication of all of our staff; they are terrific.

You can get a better sense of the breadth and depth of our activities by visiting our website at www.asmfc.org, clicking on Press Releases, and scrolling through the lists. I was struck by the complexity and importance of what has been accomplished in 2006. These accomplishments reflect the power of the fundamental principle of the Commission – that the states can accomplish more by working cooperatively than they could by standing alone. Hopefully, that is something we can all continue to agree on.

From all of us here on the staff, we send out our warmest wishes to you all for a safe and happy holiday season, and for good health and prosperity in 2007.

American Eel
Anguilla rostrata

Common Names: elver, silver eel, yellow eel, freshwater eel

Interesting Fish Facts:
•Aristotle did the first known research on eel.
• Leptocephali were originally thought to be a different species.
•American eel were once thought to be the same species as the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*).

Special Uses:
•Bait for both commercial & recreational fisheries
•Eaten fresh or smoked
•Elvers are often exported to Asian markets for aquaculture purposes.

Largest Recorded: 25 inches, 8 lbs, 2 oz.

Oldest Recorded: 20 years

Stock Status: Unknown

Species Profile: American Eel
Management Program Seeks to Improve Our Understanding of Species Through Data Collection

Introduction

American eel are an important resource from both a biodiversity and human use perspective. In all its life stages, eel serve as an important prey species for many fish, aquatic mammals, and fish-eating birds. Although fisheries are a fraction of what they were historically, eel support valuable commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries.

American eel are a particularly challenging species to conserve and manage on a coastwide basis for a number of reasons. Throughout its life-span, from multiple juvenile life stages through adulthood, American eel will have inhabited and traversed a wide range of habitats from the Sargasso Sea to estuaries and inland riverine systems. During this journey, they will have moved through myriad jurisdictions and management authorities from the high seas to federal government and on to state governments.

From a biological perspective, there is a lot that is still unknown about the species. Information about abundance and status at all life stages, as well as habitat requirements, are very limited. The life history of the species, such as late age at maturity and a tendency of certain life stages to aggregate can make this species particularly vulnerable to overharvest. New management measures are being developed to enhance eel recruitment biomass and facilitate escapement of potential spawners.

Life History

American eel are a catadromous fish species, spending most of their life in freshwater or estuarine environments, traveling to the ocean as adults to reproduce and die. Sexually maturing eel migrate to spawning grounds located in the Sargasso Sea, a large portion of the western Atlantic Ocean east of the Bahamas and south of Bermuda. The Gulf Stream then transports and disperses fertilized eggs and larval eel, called leptocephali, along the eastern coast of Central and North America. American eel are a panmictic stock, meaning that individuals from the entire range come together and reproduce at random. American eel found in the St. John's River in Florida are from the same population as eel that are found in the St. Lawrence River in Canada.

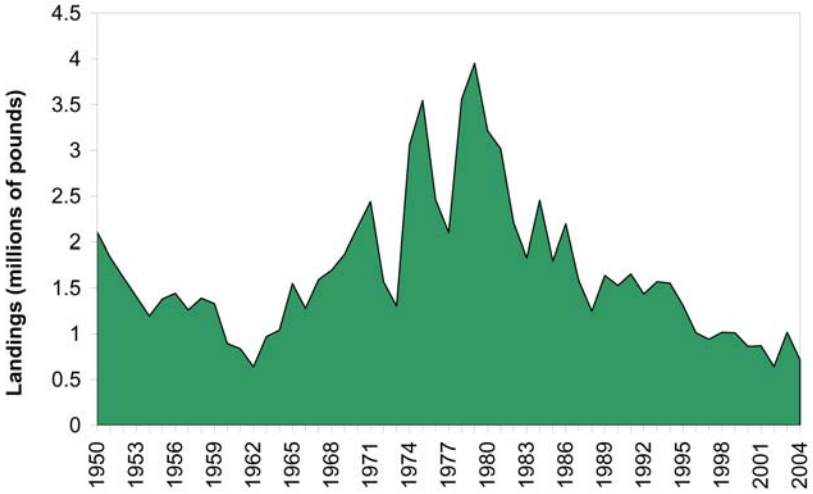
American eel are known to exhibit a multitude of life stages: leptocephali, glass eel, elver, yellow eel, and silver eel. Leptocephali metamorphose into glass eel as they migrate toward land and freshwater bodies. Glass eel develop into the pigmented elver stage as they move into brackish or freshwater. Usually by age two, elvers make the transition into the yellow eel stage. Yellow eel inhabit bays, estuaries, rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds where they feed primarily on invertebrates and smaller fishes. Upon reaching sexual maturity, which can occur any time between eight and 24 years of age, yellow eel begin a downstream migration toward their spawning grounds. During this migration yellow eel metamorphose into the adult silver eel phase, undergoing several physiological changes that enable the animals to move from a freshwater to a saltwater environment. Adult silver eel are believed to spawn in the Sargasso Sea during winter and early spring.

