



ASMFC

# Fisheries *focus*

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## *Menhaden Stock Assessment Peer-Reviewed; Management Board Recommends Development of FMP Amendment*

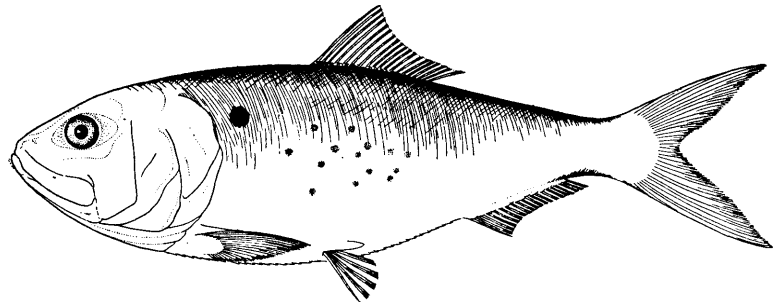
On January 12, 1999, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Atlantic Menhaden Management Board recommended that the Commission begin developing an amendment to the existing Menhaden Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This action followed a presentation of the results of the external peer-review of the Atlantic menhaden stock assessment held November 16-18, 1998, in Baltimore, Maryland. The review supported the assessment methodology for Atlantic menhaden, but recommended enhancements to the assessment and data sources. The review also recommended major revisions to the existing management process, which prompted the Board's action.

The Peer Review Panel concluded that the stock assessment methodology used for Atlantic menhaden was reasonable given the available data. The catch-at-age matrix used in the assessment was based on comprehensive biostatistical sampling with a sufficient broad geographical and temporal range. Specific recommendations by the Panel to improve the assessment include:

1. increasing the number of samples per catch;
2. performing sensitivity analyses on estimates of spawning stock biomass and recruitment by varying natural mortality estimates, including age-specific variations in natural mortality;
3. evaluation of various fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data sets for their utility as tuning indices and to verify estimates derived from the assessment;
4. collecting data on spawning frequency and current size/age at maturity; and
5. developing yield-per-recruit analysis, spawning stock biomass-per-recruit and estimates of biological reference points be developed for future assessments.

The Panel also recommended that alternatives to the Ricker spawner-recruit relationship currently used in the assessment be investigated as well as investigating the precision of the assessment results and management trigger variables using error estimates associated with the catch at age data and catch curve analyses.

The Peer Review Panel expressed concern with recent low levels of menhaden recruitment and suggested that declines in population abundance and spawning stock may continue into coming years. The management process for Atlantic menhaden currently relies on six "trigger variables" to monitor changes in stock size and recruitment in the population. The Panel was concerned that since the majority of these triggers are based on catch data they do not reflect true trends in the population. Additionally, the trigger variables do not result in any direct management and/or regulatory action. Therefore, the Panel recommended replacement of several of these triggers with true biological reference points which would respond to the man-



agement goals and result in regulatory changes in the menhaden management process. Further, the Panel recommended that the biological reference points should address the ecological role of menhaden as a forage base for other species and as a consumer of phytoplankton. The Panel suggested the development of a quota based management system with annual total allowable catch allocated by season and fishing areas. The Board instructed staff to incorporate the Panel's management recommendations as options to be considered in developing the amendment.

The Peer Review Panel supported the research needs identified in the stock assessment report and emphasized the importance of the following: (1) evaluate the effects of environmental factors and predation on menhaden recruitment into the spawn-

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***T***he 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, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

***Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission***

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## Upcoming Meetings

***2/22:***

Tentative ASMFC Atlantic Herring Technical Committee and Plan Development Team, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

***2/22:***

ASMFC American Lobster Management Board, Providence Biltmore, Kennedy Plaza, Providence, Rhode Island; (800)294-7709 or (401)421-0700.

***2/23 - 25:***

ASMFC American Eel Technical Committee and Plan Development Team, Best Western Old Colony Inn, 615 First Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (703)739-222.

***2/23 & 24:***

ASMFC Nearshore Trawl Survey Vessel Acquisition Workshop, Providence Biltmore, Kennedy Plaza, Providence, Rhode Island; (401)421-0700.

***2/24 & 25:***

ASMFC Nearshore Trawl Survey Data Management Workshop, Providence Biltmore, Kennedy Plaza, Providence, Rhode Island; (401)421-0700.

***2/24 & 25:***

New England Fishery Management Council, Radisson Hotel, New London, Connecticut.

***3/1 - 5:***

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sea Palms Resort, St. Simon's Island, Georgia.

***3/3 & 4:***

U.S./Canada Lobster Summit III, Samoset Resort, Rockport, Maine. For more information, contact: Patrice Farrey at (617)573-0748.

