

# ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

*Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

## Draft Five-Year Strategic Plan 2014-2018



*The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources  
as assets which it must turn over to the next generation  
increased and not impaired in value.*

*Theodore Roosevelt*

## Introduction

Each state has a fundamental responsibility to safeguard the public trust with respect to its natural resources. Fishery managers are faced with many challenges in carrying out that responsibility. Living marine resources inhabit ecosystems that cross state and federal jurisdictions. Thus, no state, by itself, can effectively protect the interests of its citizens. Each state must work with its sister states and the federal government to conserve and manage natural resources.

Beginning in the late 1930s, the 15 Atlantic coastal states from Maine to Florida took steps to develop cooperative mechanisms to define and achieve their mutual interests in coastal fisheries. The most notable of these was their commitment to form the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) in 1942, and to work together through the Commission to promote the conservation and management of shared marine fishery resources. Over the years, the Commission has remained an effective forum for fishery managers to pursue concerted management actions. Through the Commission, states cooperate in a broad range of programs including interstate fisheries management, fisheries science, habitat conservation, and law enforcement.

Congress has long recognized the critical role of the states and the need to support their mutual efforts. Most notably, it enacted the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) in 1993, which built on the success of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act of 1984. Acknowledging that no single governmental entity has exclusive management authority for Atlantic coastal fishery resources, the Atlantic Coastal Act recognizes the states' responsibility for cooperative fisheries management through the Commission. The Atlantic Coastal Act charges all Atlantic states with implementing coastal fishery management plans that will safeguard the future of Atlantic coastal fisheries in the interest of both fishermen and the nation.

Accepting these challenges and maintaining their mutual commitment to success, the Atlantic coastal states have adopted this five-year Strategic Plan for the Commission. The states recognize circumstances today make the work of the Commission more important than ever before. The Strategic Plan articulates the mission, vision, values, goals, and strategies needed to accomplish the Commission's mission.

## Mission

The Commission's mission, as stated in its 1942 Compact, is:

*To promote the better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell and anadromous, of the Atlantic seaboard by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries, and by the prevention of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.*

The mission grounds the Commission in history. It reminds everyone of the Commission's sense of purpose that has been in place for over 70 years. The constantly changing physical, political,

social, and economic environments led the Commission to restate the mission in more modern terms:

*To promote cooperative management of marine, shell and diadromous fisheries of the Atlantic coast of the United States by the protection and enhancement of such fisheries, and by the avoidance of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.*

The mission and nature of the Commission as a mutual interstate body incorporate several guiding principles. They include:

- States are sovereign entities, each having its own laws and responsibilities for managing fishery resources within its jurisdiction
- States serve the broad public interest and represent the common good
- Multi-state resource management is complex and dependent upon cooperative efforts by all states involved
- The Commission provides a critical sounding board on issues requiring cross-jurisdictional action, coordinating cooperation, and collaboration among the states and federal government

## **Vision**

The long-term vision of the Commission is:

*Sustainably managing Atlantic coastal fisheries*

## **Values**

The Commission and its member states have adopted the following values to guide its operations and activities. These values affirm the Commission's commitment to sustainable fisheries management for the benefit of recreational and commercial fishermen and coastal communities. They also acknowledge the growing importance of managing fisheries in a more holistic and adaptive way, seeking solutions to cross cutting resource issues **with the goal of long-term ecological sustainability.**

- Effective stewardship of marine resources through strong partnerships
- Decisions based on sound science
- Long-term ecological sustainability
- Transparency and accountability in all actions
- Timely response to new information through adaptive management
- Balancing resource conservation with the economic success of coastal communities
- Efficient use of time and fiscal resources
- Work cooperatively with honesty, integrity, and fairness

## **Driving Forces**

The Commission and its actions are influenced by a multitude of factors. These factors are constantly evolving and will most likely change over the time period of this Strategic Plan. However, the most pressing factors affecting the Commission today are increased pressure on fishery resources, elevated stakeholder scrutiny of the science supporting management decisions, a shifting legislative climate, shrinking state and federal budgets, a growing demand to address ecosystem functions, shifts in populations and habitats due to climate change, and the potential listing of coastal species as threatened and endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The Strategic Plan, through its goals and broad strategies, will seek to address each of these issues over the next five years.

