

MONKFISH

Stock Status - Recovering – Based on revised biomass reference points (2007 assessment) both the Northern and Southern stocks are no longer considered overfished. Due to some uncertainty in the stock assessment results, however, management of the monkfish fishery still remain concerned about the status of the stock. Currently, the biomass indexes for both the monkfish stocks are above the minimum biomass threshold and annual biomass target index.

Average Commercial Landings and Value - 2000-2009 – 257,139 lbs./\$280,940

2009 Commercial Landings and Value – 99,549 lbs./\$112,354 (quota managed)

Average Recreational Landings - 2000-2009 – insufficient data to quantify.

Status of Fishery Management Plan (FMP) – In North Carolina, monkfish are currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC)/Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) FMP compliance requirements in federal waters (3–200 miles). The fishery is currently managed under Amendment 2 of the FMP which establishes Northern (NFMA) and Southern (SFMA) fishery management areas with annual quotas for each area, limits entry along with different permit categories for the directed fishery, allocates days at sea fishing for monkfish, sets daily trip limits, and still allows the traditional incidental catch to occur. The monkfish FMP adopted in 1999 outlined a 10-year rebuilding plan for the stock. In response to continued concern over the status of the monkfish stock, NMFS implemented interim management measures effective May 1, 2008, for the 2008 fishing season including limiting days at sea and reducing the allowable incidental catch.

Research and Data Needs - Reliable estimate of fishing mortality, commercial fishery sampling, determination of timing and location of spawning, bycatch and discard estimates, age and growth studies.

Current Regulations - 17 inches total length (TL) and 11 inches tail length in the NFMA and SFMA.

Harvest Season - In North Carolina, large mesh gill net restrictions implemented by NMFS to protect sea turtles and harbor porpoises significantly limit the directed gill net fishery for monkfish. A directed commercial fishery occurs from March 16th through April 14th. During this time, fishermen harvesting monkfish in state waters using gill nets greater than seven inches stretched mesh, must hold a valid N.C. Monkfish Large Mesh Gill Net Permit and limit fishing activity to a one mile wide area extending from two miles seaward of the coastline to three miles seaward of the coastline from the North Carolina/Virginia state line southward to Wimble Shoals (Latitude 35° 30'N).

Size and Age at Maturity – Males: 14 inches/3 years; Females: 17 inches/4 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age - Males: 9 years; Females: 14 years

Juvenile Abundance Index 2000-2009 – N/A

Habits and Habitats – Monkfish, also called goosfish or anglerfish, range from the Grand Banks and northern Gulf of St. Lawrence south to Cape Hatteras. Found from inshore out to depths greater than 800 meters, monkfish are most common in depths ranging from 70 to 100 meters. Migration is driven by spawning and feeding. Spawning occurs offshore in early spring in North Carolina and lasts until late September in northern latitudes. Eggs are buoyant and float in huge gelatinous masses until hatching. Monkfish are bottom fish that have a modified first dorsal spine that is used to attract prey. The tip of the spine possesses a red fleshy flap of skin that can be wiggled to lure in prey, which is

then engulfed in their large mouth. Prey includes spiny dogfish, skates, weakfish, tautog, flounders, and sea birds.

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