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Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council develops fishery management plans and fishery regulations for fisheries off the central east coast of the United States. The seven states that comprise the Mid-Atlantic Council region are New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. The Council manages fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Atlantic mackerel, longfin squid, shortfin squid, butterfish, bluefish, tilefish, surfclams, and ocean quahogs. The Council jointly manages spiny dogfish and two stocks of monkfish with the New England Fishery Management Council, and works with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to cooperatively manage other fisheries in the region.

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Opportunities & Challenges



Providing Good Stewardship

The Mid-Atlantic Council has been very successful at recovering and rebuilding depleted fish stocks by adhering to principles of sound stewardship. The Council has implemented measures to prevent overfishing and rebuild previously depleted stocks including surfclams, ocean quahogs, Atlantic mackerel, scup, bluefish, monkfish, spiny dogfish, and tilefish. Of the 14 stocks managed by the Council, only butterfish is currently categorized as “overfished”, and only black sea bass is subject to overfishing. The challenge will be to continue these overall successes, as well as provide additional opportunities for fishing related businesses to grow.

In 1990, the Council implemented an individual transferable quota program for the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries, in which catch amounts were allocated to individual vessel owners. This was the first limited access privilege program in the United States. The program not only worked to rebuild the stocks, it reduced the number of vessels in the fishery, tripled the average harvests per vessel, eliminated derby fishing, and increased profits for participants. Due to the success of this program, the Council adopted and submitted for Secretarial approval a limited access privilege program for the tilefish fishery. The Council will continue to avail itself of the opportunity to use limited access privilege programs as a tool for the sustainable management of marine resources in the region.

Working Towards Ecosystem-based Management

One of the more direct and practical approaches to ensure healthy marine ecosystems is to protect the habitats used by fishes and other organisms. The Mid-Atlantic Council has developed measures to minimize the effects of fishing on benthic habitats essential for survival and reproduction of fish stocks. These measures include restrictive harvest limits, gear-restricted areas for small-mesh fisheries, and closed areas in selected canyons. Additionally, rebuilding plans implemented by the Council have increased the abundance of fish in the region and reduced fishing effort, which together have had a positive impact on habitat and the marine ecosystem.





In 2004, Congress tasked the Mid-Atlantic Council to initiate a pilot study to explore ways to implement ecosystem-based fishery management in a more holistic manner. The pilot project that the Council undertook during 2005-2007 provided an opportunity for the public to voice their opinion regarding the goals and objectives of an ecosystem approach to fisheries. The intent of the project was to provide a framework for organizing information about the structure and function of ecosystems, and for developing ways to enhance decision-making when single species or fishery specific management approaches are not achieving their goals. The Council will be challenged to move ahead with implementing ecosystem-based fishery management in the region without additional funding to support the necessary research and analysis.

Enhancing Recreational Fishing Opportunities

Each year, over four million recreational anglers fish for bluefish, summer flounder, croaker, striped bass, and black sea bass in the mid-Atlantic region. The Council is developing a guide for recreational catch-and-release fishing that encourages sport fishermen to follow certain practices to enhance the survival of fish that are released. Careful release of sport-caught fish is a conservation measure, and the guide provides practical suggestions on how to handle and release fish, as well as an overview of fishing tackle that can be used to improve survival. By providing this brochure, and similar educational publications, the Council is raising the public's awareness of conservation practices in recreational fisheries and contributing to the rebuilding of fish stocks to their maximum sustainable yield levels.

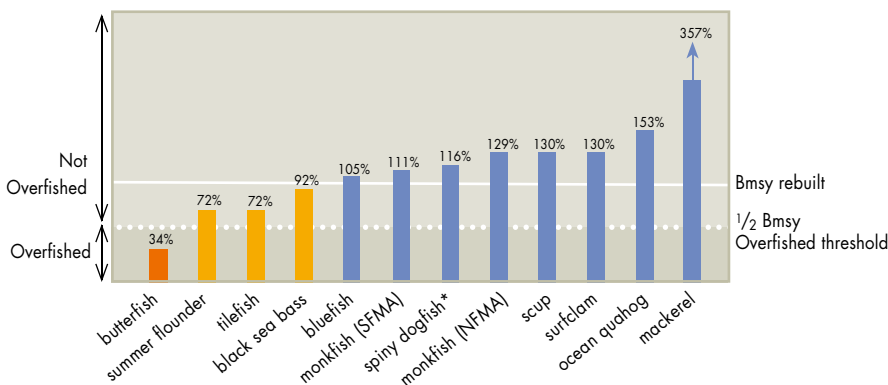




Obtaining Critical Assessment Data

One of the biggest challenges for the Mid-Atlantic Council is the limited availability of data that support management decisions. Commercial fisheries sea sampling data and data from vessel trip reports are available but very limited, making it difficult to develop definitive or reliable conclusions. Lack of discard data also is a problem in the commercial fisheries. Similarly, data from recreational fisheries are also limited, and the Council is working closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service to collect adequate data through implementation of the Marine Recreational Information Program. There is a great need for improved estimates of discards for all fisheries.

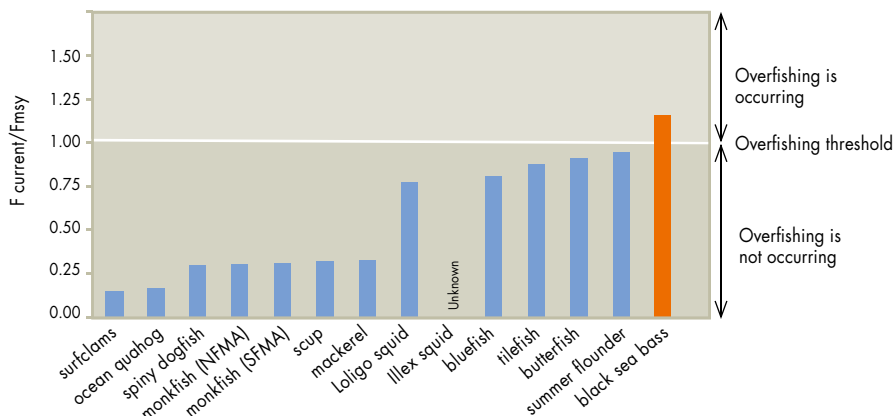
Stock Size Relative to Biological Reference Points



* No approved target for spiny dogfish.

NOTE: Illex and Loligo squids are short lived species and not included in above.

Fishing Mortality Ratios for MAFMC Managed Stocks



The graphs above show the current status of the Mid-Atlantic stocks.

To address these data gaps, the Mid-Atlantic Council developed a Research Set-Aside Program to encourage data collection and provide an opportunity for cooperative research with the fishing industry. The Research Set-Aside Program, which was implemented in 2000, allows for the establishment of set-aside quota which is removed from the annual total allowable landings each year. The quota that is set-aside is then available to applicants who successfully compete in the grant program. The funds generated from the sale of the individual quota set-asides are used to conduct approved research projects. The research conducted under the Research Set-aside Program has enhanced the effectiveness of the Council's conservation and management programs.