### **Pressure on Fishery Resources and Industry**

Fishery resources are impacted by a range of sources from fishing related events (harvest and discards) to non-fishery related factors such as trophic interactions, habitat quality and availability, invasive species, and climate change. The Commission, through the authority of the states' marine fishery agencies, can significantly affect fishery-related mortality (through harvest limits and input/output controls), but has little or no control over the non-fishery related factors. Partnerships, research, education, and advocacy will continue to play an important role in enabling the Commission and the states in addressing non-fishery related impacts.

The fishing industry also faces a variety of pressures, including global, national, and local market forces. Essential waterfront infrastructure is being lost to or dramatically changed by more profitable coastal development. Fishermen face increasingly stringent regulations that at times shift fishing effort, create inefficiencies, and restrict fishing opportunities. Resource allocation among the states and between various user groups will continue to be an important issue over the next five years.

### **Science-based Management**

There is a tendency for the public and stakeholders to question the science supporting fisheries management decisions, due in part to a perceived disconnect between fishermen's on-the-water observations and stock assessment results. In some cases, this has resulted in stakeholders developing separate research initiatives or hiring their own fisheries consultants to develop alternative data sets, analyses, and stock assessments, often resulting in conflicting information available to managers. The Commission remains committed to management decisions based on sound science. This includes collaborating with stakeholders to conduct cooperative research, and seeking stakeholder input during the stock assessment process. It also includes an obligation to clearly communicate stock assessment results and advance the public's understanding of fisheries biology and stock assessment concepts through outreach tools.

### **Legislation**

Over the next five years, there are several items on the legislative front that the Commission will need to track closely, including reauthorization of the Atlantic Coastal Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act – all of

which have expired. Each of these laws has a tremendous impact on the states' fisheries programs, greatly influencing Commission/federal alignment in carrying out our shared stewardship responsibilities. The Commission is dedicated to advancing the states' interests to Congress as it reauthorizes these Acts or takes action on any other legislation that may affect the Commission's operations.

### **Federal, State, and Commission Resources**

Federal funding continues to be restricted by the Budget Control Act of 2011, which includes spending caps on yearly appropriations bills as well as automatic, across-the-board spending cuts, commonly known as "sequestration". Beginning in 2013, nearly every stream of federal fisheries funding decreased by approximately ten percent, including grants that go directly to the states and funding for data collection, as well as the day-to-day operations of the Commission.

The states have also been severely impacted by reduced budgets over the past several years, resulting in an overall reduction in workforce and an associated reduction in fisheries management and research activities. This dire funding environment has led to a situation where current federal and state resources for fisheries science and management are insufficient to meet our collective responsibilities and mandates. Federal and state government resources will continue to be stretched as complex requirements are added without adequate complementary funding. Given these financial realities, the states and their federal partners must maintain and strengthen their partnerships, providing for efficient and effective fisheries management across all agencies. No one state or federal agency has the resources or authority to do it alone.

### **Ecosystem Functions**

Nationally, there has been a growing demand for fisheries managers to address broader ecosystem functions such as predator/prey interactions and environmental factors into their fisheries management planning. The challenge in meeting this demand is its rigorous data requirements. The lack of resources to collect and manage these additional data sets has hindered the Commission in implementing ecosystem-based management. A majority of the Commission's species are managed and assessed on a single species basis incorporating ecosystem services information where available. The Commission remains committed to seeking ecological sustainability over the long-term through continuing its work on multispecies assessment modeling and the development of ecosystem-based reference points in its fisheries management planning process.

