



ASMFC

# FISHERIES *focus*

Volume 21, Issue 1  
January 2012

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission • 1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA

*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 February 6 - 9, 2012**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel Old Town  
901 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, Virginia  
703.683.6000**

### **Final Schedule**

The agenda is subject to change. The agenda reflects the current estimate of time required for scheduled Board meetings. The Commission may adjust this agenda in accordance with the actual duration of Board meetings. Interested parties should anticipate Boards starting earlier or later than indicated herein.

#### February 6, 2012

1:00 - 5:00 PM Legislators and Governors' Appointee Workshop with Blank Rome

#### February 7, 2012

8:30 - 10:30 AM American Lobster Management Board

- Public Comment
- Draft Addendum XVII for Final Approval (*T. Kerns*) **Final Action**
  - Review Lobster Conservation Management Team Proposals (*T. Kerns*)
  - Technical Committee Report (*J. Carloni*)
  - Law Enforcement Committee Report (*M. Robson*)
  - Consider Final Approval of Addendum XVII
- Review of Draft Addendum XVIII
  - Plan Development Team Progress on Draft Addendum Document (*T. Kerns*)
  - Technical Committee Report (*J. Carloni*)
- Overview of Technical Committee Discussion Regarding New Jersey Stock Assessment Proposal (*T. Kerns*)

10:45 AM - 12:45 PM Shad & River Herring Management Board

- Public Comment
- Consider Approval of Amendment 3 American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plans **Action**
  - Technical Committee Report (*L. Miller*)
- Consider Approval of 2012 American Shad Bycatch Request **Action**
  - Technical Committee Report (*L. Miller*)
- Update on River Herring Bycatch Avoidance Project by Sustainable Fisheries Coalition, School of Marine Science and Technology, and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries Collaborative Project (*D. Bethoney*)

*continued on page 6*

### **Inside This Issue**

**Species Profile: Winter Flounder**  
Page 4

**ASMFC Northern Shrimp  
Section Revises 2012 TAC to  
2,211 MT** Page 7

**ASMFC & MAFMC Set 2012  
Specifications for Summer  
Flounder and Scup** Page 7

**Science Highlight: Northeast  
Area Monitoring and Assess-  
ment Program** Page 10

**ASMFC Employee of the  
Quarter Named** Page 11

**On the Legislative Front**  
Page 11

**ASMFC Comings and Goings**  
Page 12

**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 diadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

*Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission*

Paul J. Diodati (MA), Chair  
Dr. Louis B. Daniel, III (NC), Vice-Chair

John V. O'Shea, Executive Director  
Robert E. Beal, Director, Interstate Fisheries Management Program  
Patrick A. Campfield, Science Director  
Laura C. Leach, Director of Finance & Administration

Tina L. Berger, Editor  
tberger@asmfc.org

703.842.0740 Phone • 703.842.0741 Fax  
www.asmfc.org

## Upcoming Meetings

**1/26 (1:30 PM):**

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel conference call. Call 888.394.8197 (passcode 499811) to join the conference call.

**1/30 (3 PM):**

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee conference call. Call 888.394.8197 (passcode 499811) to join the conference call.

**1/31 - 2/2:**

New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Harbor-side, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

**2/6 - 9:**

ASMFC Winter Meeting, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; 703.683.6000.

**2/14 - 16:**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, 3001 Atlantic Ave., Virginia Beach, Virginia.

**3/5 - 9:**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Savannah Hilton DeSoto, 15 East Liberty Street, Savannah, Georgia.

**3/26 - 30:**

ASMFC Technical Meeting Week, location to be determined.

**4/10 - 12:**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Sanderling, 1461 Duck Road, Duck, North Carolina; 252.261.7743.

**4/24 - 26:**

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, Connecticut.

**4/30 - 5/3:**

ASMFC Spring Meeting, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; 703.683.6000.

**6/11 - 15:**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Renaissance Orlando Airport Hotel, 5445 Forbes Place, Orlando, Florida; 800.545.1985.

**6/12 - 14:**

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton New York, 1335 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York; 212.586.7000.

**6/19 - 21:**

New England Fishery Management Council, Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland, Maine.

## Looking Ahead

The start of the New Year is an opportunity to pause and consider the challenges that might lie ahead. For our Commission, a number of issues come to mind but several stand out due to their importance, complexity, and high stakeholder interest. Here is a quick summary of three of those challenges.

**Atlantic Menhaden** – Last November our management board voted to adopt new reference points establishing a maximum spawning potential (MSP) threshold of 15% and a target of 30%. Based on the 2010 stock assessment update, the current MSP level is approximately 8%. In plain language, the board intends to increase recruitment and expand the stock by requiring more fish be left in the water. While the specific percent reduction has not yet been determined, it could be quite substantial. The board has committed to incorporating the new threshold level in 2013 management measures.

The challenge ahead will be to develop measures to reach these goals. Although the Virginia reduction fleet takes about 80% of the harvest, the bait fishery from Maine to North Carolina as well as Florida accounts for the remaining 20%. In addition to purse seines, the bait fishery uses pound nets and gillnets, and operates in bays and sounds as well as the ocean. The obvious issues involve deciding whether to allocate the harvest reduction across all fisheries or to certain sectors and, in the face of reductions, establishing standards for catch monitoring, reporting, and accountability. Given the value of this fishery, as well as the diversity of state monitoring programs, these will be difficult questions to resolve.

