

This Week at the Fisheries – July 11-15, 2011
An update of issues and activities at the Division of Marine Fisheries

Meetings

- July 11** **10 a.m. – Management Review Team, Headquarters Conference Room, Morehead City**
- July 14** **6 p.m. – Sea Turtle Advisory Committee, Central District Office, Morehead City**

News Bites

Commercial Harvest of Black Sea Bass Closing to Vessels Fishing in the South Atlantic Federal Waters on July 15, 2011 - The commercial sector for black sea bass in federal waters of the South Atlantic from 35°15.19' N. lat. (the latitude of Cape Hatteras Light, NC) to Key West, FL, will be closed, effective 12:01 a.m. (local time), July 15, 2011, through 12:01 a.m. June 1, 2012. NOAA Fisheries Service has determined the 2011-2012 commercial quota of 309,000 pounds has been reached.

The operator of a vessel that has been issued a federal commercial permit for snapper-grouper and that is landing black sea bass for sale must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such black sea bass prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, July 15, 2011. All black sea bass pots must be removed from South Atlantic federal waters subject to the closure prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, July 15, 2011.

During the closure, all harvest and possession of black sea bass in or from closed federal waters of the South Atlantic is subject to the applicable bag and possession limits, and the sale or purchase of black sea bass taken from closed federal waters is prohibited. In addition, those bag and possession limits, and the prohibition on sale or purchase apply in state and federal waters of the South Atlantic for a vessel for which a valid federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued.

The prohibition on sale or purchase does not apply to sale or purchase of black sea bass that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, July 15, 2011, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor.

Closure of commercial fishing for black sea bass in federal waters of the South Atlantic from 35°15.19' N. lat. (the latitude of Cape Hatteras Light, NC) to Key West, FL, complies with the regulations implementing the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region and is necessary to protect the black sea bass resource.

For more information, please contact Catherine Bruger at 727-824-5305, FAX 727-824-5308 or Catherine.Bruger@noaa.gov.

Summer Flounder Declared Viable in 2011 Stock Status Report – The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries declared summer flounder “viable” in its 2011 Stock Status Report released today.

Summer flounder had been listed as “recovering” since 2009, and according to the latest assessment by the National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Science Center the stock is no longer overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Fishing mortality has steadily decreased and the stock has generally increased since the early 1990s.

“This is truly a fisheries management success story,” said Louis Daniel, director of the state Division of Marine Fisheries. “Both commercial and recreational fishermen did their part, through regulatory restrictions, to bring the stocks back to where they are today.”

Summer flounder is managed under a joint Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission/Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council fishery management plan. Management measures include commercial quotas, minimum mesh sizes for trawls, minimum fish size limits, recreational bag limits and a moratorium on new entrants into the commercial fishery.

In other changes in stock status this year, striped bass in the Central/Southern Management Area moved from “depleted” to “concern” due to the lack of a useable stock assessment. However, the stock continues to show signs of low abundance and an absence of older fish, and the division believes regulatory restrictions need to continue. The stock’s “depleted” status had been based on a 2004 stock assessment that was not peer reviewed. The methodology used for the 2004 stock assessment was rejected by peer review in 2010 leading the stocks to be assessed as unknown and to be listed as “concern” in the stock status report.

Also, bay scallops changed from “recovering” to “concern.” While bay scallop abundance has shown improvement from the no harvest period from 2006 to 2008 and seasonal openings have occurred in some areas since, the main harvest season did not open in 2011 due to limited availability.

Finally, Atlantic menhaden changed from “viable” to “concern” based on a corrected version of a 2010 Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission stock assessment that found that the coast-wide stock is not overfished (the population is not too low), but is experiencing overfishing (the rate of removal is too high).

Staff considered upgrading Atlantic croaker from “concern” to “viable” based on a 2010 Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission/ Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review stock assessment that found that Atlantic croaker is not experiencing overfishing. However, due to data limitations, it is not certain whether the stock is overfished, so the division chose to keep croaker at “concern.”

“If positive trends continue, a viable status is possible in the near future for croaker,” Daniel said.

