

SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

(06/03 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status — *Overfished*. Based on the recent stock assessment, the population biomass of southern flounder in North Carolina has declined by 32% over the past decade, due in part to overfishing.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1993-2002 — 3,828,748 lbs., \$6,517,044

2002 — 3,448,654 lbs., \$5,140,704

Average Recreational Landings 1993-2002 — 150,644 lbs., **2002** — 238,884 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations 1993-2002 — 276, **2002** — 344

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 July 2004. 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* - Commercial: 13" TL, Recreational: 13" TL Neuse, Pamlico, and Pungo rivers, along with Pamlico County bays and mainland Hyde County bays west of Bluff Pt., 14" TL in all other internal areas

Ocean Waters - Commercial: 14" TL, Recreational: 15½" TL

Current Harvest Limit — *Internal Waters* – none

Ocean Waters – 8 fish recreational, 100 lbs. commercial, unless an individual has a license to land flounder

Harvest Season — *Internal Waters* – no closures

Ocean Waters – no closures

Size and Age at Maturity — 13.6" TL, 1 year old

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

Juvenile Abundance Indices Average 1993-2002 — 3.8 (fish per unit of effort), **2002** — 1.2

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](#)