



ASMFC

Fisheries *focus*

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

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



ASMFC Approves Amendment 6 to Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass

On February 26, 2003, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved Amendment 6 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. Four years in the making, the new Amendment charts the course for management of a healthy and viable striped bass resource. After years of constrained effort, recreational and commercial fishermen will begin to realize the benefits of a restored resource. The recreational harvest has the potential to increase by 10 to 15 percent starting in 2004 (if all coastal states increase to a two fish bag limit). The quota for the coastal commercial fishery will increase by 43 percent in 2003; this increase represents four percent of total striped bass landings from recent years.

To ensure that these increases do not jeopardize the recovery gains of the last two decades, the Amendment implements a control rule that establishes target and threshold levels for the fishing mortality rate and female spawning stock biomass. Essentially, the fishing mortality rate target and threshold mirror those contained in Amendment 5. The female spawning stock biomass target and threshold are new, however, and provide another important indicator of the health of the resource. Currently, the female spawning stock biomass is about 57 million pounds, well above the target of 38.6 million pounds established by Amendment 6. The Amendment has triggers to initiate Management Board action if biomass falls below the target and/or fishing mortality exceeds the target.

Inside This Issue

Upcoming Meetings	Page 2
Species Profile: American Eel	Page 4
American Lobster Board Initiates Emergency Action for Area 2	Page 6
Board Approves Addendum IX to the Scup FMP	Page 6
Spiny Dogfish Board Approves 2003 - 2004 Annual Specifications	Page 7
Board Approves Draft Summer Flounder Addendum VIII for Public Comment	Page 8
ASMFC Comings & Goings	Page 8
ASMFC Seeks Nominations for 2003 Annual Awards of Excellence	Page 9
ASMFC Schedules Technical Committee Meeting Weeks	Page 9
ACCSP: RI Goes Live with Web- based Reporting	Page 10
What is the Data Quality Act Anyway?	Page 11
ASMFC Honors First Employee of the Quarter	Page 12

Amendment 6 Control Rule

	FISHING MORTALITY RATE	EXPLOITATION RATE	FEMALE SPAWNING STOCK BIOMASS
TARGET	F = 0.30*	24 percent	38.6 million pounds
THRESHOLD	F = 0.41	31 percent	30.9 million pounds

**The target fishing mortality rate for the Chesapeake Bay & Albemarle-Roanoke stock is F=0.27 (22% exploitation rate)*

The Amendment also includes a recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce to reopen the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to striped bass fishing after a 13-year closure. This recommendation will initiate a lengthy review and decision-making process by NOAA Fisheries. If reopened, the Management Board committed to annually evaluating the fishery impacts of the harvest within the EEZ so that more conservative measures could be implemented if needed.

Copies of the Amendment will be available by the end of March and can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202)289-6400 or via the website at www.asmfc.org. For more information, please contact Megan Gamble, Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or <mgamble@asmfc.org>.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Laura C. Leach, Director of Finance & Administration

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Upcoming Meetings

3/26 & 27:

ASMFC Interstate Tagging Committee, Embassy Suites BWI, 1300 Concourse Drive, Linthicum, Maryland. For more information, please contact Geoffrey White at <gwhite@asmfc.org>.

4/1 & 2:

ASMFC Power Plant Committee, Holiday Inn-Brownstone Hotel, 1707 Hillsborough St., Raleigh, North Carolina; www.brownstonehotel.com; (800)331-7919. For more information, please contact Dr. Lisa Kline at <lkline@asmfc.org>.

4/2 & 3:

Joint meeting of the GSMFC and ASMFC Artificial Reef Committees, Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront, 1201 Riverplace Boulevard, Jacksonville, Florida; (800)445-8667. For more information, please contact Carrie Selberg at <cselberg@asmfc.org>.

4/7 - 11:

ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, Sheraton International Hotel BWI, 7032 Elm Road, Baltimore, Maryland; (800)638-5858 or (410)859-3300. For more information, please contact Robert Beal at <rbeal@asmfc.org>.

4/8 & 9:

ASMFC Habitat Committee, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Annapolis, Maryland. For more information, please contact Carrie Selberg at <cselberg@asmfc.org>.

4/14 & 15:

ACCSP Intercept Subcommittee, Loews Annapolis Hotel, 126 West Sreet, Annapolis, Maryland; (800)526-2593. For more information, please contact Shannon Bettridge at <shannon.bettridge@accsp.org>.

4/16 & 17:

ACCSP Operations Committee, Loews Annapolis Hotel, 126 West Sreet, Annapolis, Maryland; (800)526-2593. For more information, please contact Shannon Bettridge at <shannon.bettridge@accsp.org>.

5/6 - 8:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Westin New York, 255 W. 42nd Street (at 8th Avenue), New York, New York.

