

## **AMERICAN EEL**

(06/05 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status - *Unknown***- No stock assessment exists because the current status of the American eel stock is poorly understood. ASMFC plans to complete a benchmark stock assessment by the end of November 2005.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1995-2004** – 122,987 lbs./\$222,733

**2004 Commercial Landings and Value** – 128,720 lbs./\$270,660

**Average Recreational Landings 1995-2004** - Unknown. 2002-2004 RCGL data show recreational reporting too insignificant to infer an average yearly catch.

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan** - In North Carolina, American eel is currently included in the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management Plan, which defers to ASMFC FMP compliance requirements. The ASMFC initially approved a FMP in 1999. The most recent review was approved November 2004.

**Research and Data Needs** – The first need is to acquire a solid understanding of the species distribution and abundance. Then studies to improve an understanding of the life history and influences on stock abundance and health can be conducted. However, acquiring funding and personnel are a priority before research needs can become a reality.

**Current Minimum Size limit/Creel limit (2005)** – Recreational: 6-inch total length (TL)/ 50 eels per person per day; Commercial: 6-inch total length (TL)

**Harvest Season (2005)** - Entire year

**Size and Age at Maturity** – Males: 12 inches/4 years –8 years, Females: 18 inches/7 years-12 years

**Historical and Current Maximum Age** – 43 years

**Juvenile Abundance Index 2001-2004** – Annual YOY Abundance Survey initiated in January 2001: **2001**–55.32, **2002**–5.97, **2003**-7.02, **2004**–7.76.

**Habits/Habitats** – The American eel is a catadromous species requiring multiple habitats including: ocean, estuaries, and fresh water streams, rivers, and lakes. This catadromous life cycle requires a migration back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn, while spending the majority of its life in brackish and freshwater. Larvae develop at sea and change from glass eels into elvers in nearshore ocean waters and estuaries. Elvers either remain in the estuary or migrate upstream. At approximately 2 years of age individuals are classified as the yellow eel stage and resembles the adult form. This stage lasts from approximately 5 years to 20 years. Yellow eels also inhabit estuaries and fresh water tributaries where they feed on invertebrates and smaller fish. They prefer areas with soft bottom and vegetation. The mature silver eel life stage occurs at the time of downstream migration, leaving the estuary for the open ocean to spawn then die. Seaward migration occurs in late summer and fall.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#)