**River Herring** – While there are a few bright spots of local river herring abundance, the outlook in most areas is bleak. Productivity of river systems previously described in millions of pounds of fish is now measured in dozens of fish. Late last year, in response to an Endangered Species Act (ESA) petition, NOAA Fisheries determined sufficient concern existed to conduct a review of the status of the stock for possible listing under ESA. The Commission's river herring stock assessment, scheduled for completion in May, is expected to be included in the NOAA review.

Regardless of what the review concludes, it seems there is potential for the current management of river herring to change. The challenge ahead will be to devise measures to react to those changes. For example,

lawsuits have been filed against the Commission and NOAA Fisheries alleging shortcomings in the efforts to protect and conserve river herring. At a minimum, the ESA listing process will increase public interest and focus on river herring management.

This could increase scrutiny on the states' sustainable harvest plans for river herring. In some cases, recent changes in state salt water license programs have removed funding available for state managers to monitor their directed fisheries on anadromous species. It will also raise interest in the level of observers and the amount of bycatch for those state and federal fisheries known to have river herring bycatch. Finally, a finding indicating river herring require protection under the ESA could trigger the need for significant management changes to state and federal fisheries currently operating in the proximity of river herring. The impacts to state fisheries could be significant as river herring are found from Maine to Florida.

**Atlantic Striped Bass** – The 2011 stock assessment update recently presented to the board indicated the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. In addition, Maryland and Virginia reported that after several years of apparently poor recruitment, their 2011 young of the year indices appear to be some of the highest on record.

While the assessment and indices reports were positive and cited as reasons for the board to defer initiating new conservation measures, not everyone was happy. Gulf of Maine states continue to express concern about the lack fish and low harvest levels in their region. The 2010 recreational catch estimate of 8.37 million fish (includes number of fish landed and released) is the lowest on record since 1995, and represents a 70% decline from the peak in 2006, raising the concern of both anglers and some managers.

The challenge ahead will be for the board to determine how to deal with these apparently conflicting signals and stakeholder concerns. The next benchmark stock assessment is scheduled for 2013. While some will want to wait for those results, others may argue for earlier precautionary action.

These are but three issues; there are more ahead of us. Identifying the challenges is often easy. Solving them is usually hard. That is why working together is so important; hopefully, that is something we can all agree to do.



**Winter Flounder**  
*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*

**Common Names:**

\* **Blackback, lemon sole, flat fish, mud dab, black flounder**

**Identification:**

\* **Dark coloring and eyes on right side of the body (termed “right-eyed”, “right-sided”, or “right handed” flounder.**

**Interesting Facts:**

\* **Generally the darkest of all GOM flat fishes**  
 \* **Winter flounder grow largest in GBK and smallest in GOM**  
 \* **High site fidelity (attachment to specific sites) creates potential for local extinction**

**Largest Recorded: 25”, 8 lbs., 2 oz.**

**Oldest Recorded: 14 years (www.fishbase.org)**

**Stock Status:**

\***GOM - overfished status unknown and overfishing is not occurring**  
 \***SNE/MA - overfished and**

## **Species Profile: Winter Flounder** **Depleted SNE/MA Stock in Early Stages of Rebuilding**

### **Introduction**

In 2008, the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stocks were at an all time low – 9% of the target biomass. To end overfishing and rebuild the stock, the Secretary of Commerce prohibited retention of SNE/MA winter flounder and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) implemented bycatch limits in state waters. Since then, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) established sector management for groundfish and a benchmark stock assessment was completed in 2011. Management efforts have been successful in increasing biomass but the stock is far from rebuilt.

### **Life History**

Winter flounder is an estuarine flatfish found in almost all shoal water habitats along the northwest Atlantic coast. The geographic distribution ranges from nearshore habitats to offshore fishing banks along the Atlantic coast of North America.

The name ‘winter’ flounder refers to their annual spawning migrations into nearshore waters in winter. Adults migrate in two phases; an autumn estuarine immigration prior to spawning, and a late spring/summer movement to either deeper, cooler portions of estuaries or to offshore areas after spawning. This pattern of seasonal distribution may change in the colder waters of the northern extent of the range where they migrate to shallow water in the summer and deeper waters in the winter. The annual spawning period varies geographically and although spawning periods overlap considerably, peak spawning times are earlier in southern locations.

During spawning, females release demersal (negatively or neutrally buoyant) adhesive eggs whose properties facilitate retention within spawning grounds. Many factors influence larval and juvenile growth and survival, including temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, and food availability. Nursery habitat for winter flounder larvae and juveniles is typically littoral and sublittoral saltwater coves, coastal salt ponds, estuaries, and protected embayments; although larvae and juveniles have also been found in open ocean areas such as Georges Bank and Nantucket shoals. Larvae are predominantly found in the upper reaches of natal estuaries in early spring, moving into the lower estuary later in the season.

Adult growth rates vary between stock units. Fish from the offshore Georges Bank stock typically grow faster and larger than fish from the inshore areas. Maximum age appears to decrease from north to south over the winter flounder’s range as well.