***3/9 - 11:***

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Wilmington Hilton, Claymont, Delaware.

***3/15 - 18:***

ASMFC Meeting Week (***Preliminary*** Meetings -- Habitat Committee, Northern Shrimp Section, Weakfish Management Board and Advisory Panel, Tautog Management Board, Bluefish Management Board, Summer Flounder, Scup & Black Sea Bass Management Board, Striped Bass Management Board and Advisory Panel, American Eel Management Board, Horseshoe Crab Management Board), Ramada Plaza Hotel, Alexandria, Virginia; (703)683-6000.

A sort of organizational existentialism has pervaded much of the thinking of the upper levels of private and government institutions over the past decade. Who are we? What are we trying to do? Where are we going? When will we know we are there? Why are we doing all of this anyway? How are we going to do it? This is called "strategic planning."

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission undertook this kind of introspection, not because some think tank thought it would be good, but because many Commissioners – to say nothing of their fisheries constituencies – recognized that "this was not your grandparents' ASMFC anymore." Amid the maze of boards, committees, panels and meetings that the Commission sponsored, it was – and continues to be – important to understand how all of this makes sense.

Over the next few months I am going to take the opportunity to take a close look at the Commission's new strategic plan. Like any good plan, it begins with a solid assessment of AFMFC's mission. The Compact that established the Commission is as relevant today as it was almost sixty years ago. The purpose of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is:

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

The states are in a unique position to promote and protect the public's interest in the valuable coastal fisheries resources. In most instances, they are the level of government that is closest to the people with the authority to take effective action. The states all realize that they are not able, acting alone, to protect their citizens' interests in these resources. Because marine fish species move among many states, sometimes over wide ranges, each state knows that it needs the cooperation of its sister states in order to be successful. In the long run, the interests of the many and the interests of the individual, are the same. The Commission is nothing more, nothing

less, than the place where the states come together to define what needs to be done to accomplish their mutual interests; and to pledge to work together to effectively pursue these goals.

The strategic plan looks at a number of things that are going on in the world today that present special challenges to the states as they undertake this effort together. Fishery resources are under amazing pressure. Fishermen are better at what they do than ever before; and their ability to catch fish is unprecedented. The demand for seafood, and for fishing as recreation, has been increasing steadily. The problem of the last two decades has been that rather than resolve the legitimate public policy questions this poses, too often we have chosen the course of fishing mortality rates that could not be sustained. Fish stocks need more protection than we have been giving them. Today the watchword for fisheries policy, and much of environmental policy, is "sustainability." We can discuss what this means at length; but at a minimum, the focus on "sustainability" at least demonstrates that there is a building consensus that the intensive rates at which we have been harvesting too many of our valuable fishery resources is wrong for America; including in the long run, its fishermen.

Another challenge for the states is the recognition by the federal government that the states have a unique capability to protect coastal fishery resources. By enacting the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, Congress adopted the states' mutual approach to conserving and managing these fish species. The federal government knows that it needs the states as full partners in addressing marine fisheries, and created a special role for the states working together through the Commission. This is a true opportunity for the states to step forward to responsibly care for so many of the fishery resources that we all share.

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## From Executive Director's Desk (continued from page 3)

Yet another challenge for the states is the manner in which the relationship between the people on the one hand, and their government at all levels on the other, is being redefined. Old models where agencies perhaps took public comment, but in the end just did whatever they wanted, are falling by the wayside. In their place is a recognition that government is not above the people, but among it. What is important is not making decisions about fisheries, but leading a process for many interested parties to discover the decisions that best serve the public as a whole.

And so the world is changing. The problems are becoming, at the same time, both different and more difficult. And yet the challenges and opportunities are clearly in front of the states as they continue to pursue their mutual partnership in coastal fisheries conservation and management.

*Next Month: The Vision and Shared Values that Guide the States*

### Dieter Busch Named New ISFMP Director; John Field Promoted to Assistant Director of the ISFMP

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission today announced that it has hired W. Dieter N. Busch to be its new Director of the Interstate Fishery Management Program (ISFMP). Mr. Busch is a career federal employee with three decades of service in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in various research, management and administrative positions. He is currently the Chief of the Lower Great Lakes Fishery Office in Buffalo, New York.

"Dieter Busch will bring a depth of experience and managerial background that will directly help the states, and will help the staff to be even more responsive," said the Commission's Executive Director, John H. Dunnigan, who made the appointment. "His energy and enthusiasm are impressive. The states, and our federal agency partners, will be well served by this appointment."

