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 Releases Atlantic Menahden Workshop Proceedings: *Scientists Acknowledge Menhaden's Ecological Role but Call for More Research*

In October 2004, the Commission held a workshop to examine the status of Atlantic menhaden with respect to its ecological role. This workshop was convened in response to a motion made by the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board in May 2004. Representatives from the environmental, recreational fishery, and the commercial fishery communities helped plan the details of the workshop. State, federal, and university scientists were invited to participate in the workshop. The workshop goals were the following:

- Examine the status of Atlantic menhaden with respect to its ecological role
- Explore the implications of current management reference points with respect to menhaden's ecological role
- Explore the effects of concentrated harvest in the Chesapeake Bay
- Develop recommendations for revised or new directions for the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan to the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board (and other Boards as necessary) at the annual meeting in November 2004

Large schools of menhaden off North Carolina coast. Photo courtesy of NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center

Workshop participants developed an extensive list of consensus statements based on discussions at the workshop. The consensus statements reflect the opinion of the scientists only, and not the stakeholder representatives at the meeting (see pages 8 & 9). Recommendations from the workshop were presented to the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board in November 2004. Copies of the full Proceedings can be obtained via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News or by contacting the Commission at (202)289-6400.

The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board developed a list of tasks for the Technical Committee at its November 2004 meeting. These tasks focus on the feasibility of incorporating ecologically-based reference points for menhaden. The Technical Committee and Management Board will be meeting on February 8, 2005 to discuss these tasks and identify next steps.

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

2/28 – 3/4:
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Savannah DeSoto, 15 East Liberty Street, Savannah, Georgia; 800-426-8483.

2/28 (10:30 AM - 5:30 PM) - 3/1 (8:30 AM - 3:00 PM):
ASMFC American Lobster Stock Assessment Subcommittee, NRC Building (Room 211), 838 Rodney French Boulevard, Fairhaven, Massachusetts.

3/3 - 5:
Maine's Fishermen's Forum, Samoset Resort, Rockport, Maine.

3/14 - 17:
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission 55th Annual Spring Meeting, Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa in Point Clear, Alabama.

3/15 - 17:
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Ramada Inn/ Outer Banks Resort & Conference Center, 1701 S. Virginia Dare Trail, Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina.

3/24 - 26:
Managing Our Nation's Fisheries II: Focus on the Future, Omni-Shoreham Hotel and Conference Center, Washington D.C. For more information go to: http://www.managingfisheries.org/index.htm

3/28 - 4/1:
ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, location to be determined.

3/29 - 31:
New England Fishery Management Council, Hotel Viking, Newport, Rhode Island.

5/3- 5:
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Princess Royale Oceanfront Hotel & Conference Center, 9100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, Maryland.

5/9 - 12:
ASMFC Meeting Week, Radisson Hotel Old Town Alexandria, 901 North Fairfax, Alexandria, Virginia.

6/13- 17:
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Radisson Resort at the Port, 8701 Astronaut Blvd., Cape Canaveral, Florida; 800-333-3333.

From the Executive Director's Desk

On December 17th, President Bush released the U.S. Ocean Action Plan in response to the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. As might be expected, the plan has received mixed reviews. A January 8, 2005 New York Times editorial suggested that the Ocean Action Plan, with its call for more committees and more science, "…is actually an invitation to paralysis by analysis." The editorial states, "What we needed are concrete regulatory initiatives to discipline the commercial fishing industry (letting scientists, not fishermen, set quotas), control residential development, reform farming practices and provide enough money to get the job done."

This top-down approach seems decisive, but unfortunately overlooks the real world complexities of both governance systems and ocean problems. In contrast, the President's plan, particularly with regard to fisheries, recognizes the realities inherent in making our oceans and coasts cleaner and more productive. A closer look at six broad areas illustrates the practicality woven through much of the 39-page strategy. (You can find the complete document at http://ocean.ceq.gov/)

Currently, over 20 federal agencies, as well as state, tribal and local governments, have a role in ocean issues. The plan establishes a new Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy to improve coordination and performance of these efforts. The Chair of the Council of Environmental Quality will serve as Chair of this Committee and advise the President on ocean policy issues. Several new interagency committees will help improve coordination. All will be tasked with working, as appropriate, with state, tribal, and local governments.

