SOUTHERN FLOUNDER
(06/04 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status -- *Overfished*. Based on the 2004 stock assessment, the southern flounder stock is overfished and has been for at least the past decade.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1994-2003 – 3,619,222 lbs., $6,331,088

2003 Commercial Landings and Value – 2,198,503 lbs., $3,661,597

Average Recreational Angler Landings 1994-2003 – 166,917 lbs. **2003** – 116,474 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations 1994-2003 – 315, **2003 –** 548

2002 Recreational Gig Landings – 361,539 lbs.

Average RCGL Landings 2002-2003 – 90,512 lbs. **2003** – 80,509 lbs.

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 FMP is scheduled to be adopted by December 2004. The federal FMP for summer flounder also affects the recreational harvest of this species.

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 on a continual basis, expanded coverage of the estuarine gill net fishery (underway), reproductive ecology (underway), increased fisheries-independent data.

Current Regulations – *Internal Waters* – The commercial fisheries have a minimum size limit of 13 inches and the recreational fisheries have a 14-inch minimum size limit in all internal waters internal waters except the Neuse, Pamlico, and Pungo rivers, along with Pamlico County bays and mainland Hyde County bays west of Bluff Pt. where the size limit is 13 inches TL; *Ocean Waters* – commercial fishermen must adhere to a minimum size limit of 14 inches and a 100 lbs. trip limit unless the individual has a License to Land Flounder from the Atlantic Ocean, and a 14-inch size limit and an 8-fish bag limit is in place for the recreational fisheries.

Size and Age at Maturity – 13.6” TL, 1 year old

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 8 years old, 10 years old

Juvenile Abundance Indices Average 1994-2003 – 3.7 (fish per unit of effort), **2003 –** 1.5

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