Mr. Busch has spent most of his career with the USFWS in the Great Lakes. He also served for two years as a coastal zone coordinator in the USFWS office in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Recently, Mr. Busch assisted the Commission with the prepara-

tion of its new draft fishery management plan for American eel. As Director of the ISFMP, Mr. Busch will be responsible for supporting the work of sixteen different boards, and their associated committees and subcommittees, that develop and monitor the implementation of policy among states on the Atlantic coast to conserve and manage valuable marine species.

Mr. Dunnigan also announced that the Commission was promoting John D. Field to become the Assistant Director of the ISFMP. Mr. Field has been with the Commission for over five years and has been responsible for its anadromous species fishery management planning, including striped bass, shad, river herring, Atlantic sturgeon and eel. "John Field has developed an impressive record of working hard to support cooperative state-federal management of coastal fisheries," said Mr. Dunnigan. "As Assistant Director, John will bring these energies to bear on helping to manage the program of bringing the states together to identify and promote their mutual interests in the conservation and management of valuable fishery resources."

The Commission was formed in 1942 the states along the Atlantic coast to help promote and protect their mutual interest in valuable marine fishery resources. The Commission carries out a program that allows the states to work with each other and with their federal agency partners to address the needs of coastal fishery resources with respect to conservation and management, research, statistics, habitat and law enforcement coordination. Under the ISFMP, the Commission undertakes cooperative regulatory planning for a wide range of interjurisdictional coastal fishery resources.

These appointments are expected to be effective approximately March 1, 1999.



# Menhaden Stock Assessment Peer-Reviewed; Management Board Recommends Development of FMP Amendment (continued from page 1)

ing stock; (2) develop and test methods for estimating the size of juvenile year-classes using fishery-independent surveys; and, (3) continue monitoring landings, size, gear, and harvest area in the reduction and bait fisheries, and determine age composition by area. In addition to these research needs, the Panel recommended that: (1) historical trends in growth be analyzed; (2) Monte Carlo simulations be conducted to evaluate precision of the assessment; (3) the feasibility of estimating year-class strength using a biologically stratified design be investigated; and (4) alternative measures of effort such as spotter pilot logbooks, trip length, or other variables, be evaluated.

The Menhaden Board's recommendation to develop an amendment will be forwarded to the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Policy Board this spring for its consideration and prioritization. In anticipation of the Policy

Board's approval, the Menhaden Board will solicit nominations for a Menhaden Plan Development Team which will begin drafting a Public Information Document (PID). The PID will broadly outline the intent of the Commission to amend the current FMP, provide background information and solicit public opinion and ideas as to how best manage this resource. Public information meetings are likely to be held in early to mid-summer, following the Commission's Spring Meeting, scheduled for May 17 - 20, 1999, in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

The Advisory Report and accompanying Stock Assessment Report will be published and should be available from the Commission shortly. To obtain copies of the reports, or for more information concerning the menhaden peer review, please contact: Dr. Joseph Desfosse, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400.

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## NAS Begins Study on Improving the Collection and Use of Fisheries Data

The National Academy of Sciences began a congressionally mandated study on improving the collection and use of fisheries data. An eleven-person committee will conduct the study using summer flounder as a case study. The committee held its first meeting on January 25 & 26, 1999, in Washington, D.C. At this meeting presentations were made on sources of summer flounder data, summer flounder stock assessments, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, and the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey.

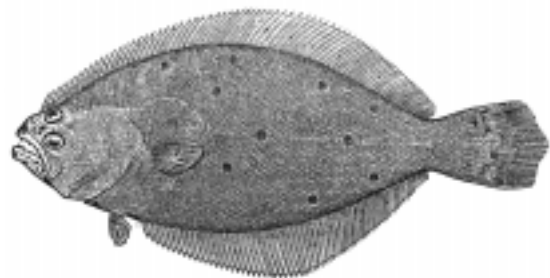
The committee plans to have two more meetings during the course of the study. A public comment period will be conducted on March 5, 1999 as part of the second meeting. The final report of the committee will be completed for distribution in late 1999.

The list of the committee members follows:

Patrick Sullivan, Cornell University, *Chair*  
Kenneth Able, Rutgers University  
Cynthia Jones, Old Dominion University  
Karen M. Kaye, U.S. Geological Survey  
Barbara Knuth, Cornell University  
Brenda Norcross, University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Estelle Russek-Cohen, University of Maryland

John Sibert, University of Hawaii at Manoa  
Stephen Smith, Bedford Institute of Oceanography  
Steven K. Thompson, Pennsylvania State University  
Richard Young, Fishermen, Crescent City, California  
John Pope, Natural Resources Consultants (Europe), *Consultant*

For more information, please contact: Bob Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400.



