

Summer Flounder  
Amendment #1

## Introduction

The summer flounder (*Paralichthys dentatus*) resource along the Atlantic coast has been under an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) fishery management plan (FMP) since 1982 and a Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) FMP since 1988. A Chesapeake Bay Summer Flounder FMP was adopted in 1991. The ASMFC/MAFMC Summer Flounder FMP has been amended several times since 1990. As a result of the ASMFC/MAFMC recommendations and requirements, the 1991 Chesapeake Bay Summer Flounder FMP needs to be updated to reflect the current status of the stock and the current problems associated with managing the quota system. The following language replaces Problem 1 and 1.1, Strategy 1 and 1.1 and Actions 1.1a-1.1d (p.27-29) in the 1991 plan.

**Problem 1: Overfishing.** Overfishing for summer flounder has been defined by the MAFMC as fishing in excess of the  $F_{max}$  level.  $F_{max}$  is a biological reference point that corresponds to the level of fishing mortality (F) that produces the maximum yield per recruit. Based on current analysis,  $F_{max}$  is 0.23. A strategy to reduce fishing mortality to  $F_{max}$  by 1998 was adopted. The schedule is as follows: reduce F to 0.41 in 1996, to 0.3 in 1997, and to 0.23 ( $F_{max}$ ) in 1998 and beyond. The adopted reduction strategy will effectively balance the reduction in fishing mortality with the short-term economic burdens placed on the participants in the fishery. As a result of coastal management measures, F has decreased from 2.1 (1993) to 1.5 (1995). The most recent stock assessment indicates that stock rebuilding is occurring more slowly than anticipated. Estimated spawning stock biomass (SSB, age 0 and older) increased to 15,235 mt in 1995. Consequently, the stock is at a medium level of historic abundance and continues to be overexploited (F is above  $F_{max}$ ). Recruitment indices from coastal state's young-of-the-year surveys indicate that recruitment has slightly improved since its lowest value in 1988. With the fishery landings quota and if recruitment is good, F is projected to decrease.

In order to control fishing effort and fishing mortality rates, the MAFMC and ASMFC have established a coastwide commercial quota and a recreational harvest limit for the summer flounder fishery. The amount of summer flounder currently allocated to each state for the commercial fishery is based on 1980-1989 adjusted landings data. Maryland is allocated 2% of the coastwide commercial quota and Virginia is allocated 21%. The individual state allocations (percentage of coastwide commercial quota) may change as more data is collected. Since 1988, approximately 88% (MDNR data 1988-1991) to 95% (NOAA data 1988-1992) of Maryland's commercial landings have been harvested from the Atlantic coast with the remaining percentage harvested from the Chesapeake Bay. Given Maryland's small percentage of the coastal quota, guidelines are necessary to ensure fair allocation among the harvesters. While a coastwide limit has been set for the recreational harvest of summer flounder, no attempt has been made to allocate a specific amount to each of the coastal states.

**Strategy 1:** The Bay jurisdictions will follow the guidelines recommended by the MAFMC/ASMFC that balance reductions in fishing mortality (F) with short-term economic burdens placed on the participants in the fishery. The Bay jurisdictions will equitably allocate the

coastwide harvest of summer flounder to maintain the traditional recreational and commercial fisheries in the Chesapeake region.

### **Problem 1.1**

The summer flounder stock is overexploited and at a medium level of historical abundance. Fishing mortality (F) has decreased from 2.1 (1993) to 1.5 (1995). With the MAFMC/ASMFC reduction strategy in effect and good recruitment, F is projected to decrease. If the estimates of F continue to be above the management targets, additional steps will be necessary to reduce exploitation. The spawning stock biomass has increased since 1989 but the stock is rebuilding at a slower rate than anticipated. The age structure of the population remains truncated.

### **Strategy 1.1**

The Bay jurisdictions will continue to implement management measures which reduce fishing mortality on the summer flounder stock and equitably allocate the harvest of summer flounder.

#### **Action 1.1a**

The jurisdictions will implement annual quotas, individual quotas and/or possession limits in addition to seasonal restrictions, minimum mesh size requirements, minimum size limits, limited entry and license requirements to meet the coastwide commercial quota. The traditional balance of harvest between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic coast will be maintained.

#### **Action 1.1b**

The jurisdictions will implement recreational seasons, creel limits and minimum size limits to meet the annual coastal recreational harvest limits recommended by the MAFMC/ASMFC.

**Action 1.1c** Maryland and Virginia will maintain the traditional commercial fishery by requiring a special landings permit for the Atlantic commercial summer flounder fishery. The jurisdictions will develop, define and adopt criteria to determine eligibility for participation in the fishery.