### **Ocean Planning**

Marine spatial planning has become an increasingly popular method of balancing the growing demands on valuable ocean resources. More specifically, the competing interests of commercial and recreational fishing, renewable energy development, aquaculture, marine transportation, offshore oil exploration and drilling, military needs, habitat restoration, and weather forecasting are all components that must be integrated into successful ocean use policies. The Commission has always emphasized cooperative management with our federal partners; however, the states' authorities in their marine jurisdictions must be preserved and respected. The Commission will continue to prioritize the successful operation of its fisheries, but it will be imperative to work

closely with federal, state, and local governments on emerging ocean use conflicts as they diversify into the future.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change and warming water temperatures will play an important role in the health and availability of coastal fishery resources for years to come. Potential impacts include prey and habitat availability, water quality, susceptibility to disease, and spawning and reproductive potential. The Commission is exploring the relationship between climate change and warming coastal water temperatures, and possible shifts in the geographic distributions of several key Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic stocks. Where shifts are occurring, the Commission may reconsider state-by-state allocation schemes and the need for adjustments to our fishery management plans.

### **Protected Species**

Like coastal fishery resources, protected species, such as marine mammals, sea turtles, and listed and candidate fish species, traverse both state and federal waters. The protections afforded these species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act can play a significant role in the management and prosecution of Atlantic coastal fisheries. The Commission and the states have a long history of working closely with our federal partners to minimize interactions with and bycatch of marine mammals and sea turtles by state water fisheries. The recent listing of Atlantic sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act and the potential listing American eel add a whole new level of complexity in the ability of the Commission and its member states to carry out their stewardship responsibilities for these important diadromous species. These species spend the majority of their lives in state waters and depend on estuarine and riverine habitat for their survival. Listing has the potential to jeopardize the states' ability to effectively monitor and assess stock condition, as well as impact fisheries that may encounter listed species. It is incumbent upon the Commission and its federal partners to work jointly to assess stock health, identify threats, and implement effective rebuilding programs for listed and candidate species.

## **GOALS & STRATEGIES**

The Commission will pursue the following seven goals and their related strategies during the five-year planning period, from 2014 through 2018. It will pursue these goals through specific objectives, targets, and milestones outlined in an annual Action Plan, which is adopted each year at the Commission's Annual Meeting to guide the subsequent year's activities. Throughout the year, the Commission and its staff will monitor progress in meeting the Commission's goals, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. While committed to the strategies included in this plan, the Commission is ready to adopt additional strategies to take advantage of new opportunities and address emerging issues as they arise.

**Comment [TB1]:** How do we measure progress in meeting our goals? Quantifiable achievements? Performance milestones?

## Goal 1 - Rebuild, maintain, fairly (equitably) allocate, and promote Atlantic coastal fisheries

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests and needs of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources mean more jobs and more opportunity for those that live along the coast. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socio-economic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well defined fishery management plans. Fishery management plans will also address fair (equitable) allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding global climate change and its impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to making significant progress on rebuilding overfished or depleted Atlantic fish stocks and promoting the sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to ending overfishing and working to rebuild overfished or depleted Atlantic coast fish stocks, while promoting sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries.

**Comment [TB2]:** A work group member suggested striking this language based on his observation that we have high biomass of certain species that are still under restrictive management and have not yielded more jobs and opportunities. He does not think the statement reflects today's reality.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Manage interstate resources that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries using sound science
- b. Strengthen state and federal partnerships to improve comprehensive management of shared fishery resources
- c. Adapt management to address emerging issues
- d. Practice efficient, transparent, and accountable management processes
- e. Evaluate progress towards rebuilding fisheries
- f. Strengthen interactions and input among stakeholders, technical, advisory, and management groups

## Goal 2 – Provide the scientific basis to conduct stock assessments and support informed management actions

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed by a vast network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. The goal encompasses the development of new, innovative scientific research and methodology, and the enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure sound science is available to serve as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

*Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Conduct stock assessments based on comprehensive data sources and rigorous technical analysis
- b. Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs and collaborative research projects
- c. Facilitate stakeholder involvement in research initiatives and the stock assessment process
- d. Promote data collection and research to support ecosystem-based management
- e. Provide stock assessment training to improve the expertise and involvement of state and staff scientists

**Goal 3 – Ensure stakeholder compliance with interstate fishery management plans through effective law enforcement**

**OR**

**Goal 3 – Ensure stakeholder adherence to interstate fishery management programs through effective law enforcement**

**OR**

**Goal 3 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast fisheries**

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with fishery management plans. This requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission's fishery management plans.

*Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Develop practical compliance requirements that foster stakeholder buy-in
- b. Evaluate the enforceability of management measures and the effectiveness of law enforcement programs
- c. Promote coordination and expand existing partnerships with state and federal natural resource law enforcement agencies
- d. Enhance stakeholder awareness of management measures through education and outreach
- e. Use emerging communication platforms to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations

## **Goal 4 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education**

Goal 4 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The Commission’s Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat in the absence of specific regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership, and will continue to work cooperatively with the program to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Identify critical habitat through fisheries management programs and partnerships
- b. Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- c. Engage local, state, and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs through partnerships
- d. Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage regulatory, political, and financial support
- e. Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health
- f. Engage in state and federal agency efforts to ensure climate change response strategies are included in habitat conservation efforts

## **Goal 5 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission**

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making processes. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Increase public understanding and support of activities through expanded outreach at the local, state, and federal levels

- b. Clearly define Commission processes to facilitate stakeholder participation, as well as transparency and accountability
- c. Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions
- d. Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission's activities and actions

### **Goal 6 – Advance Commission and member states' priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda**

Although states are positioned to achieve many of the national goals for marine fisheries through cooperative efforts, state fisheries interests are often underrepresented at the national level. This is due, in part, to the fact that policy formulation is often disconnected from the processes that provide the support, organization, and resources necessary to implement the policies. The capabilities and input of the states are an important aspect of developing national fisheries policy, and the goal seeks to increase the states' role in national policy formulation. Additionally, the goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress in all phases of policy formulation. Several important fishery-related laws will be reauthorized over the next couple of years (i.e., Atlantic Coastal Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act). The Commission will be vigilant in advancing the states' interests to Congress as these laws are reauthorized and other fishery-related pieces of legislation are considered.

#### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Increase the Commission's profile and support in the U.S. Congress by developing relationships between Members and their staff and Commissioners, the Executive Director, and Commission staff
- b. Communicate the Commission's federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations
- c. Engage Congress on fishery-related legislation affecting the Atlantic coast
- d. Promote member states' collective interests at the regional and national levels
- e. Promote economic benefits of the Commission's actions (return on investment)

### **Goal 7 – Ensure the fiscal stability & efficient administration of the Commission**

Goal 7 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission's management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage it's the resources it currently receives and develop strategies for finding

new funding sources to carry out its programs. The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners and Commission staff to maintain and increase the institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

*Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- a. Maintain or increase long term funding for Commission programsConservatively manage the Commission's operations and budgets to ensure fiscal stability
- b. Utilize new information technology to improve meeting and workload efficiencies, and enhance communications
- c. Refine strategies to recruit professional staff, and enhance growth and learning opportunities for Commission and state personnel
- d. Fully engage new Commissioners in the Commission process and document institutional knowledge.
- e. Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary.

# **ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**

## **Draft 2014 Action Plan**



**Presented to the Full Commission on October 28, 2013**

## **Goal 1 - Rebuild, maintain and fairly (equitably) allocate Atlantic coastal fisheries**

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources mean more jobs and more opportunity for those that live along the coast. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socio-economic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well defined fishery management plans. Fishery management plans will also address fair (equitable) allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding global climate change and its impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to making significant progress on rebuilding overfished or depleted Atlantic fish stocks.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- 1.1 Manage interstate resources that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries using sound science

#### **American Eel**

Task 1.1.1 – Complete Addendum IV (changes to the glass and yellow eel fisheries) in response to 2012 benchmark stock assessment and peer review results

Task 1.1.2 – Work with Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) on monitoring poaching and illegal sale of glass eels (see Task 3.3.1).