## Atlantic Herring Amendment Certified by Section; IWP Allocations Set for 1999

On January 11, 1999, the Atlantic Herring Section gave final certification to *Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan* (FMP). The full Commission had adopted the Amendment during its Annual Meeting last October contingent upon final certification by the Section. This action was necessary due to the desire to have complementary management regimes in both federal and state waters, and differences between the Commission's and New England Fishery Management Council's meeting schedules. The Council approved its suite of management measures for submission to the National Marine Fisheries Service in December and the Section subsequently approved minor adjustments to Amendment 1 in order to be consistent with the Council's FMP.

Under Amendment 1, states are required to submit their management programs for Atlantic herring by April 1, 1999 with implementation scheduled for on or before June 1, 1999. The herring fishery will be managed primarily through a total allowable catch (TAC) system, with TACs set for individual management areas. As the catch nears the TAC in each area, a regimen of effort control measures or days out of the fishery, are slated to be implemented through the federal plan in order to slow the catch and provide a steady supply of herring for the sardine canneries, bait for the lobster fishery, and other uses.

The Section also gave final approval for the 1999 state allocations of Internal Waters Processing (IWP) operations. Initial IWP (and Joint Venture Processing) allocations for each management area had been developed in conjunction with the Council's Atlantic Herring Committee last September. The following IWP allocations were approved: Management Area 1 (Gulf of Maine) - 5,000 metric tons (mt) for Massachusetts, with the harvest to come from subarea 1B (offshore Gulf of Maine); Management Area 2 (South Coastal Area) - 2,500 mt for Massachusetts south of Cape Cod; 10,000 mt for Rhode Island; 5,000 mt for New Jersey; and 2,500 mt kept in reserve for subsequent requests from any state. As specified in Amendment 1, future recommendations for IWP allocations for each upcoming fishing season are scheduled to be developed during a June meeting held jointly with the Council's Herring Committee.

Amendment 1 is undergoing final editing and will be available from the Commission by the end of February. A source document for Amendment 1 is also in preparation and will include more in-depth analyses and technical information used during the development of Amendment 1. The source document is slated for completion in late spring or early summer. For more information please contact: Dr. Joseph Desfosse, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 319.

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## Winter Flounder Board Recommends Developing Amendment

On January 11, 1999, the Winter Flounder Management Board recommended that an amendment to the current fishery management plan (FMP) be developed, primarily to address differences in the overfishing definitions and rebuilding schedules between the Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council FMPs. The recommendation will be forwarded to the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board this spring for its consideration and prioritization. The Board also suspended any consideration of state compliance with measures to reach the next management goal of attaining  $F_{40}$  (40 percent maximum spawning potential) while the amendment is being developed. This action is contingent upon states maintaining their current management programs although, states may impose stricter regulations if they so desire.

The Board did receive some good news from Dr. Terry Smith (National Marine Fisheries Service) concerning the recent Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) results. According to

the SARC, the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stock complex continues to rebuild despite an increase in fishing mortality during 1998. Recruitment has been fair recently and this, coupled with a decrease in fishing mortality beginning in 1993, has allowed the overall stock and spawning stock biomass to increase. The SARC reports will be published following the public review workshops to be held during the New England Fishery Management Council's January 27-28 meeting and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's meeting February 2-4.

For more information please contact: Dr. Joseph Desfosse, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400, ext. 329.

# Canadian Drilling Moratorium on Georges Bank Set to Expire; U.S. Officials Urge Re-enactment

The Canadian moratorium on petroleum exploration and drilling that has protected the marine resources of Georges Bank is set to expire in January 2000. U.S. officials have responded by urging the Canadian government to continue the moratorium in order to maintain protection for marine resources in both Canadian and U.S. waters.

Georges Bank is an area of fairly shallow waters in the Gulf of Maine, located between Cape Cod and the southwest tip of Nova Scotia. Jurisdiction of the area is geographically split between the U.S. and Canada by the "Hague line," which was established in 1984. The Bank is recognized as one of the most highly productive continental shelf areas of the world and supports valuable fisheries, as well as endangered marine mammals. It has also been identified as an area with potential value for hydrocarbon production.

The moratorium was first established in 1988 in response to public outcry regarding industry attempts at exploratory drilling. In mid-1998, the U.S. extended its own moratorium on offshore oil and gas development in the area into the year 2012. Review of this issue by Canadian officials is entrusted to a panel appointed by the Ministers of Natural Resources for Canada and Nova Scotia. Their report is due to the Ministry by July 1, 1999.

