

Contact: Patricia Smith
Date: June 30, 2009
Phone: 252-726-7021

GRADES IMPROVE FOR FOUR SPECIES ON STOCK STATUS REPORT

MOREHEAD CITY – The stock status of four species improved in this year’s North Carolina Stock Status Report of Important Coastal Fisheries.

State fisheries authorities believe this is a sign that fishery management plans are working.

“All four of the improved species are managed under scientifically-based plans,” said Louis Daniel, director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

Most notably, bay scallops moved from “depleted” to “recovering.”

The commercial bay scallop season opened in Core and Pamlico sounds in 2009 for the first time since 2006. The state had closed the fishery due to poor harvests in 2004 and 2005. Stocks had never fully recovered from a red tide event in 1987 and several hurricanes in the 1990s, and were unable to sustain fishing pressure and predation from cownose rays.

In 2009, populations in Core Sound and Pamlico Sound showed signs of increased abundance and were reopened for limited harvest. The abundance levels of bay scallops in all other areas of the state showed improvements in numbers, but not enough to reach a target for reopening, and therefore remained closed during the 2009 harvest season.

Summer flounder and monkfish moved from the “concern” category to the “recovering” category, and scup moved from “concern” to “viable.” These upgrades were based on updated stock assessments that indicate the species are no longer overfished. Summer flounder, monkfish and scup all fall under federal and/or interstate fishery management plans.

The stock status of three species declined in this year’s report. Spotted seatrout, king mackerel and croaker all dropped from “viable” to “concern.”

North Carolina’s first stock assessment for spotted seatrout, released in January, determined that the stock is overfished for the assessment years of 1991 to 2006. The stock assessment is being updated to include 2007 and 2008 data. Advisory committees to the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission will meet this month to consider whether to recommend that the state adopt interim regulations while a Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan is being developed.

While the most recent stock assessments for South Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic croaker show the species are not overfished, there is concern about heavy fishing pressure on king mackerel and a drop in commercial landings of croaker.