Existing regional fishery management councils and interstate fisheries commissions are prominent players in fisheries management. The states assert jurisdiction over the near shore and inland waters, as well as the coastal habitat critical for the health of our oceans and fisheries. The plan recognizes these realities and seeks to improve performance by working collaboratively with these entities and promoting cooperation.

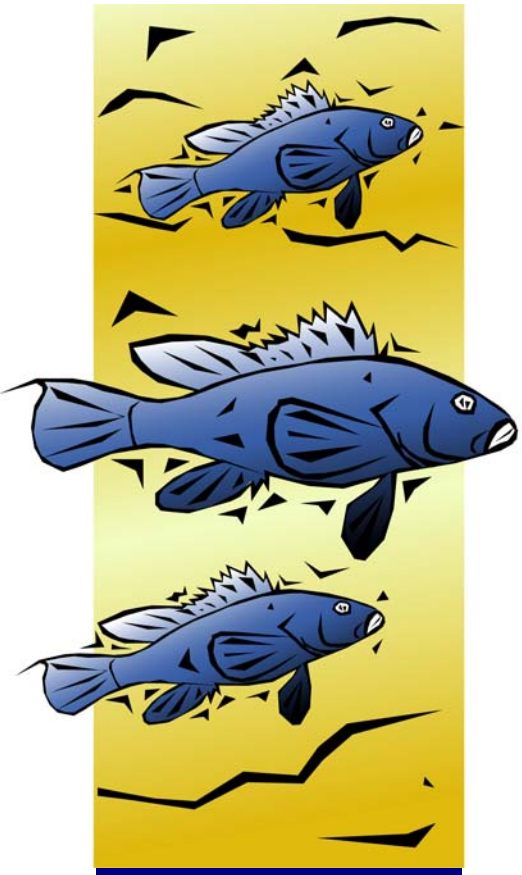
Like them or not, rights-based fishery management approaches promote stock abundance, increase economic returns to harvesters, and improve product quality for consumers. Under individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs harvesters control a percentage of the total allowable catch. Since poundage increases if stocks expand, harvesters have a strong incentive to advocate for long-term sustainable management, a goal that is aligned with the broad public interest. The Ocean Action Plan seeks to apply this incentive based tool, in cooperation with the councils, to improve stocks.

Science and data are critical to our understanding and management of the oceans and fisheries. The Plan recognizes improvements will be needed in science and data to support ecosystem-based approaches to management. It proposes actions to strengthen science and expand data collection, particularly for recreational and commercial harvests.

However, that having been said, the best science is of little use if stakeholders do not understand it, lack confidence in it, or do not accept a stewardship role and exert political pressure to block meaningful fisheries management measures. The Ocean Action Plan contains initiatives to improve ocean literacy and increase the public's awareness of the need to take better care of the oceans. It includes young people as a change agent to implement this vision.

Expanding areas of anoxia and hypoxia in our near shore waters, such as the Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay and Long Island Sound, should be of concern to us all. Most marine life in any form is unable to survive in such dead zones. They are caused by nutrient loads accumulating from upland sources. The plan contains initiatives to improve watershed and coastal habitat management programs by working cooperatively with States, recognizing their sovereignty and jurisdiction over these areas.

Obviously, there is more in the plan than I have discussed here and there are some things that are missing. But the examples above reflect the recognition that our oceans are in trouble and need our help. It demonstrates a leadership decision to raise the visibility of these issues within our government and to use our existing governance and regulatory systems in a more efficient and effective manner. Hopefully, the President's clear goal of improving the health and productivity of our oceans is something that we can all agree with.



Species Profile: Black Sea Bass
Joint Management Yields Positive Results for Popular Mid-Atlantic Fish

Black Sea Bass
Centropristis striata

Common Names: black will, chub, pinbass, old humpback

Family: Serranidae (true sea bass)

Interesting Fact: Breeding males have vivid hues of flourescent blue and green around the eyes and nape; an older female can produce up to 1.05 million pelagic eggs

Largest Recorded: 10 pounds, 4 ounces (Virginia Beach, VA)

Maximum Age: 20 years

Length at Maturity (female): 7.48"

Stock Status: Not overfished and overfishing is not occurring

Introduction

Black sea bass are highly sought by both commercial and recreational fishermen throughout the Mid-Atlantic. It is one of four species jointly managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council). Commission management of black sea bass was initiated as one component of a multi-species fishery management plan (FMP) addressing summer flounder, scup and black sea bass. In 1990, summer flounder was singled out for immediate action under a joint Commission and Council Plan. The Commission approved the FMP for Black Sea Bass in October 1996.