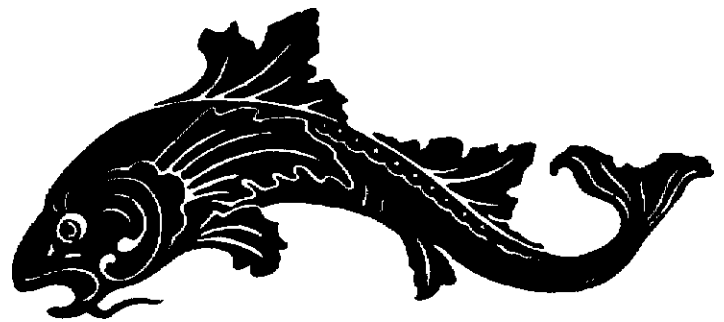
The primary steward for U.S. marine resources is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA Administrator D. James Baker has urged the Canadian government to extend their moratorium. "The review of Canada's current moratorium is central to NOAA's environmental stewardship efforts on Georges Bank and in the Gulf of Maine and waters off southern New England," stated Dr. Baker in a letter to the Review Panel. "We strongly encourage Canada to extend the moratorium."

Georges Bank is one of the most productive areas for New England groundfish and scallop fisheries, many of which are severely struggling. Intense fishing pressure by an aggressive and resourceful fishing fleet has severely depressed Georges Bank stocks of cod and haddock. Stringent regulations imposed by the New England Fishery Management Council and Canadian government have just begun to show some effect, with recent signs of stock recovery. Dr. Baker stated, "Although much of Georges Bank is currently closed to harvesting in both U.S. and Canadian waters, there are promising signs of recovery for these severely depleted stocks. NOAA would not want to see that progress jeopardized by the threat of environmental harm from hydrocarbon development."

Endangered marine mammals including the North Atlantic right whale, humpback whale, fin whale, sperm whale and sei whale are also threatened by drilling activities. Potential impacts to these species include acoustic disturbances which could effect whale communication, disruption of food chains, and an increase in ship strikes, thought to be the largest source of human related mortality to northern right and humpback whales.

Eastern Canadian waters have recently become active in oil and gas development. Productive fields are in operation off Newfoundland, Labrador, and Nova Scotia. The industry has substantially contributed to the strained economies of areas formerly supported by the ailing fishing industry. It is expected that the oil and gas industry will seek to lift the Georges Bank moratorium, and extend development in this area as well. The prospect of oil and gas development on what has historically been prime fishing grounds could be another hardship that leads to the end of a long fishing tradition for the New England and Nova Scotian groundfishing fleets.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has joined the U.S. government (through NOAA) in its request for a moratorium extension. Comments from Massachusetts and Maine are also expected to emphasize the fisheries resources of the area, and press the Canadian government to continue the moratorium. Individual and organizational input in the form of public comment may be provided by February 10, 1999 to: John Mullally, Chair, Georges Bank Review Panel, P.O. Box 698, Halifax, Nova Scotia, CANADA, B3J 2T9.



# 1999 Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Measures

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recently issued the final specifications for the 1999 summer flounder, scup, and black sea commercial fisheries. The recreational harvest limits for these three species have also been set. The commercial specifications and recreational harvest limits are set by NMFS based on the recommendations of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council). The Commission and the Council have made recommendations for the specifications of the recreational fishery, which are currently being reviewed by the NMFS for approval.

## Summer Flounder

The summer flounder commercial quota for 1999 has been set at 11.11 million pounds coastwide, which is unchanged relative to 1998. The minimum fish size is 14-inches for the commercial fishery and the minimum mesh size is 5 ½-inch diamond or 6-inch square mesh throughout the body, extension(s) and codend portions of the net. The commercial quota is allocated to the states based on the percentages in the fishery management plan (FMP). State quotas will be reduced as required by the FMP for any state overages of the 1998 quota. Table 1 contains the preliminary state commercial quotas for 1999; adjustments have not yet been made due to any individual state overages.

**Table 1. Preliminary 1999 State Commercial Quotas for Summer Flounder**

<u>State</u>	<u>Percent Share</u>	<u>Quota (lb)</u>
Maine	0.04756	5,285
New Hampshire	0.00046	51
Massachusetts	6.82046	757,842
Rhode Island	15.68298	1,741,583
Connecticut	2.25708	250,791
New York	7.64699	849,680
New Jersey	16.72499	1,858,363
Delaware	0.01779	1,977
Maryland	2.03910	226,570
Virginia	21.31676	2,368,569
North Carolina	27.44584	3,049,589
TOTAL	100.00000	11,111,191

Many of the states have implemented regulations that set aside a portion of their state commercial quota to allow landing of summer flounder that is caught incidentally in fisheries targeting other species. States have also implemented various trip

limits and seasonal limits. Please contact the appropriate state fisheries agency for further details.

