

SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

Stock Status - *Depleted* - Based on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries 2009 stock assessment, the southern flounder stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring.

Average Commercial Landings and Value - 2000-2009 – 2,605,716 lbs./\$4,760,036

2009 Commercial Landings and Value – 2,395,384 lbs./\$4,608,301

Average Recreational Landings - 2000-2009 – 318,788 lbs., **2009** – 297,790 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (5 lbs.) 2000-2009* – 409, **2009*** – 417

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - A FMP for southern flounder was developed by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries in February 2005. Development of Amendment 1 of the Southern Flounder FMP is currently underway. The federal FMP for summer flounder also affects the harvest of this species.

Research and Data Needs – Effort and harvest estimates for the recreational gig fishery, reproductive ecology, continued at-sea observer coverage of the estuarine gill net fishery, bycatch mortality estimates from all fisheries, verification of escapement of older southern flounder from the fishery, and species composition of recreationally released flounder.

Current Regulations – Commercial: 14-inches total length (TL) minimum size limit in internal and ocean waters, closed season in internal waters from December 1-31; no trip limits in internal waters and a 100 lb. trip limit in ocean waters unless the individual has a License to Land Flounder from the Atlantic Ocean. There were various gear regulations to minimize undersized southern flounder bycatch implemented in the fall of 2005. Recreational: 15-inches TL minimum size limit/8 fish creel limit for eastern estuarine waters and ocean waters north of Brown's Inlet with no closed season; 14-inches TL minimum size limit/8 fish limit in western estuarine waters and ocean and estuarine waters south of Brown's Inlet with no closed season.

Harvest Season — Commercial: January through November (closed season in December) with peak catches from September to November. Recreational: Year-round with peak catches from July through October.

Size and Age at Maturity – Females: 13-inches TL/1 year; Males: 10-inches TL/1 year

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 9 years/7 years

Juvenile Abundance Index- 2000-2009** – 1.4, **2009**** – 0.8 (not validated)

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 late fall and winter and inshore and north during late spring and summer. 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.

*Includes southern, summer and Gulf flounders, but the majority are southern flounder.

**Geometric mean from Juvenile Estuarine Trawl Survey

For more information, contact Chris Batsavage by email at chris.batsavage@ncdenr.gov (800-682-2632 or 252-808-8088).