Winter flounder are an essential component of



Winter Flounder in Eelgrass, Dawn McReynolds, NYSDEC

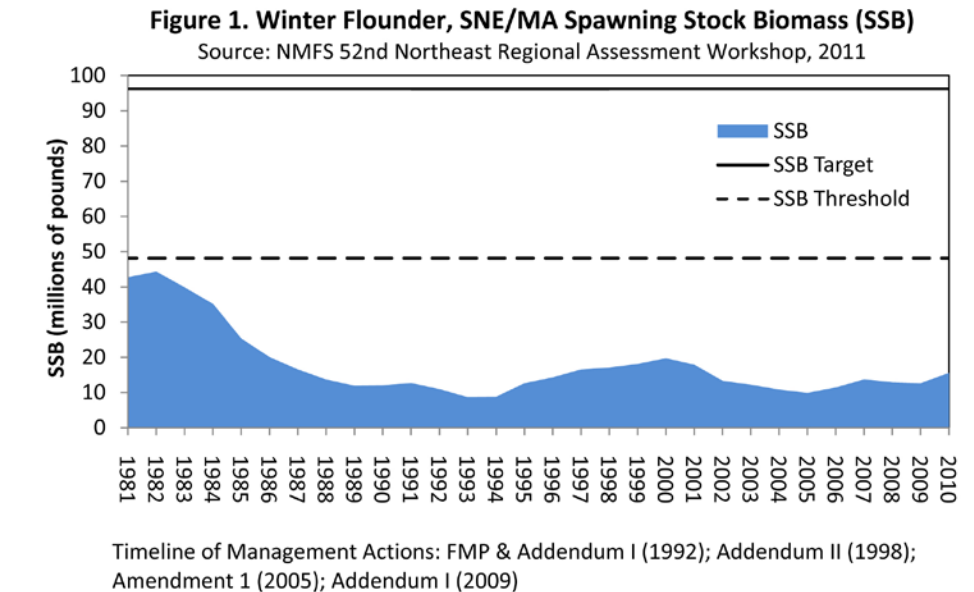
estuarine assemblages throughout most of their geographic range. Estuarine habitats provide spawning areas for adults, juvenile nursery habitat, and juvenile and adult foraging area. Young of the year (YOY) and juveniles reside permanently in the estuaries while adults may leave the estuary during warm summer months. While estuaries provide good habitat for spawning, predatory and competitive interactions may occur frequently in these areas due to the high number of organisms found there. Additionally, the nearshore grounds are vulnerable to water pollution and habitat loss.

Tagging studies have shown spawning-site fidelity in winter flounder, meaning that individuals will often return to the location where they were hatched, or close by. What this suggests is that sub-populations of winter flounder may be vulnerable to localized depletion.

Sources of natural mortality for winter flounder include predation, parasites, disease, and competition. Predatory fish such as striped bass, bluefish, toadfish, and summer flounder, as well as birds, invertebrates, and marine mammals prey on larvae and juveniles. Atlantic cod, spiny dogfish, goosfish, and winter skate are the main predators of adult winter flounder. Little skate, smooth dogfish, hakes, sea raven, striped sea robin, striped bass, bluefish, and wrymouth also consume adult winter flounder in smaller amounts. Diet is limited by the winter flounder's small mouth size and reliance on sight to locate prey (called sight feeding). Feeding occurs solely during the day but intensifies during ebbing and flooding tides. Adults feed mostly on small invertebrates, shrimp, clams, and worms. At night, winter flounder lie flat with their eye turrets retracted until sunrise.

## Stock Status

Winter flounder stocks were most recently assessed at the 52nd Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SAW/SARC 52) in 2011. Consistent with previous assessments and management



delineations, three regional assessments were produced: Gulf of Maine (GOM), SNE/MA, and Georges Bank (GBK). The GOM stock occurs in the coastal waters north of Cape Cod, while the SNE/MA stock occurs in coastal waters south of Cape Cod. The offshore GBK stock does not fall under Commission management, and is managed solely by the Council and NMFS. The GBK stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.

### Gulf of Maine

Overfishing was not occurring in 2010 and the overfished status is unknown for the GOM stock. The statistical catch-age model could not account for conflicting trends in the catch and survey information, and was not accepted by the review panel who determined the outputs were not reliable enough for stock status determination. Consequently, fishing mortality (F) and spawning stock biomass (SSB) reference points could not be generated. To determine overfishing status, a proxy  $F_{\text{threshold}}$  was generated and the SAW/SARC 52 concluded that overfishing was not occurring in 2010 based on the proxy  $F_{\text{threshold}}$ .

Similar to the 2011 SAW/SARC, the GOM assessment failed review in 2008 at the GARM III. The most recent biological reference points for the stock were generated in 2003 at the SARC 36 but it is inappropriate to compare the 2010

exploitation rate and previously generated reference point values.

### Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic

In 2010, the SNE/MA stock was overfished but not experiencing overfishing. SSB was estimated to be 15.6 million pounds in 2010, about 16% of the  $SSB_{\text{target}}$  ( $SSB_{\text{MSY}}$ ) of 96.3 million pounds, an improvement from 9% of  $SSB_{\text{target}}$  in 2007 (see Figure 1). Fishing mortality in 2010 was estimated to be 0.051, well below the  $F_{\text{threshold}}$  ( $F_{\text{MSY}}$ ) of 0.29.

### Atlantic Coastal Management

The Commission and Council manage winter flounder with complementary management plans that regulate state and federal waters based on fisheries and the biology of winter flounder. The Council includes winter flounder as part of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP), which includes several highly valuable commercial species such as cod and yellowtail flounder. Federal management focuses on the commercial fishery because the bulk of harvest in federal waters is from that sector. The Commission's FMP is designed to protect spawning females (the most productive part of the population) when they have migrated to inshore state waters spawning grounds because they are easy to locate and catch when congregated for spawning.

