Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) - Select Activities Update

Recent Workshops

The Council successfully conducted several workshops on Climate Change Science, Climate Change Governance, and Offshore Wind Best Management Practices, in the first quarter of 2014. Workshop presentations and final reports are available at: http://www.mafmc.org/workshops-events/

Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Reauthorization

Both the House and Senate have released discussion drafts for the MSA reauthorization. These drafts were most recently discussed extensively at the Council Coordination Committee meeting held on May 12-15, 2014. In February 2014, Council Chairmen Rick Robins testified before the U.S. House of Representatives, Natural Resources Committee on this subject. Transcripts of the Congressional hearings and testimony, as well as letters from the councils to the House and Senate are available at: http://www.mafmc.org/legislative/

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management

The Council is currently developing an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Guidance Document. Rather than drastically change the Council's management approach, the final product will serve as a non-regulatory umbrella document to guide policy decisions as the Council transitions from single-species management toward an ecosystem-based approach. The Council defines EAFM as a fishery management approach that recognizes the biological, economic, social, and physical interactions among the components of ecosystems and attempts to manage fisheries to achieve optimum yield, while taking those interactions into account. The Council will be working to develop this document with its Committee's through 2014 and 2015.

Habitat Pilot Project

The Council is in the process of initiating a pilot project working with NOAA Fisheries Habitat Division to address a number of objectives in 2014 and 2015. Fish require healthy surroundings to survive and reproduce. Essential fish habitat includes all types of aquatic habitat where fish spawn, breed, feed, and grow to maturity. To date, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has identified the essential habitat for every life stage of its managed species using the best available scientific information and has developed several habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs). HAPCs are considered high priority areas for conservation, management, or research because they are rare, sensitive, stressed by development, or important to ecosystem function. However, these HAPC designations have been made in the single species context and the Council has made relatively limited use of the HAPC provisions and other place-based approaches. Identifying HAPCs that are critical for the productivity of Mid-Atlantic fish populations, in a more holistic, multi-species context, is essential for maintaining healthy ecosystem and sustainable fisheries.

As the Council develops an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Document, under its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, it will become necessary to identify HAPCs for Mid-Atlantic managed fish and shellfish species. Proactive identification of these areas will enable the Council to reduce or mitigate impacts from anthropogenic (human-caused) activities, such as certain fishing practices as well as coastal and marine development, which threaten to alter, damage, or destroy these habitats. In the larger context, making fisheries management decisions and recommendations in an ecosystem context will make Mid-Atlantic fisheries more resilient to changes in coastal and ocean habitats due to development, climate, and other pressures.

This project will enhance the ability of the Council, NOAA Fisheries, and other Federal agencies to work together to minimize these threats and support activities that enhance or maintain marine fisheries productivity by identifying multi-species priority areas (HAPCs) and using place-based habitat solutions to address coastal and marine resource challenges. Productive commercial and recreational fisheries are inextricably linked to healthy marine habitats. Protecting and restoring these habitats will help support Mid-Atlantic fisheries and coastal economies.

The specific project objectives are to:

1) Produce a report on current practices and objectives used in the identification of critical habitat areas in the US and abroad.
2) Develop Council policy statements on anthropogenic activities in our region that may affect fish habitat, from which overarching habitat objectives for the EAFM Document will be derived.
3) Utilize the EFH Geodatabase Project in conjunction with Council EAFM habitat objectives to develop multi-species HAPCs.
4) Identify a process for monitoring success relative to those habitat objectives.

New Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel

The Council formed a Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel this Spring 2014. Advisors will assist in the development of management measures to support the conservation of river herring (alewives and blueback) and shad (American and hickory) populations. A Council River Herring and Shad Committee will oversee efforts to improve the information about how the catch cap in the Atlantic mackerel fishery should be set. The committee will also investigate other opportunities for the Council to engage in river herring and shad conservation. The advisory panel will provide stakeholder input to the Committee and the Council on these and other river herring and shad issues.