

NCFA UPDATE: 02/21/2022
NORTH CAROLINA FISHERIES ASSOCIATION
"Serving the Commercial Fishing Families of North Carolina since 1952"
PO Box 86; Morehead City, NC 28557
Phone: (252) 726-NCFA (6232)
Fax: (252) 726-6200
www.ncfish.org

Have we failed to Rebuild the Southern Flounder Stock?

If you've sat through as many Marine fisheries commission and Advisory Committee meetings as I have, then you've certainly heard "we've failed to rebuild the Southern Flounder stock."

But is it true?

Let me start by saying I have an issue with the use of the term "rebuild" when it comes to Southern Flounder. The term rebuild implies we are trying to restore the stock to its previous condition or level of abundance, but, to date, I've seen no data to suggest that the Southern Flounder stock has ever been at the level of abundance we are striving to achieve.

The Marine Fisheries Commission is attempting to reduce the total removals of Southern Flounder by 72%, a reduction that is predicted to increase the spawning stock biomass (SSB) to their target of 5,452 metric tons or 12 million pounds, within 10 years. Simply put, the MFC is hoping to have 12 million pounds of, sexually mature, female Southern Flounder in the water within 10 years.

According to the data, used by the DMF to assess the health of the stock, the SSB was well below this target of 5,452 metric tons, for the entire time series from 1989-2017. In fact, the Spawning Stock Biomass was also well below the overfishing threshold of 3,900 metric tons (8.6 million lb) for the entire time series, meaning we have been "overfishing" this species for 3 decades, more than 3 generations.

That said, we're not trying to "rebuild" the stock back to previous levels of abundance, we're attempting to increase the SSB to a level of abundance we've never seen before, not even when we were harvesting 5 million pounds in a year.

So, if NC has indeed failed, it was not a failure to rebuild the stock, it would be a failure to increase the spawning stock biomass to a level that exceeds the threshold (end overfishing) or meets the target SSB.

But, have the management measures adopted by the NC Marine Fisheries Commission really failed?

Over the years the MFC has adopted multiple management measures, each with the same primary goal, to reduce the harvest of Southern Flounder. As I mentioned in previous articles, the number of flounder being caught has remained steady, but harvest has been significantly reduced meaning the management measures were, without a doubt, successful at reducing harvest. Unfortunately, if the data is correct, the decrease in harvest did nothing to increase the Spawning Stock Biomass and end overfishing.

That's right, supposedly millions of fish that were once harvested are now being released in the recreational hook and line fishery, with an assumed 91% survival rate, but the spawning stock continues to decline.

How can this be?

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A key strategy of the state was to increase the size limit of flounder to the point where the majority were mature before being vulnerable to harvest, or "let em spawn." By repeatedly increasing the size limit they shifted harvest primarily to females many of which are sexually mature, which makes no sense when your ultimate goal is to increase SSB, or the number of mature females.

This could explain why the SSB has not expanded, but let's pray that's not the case. Not only has NC chose to maintain our current size limit of 15-inches, now both South Carolina and Florida have decided to increase their minimum size limits, meaning, for the foreseeable future, the majority of the harvest throughout this stocks range will be primarily female fish.

How this is going to increase the abundance of mature females (SSB) is beyond me!

Did I forget to mention that the Southern Flounder stock, we've been trying to manage, is not ours alone, it's a multi-state stock shared with South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Of course, our management measures and statutory requirements only apply to NC fishermen and anglers, which raises an important question.

Can North Carolina be held solely accountable for failing to properly manage a multi-state stock, like Southern Flounder?

According to the DMF/MFC's interpretation of our states statutes the answer is yes!

NC has the most restrictive fisheries statutes in the country. Our statutes require that, when a fishery is overfished or overfishing is occurring, the MFC must adopt management measures that have at least a 50% probability of ending overfishing in 2 years and achieving sustainable harvest in 10 years. No other coastal states, including South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida have these statutes which means they're not required to adopt measures that meet our statutory timelines. A failure to increase the SSB, above the overfishing threshold, would be a failure of all 4 states but due to our statutes only NC fishermen would be required to take further reductions. Despite this, the State has decided to apply these statutory requirements to the management of Southern Flounder even though we know N.C. alone cannot possibly meet these goals.

After the reductions we've already taken what's left? A complete closure?

If the stock fails to respond positively and more reductions are necessary, it will certainly be a failure of the CCA agenda as they are responsible for North Carolina's restrictive fishery statutes and the increased size limits in all three states!

To make matters worse all of these reductions may not be necessary at all. I, and many others, believe that a portion, if not the majority, of the mature Southern Flounder do not return to our estuaries after migrating to the ocean to spawn. If this is the case, it would mean that, at least a portion of, the spawning stock biomass remains offshore where no directed fisheries or sampling for Southern Flounder occurs, meaning the SSB could be significantly larger than the current assessment suggests.

Simply put, if these flounder are not captured through targeted fishing or independent sampling, they do not end up on a data sheet. If they don't end up on a data sheet, it doesn't matter how many there are, because they don't exist. In my opinion, this unseen and undocumented spawning stock is the only explanation for why the number of flounder being caught has remained stable, and the stock hasn't collapsed, while we've supposedly overfished this stock, at a very high rate, for 3 decades.