Life History

Black sea bass inhabit Atlantic coastal waters from the Gulf of Maine to the Florida Keys, concentrating in areas from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Canaveral, Florida. Two distinct stocks of black sea bass exist along the Atlantic coast with overlapping ranges. The northern stock migrates seasonally and spawns off of New England in the late summer. The southern stock spawns off of Chesapeake Bay in the early summer. A temperate reef fish, black sea bass commonly inhabit rock bottoms near pilings, wrecks, and jetties. Black sea bass rely on their large mouth and swift ocean currents to catch prey, which include fish, crabs, mussels, and razor clams. Black sea bass summer in northern inshore waters at depths of less than 120 feet and winter in southern offshore waters at depths of 240 to 540 feet.

Black sea bass are protogynous hermaphrodites, which means they start life as a female and when they reach 9-13 inches they change sex to become males. Thirty-eight percent of the females in the Mid-Atlantic demonstrate sex reversal between August and April, after most fish have spawned. Even though some fish are males when they reach sexual maturity, most produce eggs when they first mature. The ovaries eventually stop functioning as the testes begin sperm production. Most black sea bass reverse sex before the age of six.

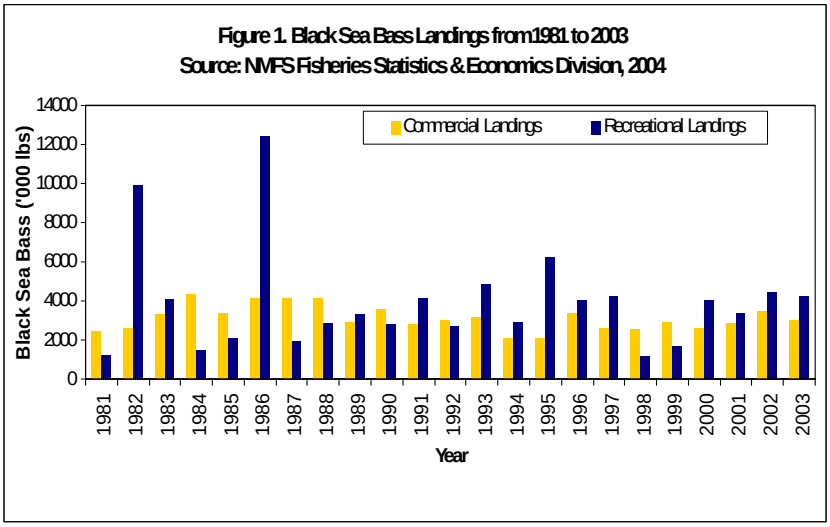
Black sea bass reproduce from February to July, the spawning season starts earliest in the southern portion of their range and progresses northward through spring. An average size black sea bass (ages two - five) produces 280,000 eggs. Eggs float in the water column until they hatch within a few days after fertilization. Larvae drift in coastal water two to 50 miles offshore until they reach about a half an inch. Young sea bass migrate into estuaries, bays, and sounds. They seek shelter in a variety of habitats such as submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster reefs, and man-made structures.

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Commercial landings of black sea bass have been recorded since the late 1800s. From 1887 through 1948, commercial landings north of Cape Hatteras fluctuated around six million pounds and then peaked at 22 million pounds in 1952. Fish were primarily harvested by handlines during the 1900s.

Photo courtesy of Mark Terceiro, NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center

The 1950s marked the development of the trap fishery. By 1971, landings declined to 1.3 million pounds. Since the late 1970s, landings have varied with a low of two million pounds in 1994 to a high of 4.3 million pounds in 1984 (Figure 1). Otter trawls and fish pots/traps have accounted for the majority of the black sea bass landings in most states. Other important gear includes hand lines and lobster pots.



