

SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

Paralichthys lethostigma

(06/01 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status – *Concern*. Based on the recent stock assessment, the stock appears to be viable. However, the assessment assumes that flounder above age three are escaping fishing mortality, potentially by remaining offshore following the spawning period, and this has yet to be validated. Pending the results of an ongoing study examining escapement in the fishery, the fishery will remain designated as “Concern”.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1991-2000 – 3,862,454 lbs., \$6,339,565
2000 – 3,212,925 lbs., \$5,645,683

Average Recreational Landings 1991-2000 – 126,590 lbs., **2000** – 250,326 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations 1991-2000 – 224, **2000** - 534

Status of Fisheries Management Plan – A fishery management plan (FMP) for southern flounder is currently being developed by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. The plan is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2002. The federal FMP for summer flounder also affects the harvest of this species in ocean waters.

Research and Data Needs – continued monitoring of the commercial and recreational fisheries, bycatch mortality estimates, verification of escapement of older flounder from the fishery (underway), estimation of participation and harvest in the recreational gig fishery (underway), expanded coverage of the estuarine gill net fishery (underway), reproductive ecology (underway), increased fisheries-independent data.

Current Minimum Size Limit – *Internal Waters* – 13 in.
Ocean Waters – 15½ in. recreational, 14 in. commercial

Current Harvest Limit – *Internal Waters* – none
Ocean Waters – 8 fish recreational, 100 lbs. commercial

Harvest Season – *Internal Waters* – no closures
Ocean Waters – recreational closure from May 1-14, 2001

Size and Age at Maturity – 13.6 in., 1 year old

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 8 years old, 6 years old

Juvenile Abundance Indices Average 1991-2000 – 4.0 (fish per unit of effort), **2000** – 2.9

Habits and Habitats – Southern flounder are estuarine dependent members of the left-eyed flounder family that include summer flounder and gulf flounder. Southern flounder migrate offshore and south during winter and early spring and inshore and north during late spring, summer, and fall. Southern flounder spawn in near shore continental shelf waters from November through March. Young fish enter inlets and settle on muddy bottoms in lower-salinity areas of estuaries. Unlike summer flounder, most adult southern flounder return to North Carolina's estuaries after spawning.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#)