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Our inability to locate and sample Southern Flounder after they leave our estuaries has created a data gap that has the potential to significantly impact the accuracy of the stock assessment. For this reason, the commercial fishing industry has funded a satellite tagging study for Southern Flounder, which we hope will be the first step of many, towards answering this very important question. While we attempt to further our understanding of what's really occurring in this fishery, the CCA and Wildlife Federation claim the stocks gone to hades in a handbag and blame commercial fishermen, anglers, and the State. Which one has the most potential to benefit you in the future?

Has anybody asked, how they can blame the state for mis-management when they've publicly supported almost every management measure the state has passed?

All this said, the question remains. Have we failed?

Maybe, maybe not.

I think our true failure has been to protect our citizens and the integrity of our management process from the devastating impacts of the CCA and NCWF's agenda.

What do you think?

Glenn Skinner
NCFA- Executive Director

MEDIA ADVISORY: Marine Fisheries Commission to meet Feb. 23-25 in New Bern

MOREHEAD CITY – The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission will meet in-person Feb. 23-25 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel New Bern Riverfront, 100 Middle St, New Bern. The meeting also will be livestreamed on YouTube.

The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 23; at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 24; and at 9 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 25. In accordance with current guidance to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the chairman asks that everyone attending the meeting wear a mask, except when giving public comment to the commission.

The commission will hold in-person public comment sessions at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 23 and near the beginning of the meeting on Thursday, Feb. 24. Public comment will not be taken through web conference.

The following information pertains to in-person public comment:

- Those who wish to speak may sign up at the hotel beginning at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 23.
- To accommodate as many speakers as possible, the chairman will limit each speaker to 3 minutes.
- Those making comments will be asked to speak only once, either Wednesday night or Thursday morning, but not during both public comment periods.
- Those who wish to submit handouts to the commission during a public comment period should bring at least 12 copies to the meeting.

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The public may also submit written comments:

- Written comments may be submitted through an online form accessible through the [Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting webpage](#).
- Written comments may be mailed to February 2022 Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting Comments, P.O Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557.
- Written comments may be dropped off at the Division of Marine Fisheries' Morehead City Headquarters Office at 3441 Arendell St., Morehead City.
- Written comments must be posted online or received in the Division of Marine Fisheries Office by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 21.
- The Marine Fisheries Commission Office will not accept public comment for this meeting through email.

The YouTube link will be posted on the [Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting webpage](#). After the meeting, a recording will be posted online.

Agenda items include:

- Reviewing the draft Estuarine Striped Bass FMP Amendment 2 and sending it out for public comment and advisory committee review.
- Selecting preferred management options for the draft Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan Amendment 3 and sending it for departmental review.
- Approving a management option and associated proposed rule language to begin the process of amending the Mutilated Finfish Rule.
- Final approval for the adoption, readoption, repeal, and amendment of a slate of rules under a state mandated periodic review (G.S. 150B-21.3A).

A full meeting agenda and briefing book materials will be posted on the [Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting webpage](#) as they become available.

WHO:	N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
WHAT:	Quarterly Business Meeting
WHEN:	Feb. 23 at 6 p.m. Feb. 24 at 9 a.m. Feb. 25 at 9 a.m.
WHERE:	DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel New Bern Riverfront 100 Middle St, New Bern.
Livestream:	Click here for links

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UPDATE for 2.21.2022

GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

The General Assembly met last week on Wednesday & Thursday to address the redistricting issue. They also addressed the school masking issue on Thursday.

Here is a general wrap-up of what they approved for redistricting, keeping in mind that the courts still must approve. More details will come once we're certain this is what the new districts really are. Listed here are the significant changes for coastal counties.

CONGRESSIONAL:

The coastal counties are either in District 1 or 3. The coastal counties in District 1 begin with Currituck and all the way down to Pender. District 4 includes the coastal counties of New Hanover and Brunswick.

NC SENATE & HOUSE:

The biggest news here as far as coastal counties are concerned is that Dare County is now in the proposed district where Bob Steinburg and Norman Sanderson are running. Previously Dare was to be in the district where Bobby Hanig has declared as a candidate. This will be a challenge for Bobby in a district without Dare.

Here is a list of counties included in the new District 1. As of now the candidates that have publicly announced are Bob Steinburg and Norman Sanderson, both Republicans:

Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, Washington, Dare, Hyde, Pamlico and Carteret.

For the new District 3. As of now the candidate that has publicly announced is Bobby Hanig, Republican. Incumbent Senator Ernestine Bazemore, Democrat, has not yet announced her intentions.