*continued on page 8*

# ASMFC 2012 Winter Meeting Final Agenda (continued from page 1)

## 10:45 AM - 12:45 PM Shad & River Herring Management Board (continued)

- Review and Discuss NEFMC Draft Amendment 5 (*L. Steele*)
- Review and Discuss MAFMC Draft Amendment 14 (*J. Didden*)
- Discuss and Develop Public Comment Guidance on Federal Amendments
  - NEFMC Amendment 5
  - MAFMC Amendment 14
- Election of Vice-Chair **Action**

## 2:00 - 4:00 PM Atlantic Herring Section

- Public Comment
- Update of 2010 Final Landings (*C. Vonderweidt*)
- Select Preferred Alternatives in NEFMC Amendment 5 (*L. Steele*)
- Technical Committee Review of Spawning Regulations (*M. Cieri*)

## 4:15 - 5:45 PM Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board

- Public Comment
- Review Interstate Watershed Task Force Recommendations **Possible Action**
  - Law Enforcement Report (*M. Robson*)
- Review of Connecticut Alternative Management Plan Implementation (*K. Taylor*)
- Election of Vice-Chair **Action**

## February 8, 2012

### 8:30 - 9:15 AM Bluefish Management Board

- Public Comment
- Draft Addendum I for Final Approval **Final Action**
  - Review Options (*M. Waine*)
  - Public Comment Summary (*M. Waine*)
  - Consider Final Approval of Addendum I
- Elect Vice-Chair **Action**

### 9:30 - 11:30 AM Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

- Public Comment
- Technical Committee Report (*J. Brust*)
  - Landing Scenarios to Achieve New Reference Points
- Consider Approval of Draft Public Information Document to Amendment 2 for Public Comment (*M. Waine*) **Action**
- Multispecies Technical Committee Overview of Management Decision Analysis (*H. Townsend*) **Action**
  - Review Recommendation to Adopt Decision Analysis Framework for Developing Ecological-based Reference Points
- Review and Populate Membership to the PDT and Committee on Economics and Social Sciences (*M. Waine*) **Action**

### 11:45 AM - 12:45 PM Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board

- Public Comment
- Consider Approval of State Summer Flounder Recreational

## Proposals Action

- Technical Committee Report (*J. McNamee, T. Kerns*)
- Consider Approval of State Scup Recreational Proposals **Action**
  - Technical Committee Report (*J. McNamee, T. Kerns*)
- Draft Addendum XXII for Final Approval **Final Action**
  - Review Options (*T. Kerns*)
  - Public Comment Summary (*T. Kerns*)
  - Technical Committee Report (*J. McNamee*)
  - Advisory Panel Report
  - Consider Final Approval of Addendum XXII
- Review and Populate Committee on Economics and Social Sciences Membership (*T. Kerns*) **Action**

## 2:00 - 5:00 PM Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Policy Board

- Public Comment
- Compliance Committee Report (*J. Gilmore*)
- ASMFC Commissioner Survey Results (*R. Beal*)
  - Summary of Results
  - Discuss Next Steps
- Discussion on Policy Board Involvement in Species Management (*R. Beal*)
- Update on MRIP Re-estimation of Recreational Catch (*G. Colvin*)
- Report on ASMFC Assessment Capacity (*P. Campfield*)

## 5:15 - 6:15 PM Tautog Management Board

- Public Comment
- Review State Implementation of Addendum VI
- Update on Approved State Regulations (*C. Vonderweidt*)
- New Jersey Commercial Size Proposal and Technical Committee Review (*J. McNamee*) **Action**
- Update of Tautog Aging Review (*K. Drew*)

## February 9, 2012

### 8:30 - 10:00 AM Horseshoe Crab Management Board

- Public Comment
- Draft Addendum VII for Final Approval **Final Action**
  - Review Options (*D. Chesky*)
  - Public Comment Summary (*D. Chesky*)
  - Delaware Bay Ecosystem Technical Committee Report (*J. Brust*)
  - Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel Report (*J. Cooper*)
  - Shorebird Advisory Panel Report (*S. Karpany*)
  - Law Enforcement Committee Report (*M. Robson*)
  - Consider Final Approval of Addendum VI

### 10:15 - 11:15 AM Weakfish Management Board

- Public Comment
- Technical Committee Report (*L. Paramore*)
  - Update on North Carolina Conservation Equivalency
- Consider 2011 FMP Review and State Compliance

(*M. Waine*) Action

- Review and Populate Committee on Economics and Social Sciences Membership (*M. Waine*) Action

#### 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board

- Public Comment
- Consider Approval of Black Drum Public Information Document for Public Comment (*D. Chesky*) Action
- Review State/Regional Quota White Paper (*D. Chesky*) Possible Action
- Discussion of Future Red Drum Assessment and Management (*L. Daniel*)

#### 1:00 - 3:30 PM Spiny Dogfish & Coastal Sharks Management Board

- Public Comment
- Review Spiny Dogfish Overfishing Definition and Technical Committee Recommendations (*C. Vonderweidt*)
- 2011 SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR 21) for Dusky, Sandbar, and Blacknose Sharks
  - Assessment Overview (*G. Skomal*)
  - Technical Committee Review of Results (*G. Skomal*)
  - Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Rulemaking to Implement SEDAR 21 Results (*K. Brewster Geisz*)
  - Technical Committee Management Recommendations (*G. Skomal*)
- Upcoming HMS Shark Management Actions (*K. Brewster Geisz*)
- Review Shark Conservation Act of 2010 (*C. Vonderweidt*)
- 2011/2012 Spiny Dogfish Fishery Performance (*C. Vonderweidt*)
- Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Sharks Technical Committee Appointments (*C. Vonderweidt*)

#### 3:45 - 4:15 PM ISFMP Policy Board (continued)

- Public Comment
- Review of Non-compliance Findings (if necessary)

#### 4:15 - 4:45 PM Business Session

- Public Comment
- Review of Non-compliance Findings (if necessary)

## ASMFC Northern Shrimp Section Revises 2012 TAC to 2,211 MT

The Commission's Northern Shrimp Section has revised the total allowable catch (TAC) for the 2012 northern shrimp fishery to 2,211 mt, an increase of 211 mt from the originally established TAC. The Section modified the TAC to address harvester and processor concerns regarding their ability to maintain markets that have been established over the past few seasons. The Section maintained all other fishery specifications for the 2012 season, including the Monday/ Wednesday/Friday landing days and closure of the fishery when landings are projected to reach 95% of the TAC (2,100 mt). Maine may consider conservation equivalency alternatives to the current 1,000 lb trip limit for its trap fishery.