Black sea bass are also an important recreational species in the Mid-Atlantic. In 1965, over half of the total catch of black sea bass was credited to recreational fishing. Angling pressure increased markedly in the mid-1980s. In 1998 and 1999, recreational landings decreased substantially relative to the levels of the early to mid-1990s (Figure 1). The decrease in recreational landings may be partially attributed to an increase in minimum size limits. Landings started to increase in 2000 and have averaged 4 million pounds from 2000 to 2004. Landings were estimated at 4.3 million pounds in 2003 or about .35 million pounds above the average for 1981-2003. Recreational anglers commonly bottom fish using squid and natural bait.

Status of the Stock

Black sea bass were last assessed at the 39th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee (39th SAW/SARC) in June 2004. Data collected in the recent tagging program contributed to the success of this stock assessment. The SARC found that the stock is no longer overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Survey biomass indices (estimates number of available fish) declined in 2003 and 2004 from the high in 2002. The average exploitable biomass (# of fish that can be harvested without damaging the population) in 2002-2004 exceeded the biomass threshold by 55 percent (Figure 2 on page 7). Data indicates a general increase in the harvestable biomass since 1996.

Good year classes (number of new fish into the population in a given year) were produced in 1988, 1990-1992, 1995, 2000 (strongest year in the time series), and 2002, while the survey indicates poor recruit-

continued on page 7

Tagging Project

Since the fall of 2002, state and federal fishery biologists and the fishing industry have come together as part of a cooperative tagging effort to gather information on abundance, migration, and exploitation of black sea bass. To date, more than 13,650 black sea bass, from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Henry, Virginia, have been tagged and released. About 160 of the tags are electronic data storage tags that measure temperature and pressure (depth) at regular intervals (~15 minutes). Tags help track the movements of the black sea bass as they move from their summer, coastal residence to their offshore, wintering grounds.

Photo courtesy of NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Information from this project has helped fishery biologists improve stock assessments used to manage the fishery, as well as provide information about black sea bass growth rates, migration, and harvest rates in commercial and recreational fisheries. Very few studies observe the ecology of black sea bass; none have specifically examined population size or exploitation, as the tagging project will. By comparing data on where fish are originally tagged with information on where fish are recovered by fishermen, scientists will be better able to determine the species' seasonal inshore and offshore movements.

"Fishermen have been very responsive to the program, with nearly 1,930 tags being recovered since 2002," states Gary Shepherd, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center. "Their participation is essential since recovering tags is the key to our improved understanding of the black sea bass population. Valuable information is also gathered through speaking directly with fishermen and learning from their experiences."

New England Officers Gather to Coordinate Enforcement of American Lobster and Northern Shrimp Regulations

On December 15, 2004, over 60 law enforcement officers, supervisors, and fisheries managers meet for a one-day training session on law enforcement efforts in New England and the interpretation of laws regulating American lobster and northern shrimp.

Law enforcement representatives from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Law Enforcement, and the US Coast Guard organized the training session.

The agenda included a thorough review of zero-tolerance for v-notch lobster law enforcement in Area 1. Sgt. Jeff Marston of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, Captain Jim Hanlon of the Massachusetts Environmental Police, along with Colonel Joe Fessenden of the Maine Marine Patrol facilitated this discussion to ensure that all law enforcement officers in Area 1 were implementing the zero-tolerance of a v-notch lobster in a consistent manner.

Sgt Jeff Marston also gave an overview of the upcoming 2005 Northern Shrimp season and developed enforcement strategies that will improve compliance with the Management plan.

Additionally, the National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement lead a discussion of federal enforcement guidelines and using "Joint Enforcement Agreements" to assist with improved conservation enforcement in the EEZ.

Dana Morse of the Maine Sea Grant program and experts from Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island went over current gears utilized by various fishers and shared a working knowledge of proper measurements of nets and gear.

The entire day was designed to bring enforcement agencies together on a regional basis to develop and implement joint and consistent enforcement strategies for species harvested in the same geographic area by resource users from various states.

VMRC Special Investigative Unit Receives MAFMC's 2004 Fishery Achievement Award

The Special Investigative Unit of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) received the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) 2004 Fisheries Achievement Award at the Council's meeting in Hampton, Virginia on January 19. The award was presented to Colonel Steven Bowman, Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Law Enforcement on behalf of the Special Investigative Unit.