5/20 - 22:

New England Fishery Management Council, Courtyard by Marriot, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

6/9 - 12:

ASMFC Meeting Week, Doubletree Crystal City, 300 Army Navy Drive, Arlington, Virginia; (703)416-4100.

The Commission's Annual Meeting is an occasion for a report from the Executive Director. For those of you who couldn't be with us in Williamsburg, here is a condensed version of my report to the Commissioners.

I am delighted to be able to report what we accomplished last year and share my view of the challenges that lie ahead. Before doing that, I want to recognize the entire ASMFC staff for their dedication and professionalism. They have done a superb job breaking in a new boss, while not missing a beat carrying out their important work at the Commission.

Our outgoing Chair, Susan Shipman, and John Nelson have been terrific. Susan has been especially supportive to the staff, taking a personal interest in their development and welfare. Thank you both for taking so much time out of your incredibly busy days to help us. I also want to thank our Commissioners for your strong support and sincere words of encouragement. Succeeding someone as good as Jack Dunnigan is daunting. Thank you all for making that easier for me.

Since April, my first priority has been to establish credibility with Commissioners and Commission staff. My strategy has been to meet people, listen and learn. I have visited 14 of your states. I have attended meetings of the three fishery management councils, as well as Commission public hearings. I have been underway on a variety of commercial, state and charter boats. I have met many interesting people and have seen a lot. My goal has been to learn how I can help you succeed.

I am a person who has committed 33 years of my life to public service. This is the fourth time I have moved between the resource rich North Pacific and the Atlantic. The contrasts are apparent. I've seen the clear and long-term economic and social benefits of conservative management and healthy stocks. I've reached the conclusion that without a resource there can be no recreational or commercial sectors. Despite what some would argue, I am convinced stocks cannot be rebuilt by overfishing. Our Commissioners instinctively know this. I am committed to help you stand firm when others try to convince you otherwise, especially for stocks that were in trouble when I left the East Coast for the first time 14 years ago.

My next priority will be to work with you all to identify ways the Commission can provide value to the states. I have told staff our job is to ensure the states achieve success. I'll measure our progress from your reports

saying you could not have reached your goals without our support. I've been here long enough to know we have some work to do with some folks in that area. Assessing our environment and setting priorities will be a key part of our strategic planning process for 2003. I am looking forward to working with you on this important project; it will define our success for the next five years. I would ask you give careful thought to these issues, discuss them widely with your constituents and share your ideas with us.

Our fisheries management function sets us apart from the other interstate commissions. We must stay focused on the health of the stocks under our care as a measure of the Commission's effectiveness. Our current vision statement reflects this concept and I would challenge you all to help ensure our actions contribute to rebuilt stocks by 2015.

This focus is particularly relevant in view of the Pew and U.S. Oceans Commissions. Both groups are hearing the growing sentiment that our present fisheries management system lacks the political will to make short-term sacrifices to achieve long-term gains of healthy and restored stocks. We have an opportunity to serve as counter example to this premise. We need to expand our winning record beyond striped bass, while guarding carefully against stock collapses.

We also need to think about how our nation's focus has changed since 9/11. The new office of Homeland Security will be the largest reorganization of our government since the 1940s and will consume resources and legislative attention. As a result, natural resource and environmental issues will be below the national radar screen for the next several years. Our state directors will be challenged by funding deficits and cuts to existing programs and staffs. These two realities alone make it more important than ever for us to cooperate and collaborate. Collectively, we must find ways for the Commission to do things better, more efficiently, and with greater benefit to the health of the resources under our stewardship.

Keep in mind the challenges our nation faced in 1942. Despite the demands of World War II Congress found time to ratify the Commission's Compact, as leaders still saw it important to tend to the proper management of fisheries resources. If they could do it then, we can do it now.



American Eel
Anguilla rostrata

Family: Anguillidae

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

Special Uses: Bait for both commercial and recreational fisheries; eaten fresh or smoked; young-of-the-year (elver) are often exported to Asian markets for aquaculture purposes

Age at maturity: 8 - 24 years

Species Profile: American Eel

Plan Seeks to Improve Our Understanding of the Species through Data Collection

Introduction

American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) are an important resource from both a biodiversity and human use perspective. In all its life stages, eel serve as an important prey species for many fish, aquatic mammals, and fish eating birds. Eel continue to support valuable commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries coastwide, although fisheries are at a fraction of what they were historically.

American eel are a particularly challenging species to conserve and manage on a coastwide basis for a number of reasons. Throughout its lifespan from multiple juvenile life stages through adulthood, American eel will have inhabited and traversed a wide range of habitats from inland riverine systems through estuaries and far out into the Atlantic Ocean. During this journey, they will have moved through a myriad of jurisdictions and management authorities from inland and coastal states to the federal government.

From a biological perspective, there is a lot that is still not known about the species. Information on abundance and status at all life stages, as well as habitat requirements are very limited. The life history of the species, such as late age of maturity and a tendency of certain life stages to aggregate, can make this species particularly vulnerable to overharvest.