"The Section took its action to partially offset the economic impacts of the reduced season to northern shrimp harvesters and processors," stated Section Chair Terry Stockwell of Maine. "However, it also cautioned industry that it remains concerned about the projected status of the resource, with below average strength of upcoming year classes, and the potential for restricted seasons in the near future."

While the new TAC is in excess of the Technical Committee recommended TAC of 1,834 mt, it is projected to equate to a fishing mortality rate consistent with the management program's fishing mortality threshold ( $F_{\text{threshold}}$ ) of 0.41. Any fishing above the  $F_{\text{threshold}}$  would lead to overfishing of the stock. The Section will meet on February 2nd in Portsmouth, New Hampshire to monitor the rate of landings and determine whether any further changes to the season specifications are warranted.

The Section also initiated development of an addendum to consider possible changes to the management program's biological reference points and rebuilding schedule, as well as to explore issues related to management by area, harvest set asides, limited entry, and catch controls (quotas). The draft addendum will be developed over the next few months. For more information, please contact Mike Waine, FMP Coordinator, at 703.842.0740 or mwaine@asmfc.org.

## ASMFC & MAFMC Set 2012 Specifications for Summer Flounder and Scup

In mid-December, the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to revise catch and harvest limits for summer flounder and scup. Both the Board and Council had set limits for the 2012 fishing year in August, however, updated stock assessments released in October indicated that the previous limits for summer flounder and scup were too high. The Board and Council adopted a recreational harvest limit of 8.76 million pounds for the summer flounder fishery. Although the 2012 harvest limit represents a 26% decrease from the 2011 limit, landing estimates indicate that the recreational fishery only landed 5.61 million pounds in 2011. As a result, some states may still liberalize regulations in 2012. The Board adopted a commercial quota of 13.1 million pounds

The Board also adopted and the Council recommended a recreational harvest limit of 8.45 million pounds for the scup fishery – nearly double the 2011 limit of 4.4 million pounds. The Board adopted a commercial quota of 31.9 million pounds.



Photo: Kevin Sullivan, New Hampshire Fish & Game

## Winter Flounder Species Profile (continued from page 5)

limits, limited access, and days-at-sea restrictions.

Considerable management changes occurred in 2009 following the 2008 peer-reviewed benchmark assessment, which estimated the SNE/MA stock at 9% of the target biomass. To rebuild the depleted stock, the Commission initiated Addendum I to Amendment 1 (Addendum I), the Secretary of Commerce prohibited retention of SNE/MA winter flounder

through interim action, and the Council included measures to incorporate the assessment results into Amendment 16 to the Groundfish FMP (Amendment 16).

Rather than prohibit possession of winter flounder, resulting in increased discard mortality and loss of fishery-dependent data, the Commission opted to establish bycatch-only possession limits for the SNE/MA stock. Addendum I limits recreational fishermen to 2 fish and commercial fishermen can land a maximum of 50 pounds (or 38 fish) in the SNE/MA. For the GOM, Addendum I required states to reduce recreational fishing mortality by 11% and established a 250 pound commercial trip limit.

The Council's Amendment 16, effective May 1, 2010, prohibits retention of SNE/MA winter flounder and established an annual catch limit (ACL) for the GOM stock based on the GARM III results. While these reductions were significant, their impact pales in comparison to the establishment of groundfish sectors in Amendment 16, which reinvented federal groundfish effort control. Prior to sectors, effort was controlled by restricting the number of days a vessel was allowed to fish each year by allocating them days-at-sea. Sectors are a catch share program where limited access permit holders formed "sectors" that receive an annual groundfish allocation based on the landings history of its members. Each sector

creates its own rules to allocate catch to its members, avoid exceeding catch limits, and minimize discards which are counted against their allocation. A common pool sub-ACL was created for vessels that did not join a sector and their effort is controlled through days-at-sea allocations. A state sub-ACL accounts for catch in state waters by state-permitted fishermen. If the state sub-ACL is exceeded, other sub-ACL component may be reduced.

The Council's Framework 47 to the Groundfish FMP, currently in the draft stage of development, will establish ACLs for the 2012-2014 fishing years (May 1 – April 30) based on the results of the SAW/SARC 52 and revise status determination criteria for groundfish stocks. Its measures are not expected to impact winter flounder regulations, however, because retention of SNE/MA winter flounder will remain prohibited, and the GOM stock was not experiencing overfishing in 2010.

### Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

Historically valuable to commercial and recreational fishermen throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic, winter flounder fisheries are a mere fraction of what they once were. Total landings (commercial and recreational) in both areas peaked in the early 1980s at approximately 10 million pounds for GOM and 36 million pounds for SNE/MA. Today, as a result of stringent regulations, landings in both areas are significantly reduced, with total landings in 2010 in GOM and SNE/MA estimated at approximately 414,000 pounds and 445,000 pounds, respectively.