Photo of glass eels courtesy of Vic Vecchio, NYSDEC

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

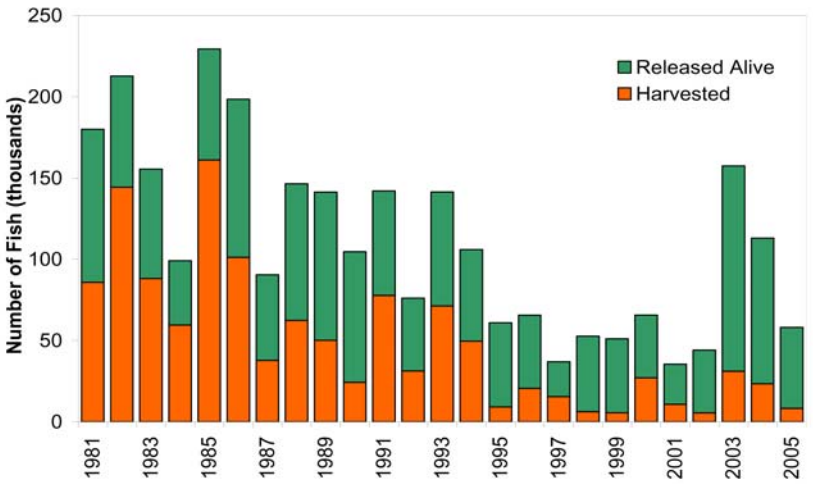
Since the early 17th century, Native Americans have harvested eel for food and cultural sustenance. Today, commercial and recreational fisheries for American eel are seasonal, but remain economically important. Commercial landings have fluctuated widely as the fisheries are market-driven. Since the fishery's peak in 1979 at 3.95 million pounds, commercial landings have declined to a near record low of 641,255 pounds in 2002 (Figure 1). Since then, commercial landings have increased to 731,636 pounds at an estimated ex-vessel value of $1.2 million. In recent years, landings from New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission have represented the majority of commercial landings coastwide.

Figure 1. Commercial Landings of American Eel Along the Atlantic Coast
Source: NOAA Fisheries Website, 2006



Although eel are often purchased by recreational fishermen for use as bait for larger gamefish such as striped bass, few recreational anglers directly target eel. For the most part, hook and line fishermen catch eel incidentally when fishing for other species. According to the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, recreational catch (including harvest and live releases) has widely fluctuated since the early 1980s, with several high points in the early to mid-80s and consistently low values from 1995 - 2002 (Figure 2). Catch peaked at 229,5416 pounds in 1985 and declined to a time series low of 35,510 in 2001. Recreational catch in 2005 is estimated at 58,154 pounds, the majority of which (86 percent) was released alive. Florida, Georgia, Delaware, and Maryland combined represented 78% of the recreational harvest in 2005.

Figure 2. Recreational Catch of American Eel Along the Atlantic Coast
Source: NOAA Fisheries Website, 2006