Life History

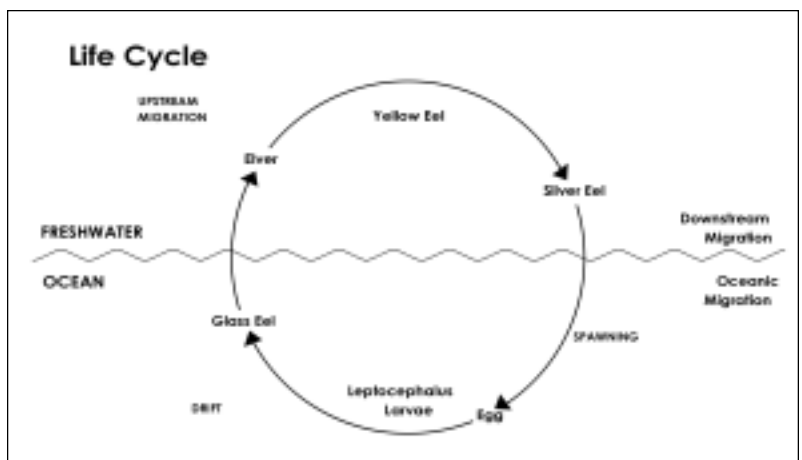
American eel are a catadromous fish species, spending most of their life in freshwater or estuarine environments, returning to the ocean to reproduce. Adult eel migrate to spawning grounds located in the Sargasso Sea, a large portion of the western Atlantic Ocean east of the Bahamas and south of Bermuda. The Gulf Stream then transports and disperses fertilized eggs and larval eel, called leptocephali, along the entire U.S. East Coast and into Canadian waters.

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

Commercial &

Recreational Fisheries

Since the early 17th century, Native Americans have harvested eel for food and cultural sustenance. Today, commercial and recreational fisheries for American eel are seasonal, but remain economically important by providing both direct and indirect employment. Such employment includes gear manufacturing, food processing and shipping. Commercial landings of American eel fluctuate widely, as the fisheries are market-driven. Since the fishery's peak in the mid-1970s at 3.5 million pounds,



commercial landings have declined significantly to a near record low of 868,215 pounds in 2001. Recreational data concerning eel harvest appears to indicate a decline in abundance. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, recreational harvest in 2001 was 10,805 eel, a significant decrease from the peak of 106,988 eel in 1982.

Atlantic Coast Management Considerations

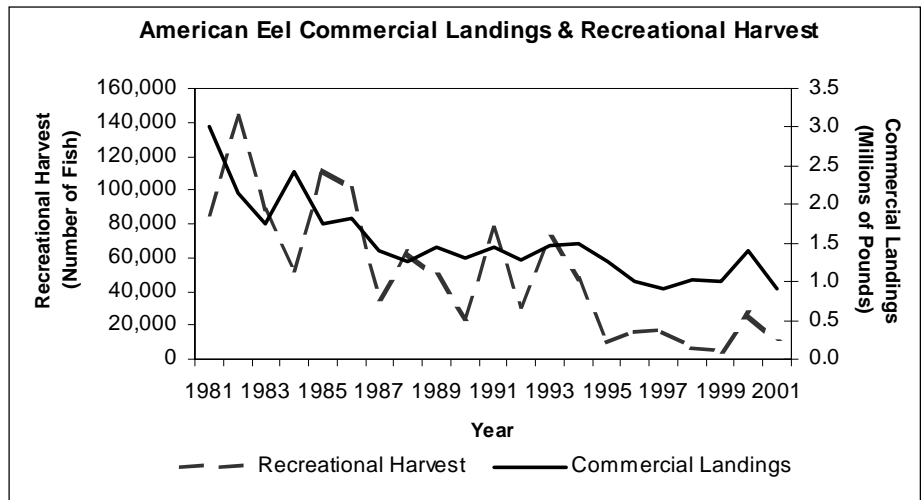
Increasing demand for eel by Asian markets and domestic bait fisheries, coupled with concern about declining eel abundance and limited assessment data, spurred plan development in the mid-90s, with final plan approval in 1999. The plan identified a number of factors contributing to possible declines in eel abundance along the Atlantic coast, including intense harvest pressure and habitat loss. It provided several reasons why heavy harvest pressure may adversely affect American eel populations. These include (1) a slow rate of maturation, requiring eight to 24+ years to attain sexual maturity; (2) a tendency for glass eel to aggregate seasonally during migration, making them vulnerable to directed harvest; (3) yellow eel harvest is a cumulative stress, over multiple years, on the same year class; and (4) all fishing mortality occurs prior to spawning.

