AMERICAN EEL

(06/04 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status – *Unknown*, The current status of the American eel stock is poorly understood and no stock assessment exists. ASMFC is planning a benchmark assessment in 2005.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1994-2003 – 119,715 lbs., \$213,238

2003 Commercial Landings and Value – 172,065 lbs., \$267,350

Average Recreational Landings 1994-2003 -- Unknown **2003 --** Unknown. 2002-2003 RCGL data shows recreational reports to insignificant to infer an average yearly catch.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan -- ASMFC 1999 FMP last reviewed/approved 26 May 2004.

Research and Data Needs – First need is to acquire a solid understanding of the species distribution and abundance. Then conduct studies to improve an understanding of the life history and influences on stock abundance and health.

Current Minimum Size limit/Creel limit – 6 inch total length (TL) for recreational and commercial fisheries, as well as a recreational possession limit of 50 eels/person.

Harvest Season -- Entire year

Size and Age at Maturity - Males 12 inches at age 4-8, Females 18 inches at age 7-12

Historical and Current Maximum Age -- 43 years old

Juvenile Abundance Index 2001-2003 – Annual Y-O-Y Abundance Survey initiated in January 2001: **2001** – 55.32, **2002** – 5.97, **2003** – 7.02

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 (leptocephali) that develop at sea change from glass eels into elvers in nearshore oceanic 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 5-20 years. Yellow eels also inhabit estuaries and fresh water tributaries were 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.

Interesting American Eel Links:

http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/spc/eel.htm http://www.fishbase.org/

For more information, see DMF Species Leads page