Stock Status

The Commission conducted a benchmark stock assessment for American eel in 2005. Insufficient data prevented the American Eel Technical Committee from developing reference points or quantifying stock status in the assessment. Because of this, the status of the stock remains uncertain. An independent panel of fisheries scientists (Peer Review Panel) reviewed the stock assessment and concurred with its findings that eel abundance was likely much higher in the late 1970s to mid-1980s. Further, that the abundance of yellow eel has declined in the last two decades and the stock is at or near historic low levels coastwide. This is of serious concern as it may represent a long-term decline in the stock's reproductive capability. It is unknown why the decline in abundance is occurring. Possible causes could include harvest, habitat loss, predation, hydroturbine mortality, disease, parasitism, reduced fecundity resulting from pollution, or a combination of factors. The Technical Committee has stated that further reductions in yellow eel abundance coastwide, combined with lower escapement of maturing adults, could lead to reductions in spawning stock biomass. Such reductions may result in lower reproductive capacity for this stock and possible recruitment failure. At this time, recruitment failure does not appear to have occurred in the Mid-Atlantic, though it may be occurring in the North Atlantic. Most fishery-dependent indices show a decline, but some do not. While aggregate fishery-dependent indices coastwide suggest increasing catch per unit effort over time, some areas of the U.S. and Canada are experiencing a decline.

Atlantic Coastal Management Considerations

Increasing demand for eel by Asian markets and domestic bait fisheries, coupled with concern about declining eel abundance and limited assessment data, spurred plan development in the mid-1990s, with final plan approval in 1999. The

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Species Profile: American Eel (continued from page 5)

plan identified a number of factors contributing to possible declines in eel abundance along the Atlantic coast, including intense harvest pressure and habitat loss. It provided several reasons why heavy harvest pressure may adversely affect American eel populations: (1) a slow rate of maturation, requiring eight to 24+ years to attain sexual maturity; (2) a tendency for glass eel to aggregate seasonally during migration, making them vulnerable to directed harvest; (3) yellow eel harvest is a cumulative stress, over multiple years, on the same year class; and (4) all fishing mortality occurs prior to spawning.

Habitat loss and alteration has been a chronic problem for hundreds of years. Blockage of stream access, pollution, and nearshore habitat destruction limit habitat availability for eel. Current data indicate that oceanic changes might also contribute to decline in eel abundance. Research in the late 1990s has estimated that species that depend upon access to Atlantic coastal watersheds may be deterred from reaching up to 84% of upstream habitats.

Currently, American eel is undergoing a status review under the Endangered Species Act, the findings of which may significantly alter the species' management. In the interim, the American Eel Plan Development team has been charged by the Management Board to develop management measures to prevent further declines in eel abundance and to promote an increase in spawning stock. Potential changes in American eel management by the Commission could be seen in the upcoming year.

Management Challenges

The greatest hindrance to the development and implementation of an effective management program for American eel is the panmictic nature of the stock. Local, regional, and ocean-wide actions have the ability to affect the entire stock because there is random mating within the breeding population—all of the American eel found from Canada to Central America. For example, management decisions on the St. Lawrence River have the ability to affect the annual recruitment to the Chesapeake Bay. While different agencies have authority over eel in their jurisdictions, they do not have the ability to alter the population beyond their management boundaries.

Photo credit: Rutgers University Marine Field Station

This problem is compounded by the lack of long-term data sets describing eel abundance at any life stage. Although eel have been continuously harvested, consistent data on harvest are often not available and, when available, are not good indicators of abundance because eel harvest is dependent on demand.

Plan Requirements

To increase the amount of available data, the plan requires states to implement conservative commercial and recreational regulations, as well as monitoring programs. The plan's primary focus is on data collection to further our understanding of American eel biology, behavior, habitat requirements, and the fisheries themselves.

Under the plan, states are required to maintain their existing commercial fishery regulations, unless opting for more conservative regulations. In their recreational fisheries, states are required to establish uniform possession limits, including minimum six-inch size limit and possession of no more than 50 eels per person for bait purposes during fishing, including crew members involved in party/charter (for-hire) employment.

As of February 2006, states are also required to establish a mandatory trip-level catch and effort monitoring program for American eel. The Addendum provides states the option to collect the data through either a commercial eel harvester permit and mandatory reporting system or an eel dealer permit and reporting system.

In terms of biological monitoring, all states must perform an annual young-of-the-year (YOY) abundance survey. This survey, conducted over a six-week time period each year, provides an annual estimate of juvenile abundance. The 2005 Peer Review Panel affirmed the importance of the YOY surveys in showing trends in annual recruitment. Data from the YOY surveys can also provide managers with information on the effectiveness of coastwide management programs since juvenile abundance is influenced by factors that affect spawning, larval survival, transport, metamorphosis, and recruitment.