Habitat losses have been a chronic problem for hundreds of years. Blockage of stream access, pollution and nearshore habitat destruction limit habitat availability for eel. Current data indicate that oceanic changes may also contribute to decline in eel abundance. Research in the late 90s has estimated that species that depend on access to Atlantic coastal watersheds may be deterred from reaching up to 84 percent of upstream habitats.

Management Hindered by Data Availability

The greatest hinderance to the development and implementation of an effective management program for American eel has been the lack of long-term data sets describing eel abundance at any life stage. Although eel have been continuously harvested, consistent data on harvest are often not available and, when available, are not good indicators of abundance because eel harvest is dependent on demand. Additionally, most of the data sets are of short duration and data collection protocols were not standardized between management agencies.

Few other long-term data sets are available from fish ladders, impingement sampling, research collections and monitoring programs. In addition, changes in year-class strength are not readily recognizable because most samples include individuals of similar sizes but from an unknown number of year classes. A compilation of all available information on eel fisheries and biology suggests that the data are fragmented and incomplete.



Source: Personal communication from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Fisheries Statistics and Economics Division.

Plan Requirements & Recommendations

To address these issues, the plan requires states to implement conservative commercial and recreational regulations, as well as monitoring programs. The plan's primary focus is on data collection to further our understanding of American eel biology, behavior, habitat requirements and the fisheries themselves. All states are required to perform an annual young-of-the-year (YOY) abundance survey. This survey, conducted over a six-week time period each year, provides an annual estimate of juvenile abundance. It will be the primary source of fishery-independent data used in the upcoming stock assessment, scheduled for 2004. Data from the YOY survey can also provide managers with information on the effectiveness of coastwide management programs since juvenile abundance is influenced by factors that affect spawning, larval survival, transport, metamorphosis and recruitment.

In addition, the plan specifies that states will maintain their existing commercial fishery regulations, unless opting for more conservative regulations. Recreational fisheries management measures require states and/or jurisdictions to establish uniform possession limits, including a minimum six-inch size limit and possession of no more than 50 eels per person for bait purposes during fishing, including crew members involved in party/charter (for-hire) employment. Identification and protection of existing eel habitat, as well as restoration of historic habitat, are also addressed in the plan through recommendations concerning upstream and downstream passage and habitat monitoring.

On the international front, the Commission has begun to meet with American eel researchers through the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea Working Group on Eels and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans to exchange information and discuss issues related to assessing stock size in data poor situations. These efforts are helping to ensure that the Commission will be able to perform the best possible stock assessment with the limited data available.



ASMFC Lobster Board Initiates Emergency Action for Area 2 in Light of Stock Declines & Accepts Massachusetts Proposal to Implement Zero Tolerance V-Notching

On February 26, 2003, the Commission's American Lobster Board acted on two key lobster management issues. The Board took Emergency Action in response to declining

stock conditions in Area 2, which includes the inshore and offshore waters of Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts. As a result, states are required to increase the gauge size in Area 2 to 3 11/32" immediately and to 3 3/8" on July 1, 2003.

In taking this action, the Board acknowledged that additional measures are needed and has taken action to initiate the development of an addendum to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American Lobster. The purpose of the Addendum is to reduce the fishing mortality rate in Area 2 to a level that will allow for stock rebuilding. The Adden-

dum will be developed in 2003 for implementation in 2004.

In August 2002, based on concern for potential stock declines in Area 2, the Board directed its Technical Committee to evaluate the magnitude and extent of these declines. Fall trawl survey abundance indices from Massachusetts and Rhode Island have dropped substantially from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The 2001 abundance indices from both surveys are significantly below the average over the past twenty years for all sizes of lobsters from juveniles to legal sized. From 1999 to 2001, total landings from both the inshore and offshore waters of Massachusetts and Rhode Island declined 26 and 29 percent below the ten-year average, respectively.

The Emergency Action shall be effective for a period of up to 180 days and may be renewed by the Management Board for two additional periods of up to one year each provided that the Board has initiated action to amend the FMP. Throughout March, the Commission and

the states will be holding public hearings on the Emergency Action.

In addition this action, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts indicated that it will implement a zero tolerance v-notching definition for Area 1 by March 15, 2003, as required under Addendum III to FMP. Now all the states in Area 1 (Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire) have a zero tolerance v-notching definition.

"I am pleased that the states in Area 1 will all have a zero tolerance definition for v-notching within a few weeks," stated Board Chair, George Lapointe of Maine. "Consistent management measures across our area are critical to effective lobster management. I applaud Massachusetts for finding a solution to this on-going issue."

For more information, please contact Carrie Selberg, American Lobster Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or <cselberg@asmfc.org>.

ASMFC Board Approves Addendum IX to the Scup FMP *Addendum Allows for Increases in Recreational Harvest from Rhode Island through New York*

On February 24, 2003, the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board approved Addendum IX to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Specifically, Addendum IX provides the states with a mechanism for effectively managing their 2003 recreational scup fisheries on a state-specific basis.