Over the last decade, commercial harvest has accounted for about 90% of total fishing mortality with half of the commercial landings occurring in state waters. Additionally, the vast majority of commercial harvest (~98%) has been taken by fishermen who possess a federal groundfish permit. The majority of the recreational harvest occurs in state waters.

The Commission and Council use stock area-specific management measures for both the recreational and commercial sectors of the fishery. The variability in biology, as well as current and historical exploitation patterns, necessitate the delineation of the range of winter flounder into stock units where growth, seasonal movement, and female maturity schedules are similar enough to be modeled as one group. Within these stock groups, winter flounder move across state boundaries and between state waters and the EEZ. Of the three winter flounder management areas, only the GOM and SNE/MA fall within state jurisdiction.

The Commission significantly reduced fishing on state waters spawning grounds in 2005 when Amendment 1 to the Interstate FMP for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder (Amendment 1) replaced all previous winter flounder management documents. Amendment 1 established a minimum size limit, shortened seasons, and lowered trip/bag limits to reduce fishing pressure on spawning fish and rebuild the spawning stock biomass to target levels. Amendment 1 complemented Amendment 13 and Framework 42 to the Groundfish FMP, which focused on offshore commercial fisheries (3 – 200 miles). Its goal is to rebuild overfished stocks by reducing fishing mortality and minimizing adverse effects on all essential fish habitat with seasonal closures, gear restrictions, minimum size limits, trip



## Gulf of Maine

Otter trawls and gillnets are the primary commercial gear types in GOM winter flounder fishery. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, commercial landings fluctuated around 2.2 million pounds. In 1982, landings peaked at just over six million pounds and then declined steadily to approximately 770,000 pounds in 1999 (see Figure 2). This decline may be attributed to extended spring closures in the GOM. From 2000 to 2004, landings were around 1.5 million pounds. Landings have been below one million pounds since 2005, and reached a record low of 308,000 pounds in 2010. The commercial fishery accounted for over 90% of total harvest from 1995 to 2007, but has dropped to between 73 and 80% of total harvest over the last three years.

GOM recreational landings fluctuated between one and 3.5 million pounds in the early 1980s before declining below 200,000 pounds in 1991 and remaining between 150,000 and 200,000 pounds through 1996 (see Figure 3). From 1997 to 2007, recreational landings dropped below 100,000 pounds. An almost four-fold increase in recreational landings occurred from 2007 to 2008 when landings increased from approximately 57,300 to 227,000 pounds. 2010 recreational landings were around 106,000 pounds.

## Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic

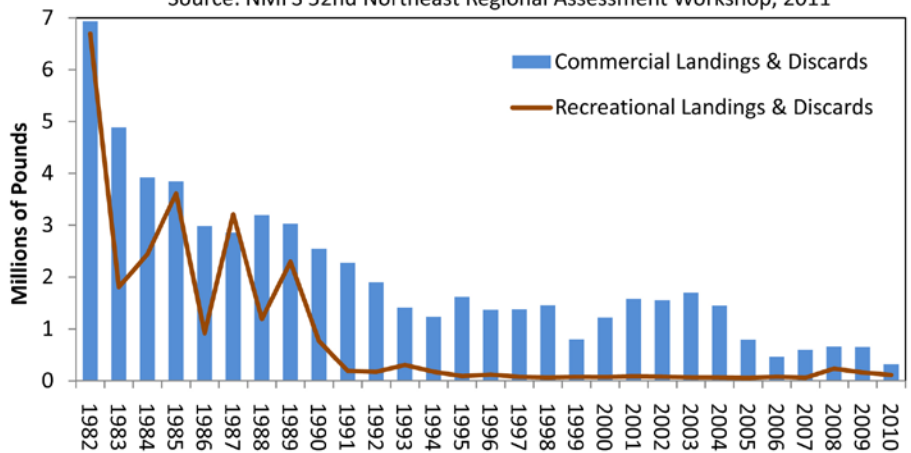
Prior to the 2009 federal waters retention prohibition, otter trawls were the primary gear type used by commercial fishermen to catch winter flounder in the SNE/MA area. Commercial landings from the SNE/MA stock averaged 18.7 million pounds from 1964 to 1972 before declining to around 10.6 million pounds throughout the mid- to late 1970s. Landings increased in the early 1980s to a record high of 24.6 million pounds and then declined to 20 year low of 4.7 million pounds in 1994. For the next seven years, landings increased steadily and exceeded 10 million pounds in 2001. Commercial landings decreased for the next few years until settling between two and three million pounds from 2004 to 2008. Time series low landings occurred in 2009 and 2010 (~597,400 and 383,600 pounds) as a result of the federal waters retention prohibition and state waters 50 pound commercial bycatch limit. The commercial fishery accounts for roughly 90% of total harvest in the SNE/MA since 1998.

Most recreational landings in the SNE/MA stock occur from January to June. They were around six million pounds in the early 1980s, increasing to 12 million pounds in 1985, and then steadily declined to between one to two million pounds (with the exception of a couple years) from 1992 to 2001. Landings further decreased to less than 500,000 pounds in 2002 and below 300,000 in 2005; by 2010 landings fell to an historical low of ~62,000 pounds. Similar to the commercial SNE/MA landings, this decline is likely due to the retention prohibition in federal waters and 2 fish bag limit in state waters.

For more information, please contact Christopher Vonderweidt, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at 703.842.0740 or [cvonderweidt@asmfc.org](mailto:cvonderweidt@asmfc.org).