On the international front, the Commission has begun to work with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, which is founded by a binational agreement between the U.S. and Canada, to facilitate participation and data sharing in stock assessments and the development of management objectives. This relationship stems from the realization that in order to enact the best management for American eel, management agencies must consider the whole stock, not just the individual eels within their respective jurisdictions. As our knowledge of eel expands, management can be refined to match the species' biology.

For more information, please contact Erika Robbins, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or erobbins@asmfc.org.

DE DNREC Orders Two-Year Moratorium on Horseshoe Crab Harvesting

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Secretary John A. Hughes has ordered a two-year moratorium on the harvesting of horseshoe crabs in Delaware waters effective December 11, 2006 as a protective measure for the horseshoe crab population and the migratory bird populations that depend on the resource for food.

The moratorium was imposed in an Order issued by Secretary Hughes on November 20, 2006 that approves a final regulation for horseshoe crabs beginning January 1, 2007.

"The red knots are at risk and the only thing in the world we can do is to make certain that every egg from every female horseshoe crab that spawns on our beaches is fertilized," said Secretary Hughes.

The decision is based upon a record, as stated in the Order, "that establishes the need to protect the horseshoe crabs, which are one of the world's oldest species." The record shows that horseshoe crab populations in the Delaware Estuary declined significantly in the 1990s in the Delaware Bay – the epicenter for horseshoe crabs – and therefore "Delaware and New Jersey together need to act to preserve and foster the environment for horseshoe crabs."

Secretary Hughes emphasized the importance of establishing an alternative to the horseshoe crab as bait for eel and conch in his decision, and noted the Department's $350,000 support for the University of Delaware's College of Marine and Earth Studies' three-year effort to establish an attractant as alternative bait for conch and eel. That effort, spearheaded by Dr. Nancy M. Targett has been joined by DuPont.

"We are pleased to be volunteering our assistance to the University of Delaware to accelerate the development of a substitute that could replace the horseshoe crab as bait in the conch and eel fisheries. We are offering DuPont's scientific capabilities to this challenging research project because it matches our own commitment to sustainable product development and is part of our ongoing support of the ecology of the Delaware estuary," said Nick Fanandakis, vice president and general manager, DuPont Chemical Solutions Enterprise.

"This collaborative effort will make a considerable difference in the timeline for offering a remedy to the watermen," said Secretary Hughes. "I'm hopeful that we may have something concrete by early June."

Laura Leach Celebrates 25th Anniversary at the Commission

Laura C. Leach, longtime Director of Finance & Administration, was recently honored by Executive Director John V. O'Shea and the full contingent of Commissioners for her 25 years of outstanding service to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The second Commission employee to reach this impressive milestone, Laura began working at the Commission on November 3, 1981, as its bookkeeper/accounting manager. Since April of 1991, she has been the Director of Finance and Administration, capably managing the Commission's fiscal and human resources in times of scarcity and abundance. Laura has also provided critical continuity through her support to three Executive Directors and by her service as interim Executive Director.

Of particular note, are her efforts to support the growth of the Commission staff and promote the financial strength of the Commission during her tenure. Consistently projecting energy and enthusiasm in supporting the needs of the Commissioners and staff, she has become the human and caring voice of the Commission. In honor of her great energy, commitment, and loyalty, Laura was presented with a commemorative letter from the Executive Director and a beautiful cut crystal bowl from the Commissioners. Congratulations, Laura!

Protected Species News

Photo courtesy of Andy Bruckner, NOAA

URI Sea Turtle Bycatch Reduction Workshop for Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic Inshore Trawl Fisheries -- On January 25 & 26, 2007, the University of Rhode Island will be conducting a workshop to investigate technological solutions to reduce bycatch of protected species in southern New England and Mid-Atlantic inshore trawl fisheries. Two objectives of the workshop are to: (1) solicit ideas/concepts for bycatch reduction technologies or other measures for the trawl fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic region that will reduce the capture of sea turtles while minimizing impact on target species catch; and (2) plan specific evaluations/experiments in selected fisheries to be conducted in the summer and fall of 2007. URI has funding to support travel expenses for a limited number of fishermen and fishing industry representatives to participate in the workshop. For more information, please contact Joe DeAlteris at (401) 874-5333 or jdealteris@uri.edu.