The 1999 recreational harvest limit is 7.41 million pounds, which is also unchanged relative to 1998. Due to overages in the recreational fishery in 1998, the Commission and the Council have recommended a combination of size limits, possession limits, and seasonal closures that would achieve a 40 percent reduction in recreational landings. The Commission and Council have recommended a 15-inch minimum size, and 8 fish possession limit, and a closed season from September 12 to May 28. This recommendation also includes a provision of conservation equivalency such that the states could adopt different combinations of size limits, possession limits, and seasonal closures in order to meet the required 40 percent reduction. Many states are currently developing alternative regulations to achieve the required reductions in landings. Contact the appropriate state fisheries agency to determine the status of any changes.

## Scup

The scup commercial quota for 1999 is 2.534 million pounds coastwide. The commercial quota is divided into three periods during the year; Winter I (January – May), Summer (May – October), and Winter II (November – December). Table 2 contains the quotas and trip limits for the three different periods.

**Table 2. 1999 Scup Quota Allocation**

<u>Period</u>	<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Trip Limit (lbs)</u>
Winter I (Jan.-May)	1,143,087	12,000 (1,000 @85%)
Summer (May-Oct.)	986,993	Set by States
Winter II (Nov.-Dec.)	403,920	4,000
TOTAL	2,534,000	

The trip limit for the Winter I period is 12,000 pounds and will drop to 1,000 pounds once 85 percent of the quota is landed. The minimum fish size for the commercial scup fishery is 9-inches. The minimum otter trawl mesh size of 4 ½-inch diamond mesh when in possession of 200 pounds or more of scup from November 1 through April 30 or 100 pounds of scup from May 1 through October 31.

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# Striped Bass Board Reviews State Proposals & Discusses Long-term Management Strategies

The Striped Bass Management Board met on January 13, 1999 to discuss alternative state fishing proposals for 1999 and long-term management strategies for striped bass.

The Board approved a 17 percent increase in Delaware's commercial quota for this year, after reviewing data that indicated this would not result in any exceedance of the fishing mortality target. The state had previously demonstrated to the Technical Committee that the exploitable portion of the Delaware River stock would grow by 11 percent over 1998 levels, and that fishing mortality for these fish was five percent under the target level established in Amendment 5.

The Board also considered a proposal from the three Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions (Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission) to increase the Bay-wide quota (sport and commercial) by six percent. The proposal was based on the same model as the Delaware proposal, and indicated that the exploitable Chesapeake stock has grown by 50 percent since 1998 while fishing mortality was below target levels in 1997. The Chesapeake states have been monitoring fishing

mortality for several years through localized tagging studies conducted each fall, but the Technical Committee has recently raised some concerns over how the data are analyzed to get a final estimate of fishing mortality. The Bay states have agreed to reexamine their data and provide a new report to the Commission by the end of January. After considering all the information at hand, the Board voted to not approve the 1999 Bay-wide quota increase.

The Management Board finished its January meeting by discussing long-term strategies for the striped bass program after the year 2000. The participating states are trying to maintain a regulatory status quo for the next two years, while they reconsider current allocation schemes and fishery qualities. The Board is scheduled to meet at every Commission meeting week in 1999, in conjunction with several Advisory Panel and Technical Committee meetings, to resolve these issues and develop another amendment to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Striped Bass.





For more information, please contact: John Field, Anadromous Species Coordinator, at (202)289-6400.

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## New Commission Publications Now Available

Four new reports are now available from the Commission. They are:

-  1998 Annual Review of Interstate Fishery Management Plans (December 1998);
-  Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab (December 1998);
-  Stock Assessment Peer Review Process (October 1998); and
-  Terms of Reference & Advisory Report for the Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessment Peer Review (December 1998).

To obtain a copy of any of these publications, please contact: Edith Carr, Staff Assistant, at (202)289-6400.

## Preparation of American Lobster Addendum 1 Continues

The American Lobster Management Board met on January 12-13, 1999 to begin discussions on Addendum 1 to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American Lobster. The topics included *de minimis* specifications and a trap tag system. At the next meeting, the Board will discuss the inclusion of the Lobster Conservation Management Teams' proposals and monitoring and reporting requirements. The Board will meet again on February 22, 1999 at the Providence Biltmore, Rhode Island to approve a draft Addendum 1 for public comments.

For more information, please contact: Amy Schick, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400, ext. 317.