**Figure 2. Winter Flounder Gulf of Maine Landings and Discards**

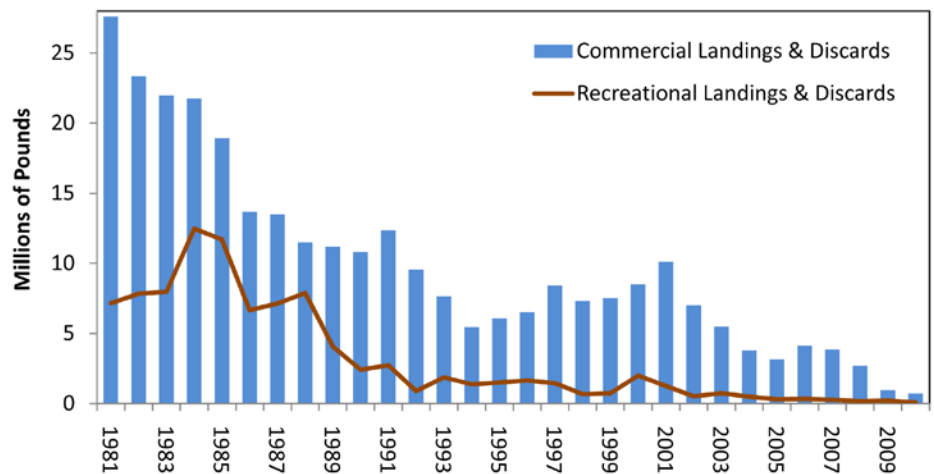
Source: NMFS 52nd Northeast Regional Assessment Workshop, 2011



Note: The 52nd Northeast Regional Workshop did not accept the analytical assessment model used to evaluate the status of the Gulf of Maine stock of winter flounder; therefore, landings are being provided as a proxy for stock status.

**Figure 3. Winter Flounder SNE/MA Landings and Discards**

Source: NMFS 52nd Northeast Regional Assessment Workshop, 2011



Timeline of Management Actions: FMP & Addendum I (1992); Addendum II (1998); Amendment 1 (2005); Addendum I (2009)

# Science Highlight: NEAMAP Region-wide Program Continues to Build Fishery-independent Time Series

## Introduction

The Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) is a cooperative state-federal fishery-independent research and data collection program established in 1998 for the coastal waters of Maine to North Carolina. The program was developed to respond to the lack of a complete biological data for important vertebrate and invertebrate marine species and the need to better coordinate surveys and data use for this region. The primary tool to improve regional survey coverage has been the NEAMAP Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) Nearshore Trawl Survey that was piloted in 2006 and has completed surveys in spring and fall of each year, beginning in fall 2007.

## Overview of Surveys

Further improvements in the region-wide nature of the program were endorsed by the NEAMAP Board in 2011, by including the Maine-New Hampshire (ME/NH) Inshore Trawl Survey as well as the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) Inshore Bottom Trawl Survey as part of NEAMAP. The objective of all NEAMAP surveys are to provide long-term estimates of abundance, biomass, length composition and age structure, diet composition, and other critical stock assessment parameters for the various marine species of management interest in this region.

### *NEAMAP SNE/MA Nearshore Trawl Survey*

The NEAMAP SNE/MA Nearshore Trawl Survey samples inshore waters from Cape Hatteras, NC, northward to Martha's Vineyard, MA. In 2011, research scientists from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science completed spring and fall trawl surveys, working aboard the *F/V Darana R*, a commercial fishing vessel owned and operated by Captain James Ruhle. Each survey in 2011 conducted tows at 150 locations in depths ranging from 3-25 fathoms. Nearly six million individual fish and invertebrates, representing over 175 different species, have been collected during the nine full-scale surveys completed. Individual length measurements were recorded for more than 620,000 animals and laboratory processing is proceeding on the 36,000 stomach samples and 49,000 aging structures (ear bones, vertebrae, spines) collected in the field. Data has been provided for assessments and research for black sea bass, bluefish, scup, spiny dogfish, summer flounder, winter flounder, Atlantic sturgeon, river herring, Atlantic croaker, black drum, spot, weakfish, Atlantic sea scallop, butterfish, Loligo squid, and skates.

### *ME/NH Inshore Trawl Survey*

Since October 2000, the ME/NH Inshore Trawl Survey has been conducted in the spring and fall off the coastal waters of

ME and NH. The survey is performed by the ME Department of Marine Resources aboard the commercial vessel, *F/V Robert Michael*. This collaborative research between scientists and the fishing industry samples 120 tows per season, with 20 stations being fixed. The survey provides seasonal abundance indices, catch at length data, and distribution charts for approximately 25 species of finfish and invertebrates. Data has been provided for use in the American lobster and winter flounder stock assessments as well as for management of Atlantic herring, northern shrimp, American shad, sea scallop, monkfish, and Jonah Crab.

### *MA DMF Inshore Bottom Trawl Survey*

The MA DMF Inshore Bottom Trawl Survey has been completed every spring and fall over the last 34 years, beginning in 1978. In spring 1982 the survey moved aboard the *R/V Gloria Michelle*, which is staffed by NOAA Corps officers. This is the same vessel and crew that has conducted the Northern Shrimp Survey since 1984. Over this time, they have completed 6,482 successful stations in Massachusetts territorial waters from New Hampshire to the Rhode Island border. Over 169 species of finfish and invertebrates have been recorded, collecting over 69,000 age samples. ASMFC managed stocks utilizing these indices for stock assessments include lobster, horseshoe crab, scup, black sea bass, summer flounder, tautog, and winter flounder.