Photo courtesy of Dept. of Commerce, NOAA

Emergency Rule to Protect Right Whales from Gillnet Entanglement During Calving Season in the Southeast -- NOAA Fisheries Service has announced a temporary emergency rule prohibiting gillnet fishing and possession of gillnets in Atlantic Ocean waters off South Carolina, Georgia and northeast Florida during right whale calving season from November 15, 2006 through April 15, 2007. An exemption is provided to the prohibition on possession of gillnet gear for transiting through this area if the gear is properly stowed and no fish are onboard. Continued gillnet fishing in the Southeast calving grounds without seasonal closures constitutes a significant risk to the well-being of critically endangered right whales. The North Atlantic right whale population is estimated to be approximately 300 animals. The coastal Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. are the North Atlantic right whale's only known – and likely only – calving grounds. During the winter calving season, these waters support the entire population's calving females and their calves, and in some years may also support a large proportion of the remaining population. A map illustrating the closed area can be found at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/RightWhaleDocs.htm. NOAA Fisheries Service is also publishing a proposed rule in the Federal Register which will permanently protect right whales during calving seasons. For more information, please contact Kim Amendola at (727)403-6533 or Kim.Amendola@noaa.gov.

New East Coast Ship Traffic Routes to Reduce Collisions with Endangered Whales -- NOAA has urged ship captains to use new recommended routes when entering or leaving the Florida ports of Jacksonville and Fernandina, and Brunswick, Georgia, as well as in Cape Cod Bay off Massachusetts. The recommended routes take into account safety and economic impact to the mariner. Although the routes are voluntary, they will appear on both electronic and paper NOAA nautical charts no later than November 30. The new designations will help mariners decrease whale strikes by reducing vessel activity in areas frequented by ships and whales. For more information, visit http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2006/s2745.htm or contact Connie Barclay at (301) 713-2370.

Photo couresty of Commander Alan Bunn, NOAA Corps (ret.), NOAA Sea Grant Program

Proposed Rule to Improve Sea Turtle Bycatch Data Collection through Comprehensive Monitoring of Fishing Vessels -- NOAA Fisheries Service is proposing a rule under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to require state and federal fishing vessels operating in the exclusive economic zone and territorial sea (state and federal waters) of the U.S. to take onboard an observer upon request. The rule would allow the collection of comprehensive data on sea turtles that are incidentally caught (bycatch) during fishing operations (both commercial and recreational). It would enable NOAA Fisheries Service to adequately document sea turtle takes, to evaluate existing measures to reduce sea turtle takes, and to determine whether there is a need for new or additional measures to reduce sea turtle takes. Current ESA regulations allow NOAA Fisheries Service to place observers on vessels on a short-term basis in response to an emergency event involving sea turtles, such as a mass sea turtle stranding. These temporary observer requirements are designed to respond to acute problems and do not enable collection of comprehensive information on sea turtles and fishing activities.

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ACCSP External Peer Review in Depth; Recreational Data Queries Available through New ACCSP Data Warehouse Queries

ACCSP External Peer Review

A panel of six scientists, with expertise and backgrounds in a variety of disciplines, convened in mid-September to conduct an external peer review of the ACCSP, with emphasis on a broad evaluation of how ACCSP is meeting the goals and mission of the program.

The Peer Review Panel reviewed the ACCSP structure, including governance, operating environment, mission goals and priorities, and the 2002 – 2007 strategic plan. They outlined successes, important lessons learned, and made recommendations for the future.

Successes

- ACCSP has fostered an atmosphere of cooperation among partners that did not previously exist.
- The development of data collection standards within the ACCSP community has set the stage for a unified, coastwide database of fisheries-dependent data.
- SAFIS development has allowed ACCSP to populate its landings data tables sooner than would have occurred under other data collection systems, and allowed ACCSP to expedite the use of commercial catch and effort data standards sooner than would have otherwise occurred.

Lessons Learned

- Taking on too many projects too quickly, generating unrealistic expectations of when products would be implemented and ready for use.
- Participation of some partners, especially as represented on the Coordinating Council, are not sufficient to achieve organization goals.

