BLUEFISH
(06/07 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock status – *Viable*– Bluefish are not experiencing overfishing, and are no longer overfished. Fishing mortality has steadily declined since 1991, with biomass estimates increasing since 1997.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1997-2006 - 3,231,050 lbs./$900,186

2006 Commercial Landings and Value – 2,791,100 lbs./$815,626 (quota managed)

Average Recreational Landings 1997-2006 – 953,592 lbs., **2006 –** 1,207,241 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (17 lbs.) 1997-2006 – 11, **2006 –** 5

Average Recreational Commercial Gear Landings 2002-2006 –16,457 lbs., **2006 –** 10,275 lbs.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - In North Carolina, bluefish is currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)/Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) FMP compliance requirements. Amendment 1 to the plan, established a schedule to rebuild the stock to a biomass level to support harvests at or near the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2007, by eliminating overfishing through a gradual reduction in the fishing mortality rate (F). Fishing mortality rates have decreased from F=0.51 (1999-2000) to F=0.31 (2004-2007). The FMP allows annually adjusted, state-by-state commercial quota system and recreational harvest limits to reduce fishing mortality. Amendment 1 also outlines a series of permitting and reporting requirements. The most recent stock status information (Bluefish Technical Committee 2005) indicated bluefish were overfished, but overfishing was not occurring. Most recent stock status information indicates that bluefish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, based on the biological reference points developed in the 2005 stock assessment. Trends in state and Northeast Fishery Science Center (NEFSC) data show a decreasing trend in fishing mortality, an increasing trend in population biomass, and an increasing trend in population numbers.

Such trends resulted in the commission and the council increasing the 2007 total allowable landings (TAL) to 27.76 million lbs. The overall TAL was then allocated to the recreational (83%) and commercial (17%) fisheries. As such, the commercial quota was set at 4.72 million pounds and the recreational harvest limit at 23.04 million pounds. Based on the unlikelihood that the recreational sector would land their 83%, 4.78 million lbs. of the recreational harvest limit for 2007 will be transferred from the recreational harvest to the commercial quota. As a result of the transfer, the recreational harvest limit for 2007 will be 18.26 million lbs. and the commercial quota will be 9.5 million lbs. North Carolina's commercial quota (32%) increased slightly to 3,045,776 lbs. for 2007.

Data/Research Needs - Validated age data, fishery independent data, commercial bycatch and recreational mortality estimates, exploration of alternative assessment models.

Current Regulations (2007) – 15-fish per person per day taken by hook and line. Only 5 fish of the 15-fish limit can be greater than 24 inches total length (TL).

Harvest Season - Open year round

Size and Age at Maturity - 13 inches fork length (FL)/2 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 14 years/12 years

Juvenile Abundance Index - Unknown

Habits and Habitats - Bluefish are pelagic and important to saltwater fishermen throughout the world. Bluefish school by size and make seasonal migrations north in the spring and south in winter. Large fish tend to congregate in the northern part of the range. There are two spawning groups, one that spawns at sea during the spring and the other spawns at sea in the summer.

For more information, see DMF Species Leads page.