Task 1.1.3 – Explore strategy to complete Memorandum of Understanding on management and scientific collaboration with Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

Task 1.1.4 – Monitor action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the petition to list American eel under the Endangered Species Act. Monitor activities on CITIES.

Task 1.1.5 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

#### **American Lobster**

Task 1.1.6 – Monitor implementation of Addenda XVII, XVIII and XIX, XX, XXI, and XXII to establish measures to rebuild the Southern New England (SNE) stock. Develop an addendum to adjust the fishery effort to the size of the resource in Lobster Conservation Management Areas 4, 5, and 6.

Task 1.1.7 – Monitor the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) actions on habitat area closures for impacts to the lobster fishery, respond if necessary.

Task 1.1.8 – Explore long-term funding options for fishery-independent and dependent data collection.

Task 1.1.9 – Continue the development of the lobster trap database to track trap tag transfers.

Task 1.1.10 – Continue to work with the federal government to ensure consistency between regulations in state and federal waters. Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

Task 1.1.11 – Update the lobster assessment database with landings information and monitor landings patterns in both the trap and non-trap fisheries. Complete the 2014 benchmark stock assessment and consider management response to the assessment findings.

Task 1.1.12 – Continue to monitor progress towards implementing more complete catch reporting as recommended by the 2009 Stock Assessment Peer Review Panel.

Task 1.1.13 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Atlantic Herring**

Task 1.1.14 – Finalize 2013-2015 specifications and review 2014 specifications to determine if any changes are necessary.

Task 1.1.15 – Monitor activities of the NEFMC and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) in response to the legal decision regarding small mesh bycatch.

Task 1.1.16 – Hold meetings as necessary to establish state effort control (days-out) programs for Areas 1A and 1B.

Task 1.1.17 – Implement measures included in Addendum II spawning provisions. Consider addendum to establish and/or modify spawning area closures, including Nantucket Shoals Spawning Area.

Task 1.1.18 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Atlantic Menhaden**

Task 1.1.19 – Review state compliance with implementation of Amendment 2. Review effectiveness of Amendment 2 including, bycatch provision, total allowable catch, and

episodic event provisions. Review state landings history that established total allowable catch and allocations for Amendment 2. Monitor landings for the 2014 fishing year.

Task 1.1.20 – Complete 2014 benchmark stock assessment.

Task 1.1.21 – Continue to work with Technical Committee and Biological Ecological Reference Points (BERP) Working Group to examine ecosystem-based reference points that account for predation effects (See Task 2.4.1 and 2.4.2)

### **Atlantic Striped Bass**

Task 1.1.22 – Complete management response to the 2013 benchmark assessment findings.

Task 1.1.23 – Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of Addendum III, state commercial fishery tagging requirements (See Task 3.3.1).

Task 1.1.24 – Explore options to monitor wave 1 recreational harvest in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Task 1.1.25 – Continue consideration of natural mortality associated with mycobacteriosis.

Task 1.1.26 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Atlantic Sturgeon**

Task 1.1.27 – Continue development of the 2015 benchmark stock assessment, including discussions/analysis on genetics and bycatch.

Task 1.1.28 – Monitor state and federal activities in response to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing of Atlantic sturgeon

Task 1.1.29 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Bluefish**

Task 1.1.30 – Work in collaboration with NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) to complete 2014 benchmark stock assessment.

Task 1.1.31 – Review established specifications for 2015 and determine if changes are necessary in cooperation with the MAFMC.

Task 1.1.32 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Horseshoe Crab**

Task 1.1.33 – Establish the 2015 specifications using the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework and quota allocation methodology.

Task 1.1.34 – Engage federal management agencies, the biomedical community, and shorebird interest groups to secure long-term funding to support data collection for use in the ARM Framework, including the Horseshoe Crab Benthic Trawl Survey.