Future Recommendations

- Update the ACCSP Strategic Plan, including milestones and timelines that promote and identify ACCSP successes.
- Revisit program organizational structure to address communication and partner participation issues.
- Expand outreach to focus on advertising successes, including user training for ACCSP products.
- Develop an ACCSP communication plan to improve ties among committees, ACCSP staff, and staff from partners.
- Expand fundraising to support ACCSP goals.

Peer review recommendations have been shared with ACCSP committees and Coordinating Council, and the next year will be devoted to addressing these suggestions.

Presentations given at the peer review meeting and final reports are available on the ACCSP website at http://www.accsp.org/accsppeerreview2006.htm.

New ACCSP Data Warehouse Queries Excellent Tool for Accessing Recreational and Commercial Catch-and-Effort Data

The ACCSP has deployed a new web query interface for the data warehouse using Oracle Discoverer. These new queries summarize data and create reports from the commercial and recreational catch and effort warehouse databases.

The data used in the ACCSP system for recreational catch and effort is derived from the National Marine Fisheries Service Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey (MRFSS). The queries mimic queries available on the MRFSS website, but also provide some improvements: (1) they are more flexible -- it is easier to run multiple queries while changing selection parameters; (2) data are color-coded to display percent standard error by category of precision (green is less than 20 percent, yellow is 20 to 30 percent, and red is 30 percent and greater); and (3) they offer additional directed trip queries that will form the basis for bag limit queries, which are currently being developed.

General benefits of the new interface include:

- Ability to create and display more queries for end users
- User-selected parameters are displayed at top of each query, clarifying which data are displayed
- Ability to "drill" down to display more detailed information
- Options to export data, print as PDF, or email results
- Improved management of user access, both confidential and non-confidential
- No additional cost for software or support (savings of $30K annually)
- No special software required for users

Non-confidential users are required to request a new account via the ACCSP website in order to use the new interface. The old version will continue to be available until spring 2007. Users have been notified of the change via email, and given instructions on how to request a new account.

ACCSP staff will provide demonstrations and training on the new interface at upcoming ASMFC technical meeting weeks. For more information, please check the Users Guide. Questions may be directed to support@accsp.org.

For more information on the ACCSP, please visit www.accsp.org or call (202)216-5690.

Protected Species News (continued from page 8)

Under this rule, each year NOAA Fisheries Service would publish in the Federal Register a draft and final determination of fisheries it intends to monitor for sea turtle interactions. The determination would be based on the best available scientific, commercial, or other information regarding sea turtle-fishery interactions; sea turtle distribution; sea turtle strandings; fishing techniques; gears used; target species; seasons and areas fished; qualitative data from logbooks; or at the discretion of the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. Once included in the final determination, a fishery would remain eligible for observer coverage for five years to enable the design of an appropriate sampling program and to ensure collection of sufficient scientific data to quantify levels of take and assess dynamics of sea turtle-fishery interactions. For more information, please contact: Tanya Dobrzynski, (301) 713-2322, tanya.dobrzynski@noaa.gov.

Dolphin Deaths from Recreational Fishing Gear are on the Rise: NOAA Recommends "Best Practices" for Recreational Fishermen -- The number of bottlenose dolphins stranding dead with recreational fishing gear attached appears to be escalating throughout Florida – a trend that is beginning to concern biologists and conservation agencies. The Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota has recovered five dolphins since January with recreational gear attached. Four died as a direct result of the fishing gear – three adults from ingestion of lures, hooks and line, and one calf from entanglement that nearly cut off its tail. The four dead adults were all well-known, long-term residents of Sarasota Bay. The two males had been observed since their births 17 and 22 years ago, and had no known previous history of interacting with fishing gear.

In 2006, Hubbs-Sea World Research Institute (HSWRI) in Orlando recovered six dead animals with gear present. Four showed signs that the gear significantly contributed to the dolphins' mortality. Last year, HSWRI recovered only two animals with recreational gear attached. These lethal interactions with recreational fishing gear may be the result of dolphins being fed by boaters and fishermen. This feeding can cause dolphins to become habituated to humans and may teach them to steal recreational fishermen's bait or catch. These dolphins are at increased risk of entanglement in recreational gear, of swallowing hooks and lures, and of boat strikes, when they have learned to associate humans with food.