# *Atlantic Coastal News Bites*



**North Cape Oil Spill Lawsuit.** On January 18, 1999, the Rhode Island Lobstermen's Association filed a \$40 million federal lawsuit, claiming financial losses in the oil-related mortality of 12 million lobsters, 82 million crabs, and 81 million crabs, from the January 1996 North Cape oil spill. [Boston Globe]

**Lands Legacy Initiative.** On January 13, 1999, the Clinton Administration announced a \$1 billion Lands Legacy Initiative as part of the FY2000 budget proposal, including \$183 million to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This would provide \$29 million to expand and protect national marine sanctuaries; \$90 to assist states in protecting and restoring coastal lands; \$19 million to states for estuarine protection; and \$45 million to restore coral reefs (\$10 million for restoring damaged reefs in Florida, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories), fisheries (\$25 million for the National Marine Fisheries Service to acquire and protect critical coastal habitat), and marine habitat (\$10 million for use of Corps of Engineers dredged spoil to restore coastal habitat). [NOAA press release]

**Sustainable Fisheries Report.** On January 13, 1999, the Marine Fish Conservation Network, a coalition of 88 environmental groups, released a report entitled "Missing the Boat" criticizing the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and regional fishery management council implementation of the 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act. NMFS contends that it has not finished reviewing many recommendations from regional councils. [Los Angeles Times, Tampa Bay Tribune]

**Federal Lobster Regulations.** On January 11, 1999, the National Marine Fisheries Service proposed regulations for lobster fishing in federal waters to protect lobster populations off New England and the mid-Atlantic regions. The regulations strive to make fishing in federal waters consistent with state rules and include a limit of 1,000 lobster traps that an individual may set, regardless of whether the individual fishes in state or federal waters. Proposed regulations would also require fishermen to declare whether they would set traps in either nearshore or offshore areas, and would require traps be modified to allow smaller lobsters to escape. [Boston Globe]

**Lobster Disease.** In early January 1999, federal and University of Maine scientists announced that the bacteria responsible for killing hundreds of Maine and New Brunswick lobsters in 1998 had been identified as *Vibrio fluvialis*. [Boston Globe]

**Gulf of Maine Harbor Porpoise.** On January 5, 1999, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published notice that it was withdrawing its earlier proposal to list the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy harbor porpoise population as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. NMFS found that such listing was not warranted at this time. [Federal Register]

**HMS Management Plan Public Hearings.** The National Marine Fisheries Service announced a series of public hearings on amendments to highly migratory species (HMS) management plans to protect and rebuild Atlantic billfish, swordfish, sharks, and tunas. The hearings are scheduled to be held between February 3 and March 4, 1999, at coastal locations from Maine to Texas — <http://www.nmfs.gov/sfa/prorules.html>. [NOAA press release]

**New England Groundfish.** On January 28, 1999, the New England Fishery Management Council met to select which of three options would be recommended to reduce cod catch by 80 percent in the Gulf of Maine. Estimated costs (economic loss) of these options ranges from \$19.9 million to \$21.8 million, with small-boat inshore fishermen particularly vulnerable. National Marine Fisheries Service scientists estimate that Gulf of Maine cod stocks have declined by 85 percent since 1994. After 14 hours of debate, the Council voted to halve the daily cod catch in the Gulf of Maine from 400 pounds per vessel to 200 pounds, and prohibit fishing with all gear capable of catching groundfish within 30 miles of shore off parts of the coast from Maine to the top of Cape Cod Bay. Coastal waters would be divided into four sections to be closed one at a time on a rolling basis in May, June, October, and November. The new restrictions are proposed to be implemented in May 1999. Critics claim these proposed restrictions favor larger Maine vessels to the disadvantage of smaller New Hampshire and Massachusetts vessels. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists reported to the Council that New England flounder and hake stocks were also not recovering. [Boston Herald, Boston Globe, Assoc Press, Reuters]

The above information was downloaded from HDRFISH@listserv.tamu.edu, a service of the Human Dimensions in Recreational Fisheries Committee of Texas A&M University, Wildlife and Fisheries Department.

# 1999 Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Measures (continued from page 8)

The 1999 recreational harvest limit for scup is 1.24 million pounds. The Commission and the Council have recommended that the recreational specifications remain status quo for 1999, i.e., a 7-inch minimum fish size, no possession limit, and no closed season.

## Black Sea Bass

The 1999 commercial quota for black sea bass is 3.025 million pounds coastwide. The black sea bass coastwide commercial quotas by quarter and associated trip limits for 1999 are presented in Table 3.