From left: Colonel Steve Bowman; Michelle Peabody, Vice-Chair of the Council's Law Enforcement Committee (LEC); Robert Pride, Chair of the Council's LEC; and Lt. Colonel Lewis Jones.

The VMRC Special Investigative Unit was recognized for its efforts to protect living marine resources through its detection and investigation of large-scale violations of marine fishery regulations in Virginia's tidal waters. The intelligence gathered during "OPERATION BACKDOOR" provided incriminating evidence regarding the sale of illegal fish and shellfish that resulted in the arrest of 14 individuals who were charged with 130 violations of Virginia's Marine Fisheries Laws and Regulations. As a result of this operation, all defendants were convicted. The defendants paid combined fines exceeding $21,000, and were required to obtain proper licenses and permits to fully comply with state regulations. These highly visible enforcement actions provide a significant deterrent to those who may be considering violating federal and state fishery regulations.

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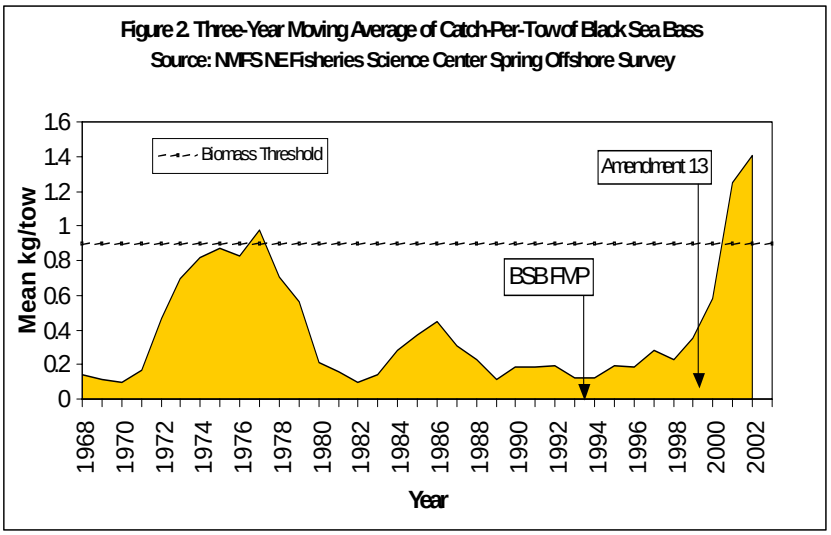
Species Profile: Black Sea Bass (continued from page 5)



ment in 1993, 1994, 1996-1998. A below average year class is forecasted from preliminary work in 2004. The average exploitation rate (rate at which fish are harvested) from September 2002 to September 2003 was less than 17 percent (F-=0.21), based on tag recaptures; from May 2003 to April 2004 exploitation rate was less than 21% F=0.26 based on tag recaptures. However, these exploitation rates may be underestimated due to some uncertainty in the tag reporting rates. Also, discard losses in the commercial fisheries were not estimates and remain an uncertain component of the fishery.

Atlantic Coastal Management Considerations

In an effort to coordinate management actions in both state and federal waters, the Commission and the Council have established a joint management program for black sea bass. The program divides an annual quota between the recreational fishery (51 percent) and the commercial fishery (49 percent). Recreational fishery management measures are developed annually to achieve a target harvest limit, and usually include a combination of minimum size limits, bag limits, and fishing seasons. The 2005 coastwide recreational fishery management measures for black sea bass require a minimum fish size of 12 inches, a maximum bag limit of 25 fish, and no closed season.

The Commission and the Council developed a management program to allocate the annual commercial quota on a coastwide basis each year. The coastwide quota is then divided among the states based on historic landings. State specific shares are as follows: Maine and New Hampshire - 0.5 percent; Connecticut - 1 percent; Delaware - 5 percent; New York - 7 percent, Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Maryland - 11 percent; Massachusetts - 13 percent; and New Jersey and Virginia - 20 percent. A variety of management measures including minimum size and mesh requirements, limited entry, and closed seasons regulate the commercial fishery.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, or <tkerns@asmfc.org>.