Photo courtesy of Mote Marine Laboratory Standing Investigations Program

In an effort to prevent these lethal interactions, biologists have developed the following list of "Best Fishing Practices" for recreational fishermen to follow to reduce or avoid harmful interactions with bottlenose dolphins and improve the quality of their fishing experience.

Best Fishing Practices for Avoiding Interactions with Wild Dolphins

1. **Never feed wild dolphins** – it is against federal law and is harmful to the dolphins.
2. **Avoid tossing leftover bait to dolphins** if they are nearby.
3. **Check your gear and terminal tackle to make sure they are in good shape** and will not break too easily, resulting in a lost fish with a hook that could be eaten by a dolphin.
4. **Avoid fishing in an area where dolphins are actively feeding** – dolphins may mistake your bait or catch for food.
5. **Do not release caught fish in the presence of dolphins** – this reinforces the association of recreational fishing activities with a food source; release fish as far from the dolphins and as quietly as possible.
6. **Change fishing locations** if dolphins are showing interest in your bait or catch.
7. **Do not cast your line toward a dolphin**.
8. **Use corrodible hooks** (any hook other than stainless steel) & **circle hooks** (believed to reduce injuries to fish and dolphins).
9. **Never try to reel in a dolphin that may be hooked** – if a dolphin is hooked and the hook is set, cut the line as close to the dolphin as safely possible. If the hook is not set, put slack on the line and give the dolphin time to release itself.
10. **Stay at least 50 yards away from wild dolphins** while boating or using personal watercraft.
11. **Stow used fishing line**. Make sure to collect any broken or used fishing lines to discard in recycling bins (Please visit the Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program Web site for a list of bin locations: http://floridaconservation.org/mrrp/bin_information.asp). If a recycling bin is not available, please discard in a secure bin.

NEAMAP Successfully Completes Mid-Atlantic Nearshore Trawl Survey Pilot

This fall, personnel from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), working closely with commercial fisherman Captain James Ruhle and his crew aboard the F/V DARANA R, successfully completed the pilot of the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) Mid-Atlantic Nearshore Trawl Survey. This survey of the 20-90 foot depth contour area from Montauk, New York to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina is the first survey developed and implemented by NEAMAP.

NEAMAP was developed in 1998 as a cooperative state/federal fisheries-independent research and data collection program to be conducted between the Gulf of Maine and Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Fisheries-independent monitoring provides insight into the status of fish stocks without the biases inherent in catch-related information. The goal of NEAMAP is to facilitate the collection, coordination, and dissemination of fishery-independent information for use by government agencies, the fishing industry, researchers, and others.

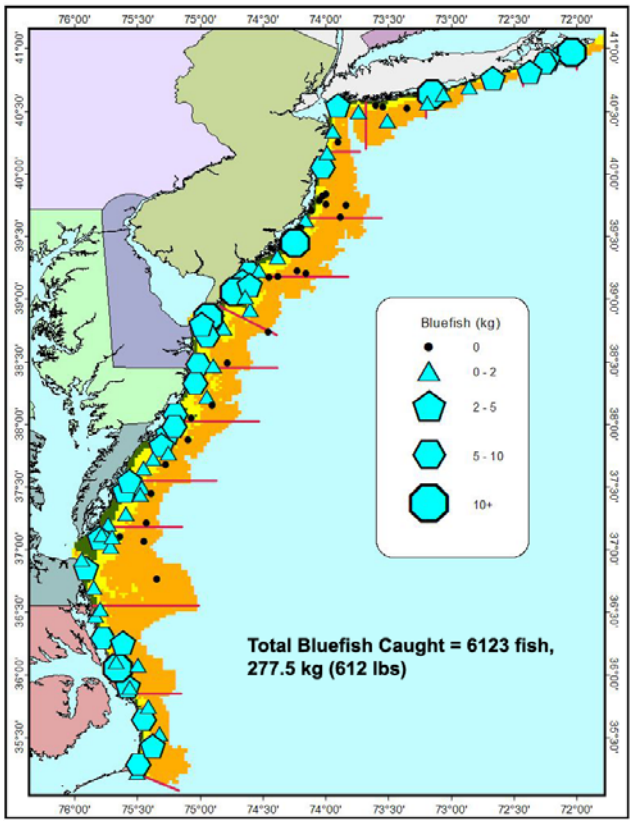
The development of the nearshore survey was in response to the lack of adequate survey coverage and coordination in the coastal waters of the Middle Atlantic Bight. In addition, the NEAMAP survey has the capability to sample inshore waters in this area that cannot be accessed with the larger draft of the new sampling platform (R/V BIGELOW) of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) long-term groundfish survey. This complementary sampling could support the continuation of the NEFSC's long running time series.