God bless,

Jerry

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N.C. shrimp fishers' perceptions of impacts on the shrimp fishery survey

The study is conducted by Dr. Nadine Heck (me), Assistant Professor in the Department of Coastal Studies at East Carolina University. The study explores fishers' observations of changes in the shrimp fishery and identifies challenges that fishers face in responding to changes in the marine environment that affect shrimp catch. To achieve these aims, the survey includes questions on fishers' perceptions of changes in the NC shrimp fishery with a focus on shrimp abundance and shrimp distribution, the subsequent impacts on catch and livelihoods, and challenges that NC shrimp fishers face in adapting to these impacts. The study is part of a larger Sea Grant funded project and outcomes will be published in scientific articles. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. As a token of gratitude, **we provide a \$ 15 gas gift card** for participating in this research study. For questions, please contact heckn19@ecu.edu. We have an online option (password ncshrimp) https://ecu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6QNoMUNlrzIXeZM.

Nadine Heck

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Important Reminder from NOAA Fisheries: Turtle Excluder Device (TED) Requirements are Now in Effect

TED Requirements for Skimmer Trawls:

- In an effort to strengthen sea turtle conservation efforts, NOAA Fisheries is offering a reminder to the shrimp industry of current TED requirements. A TED is a device that allows sea turtles to escape from trawl nets, and their use is required by regulations implemented under the Endangered Species Act. TEDs aid in the protection and recovery of sea turtle populations by reducing their incidental bycatch and mortality in southeastern U.S. shrimp fisheries.
- Currently, all vessels using otter trawls and **all vessels 40 feet and greater in length using skimmer trawls** must have properly installed TEDs in their nets. Vessel length is the length specified on the vessel's state vessel registration or U.S. Coast Guard vessel documentation required to be onboard the vessel while fishing. Skimmer trawl vessels less than 40 feet in length may also choose to use properly installed TEDs, but if they do not, those vessels must still comply with maximum tow time limits (i.e., 55 minutes from April 1 through October 31 and 75 minutes from November 1 through March 31, as measured from the time the codend enters the water until the time the codend is emptied of catch on deck). Other limited exemptions from the TED requirements can be found at [50 CFR 223.206\(d\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#).

***Important Note:** TEDs are made to order and this does take time. Vessel owners who haven't yet acquired TEDs should consider getting orders in well in advance of their planned fishing trips to make sure they don't experience delays.*

We Can Help:

- To schedule a courtesy compliance TED check please contact the Gear Monitoring Team at TED.info@noaa.gov, Canh Nguyen (228) 355-8372, Jason Letort (228) 355-8667, or Jeff Gearhart (228) 369-4265.

Upcoming TED Workshops and Additional Information:

- The Gear Monitoring Team will be conducting additional workshops and training sessions for skimmer trawl fishers. Information on these sessions will be posted on our website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/bycatch/turtle-excluder-device-regulations>.

TED Manufacturers: (updated 2/10/22)

- Due to questions coming into our Southeast Fishery Science Center's Gear Monitoring Team, we also want to provide a list of skimmer trawl TED manufacturers. NOAA Fisheries is not recommending any specific manufacturer. The list below is intended to inform the industry and public of existing skimmer trawl TED manufacturers. The list is not exhaustive and will be updated if additional manufacturers are identified.

Louisiana		
Alario Brothers Marine Supply 894 Ave A Westwego, LA 70094 Eva Alario (504) 341-1843	Bob's Net Shop 5170 Rogers St Lafitte, LA 70067 Bobby Boudreaux (504) 689-3592	Chine's Cajun Net Shop Inc 1901 N Bayou Dr Golden Meadow, LA 70357 Chine (985) 475-6788
Cutoff Net Shop 175 W 80th Street Cutoff, LA 70345 Troy Terrebonne (985) 637-8046	Fishermen's Net & Supply Co 4540 Downman Rd New Orleans, LA 70126 Warren Delacroix (504) 244-8767	The Net Doctor 5325 Bayouside Drive Chauvin, LA 70344 (985) 804-4501
Toni's Marine Supplies 598 Destrahan Avenue Harvey, LA 70058 Thomas Nguyen (504) 347-1254	Touchard Marine Supply 403 LA-14 Delcambre, LA 70528 Clark Touchard (337) 685-2715	
Mississippi	Alabama	

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Southern Supply Company 326 Howard Ave Biloxi, MS 39530 John Nguyen (228) 435-4401	Nelson's Net Shop 16746 Kennedy Rd Bon Secour, AL 36511 Shell Nelson (251) 949-7325	Brunson Net & Supply Co Inc 17778 US-98 Foley, AL 36535 (251) 943-6911
North Carolina		
Gordon's Net Works 1571 Bricklanding Rd SW South Brunswick, NC 28470 (910) 754-9713		

Sign Up for Text Message Alerts

NOAA's Text Message Alert Program allows you to receive important fishery related alerts via text message (SMS). Standard message and data rates may apply. You may opt-out at any time. Text alerts you may receive include immediate fishery openings and closures and any significant changes to fishing regulations that happen quickly.

Sign up for one or more of the fisheries-related alerts below by texting the following to **888777**:

- Gulf of Mexico Recreational: Text **GULFRECFISH**
- Gulf of Mexico Commercial: Text **GULFCOMMFISH**
- South Atlantic Recreational: Text **SATLRECFISH**
- South Atlantic Commercial: Text **SATLCOMMFISH**
- Caribbean: Text **CARIBFISH**

Other Contacts

Media: Kim Amendola (727) 551-5705, Allison Garrett (727) 551-5750