



NATIONAL COALITION FOR MARINE CONSERVATION
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TO: Menhaden Management Board
FROM: Ken Hinman, National Coalition for Marine Conservation
SUBJECT: Menhaden Assessment & Peer Review Demand Board Action

In our research paper, “Ecological Reference Points for Atlantic Menhaden” - distributed to the Management Board, Management & Science Committee, and ASMFC staff in June 2009 and attached here – we demonstrate that the biological reference points currently used for stock assessment and management are not suitable for conserving an important forage fish such as menhaden.

The inadequacy of the current reference points is now affirmed by the 2010 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Report and Peer Review Panel (SEDAR 20, April 14, 2010), which recommends that alternative reference points be considered and applied to the assessment to provide a more accurate interpretation as to the status of the menhaden resource.

The Assessment Report’s status determination of “not overfished” and “no overfishing” is only robust “relative to the current reference points,” according to the Review Panel. The assessment, in fact, reveals many negative indicators as to resource health, indicators that are highly descriptive of a seriously overfished fishery.

- Population abundance (age 1+ fish) is at a time series (1955-2008) low
- Recruitment has been poor for over two decades
- The exploitation rate on age 3+ fish is 65-69%, making it unlikely adult menhaden have a chance to spawn more than once
- Fecundity, or egg production, is less than 10% that of an un-fished population
- The number of juvenile fish surviving to replenish the spawning stock is less than 1/3 the level in the 1970s and early '80s
- Fishing mortality (F) is near the overfishing threshold; given uncertainty in the estimate of F, there is a “significant probability” that overfishing occurred in 2008, as it has 32 out of the last 53 years.

The Peer Review Panel questioned the use of the F and fecundity reference points in assessing stock health and recommends choosing alternative reference points. Given the poor condition of the menhaden stock, as reflected in the

negative indicators above, the Board should begin the task of developing new, more conservative reference points immediately, to be applied to the 2010 assessment.

Further, noting the Board's standing recommendation that, following this assessment, the ASMFC begin developing new reference points that address the role of menhaden in the ecosystem, in particular as prey for striped bass and numerous other predators, the assignment of considering new reference points as recommended by the Peer Review should go to both the Menhaden Technical Committee and the Multispecies Technical Committee.

Finally, until new reference points are adopted, the Board should consider implementing precautionary, interim management measures for 2011, or until the new reference points are translated into new management rules.

5/5/2010