Photo courtesy of Mark Terceiro, NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center

ASMFC Comings & Goings

Julie Nygard -- This January, Julie Nygard joined the Commission as its newest Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator. She has begun by working on habitat issues, including providing staff support to the Commission's Habitat Committee and Artificial Reef Committee. Over the next few months, she will begin to take over coordination responsibilities for bluefish, scup and black sea bass. Toni Kerns, who has been the lead on those three species, will be assuming coordination responsibilities for American lobster and will continue to oversee the Commission's summer flounder management activities.

Julie recently received her Master's in Conservation Biology & Ecology from San Francisco State University. While in graduate school she worked for the National Park Service analyzing data for restoration projects in the Presidio of San Francisco. Julie also has experience working for an environmental consulting firm doing public relations on environmental projects. Please join us in welcoming Julie to the Commission.

Atlantic Menhaden Workshop Consensus Statements

Session 1: Status of menhaden's ecological role

- Atlantic menhaden play a unique role transforming primary productivity directly into fish biomass.
- Menhaden productivity depends on and impacts water quality in the ways it supports primary production.
- Menhaden are important prey for large predators. Historically, at least in Chesapeake Bay and North Carolina, they were the dominant prey species. This dominance has diminished. We can quantify the role as a filter feeder, we can quantify them as prey coastwide, however, abundance in Chesapeake Bay is needed to quantify this role regionally.
- We have the tools (striped bass and menhaden bio-energetic models), but have not conducted a holistic quantitative analysis of the ecological role of menhaden.
- The abundance of Atlantic menhaden in Chesapeake Bay remains unknown.
- Menhaden may be the last major abundant inshore clupeid.
- There is a possibility of a link between striped bass disease and abundance of menhaden; however more research is needed.
- There may be a relative imbalance between the prey needs of an increased striped bass population and a decreased abundance of menhaden juveniles (age zeros and ones) in Chesapeake Bay.
- While there was not consensus by the committee as to the causes of low recruitment to age zero in Chesapeake Bay, the following are possible causes:
  - Insufficient spawning stock biomass
  - Eggs and larvae not being brought into Chesapeake Bay (transport)
  - Poor survival to at least several months old (unfavorable conditions of salinity, or temperature, mismatch of food, disease, and predation)
  - There is emerging evidence that climate forcing may play an important role.
- There is an ongoing concern of the decade-long decline in recruitment in Chesapeake Bay.
- Menhaden have diminished compared to its historical abundance in the Chesapeake Bay.
- As a prey species menhaden serve a much stronger role then 10 to 15 years ago.
- Menhaden continue to serve an important ecological role although its relative contribution in terms of forage and filtering has diminished because of reduced abundance.

Session 2: Reference points implications for menhaden's ecological role

- The current reference points are related to the coastwide stock. They use fishing mortality and reproductive capacity. They are based on a single species model. These are biological reference points, they do not take into account socioeconomic factors. The reference points are designed for stock replacement.
- There is a need for an additional reference point (threshold) for juvenile abundance (age zeros and ones), which may require management action within a separate fishery within its ecosystem if exceeded.
- The Management Board should task the Technical Committee with exploring the possibility of including the effects of predation mortality on menhaden reference points (Collie and Gislason 2001, Patterson 1992, Washington State Forage Management Plans, for example). Explore the possibility of including the MSVPA results.
- The Management Board has to provide advice to the Technical Committee on its goals and priorities, and identify a spectrum of possibilities to develop ecologically based reference points.

Session 3: Effects of concentrated harvest in the Chesapeake Bay

- Localized depletion occurs when migratory immigration of menhaden is insufficient to replace removals.
- Localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden affects two factors:
  - Availability for predation
  - Filtering capacity