Task 1.1.35 – Monitor action by the USFWS on the listing red knot under the ESA.

Task 1.1.36 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance for both the bait and biomedical industries.

### **Northern Shrimp**

Task 1.1.37 – Consider management response to the 2013/2014 benchmark stock assessment.

Task 1.1.38 – Implement Addendum I and continue development of an addendum to consider limited entry in the northern shrimp fishery.

Task 1.1.39 – Establish specifications for the 2013/2014 season.

Task 1.1.40 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### **Shad and River Herring**

Task 1.1.41 – Monitor activities of the NEFMC and the MAFMC in response to the legal decision regarding small mesh bycatch.

Task 1.1.42 – Monitor and participate in MAFMC consideration of including shad and river herring as “stocks in the fishery”.

Task 1.1.43 – Consider ASMFC management changes in response to actions taken by the Councils.

Task 1.1.44 – Work with management partners to coordinate river herring coastwide monitoring and habitat restoration workshops (NMFS Technical Expertise Working Group, MAFMC Working Group, Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Working Group)

Task 1.1.45 – Work with states in the implementation of habitat plans as required by Amendment 3.

Task 1.1.46 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

## **South Atlantic Species**

### ***Atlantic Croaker***

Task 1.1.47 – Develop white paper/addendum to consider alternative trigger mechanisms for croaker management.

Task 1.1.48 – Complete annual update of assessment triggers to determine if a coastwide assessment and/or management changes are needed.

Task 1.1.49 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Black Drum***

Task 1.1.50 – Complete 2014 benchmark stock assessment and consider management response to the assessment findings.

Task 1.1.51 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Red Drum***

Task 1.1.52 – Initiate 2015 benchmark stock assessment.

Task 1.1.53 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Spanish Mackerel***

Task 1.1.54 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Spot***

Task 1.1.55 – Develop white paper/addendum to consider alternative trigger mechanisms for spot management.

Task 1.1.56 – Complete annual update of assessment triggers to determine if a coastwide assessment and/or management changes are needed.

Task 1.1.57 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Spotted Seatrout***

Task 1.1.58 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

## **Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Sharks**

### ***Spiny Dogfish***

Task 1.1.59 – Review specifications for 2015/2016 and revise if necessary.

Task 1.1.60 – Participate in annual stock status update, as needed.

Task 1.1.61 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Coastal Sharks***

Task 1.1.62 – Establish specifications for 2015 and later.

Task 1.1.63 – Monitor and engage in the development of Amendments 5b, dusky shark measures, and 6, catch shares, by the NMFS Division of Highly Migratory Species (HMS). Determine appropriate Commission management response to HMS Amendments.

Task 1.1.64 – Continue to engage with Humane Society, commercial fishing representatives and other groups to address legislative initiatives for shark finning.

Task 1.1.65 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

## **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass**

### ***Summer Flounder***

Task 1.1.66 – Complete management response to summer flounder recreational working group.

Task 1.1.67 – In collaboration with the MAFMC and stakeholders, consider changes to commercial fishery management including allocation and fishery seasons.

Task 1.1.68 – Finalize regulations for 2014 recreational fishery.

Task 1.1.69 – In collaboration with the MAFMC, review established 2015 specifications to determine if any changes are necessary.

Task 1.1.70 – Work in collaboration with NMFS NEFSC to complete a stock status update.

Task 1.1.71 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Scup***

Task 1.1.72 – Collaborate with MAFMC to develop an amendment to address recreational/commercial allocation as well as commercial winter/summer allocation in the scup fishery considering the results of the completed economic study.

Task 1.1.73 – Work in collaboration with NMFS NEFSC to complete a stock status update.

Task 1.1.74 – Finalize regulations for 2014 recreational fishery. In collaboration with the MAFMC, review established 2015 specification to determine if any changes are necessary.

