

**Contact: Nancy Fish, Marine Fisheries**  
**Phone: 252-726-7021**  
**Date: June 30, 2005**

## **STATE RELEASES REPORT CARD ON HEALTH OF FISHERIES**

### *Stocks Reclassified to Reflect Changing Status*

**MOREHEAD CITY** – North Carolina's coastal and ocean fisheries showed limited signs of progress as two stocks, striped mullet and sharks were upgraded to recovering, while weakfish was downgraded to overfished and summer flounder was shifted to the concerned category, according to the state's annual stock status report.

Striped mullet was upgraded to recovering based on a recent state assessment indicating the stock has not been overfished since 1998. Fisheries managers will closely monitor this stock because market demand for the roe causes commercial fishermen to target females, potentially reducing the stock's ability to reproduce.

Sharks were upgraded from overfished to recovering based on a National Marine Fisheries Service assessment that concludes the overall large coastal shark stock has improved since 1998.

Weakfish were downgraded from viable to overfished based on the latest Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission assessment. Federal and state fisheries managers are perplexed because the reduction in the population continues, even though coast-wide commercial fishing catches have dropped for the last several years. Harvest reduction strategies to address declining population trends are being developed.

Summer flounder were moved from the viable to the concern category as a result of the most recent ASMFC assessment indicating overfishing is occurring. The impacts of the assessment could result in additional restrictions on this species.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' annual stock status report evaluates the health of state's important coastal fisheries, spotlighting successes, as well as areas of concern. Of the 40 stocks listed, 18 fall into the viable and recovering categories, eight are listed as concerned, eight are overfished, and six are unknown. The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission uses this report to decide priority development of the state's fishery management plans.

To determine the status of N.C. fisheries, the DMF collects data and analyzes long-term trends in the length, weight, age, catch, and fishing effort for each stock. For many stocks it is also possible to evaluate the total weight of the fish in a stock that are old enough to spawn, the number of juvenile or immature fish, fishing mortality, natural mortality, migration, size and age at maturity, regulatory impacts and bycatch.

Fish and shellfish stocks considered viable are Atlantic croaker, black sea bass north of Cape Hatteras, striped bass in the Albemarle Sound and the ocean, dolphin/wahoo, gag, king and Spanish mackerel, Atlantic menhaden, spot, spotted seatrout (speckled trout), and shrimp.

Recovering stocks include bluefish, monkfish, red drum, scup, sharks and striped mullet.

Stocks listed as concerned include white and yellow perch, reef fish, American shad, summer flounder, bay scallops, oysters and blue crabs.

Black sea bass south of Cape Hatteras, striped bass (in waters other than the ocean, Albemarle and Roanoke sounds), southern flounder, river herring in the Albemarle Sound, spiny dogfish, Atlantic sturgeon, tautog and weakfish are listed as overfished. In North Carolina, all overfished stocks either have regulations in place, or proposed regulations being developed, to stop overfishing and allow the populations to rebuild. The rebuilding process can take many years, especially for long-lived species like red drum. Even if a species is recovering, it stays in the overfished category until a consistent recovery trend is evident.

The DMF does not have sufficient data to conduct appropriate assessments on the status of some stocks. These stocks are listed as unknown and include catfishes, American eel, river herring outside of Albemarle Sound, kingfishes (sea mullet), hickory shad and hard clams. The DMF is collecting the necessary assessment information for these important fisheries and will be moving many of these stocks into the appropriate categories over the next few years.