A prior addendum addressed the 2002 recreational fishery, establishing a combination of state-specific and regional regulations. This document expired at the end of 2002, necessitating the development of a new mechanism for managing the recreational scup fishery in 2003.

Due to the recent increase in scup stocks, states from Rhode Island through New York will be permitted to develop state-specific management measures that achieve a maximum 38.8 percent increase relative to 2002 landings. As in 2002, these states will have the option of implementing mode-specific regulations for their recreational fisheries (i.e., party/charter boat versus private boat/shore-based angler) upon review and approval by the Technical Committee and Board. Mode-specific data used in state proposals must have a maximum percent standard error of 20 percent. Based on 2003 state shares,

continued on page 7

Spiny Dogfish Board Approves 2003-2004 Annual Specifications & State Implementation Proposals



On February 25, 2003, the Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Shark Management Board approved the 2003-2004 annual specifications for the commercial spiny dogfish fishery in state waters. The Board also approved state implementation proposals for the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Spiny Dogfish.

Starting May 1, 2003, the commercial spiny dogfish fishery will reopen in state waters with an annual quota of 8.8 million pounds and coastwide trip limit of 7,000 pounds. This is a departure from the proposed 2003-2004 management measures specified for federal waters, which establishes a four million pound quota, and a 600 pound trip limit for harvest period one and a 300 pound trip limit for harvest period two. To ensure equitable access to the annual quota, the Board also took action to allocate 57.9 percent (5,095,200 pounds) of the quota to Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts and 42.1 percent (3,704,800 pounds) to Rhode Island through Florida. The harvest of these allocations is not restricted to any portion of the fishing year, but the Inter-

state FMP assigns 57.9 percent of the quota to harvest period one and 42.1 percent to harvest period two.

The Spiny Dogfish FMP, which complements the federal management plan for spiny dogfish, employs a constant fishing mortality ($F = 0.03$) strategy and directs the Management Board to establish an annual commercial quota and trip limits. This quota is based on the status of the stock and is allocated between the same two periods in the federal fishery (period one is May 1 to October 31; period two is November 1 to April 30). Using the most recent stock information, the Technical Committee reviewed two proposals for an annual quota – one proposing a four million pound quota and another for an 8.8 million pound quota. The Technical Committee recommended a four million pound quota. The Management Board, however, approved an 8.8 million pound quota for the 2003-2004 fishing year based on new information from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts regarding its directed fishery and on low discard mortality rates for spiny dogfish.

The Board also took action on the state proposals to implement the FMP. Implementation proposals addressed: the ability of states to close their waters to the commercial landing, harvest and possession of spiny dogfish when the Commission or NOAA Fisheries projects the quota to be harvested; reporting weekly landings to NOAA Fisheries; weekly dealer reports; limiting the number of spiny dogfish collected under exempted permits to 1,000 fish; and prohibiting the finning of spiny dogfish. The Management Board approved the state management programs for spiny dogfish and granted *de minimis* status to Maine, Delaware, South Carolina, and Georgia. All of the states will implement their management programs by May 1, 2003.

Copies of the FMP are currently available and can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400 or via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org. For more information, please contact Megan Gamble, Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400, ext. 317 or <mgamble@asmfc.org>.

ASMFC Board Approves Addendum IX to the Scup FMP (continued from page 6)

Massachusetts is permitted a 22 percent landings increase, however, it has chosen to maintain its 2002 regulations for the 2003 season.

Recreational measures were approved for New Jersey through North Carolina during the annual specification-setting meeting in December. In the case of New Jersey, the Board approved a 10-inch minimum size, 50 fish bag limit and a season of July 1 – December 31. Due to the very low landings in the southern range of the species, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina will be permitted to maintain a 10-inch minimum size, 50 fish bag limit and open season.

While scup are managed jointly by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, this recent action applies to state waters only.

Copies of the Addendum will be available by mid-March and can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202)289-6400, or via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org. For more information, please contact Michael Lewis, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or <mlewis@asmfc.org>.

ASMFC Board Approves Draft Addendum VIII to the Summer Flounder FMP for Public Comment: *States to Hold Hearings in Early Spring*

On February 25, 2003, the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board approved Draft Addendum VIII to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for public review and comment. The Addendum was developed to address the problem of recreational landings consistently exceeding the harvest limit since 1996. Specifically, it presents the public with a suite of management options for the 2003 recreational summer flounder fishery, including strategies that allow for the repayment of harvest overages in the subsequent year(s), the carry-over of unused recreational harvest from one year to the next, and the allocation of commercial quota based on a total allowable landings (TAL) limits calculated without recreational overages. It also includes the option to maintain the status quo.