Task 1.1.75 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Black Sea Bass***

Task 1.1.76 – Develop and implement an addendum to address allocation in the black sea bass recreational fishery for 2014. Collaborate with MAFMC to develop an addendum/amendment to address recreational allocation for 2015 and later.

Task 1.1.77 – In collaboration with the MAFMC, establish the specifications for 2015.

Task 1.1.78 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

Task 1.1.79 – In collaboration with the MAFMC and the NEFSC initiate the 2016 benchmark stock assessment. Consider stock assessment update in 2014 if data become available.

### ***Tautog***

Task 1.1.80 – Complete the 2014 benchmark stock assessment and initiate management discussions to respond to the assessment findings.

Task 1.1.81 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### ***Weakfish***

Task 1.1.82 – Begin the development of the 2015 benchmark stock assessment and update stock status indicators to evaluate changes in the population for 2014.

Task 1.1.83 – Review trends in landings and conduct annual review of conservation equivalency programs, if necessary.

Task 1.1.84 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

## **Winter Flounder**

Task 1.1.85 – Continue to monitor federal water common pool landings and regulations.

Task 1.1.86 – Review state water landings and make changes to fishery specifications if necessary.

Task 1.1.87 – Continue to monitor NMFS activities regarding the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the ESA.

Task 1.1.88 – Monitor fishery for consistency with management parameters and state compliance.

### 1.2 Strengthen state and federal partnerships to improve comprehensive management of shared fishery resources

Task 1.2.1 – Participate as a non-voting member and liaison between the Regional Fishery Management Councils and the Commission on matters of mutual interest.

Task 1.2.2 – Participate on the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council and SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) Steering Committee to set state/federal management and assessment priorities

Task 1.2.3 – Work with the Regional Fishery Management Councils and NMFS to improve alignment between state and federal fishery management programs.

Task 1.2.4 – Continue to work with NEFMC and MAFMC on evaluating and mitigating shad and river herring bycatch in small mesh ocean fisheries. Work with MAFMC on shad and river herring task force (See Task 1.1.44).

### 1.3 Adapt management to address emerging issues

Task 1.3.1 – Consider findings of the Management and Science Committee (MSC) investigation of shifting population distributions in response climate change.

Task 1.3.2 – Consider findings of the MSC report that identifies common resource issues – protected species interactions, bycatch/discards, shifting population distributions, ecosystem services – that are cross-cutting among the Commission’s interstate fishery management plans.

### 1.4 Practice efficient, transparent, and accountable management processes

Task 1.4.1 – Continue to track status of stocks relative to biological reference points to evaluate and drive improvement and results in the Commission’s fisheries management process.

Task 1.4.2 – Increase the use of decision documents to structure Board discussion on complex management decisions and increase transparency of pending board action.

Task 1.4.3 – Continue to focus Board attention on developing clear problem statements prior to initiating management changes.

Task 1.4.4 – Continue to use roll call voting procedures for Commission final actions.

1.5 Evaluate progress towards rebuilding fisheries

Task 1.5.1 – Conduct annual Commissioner assessment of progress towards achieving the Commission’s mission, vision and goals using an on-line survey.

Task 1.5.2 – Continue the use of the annual performance of the stock to evaluate species rebuilding progress

1.6 Strengthen interactions and input among stakeholders, technical, advisory, and management groups

Task 1.6.1 – Engage American lobster, Atlantic striped bass, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, American eel, and northern shrimp advisory panels (APs) in the development of FMPs and Amendments. Solicit state membership of current active APs and appoint new membership where necessary.

Task 1.6.2 – Continue communication with non-active advisory panels (species in the maintenance mode).

Task 1.6.3 – Integrate non-traditional constituents into all Advisory Panels through the Advisory Panel Oversight Committee (See Task 5.2.3).