- To determine if localized depletion is occurring, there must be a reference point.
- The localized depletion in the Bay can be characterized both as a forage shortage of recruits and as a shortage of filtering capacity of all ages in the stock.
- The reduction fishery does not directly focus on zeros and ones, but the harvest of the ages 2+ could result in feedback through regional spawning and recruitment processes that impact the Chesapeake Bay.
- Absolute abundance in the Bay and the proportion of age zeros and ones in the Bay is unknown.
- The data that is available to define localized depletion is catch per unit effort (CPUE), the Rhode Island trap survey, the Delaware trawl survey and the pound net survey.
- If abundance declines, purse seine CPUE will not decline at the same rate. A decline in CPUE can be used as a conservative (under estimate) indicator of abundance.
- We are limited in our ability to accurately estimate the probability that localized depletion is occurring. We won't know the probability until we conduct the research that the Technical Committee has outlined.
- The following are risks associated with localized depletion:
  - Reduced forage for predators
  - Reduced filtering capacity
  - Disruption of the food web
  - Within species genetic diversity

Session 4: Recommendations for a revised or new direction in fisheries management

- Examples of how other forage fisheries are managed:
  - The Atlantic herring fishery uses a precautionary approach: optimum yield or OY is 20% less than maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The target is the threshold, which is OY.
  - Off of Tampa Bay, managers closed a three mile corridor for the sardine/anchovy fishery.
  - Some forage fisheries are managed by shutting down the harvest and leaving them for other purposes.
- Given the information presented during this workshop, The Committee offers the following scientific advice to the Board on a revised or new direction in fisheries management:
  1. Time and space closures/openings have potential as a management tool.
  2. Develop reference points specific to Chesapeake Bay
  3. Need to quantify predation mortality and produce estimates of abundance of menhaden to develop ecologically-based reference points
  4. Technical Committee/staff should examine the forage fishery management plans of Alaska, Washington, and California and determine if they can be applied to the menhaden fishery.
  5. The Management Board should task the Technical Committee with exploring the possibility of including the effects of predation mortality on menhaden reference points (Collie and Gislason 2001, Patterson 1992, Washington State Forage Management Plans, for example). Explore the possibility of including the MSVPA results.
  6. A Multispecies Technical Committee should be formed.
  7. Confront the need and potential mechanisms for management that cross single species management boundaries.
  8. Establish values and goals for population utilization that acknowledge ecosystem service and fisheries support provided by the menhaden population.
  9. Have joint meetings between the Management Board and Technical Committee to accomplish above task.
  10. The Technical Committee should evaluate additional reference points to address menhaden's ecological role.
  11. Explore the concept of an escapement based approach, for example, closed seasons, area closures.
  12. Investigate the issue of low recruitment in the Chesapeake Bay and what is causing it. One hypothesis is striped bass predation is reducing YOY abundance prior to YOY surveys. Stomach content field studies and bioenergetic studies can be used to evaluate this hypothesis. Spatial temporal overlap must be taken into account.
  13. The Management Board should charge the Technical Committee to meet with the ecopath/ecosim modelers to

New Hampshire Lobster Dealers Now Beginning to Report Trip-level Data

Almost Half to Report Electronically

New Hampshire lobster dealers are beginning to report trip-level landings, and nearly half plan to use SAFIS, the online data entry tool created by the partners of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP).

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department began preparing for mandatory trip-level reporting of lobster over a year ago. The state asked their 100-plus dealers in 2003 if they were willing and able to report online. While online reporting would be voluntary, some form of trip-level reporting would be mandatory.

The state coordinated the new reporting system with lobster dealers and the ACCSP staff. In December, the 43 dealers using SAFIS received welcome kits with a step-by-step tutorial on a compact disc, fact sheets explaining how to begin reporting and requirements for the dealers' computers, and information on Internet service available in coastal New Hampshire. The state is issuing account information to the dealers and helping them get used to SAFIS during January and February. Reporting will become mandatory in March.

"The fact that so many dealers are voluntarily reporting online is a real testament to the careful, comprehensive approach New Hampshire Fish and Game has taken," says Karina Jolles, Marine Biological Technician for the state. "The dealers had plenty of advance notice and the opportunity to ask questions before reporting was made mandatory. Many of them chose the electronic option to save time and cost."

Other Partners and SAFIS

Three other ACCSP partners have implemented SAFIS. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management mandated reporting of all landings through SAFIS for its dealers in 2002. Maryland followed in 2003 by adopting SAFIS for voluntary real-time quota monitoring for striped bass, black sea bass, and horseshoe crab. The National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Region mandated that its nearly 700 permitted seafood dealers report trip-level landings electronically beginning in May 2004.