Quarter	% of Quota	Quarterly Quota (lb)	Trip Limit (lb)
1 (Jan. – Mar.)	38.64	1,168,860	11,000
2 (Apr. – June)	29.26	885,115	7,000
3 (July – Sep.)	12.33	372,983	3,000
4 (Oct. – Dec.)	19.77	598,043	4,000
TOTAL	100.00	3,025,000	

The specifications for the black sea bass commercial fishery are unchanged for 1999; 10-inch total length minimum fish size, a minimum mesh size of 4.0-inch with a threshold of 1,000 pounds, and escape vent size of 1.125 x 5.75-inch rectangular, 2.0-inch circular, or 1.5-inch square.

The 1999 recreational harvest limit is 3.14 million pounds. Both the Commission and the Council have recommended to NMFS that the minimum size for black sea bass be set at 10-inches with no possession limit and no closed season. This recommendation will remove the two-week seasonal closure that occurred in August of 1998.

For more information, please contact: Bob Beal, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400, ext. 318.



# NOAA Releases It's Requested FY 2000 Budget

On February 1, 1999, the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released its requested budget of \$2.5 billion for fiscal year (FY) 2000, a 13 percent increase of about \$290 million over the current appropriation. The increase is slated to extend NOAA's many accomplishments in 1998, from issuing weather and climate forecasts during a strong El Nino season to managing our nation's ocean and marine resources, which culminated in last year's National Ocean Conference in Monterey, California. It will also support a number of departmental, interagency and presidential initiatives.

Compared with the FY 2000 base, significant resource changes in the FY 2000 budget include:

- \$131.1 million to continue the president's commitment to restore the health and wealth of America's fisheries and protect species in danger of extinction.
- \$78.1 million to support the Year of the Ocean Initiative, an outgrowth of the National Ocean Conference. This will help to promote new scientific insight into the oceans, sustain fisheries and other marine resources, provide new opportunities for economic growth, and protect fragile coastal communities and ecosystems, such as coral reefs, from damage and environmental degradation. This includes \$51.6 million to design and acquire the first of four new fisheries research vessels.
- \$32 million of the \$105 million Lands Legacy Initiative will promote "smart growth" strategies along America's coast. Fifteen million is also included in the Lands Legacy to strengthen protection at the 12 existing National Marine Sanctuaries, and to enhance America's marine resource protection through planning for future sanctuaries. An additional \$14.7 million is devoted to the anticipated doubling of the protected areas covered by the National estuarine Research Reserve Initiative.
- \$42.1 million in support of the Administration's Natural Disaster Reduction Initiative, to conduct critical activities to reduce and mitigate the direct and indirect costs of natural disasters.
- \$28.1 million to enhance significantly NOAA's oceanic and atmospheric research capabilities.
- \$22 million for the Administration's Clean Water Initiative, focusing on polluted runoff and growing outbreaks of pfiesteria and other harmful algal blooms, hypoxia and other systems of degraded coastal ecosystems.

NOAA's FY 2000 budget request is available on the Internet at <http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/budget2000>. For more information, contact Susan Weaver at (202)482-2610.

## ASMFC Comings & Goings

**Lee Benaka** — Lee joined the Commission staff this January through a contract with the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Sustainable Fisheries, Highly Migratory Species Management Division. Under the contract, Lee will be working on three tasks: (1) assisting the Longline Advisory Panel; (2) developing and implementing a tracking and appeals process for the swordfish and shark limited access program; and (3) providing expertise and support in the development of a National Fishery Observer Competencies Standard.

Lee received his masters' degree in marine affairs from the University of Rhode Island. He worked as a Sea Grant Fellow at the American Fisheries Society prior to working at the Commission. There he worked on fish habitat, specifically, essential fish habitat policy. He also organized a symposium on fish habitat and edited a proceedings volume based on the symposium which is expected to be published by the American Fisheries Society in March 1999. The Commission would like to welcome Lee on board and wish him good luck with his new baby which is due in March!

**Michael Cahall** -- Beginning February 3, 1999, Michael Cahall will join the Commission staff in the capacity of Information Systems Program Manager for the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). Michael will be working out of the National Marine Fisheries Service headquarters office in Silver Spring, Maryland, which is where the ACCSP prototype is currently housed. Mike will be working with the ACCSP contractor to further develop and implement the central ACCSP data management system. He will also work very closely with the state and federal ACCSP partners to assist with moving localized databases into the ACCSP system.

Mike has over 10 years of experience in database administration and information systems project management. He recently worked for American Radiology and has a long-term work history with the National Weather Service. We would like to welcome Mike to the Commission and look forward to the wealth of computer expertise he will bring to both the Commission and the ACCSP!

**Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission**  
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*Return Service Requested*