The wealth of data collected by all these surveys is critical to many managed species in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. Survey data can be used to complement results from the NEFSC trawl survey, which samples in deeper, offshore waters of the Mid-Atlantic and New England.

## Database Web Portal

NEAMAP SNE/MA has recently added a web portal to portions of its growing database. Summaries of the program's fish food habits records are now available in an online searchable format which provides fish diets by predator species, year, age, and state of capture, in units of either prey weight or prey number. Improvement to this page and access to other portions of the database are in the works. The portal can be accessed here [www.vims.edu/fisheries/mrg](http://www.vims.edu/fisheries/mrg) and more specifically [www.vims.edu/fisheries/fishfood](http://www.vims.edu/fisheries/fishfood). A recent VIMS press release about NEAMAP SNE/MA (<http://www.vims.edu/newsandevents/topstories/neamap.php>) contains a link to the online database.

The NEAMAP website, [www.neamap.net](http://www.neamap.net), has links to the NEAMAP surveys websites with information for obtaining data as well as other information on the NEAMAP program. For more information, please contact Melissa Paine, NEAMAP Coordinator, at [mpaine@asmfc.org](mailto:mpaine@asmfc.org).

## Toni Kerns Awarded ASMFC Employee of the Quarter



For nearly nine years, Toni Kerns has promoted the Commission's Vision of "healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015" through her critical support to the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Policy program. Her efforts have resulted in the development of Addendum V to the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan and the approval of Addendum XVII to initiate rebuilding of the Southern New England lobster stock. In recognition of these accomplishments, Toni was named Employee of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2011. The award is intended to recognize contributions and qualities in the areas of teamwork, initiative, responsibility, quality of work, positive attitude, and results.

As Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, Toni coordinates the management for some of the Commission's more contentious stocks, including those of

Atlantic menhaden, American lobster, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. For the last half of 2011, Toni worked long hours under considerable stakeholder pressure to coordinate the development of Addendum V to the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan. She conducted the majority of state public hearings (a total of 10 were held) and summarized over 90,000 public comments. In addition, Toni coordinated the approval of Addendum XVII for the Southern New England lobster stock, and kept the specification setting process on track for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.

Throughout the complexities and challenges of these recent projects, Toni maintained a positive and productive attitude. Her ability to anticipate and address potential problems has prevented management delays, and her efforts have resulted in a strong ISFMP team. She has a Master's in Coastal Environmental Management from Duke University and a Bachelor of Science in Geology from Colgate University. As Employee of the Quarter, she received a \$500 cash reward, a small gift, and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personal record. In addition, her name is on the Employee of the Quarter plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Toni!

---

## On the Legislative Front

On November 18, 2011, President Obama signed H.R. 2112, the "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act," into law, establishing the budget for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for FY 2012. Under NOAA, the National Marine Fisheries Service was allocated \$794 million for FY 2012, of which \$31.855 million was directed towards Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions. The funding level is equal to that received for FY 2010, when the NMFS budget was \$928 million. The change in the NMFS budget between FY 2010 and FY 2012 represents an approximate 14% decrease, whereas Commission and Council funding remained the same. Appropriations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were extended through December 16, 2011 as part of H.R. 2112. Full FY 2012 Ap-



propriations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, H.R. 2055, which was signed into law on December 23, 2011. Overall funding declined from \$1.503 billion in FY 2011 to \$1.478 billion for FY 2012. This decline represents a 1.7% decrease from the previous fiscal year. State and tribal wildlife grants declined by 0.7% from FY 2012, and funding for Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation declined by 2.5%. For more information, please contact Danielle Chesky, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [dchesky@asmfc.org](mailto:dchesky@asmfc.org).

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201-2196

*Return Service Requested*

## ASMFC Comings & Goings

**Patten White** -- Early this year, lifelong lobsterman and industry advocate Patten White stepped down as Maine's Governor Appointee to the Commission. During his 16-year tenure as Commissioner, Pat actively participated in the proceedings of the Commission's Legislators and Governor Appointees and Legislative Committee. He also served on several species management boards/sections, and chaired the Atlantic Menhaden and American Lobster Boards, and the Northern Shrimp Section. His tenure culminated in being presented with the Commission's highest recognition, the Captain David H. Hart Award, for his untiring work in supporting the Commission's Vision and advancing sustainable fisheries management.

In addition to his work with the Commission, Pat earned national recognition as an industry leader for his efforts to strengthen



and direct the Maine Lobstermen's Association. Pat also served as a Pew Ocean Commissioner, one of two commercial fishermen to do so. He subsequently worked with his fellow Commissioners to develop a comprehensive report detailing specific actions and changes needed in national policy to address identified problems. Pat's unquenchable enthusiasm and optimism for doing the right thing coupled with his passionate commitment to resource sustainability and a healthy

fishing industry will be sorely missed. We wish him the very best.

**Stephen R. Train** -- The Commission welcomes Stephen Train as Maine's Governor Appointee to the Commission. A full-time commercial lobsterman for 23 years, Stephen has also been actively involved in the fisheries management process at both the state and interstate level. He spent 16 years on the Board of Directors of the Maine Lobstermen's Association and served as a member and Chair of the Maine Lobster Advisory Council. He also sat on the Maine Department of Marine Resources Advisory Council, Maine Scallop Advisory Council, and the Commission's American Lobster Advisory Panel.

Stephen attended Northeastern University and has a 100-ton Captain's license. He lives in Long Island, Maine with his wife Marci and two daughters, Hattie and Rosie. Welcome aboard, Stephen!