"The Board fully recognizes that the problem of overages rests with the management program and in no way assigns blame to the recreational fishing industry for the harvest overages," stated Board Chair, Bruce Freeman of New Jersey. "However, given the persistent issue of recreational harvest overages and the impact of these overages on the resource, other users and our ability to effectively

manage the fishery, it is incumbent for the Board to present these issues and possible management options to the public for their review and comment."

Recreational harvest limits have been exceeded since 1996. From 1996 to 1999, overages in the recreational landings ranged from 13 to 67 percent. In 2000, recreational landings were more than double the harvest limit, while 2001 landings were 60 percent in excess of the harvest limit. The impacts of these overages on the fishery are significant and extend beyond the recreational sector. The annual TAL is calculated assuming the preceding year's TAL and discard level are not exceeded. When regulations fail to constrain landings effectively the resulting exploitation rate is higher than the target, which leads to a state of overfishing and thus slower stock recovery.

The recreational fishery is allocated 40 percent of the annual TAL. Though regulations have historically applied to the entire coast, geographic variations in the fishery contributed to interest in allowing states to develop regulations on an individual basis. First implemented in 1999, conservation equivalency requires states to develop and implement measures that can reasonably be expected to constrain the

recreational fishery to its harvest limit. The 2003 recreational harvest limit has been set at 9.32 million pounds.

While summer flounder is managed jointly by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Board's actions regarding Draft Addendum VIII will be taken exclusively under the states' management authority.

It is anticipated that most states from Massachusetts through North Carolina will be conducting public hearings throughout the early spring. Copies of the Draft Addendum will be available by mid-March and can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202)289-6400 or via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org. For more information, please contact Michael Lewis, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or mlewis@asmfc.org.



ASMFC Comings & Goings

Commissioners

Senator Dennis Damon -- Shortly after his election as Senator to Maine's coastal Hancock county, Senator Damon also became Maine's new Legislative Appointee to the Commission. Senator Damon brings to both Maine's legislature and the Commission a strong commitment to fisheries conservation, having come from a family of fishermen. In his own words, "My father was a fisherman,

my brothers were fishermen -- it is only because of my father's urging that I broke the mold." Senator Damon believes that more safeguards are necessary to ensure that stocks are not overfished. At the same time, he has stated that regulators do not pay enough attention to fishermen's viewpoints and that stock depletion is often caused by natural causes such as increased predation. The Commission is sure to gain from Senator

Damon's balanced perspective. Welcome aboard, Senator!

David Etnier -- Since 2001, David Etnier served as Maine's Legislative Appointee to the Commission. During that time, he was an active member of the American Lobster Management Board and Northern Shrimp Section. After leaving the legislature in late 2002, he was

continued on page 9

ASMFC Seeks Nominations for 2003 Annual Awards of Excellence

In 1998, in an effort to recognize the many people who contribute to the success of the Atlantic coastal fisheries conservation and management, the Commission established its Annual Awards of Excellence Program. Each year, awards are presented in the categories of Scientific/Technical/Advisory; Congressional/Legislative; Law Enforcement; and Management/Policy.

If you know of an individual or individuals who has (have) made highly significant contributions to the management and conservation of Atlantic coastal fisheries in any of the above areas, please forward the nomination(s) to:

Laura Leach
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1444 Eye Street, NW, Sixth Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202)289-6051 (fax)
lleach@asmfc.org

Contributions must be for work on conservation issues of Atlantic interstate, regional or coastwide importance. The nomination letter should include the following information: name of nominee; name of nominator; award category for which they are being nominated; narrative description of their contribution (not to exceed 2 pages). Nominations must be received by **April 10, 2003**.

The Annual Awards of Excellence will be presented at the Commission's Spring Meeting in June. For more information, please contact Laura Leach at (202)289-6400.

ASMFC Schedules Technical Committee Meeting Weeks

In May 2002, the Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Policy Board approved a series of improvements to the Commission technical support structure. Part of this approval was a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of conducting Commission Technical Meeting Weeks. The hope is that these meeting weeks will reduce the number of travel days for members of the technical support groups, as well as reduce the travel costs for the Commission.

The Commission has scheduled two Technical Committee Meeting Weeks for 2003. The first meeting week will be held in Baltimore from April 7 - 10, 2003, followed by a second meeting from October 20 - 24, 2003, tentatively scheduled to be held in the Providence, Rhode Island area.

During the April Technical Committee Meeting Week, the Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee, Black Sea Bass Stock Assessment Subcommittee and the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee will be initiating new stock assessments that will be peer reviewed later in 2003. Also during the April meeting the newly appointed Stock Assessment Committee will be holding its first meeting. The Committee will review the 2003 and 2004 species stock assessment schedule and develop recommendations to the ISFMP Policy Board for realistic timelines to complete these assessments. The Committee will also discuss the overall stock assessment process and develop recommendations for several species stock assessment peer reviews.