The division annually grades the status of marine finfish, shellfish, shrimp and crabs as either viable, recovering, concern, depleted or unknown. The grades serve as a barometer of the overall health of the state's fishery resources, and they are used to prioritize development of fishery management plans.

A stock is considered "viable" when it exhibits stable or increasing trends in a number of biological factors associated with healthy populations, such as a normal distribution of sizes, ages and spawning-age females or when it has met biological targets for sustainable harvest.

A "recovering" stock shows marked and consistent improvement in the criteria listed for a "viable" stock, but has not yet reached its target.

Stocks designated as "concern" are those that do not have an approved stock assessment or fishery management plan, but have seen increased fishing pressure, a decline in landings, lack a normal age distribution or are negatively impacted by environmental factors that cannot be controlled.

A "depleted" stock is a population in which there are too few spawning females to support an active fishery. Factors that can contribute to this status include overfishing, poor water quality, habitat loss, larvae survival and disease. This status determination is based on an approved stock assessment or fishery management plan.

A stock is classified as "unknown" when there is not sufficient data to determine trends in fishing pressure, landings or biological factors. Stocks designated as unknown are often prioritized for research programs.

A complete list of the 2011 Stock Status Report can be found at the division website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/home> under the "Quick Links" section.

For more information, contact Kathy Rawls in the division's Elizabeth City office, at (252) 264-3911 or Kathy.Rawls@ncdenr.gov.

Division of Marine Fisheries Has New Website Address – The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website has a new home.

As of July 5, the division's homepage is at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/home>. Those who go to the old homepages at <http://www.ncfisheries.net> and <http://www.ncdmf.net> will be redirected to the new site.

The division is moving its homepage under the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources website as part of an effort to consolidate the agency's Internet presence.

The division will complete the transition of its entire website in the coming months. In the meantime, some of the homepage links will continue to connect to pages on the old website.

NOAA Fisheries Scoping Meeting - The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) intends to promulgate regulations to reduce the mortality of sea turtles in the shrimp fishery of the southeastern United States. The scoping process will be the first stage in a multi-step process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to ensure that Federal agencies evaluate the environmental impacts of major Federal actions. During the scoping process, the public is provided with an opportunity to assist NOAA Fisheries in determining the scope of issues that require analysis. The analysis of issues and the environmental impacts of the proposed actions will be presented in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which will be made available for public comment.

A notice of intent to prepare an EIS and conduct public scoping meetings will be published in the Federal Register in the near future. The scoping meeting in North Carolina will be:

July 18, 2011, 2 - 4 p.m.
Crystal Coast Civic Center
3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City

At this time, no specific new regulatory action has been proposed. The purpose of the scoping process and drafting of the EIS is to provide NOAA Fisheries a range of management alternatives and information on anticipated effects of those actions. New regulatory requirements may be proposed in the future as a result of this process, however, there will be additional notice and opportunities for public comment at that time.

Sustainable Steps to Save Money - For the next 10 weeks, you will be given one of 10 tips developed by the DENR Sustainability Team that can save energy and money – up to \$100 per year! Take a moment to think about how you can use each of these recommendations every day at work, and at home! Here's tip number three!



3. Turn off equipment, or unplug it when it is not being used.

Many state offices and facilities have problems with “phantom energy” losses. Office equipment, large or small, will continue to draw noticeable energy even when it is turned off, and can account for as much as a third of the electric bill. For example, battery chargers left plugged in continue to use a few watts per day when not charging. Some commercial grade coffeemakers can use a few hundred dollars per year in energy costs just keeping the water tank warm. Some inefficient office printers in standby mode will use as much as 60 percent of the energy, just keeping the ink setting roller hot.

Recent Proclamations

SH-6-2011

2011 SHRIMPING AND CRAB TRAWLING

PT-3-2011 (Revised)

CRAB, EEL, FISH AND SHRIMP POTS

PT-3-2011 Maps 1-8

FF-58-2011

**SNAPPER-GROUPER COMPLEX-COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL
PURPOSES**

The Division of Marine Fisheries is dedicated to ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit of the people of North Carolina.