New Hampshire's neighboring New England states plan to integrate SAFIS into their reporting systems in 2005 also. Maine, Connecticut and Massachusetts will offer SAFIS to their state permitted dealers as an optional part of a mandatory trip-level reporting system.

New York and New Jersey are working with the ACCSP staff on incorporating SAFIS into their reporting systems.

While the federally permitted dealers in Delaware and Virginia will be required to report landings electronically, those states have no plans to implement SAFIS at this time.

North Carolina is offering its state and federally permitted dealers a SAFIS-compatible reporting software that includes inventory functions.

About the ACCSP

The ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program to design, implement, and conduct marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and to integrate 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 Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the DC Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For further information please visit www.accsp.org or call Abbey Compton at 202.216.5690.

VMRC Special Investigative Unit Receives MAFMC's 2004 Fishery Achievement Award (continued from page 6)

The Council's Law Enforcement Committee solicits nominations for this award and recommends nominees to the Council. The award is designed to recognize individuals and/or entities that exhibit outstanding professionalism, diligence, and effort to protect the living marine resources and/or fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic region through partnership, public education, and/or enforcement actions. The Council is currently seeking nominations for its 2005 Fishery Achievement Award. The Council will accept nominations for the 2005 awards through July 31, 2005. Anyone can submit a nomination and any person or organization can be nominated. Achievements nominated need not relate exclusively to enforcement activities. Other examples of protecting living marine resources include education, conservation, and public service. The Council will evaluate the nominations during its October Council meeting and present the award at its December or January meeting. For more information, go to www.mafmc.org.

ASMFC Protected Species Activities

In October 2004, the Commission's Protected Species Committee, composed of ASMFC Commissioners, and state and federal protected resource specialists, met to discuss relevant marine mammal, sea turtle and seabird issues along the Atlantic coast.

The Committee was formed over two years ago to:

1. Formalize Commission policies regarding protected species and provide oversight of ASMFC protected species activities
2. Improve communication and coordination between state and federal marine protected species and fisheries representatives
3. Facilitate integration of protected species representatives into the Commission's fisheries management planning process

In pursuit of these goals, the Committee adopted the following objectives:

1. Facilitate strong, effective partnerships between endangered (wildlife/nongame) and marine fishery agencies
2. Develop strategies to aid partners in securing long-term funding for protected species conservation programs, including the identification of alternative funding sources to provide additional support to state/federal cooperative efforts in protected species conservation and management
3. Identify ways to improve the Section 6 agreement process (one that meets federal mandates while providing flexibility to the states)
4. Coordinate the incorporation of ASMFC, state fishery and wildlife/nongame agencies, and federal fisheries management councils input into the national recovery planning and implementation process
5. Work cooperatively with state and federal partners to prevent declines in populations of protected species from fishery interactions.

The Committee discussed recent and upcoming protected species issues related to the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program. With the help of NOAA Fisheries, the protected species section of Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan For Winter Flounder was recently completed. Protected species interaction data is currently being gathered to incorporate into Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sea Herring. The Committee was updated on the formal status review of Atlantic sturgeon. Like the last review in 1998, this one will make the determination of whether Atlantic sturgeon should be proposed for listing under the ESA.

Kimberly Damon-Randall from the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Office gave a presentation on NOAA's Candidate Species/Proactive Conservation Program. Last August, the Commission assisted NOAA in conducting a stakeholder workshop on the ESA Species of Concern List.

The Committee discussed several other protected species projects that ASMFC staff are currently involved in. These projects include a state fisheries characterization that is part of the NOAA Fisheries National Sea Turtle Strategy, the marine mammal Take Reduction Teams (TRTs) affecting the Atlantic coast fisheries, a protected species valuation survey that focuses on Atlantic threatened and endangered marine species, and protected species outreach.

Several other topics were discussed because of their applicability to multiple states or need for intra-agency cooperation. Among these topics were changes occurring to Section 6 Agreements under the ESA, the potential effects of ocean windmill farms on protected species, migratory bird interactions with fishing gears, the use of Marine Protected Areas in protecting marine mammals and sea turtles, and funding sources for gear technology/research.

The next meeting of the Protected Species Committee is planned for April 2005. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Griffin, Fisheries Research Specialist, at egriffin@asmfc.org.

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