The April Meeting Week will conclude with a meetings management seminar for the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Commission's Technical Committees. The purpose of this seminar will be to provide training for the leadership of the Commission's technical support groups on meeting management and consensus building.

A copy of the full agenda is available on the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under the Events page. For more information, please contact Robert Beal, Director, ISFMP, at (202) 289-6400 or <rbeal@asmfc.org>.

ASMFC Comings & Goings (continued from page 8)

named Deputy Commissioner to Maine's Department of Marine Resources in late February. In his new position, Mr. Etnier will be responsible for assisting Commissioner Lapointe in conserving and developing Maine's marine resources, as well as ensuring the adequate enforcement of state laws relating to marine resources. Additionally, he will oversee the Department's policies, budget and general administration. We wish David the very best!

Staff

Nancy Wallace -- Nancy is the newest addition to our staff, joining the Commission this past February as a Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator. In this position, Nancy will assume the coordination responsibilities for Atlantic croaker, Atlantic menhaden, red drum, Spanish mackerel, spot, spotted sea trout.

Nancy has a Bachelor of Science in Biol-

ogy from Fairfield University in Connecticut and a Master of Arts in Marine Affairs and Policy from the University of Miami. She last worked for the Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks, coordinating the development of the visitor experience and resource protection plan. Nancy is a great addition to the Commission staff. Welcome, Nancy!



Rhode Island DEM Goes Live with Real-time, Web-based Dealer Reporting

Maryland DNR Is Next to Offer Web Solution to Its Seafood Industry

On January 6, 2003, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a partnership of 23 state and federal coastal resource management agencies, enabled the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to become the first state agency in the nation to offer a web-based reporting system to the seafood industry, and inspired the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to follow.

When Rhode Island fully deploys the new system, it will meet the ACCSP's commercial fisheries data collection standards. The ACCSP staff began working with Rhode Island to build a web-based reporting system in the summer of 2002, with the input of a panel of Rhode Island seafood dealers. The Maryland DNR staff was impressed by the results, and asked that the ACCSP staff assist in modifying the system for Maryland's data collection needs. The ACCSP staff quickly agreed, and dubbed the system "Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS)" to reflect its expansion to multiple Atlantic partners.

With the opening of SAFIS in Rhode Island, that state's seafood dealers will be the first to utilize a free on-line application for real-time reporting of lobster, finfish and shellfish landings. Mandatory trip-level reporting is a new requirement for Rhode Island dealers, who have been reporting using an integrated voice response system (IVR) for some quota-managed fisheries. Dealers licensed by the National Marine Fisheries Service are continuing to use a federal IVR and weigh-out slips during the implementation, for benchmarking purposes.

"We are very pleased that Maryland will follow Rhode Island's lead in implement-

ing SAFIS for its commercial fisheries," says Maury Osborn, ACCSP Director. "My staff and I are eager to help Maryland modify and offer this dynamic system to its seafood industry in the near future. I'm sure both states will enjoy the cost-savings SAFIS provides."

"We are looking forward to the implementation of the new system," says Phil Jones of the Maryland DNR. "It has great potential to reduce the reporting burden on the fishing industry and provide better data."

ACCSP partners have traditionally employed staff to do much of the data entry associated with commercial fisheries. SAFIS was designed to be more cost-effective, empowering dealers to enter data directly, and giving them immediate access to their own data, updated quota information and other management news. SAFIS allows dealers to instantly check that their data of record are correct, a first for any fishery data collection system. SAFIS is designed to protect sensitive financial information, and still download easily onto most Windows operating systems. It also offers the dealers business management tools, including receipt and report functions.

Coordinators who understand the states' needs are integral in the implementation of SAFIS. John Lake, the ACCSP's Rhode Island Coordinator, is spending the early months of 2003 visiting each of the state's 120 fish houses to assist seafood dealers with the new system. He will provide hands-on support and be available to answer questions as dealers get started. Rhode Island expects to have all dealers reporting trip-level landings data on-line by June of 2003. As Maryland plans development and implementation

of SAFIS, they also require an on-site coordinator, supported by the ACCSP.

ACCSP Partners Discuss New Electronic Reporting Options at Forum

The ACCSP data management staff hosted a forum on electronic reporting in January in Tampa, Florida to spawn discussion of the issues driving electronic reporting and allow partners developing solutions to present ideas and collaborate.

The 34 participants included ACCSP partner and industry representatives and ACCSP staff. The eight presentations over two days on current electronic reporting projects initiated the discussions, which helped establish and strengthen working relationships. The after hours networking opportunities also allowed participants to brainstorm and plan.

"Kudos to Mike Cahall for organizing this forum and assembling a wide variety of participants and solutions to commercial fisheries electronic reporting problems," said ACCSP Director, Maury Osborn. "I have received numerous compliments on the opportunity that the forum provided for discussion of issues among a wide variety of partner staff, and for raising the level of awareness of various programs. The participants requested we make this an annual event, and we will try to make that happen."