To aid in the standardization of the two surveys, the NEAMAP survey used trawl gear very similar to gear that likely will be used on the R/V BIGELOW. The pilot survey was the first to deploy a unique net/door configuration (four-seam, three-bridle net with Thyburon Type IV doors). This configuration proved to be a great success, as over the course of 98 tows, not a single mesh was broken in the net. Captain Ruhle's extensive trawling experience in this region contributed greatly to the gear being used successfully.

Co-principal investigators from VIMS, Chris Bonzek and Jim Gartland timed the pilot study to coincide with peak abundance and diversity of finfish assemblages during the fall. The crew, comprised of two fishermen and five scientists, worked diligently to sample 98 stations over 14 days, with between five and nine stations occupied during the day. Approximately 431,000 fish, comprising 114 species, and weighing about 41,888 lbs were processed. Catch per station ranged from 23 fish (29.8 lbs) to about 59,000 fish (2,833 lbs). Catch of scup was one of the highest numbers caught of a given species (55,461 fish), and weakfish comprised the greatest biomass (5,120 lbs). In general, catches were higher at inshore shallow stations than in the deepest stratum.

Mr. Bonzek and Mr. Gartland presented the results of the pilot study to the NEAMAP Board in October. The Board was impressed with the execution of the pilot survey, enthusiastically supporting its continuation. The Board discussed possible tasks for 2007, including conducting comparison tows for vessel standardization, as well as acquiring the necessary equipment for a full, long-term survey to commence in 2008.

Map of Bluefish Catch by Weight (kg) from the NEAMAP Pilot Survey



Support Sought for Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) is a partnership forming under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). NFHAP is a call for action to improve degraded fish habitat nationwide. Its primary interest is the protection and restoration of habitats in Atlantic coastal drainage basins. Please contact Jessie Thomas, ASMFC Habitat Coordinator, for more information on this initiative or if your organization is interested in becoming a partner. Jessie can be reached at (202) 289-6400 or jthomas@asmfc.org.

Cecilia Butler Awarded ASMFC Employee of the Quarter

In her four years at the Commission, Cecilia Butler has become an invaluable asset to the Commission staff, significantly contributing to the Commission's efforts of achieving "healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015." In recognition of her efforts, Cecilia was awarded Employee of the Quarter (October - December 2006). The award is intended to recognize special contributions and qualities in the areas of teamwork, initiative, responsibility, quality of work, positive attitude, and results.

Earlier this year, Cecilia was promoted to the position of Human Resources (HR) Administrator. She has admirably risen to the challenges of the new position, diligently learning new skills and taking on the responsibilities of HR Administrator. From the get-go, she gracefully stepped into the fast paced environment of HR, handling a significant number of personnel changes and ensuring that the program continued to run smoothly. At the same time, she provided invaluable mentoring to the Commission's new Administrative Assistant, allowing for a seamless transition in that position. She has provided critical support to the accounting department, performing assigned duties without fail or error since taking them on. Cecilia's attention to detail, strong work ethic, positive attitude, and overall responsiveness to the needs of staff have earned her the respect of supervisors and colleagues alike.

When not working, Cecilia likes to stay busy, either assisting with the care of her mom, spending time with her husband, David, or keeping active walking, swimming or jogging. As Employee of the Quarter, Cecilia received a $500 cash award, an engraved pewter pencil cup, and a letter of appreciation for her personnel record. In addition, her name will be engraved on the Employee of Quarter Plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby (and seen in the above picture). Congratulations, Cecilia!

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
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Return Service Requested