What is the Data Quality Act Anyway? And, Why Should the States Care?

by
Maury Osborn

Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554) is often called "The Data Quality Act" even though it applies to all information disseminated to the public – not just data. Section 515 directed the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines to "provide ... guidance to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information ... disseminated by federal agencies." Responding to this mandate, OMB issued guidelines which directed all federal agencies to issue their own information quality guidelines. The deadline for such guidelines was October 1, 2002, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has met this deadline.

Quality is defined by utility, integrity and objectivity. Utility means that information is understandable, in context, accessible, and unbiased. Integrity means that the information is safe from improper access and that confidentiality is protected, while objectivity means the information is accurate, reliable and unbiased, and that it is presented in an accurate, clear, complete and unbiased manner. Important concepts for objectivity include reproducibility, transparency and peer review.

The OMB and NOAA Guidelines sets standards for information quality that apply to both substance and presentation. "Information" as defined in the OMB and NOAA Guidelines covers a wide a variety of products, including biological surveys; catch statistics; model outputs; oil spill trajectories; damage assessments; buoy data; web sites; and forecasts; warnings; and advisories. The NOAA Guidelines define standards for third-party information that apply to information from third parties (e.g.,

states) that is used in NOAA products. This covers data supplied through federal grants and contracts. NOAA could also require, in grant and contract awards, that grantees and contractors meet its own standards rather than its third-party standards. This means recipients of NOAA grants under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA) or the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (and most likely other programs as well) may have to certify in their grant proposals and report that the data comply with NOAA Guidelines.

Well, what does certification mean? It means that (1) standard NOAA procedures and quality assurance processes must be followed and be fully documented; and (2) pre-dissemination review is required, meaning information must be developed, created, and reviewed with the quality standards in mind. States should be aware that the Act requests, and the NOAA Guidelines contain administrative procedures whereby affected persons may request correction, including possibly withdrawal, of information they believe does not comply with NOAA or OMB Guidelines.

Examples of information quality standards, as addressed by the NOAA Guidelines, include ensuring that (1) data are collected according to documented procedures or by practices generally accepted by the relevant scientific community (standard operating procedures); (2) data are quality checked before use or dissemination; (3) third party data are of known quality; (4) analyses are conducted on data of known quality and any limitations identified and disclosed; (5) analysis methods, assumptions, and limitations are documented; and (6) all products are presented in context and in unbiased manner.

Dissemination is defined essentially as any intended release or distribution to the public that is "Agency initiated or Agency sponsored", in any media or form (e.g., paper, web, CD). However, normal academic publication is not considered to be agency dissemination and, therefore, is not covered by the guidelines, as long as it is clear that the information does not represent the views of NOAA. Information first disseminated prior to October 1, 2002, and disseminated after that date (or continuously disseminated) will not have to have pre-dissemination review, but must meet the other standards and is subject to the administrative correction process.

What will states have to provide for certification purposes? How will states have to respond if their data are subjected to a request for review and correction? That remains to be determined, and at the workshop I attended, I did not get a definitive answer. At a minimum, I think we can all count on having to produce written documentation of all standards and quality control processes and, in some cases, establish and document pre-dissemination review processes and results.

The full text of the NOAA Guidelines is available at <http://www.noaa.gov/newsroom/stories/iq.htm>

The author extends her sincere thanks to Dr. Bonnie Ponwith at NMFS for the background information and workshop. For more information, please contact Dr. Bonnie Ponwith at (301) 713-2363, ext. 128.

Edith S. Carr Honored as ASMFC's First Employee of the Quarter

For nearly six years, Edith Carr has been the first person most of you speak with when you call the Commission office. Now, she has the honor of being the first person to be recognized as the Commission's Employee of the Quarter. In selecting Edith, the Directors noted that she has consistently added value to our organization through her professionalism and positive example. Most recently, she worked tirelessly and cheerfully to ensure our office renovation went smoothly with a minimum of disruptions.

The award is intend to recognize special contributions and qualities in the area of teamwork, initiative, responsibility, quality of work, positive attitude, and results. Edith has exemplified these traits in her daily contact with the public and the staff in her duties as telephone and

lobby receptionist. In addition to this formal award, on a daily basis Edith enjoys the respect and admiration of the entire staff.



Edith is married with four grown daughters and four grandchildren. Her grandson William recently enlisted in the United States Navy and is currently undergoing

training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. She is very active in her church and community, showing a big heart for those less fortunate. Edith volunteers at local homeless shelters and missions, and helps attend to the street people who collect in the park across the street from our office!

As an Employee of the Quarter, Edith received a \$500 cash award, an engraved pewter pencil cup, and a letter of appreciation for her personnel record. In addition, Edith's name will be engraved on the Employee of Quarter Plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby; the first name on what will certainly be a long and distinguished list. Congratulations, Edith!

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