**Goal 2 – Provide the scientific basis to conduct stock assessments and support informed management actions**

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed by a vast network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. The goal encompasses the development of new, innovative scientific research and methodology, and the enhancement of the states’ stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure sound science is available to serve as the foundation for the Commission’s evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

*Strategies to Achieve Goal*

2.1 Conduct stock assessments based on comprehensive data sources and rigorous technical analysis

Task 2.1.1 – Address data priorities for stocks of unknown status. Continue development of the Atlantic sturgeon benchmark stock assessment and complete the black drum benchmark stock assessment.

Task 2.1.2 – Address data priorities for species with limited data. Collect more comprehensive data for species with limited data in order to move from problematic to more accurate assessment models. Focal areas include sciaenid bycatch data, menhaden fishery-independent data, river herring at-sea and in-river monitoring, improved tautog indices, black drum age sampling; American eel surveys covering all life stages; bluefish coast wide monitoring.

Task 2.1.3 – Complete benchmark stock assessments for Atlantic menhaden, American lobster, tautog, and bluefish.

Task 2.1.4 – Facilitate independent peer reviews of the American lobster, tautog and black drum assessments to provide sound, actionable scientific advice to managers. Complete SEDAR peer review of Atlantic menhaden, and SAW/SARC reviews of northern shrimp and bluefish.

Task 2.1.5 – Develop and evaluate the long-term stock assessment and peer review schedule to prioritize stocks by management need; track scientists' workloads in order to complete 2015-2016 benchmark assessments; identify data and modeling changes to improve problematic assessments.

Task 2.1.6 – Monitor the workload of technical committees through the Assessment Science Committee (ASC) and MSC and inform the ISFMP Policy Board of workload issues.

Task 2.1.7 – Following benchmark stock assessments, create species-specific databases (including CDs) to facilitate efficient future assessment updates.

Task 2.1.8 – Serve as members of the American Lobster, Atlantic Menhaden, Atlantic Sturgeon, Black Drum, Multispecies, and Tautog Technical Committees and Stock Assessment Subcommittees to assist in completion of benchmark assessments and annual assessment updates. Utilize the Assessment Science Committee for guidance with assessment methods as necessary.

Task 2.1.9 – Develop alternative stock assessment models to prepare for the next weakfish benchmark stock assessment, in collaboration with Virginia Tech.

Task 2.1.10 – Develop new policies and approaches to better match assessment workload with assessment resources, using the guidance of the ASC. Develop approaches for improved and cost effective data collection.

Task 2.1.11 – Continue to work with state and federal stock assessment scientists and staff of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) to increase use of ACCSP data in the Commission's technical work.

Task 2.1.12 – Through the ASC, establish requirements and guidance for technical committees to provide uncertainty estimates when presenting scientific advice.

Task 2.1.13 – Through the MSC, develop a Commission policy regarding risk and uncertainty, in consideration of Councils approaches, and provide to the ISFMP Policy Board consideration.

2.2 Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs and collaborative research projects

Task 2.2.1 – Maintain the master list of ASMFC Research Priorities by species as benchmark assessments are completed and new priorities emerge. Establish baseline socioeconomic information needs by species and identify additional research priorities.

Task 2.2.2 – Participate in proposal reviews for MARFIN, MARMAP, MAFMC Research Set Aside (RSA), the NMFS Cooperative Research Programs, Saltonstall-Kennedy and ACCSP, when requested, to evaluate projects and monitor regional research activities to promote member state needs.

Subtask 2.2.2.1 – Develop and communicate research priorities for review and approval by species management boards, and provide to MAFMC RSA.

Subtask 2.2.2.2 – Work closely with federal partners to ensure completed RSA projects are reviewed and transmitted to appropriate technical committees and boards

Task 2.2.3 – Communicate with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to review research priorities and funding opportunities (e.g., fish passage, catch shares).

Task 2.2.4 – Provide ASMFC input to the ACCSP’s Coordinating Council, Operations Committee, Bycatch Prioritization Committee, Biological Review Panel, Recreational and Commercial Technical Committees, Outreach Committee and the Computer Technical Committee.

Subtask 2.2.4.1 – Submit ASMFC changes to existing priorities for at-sea observer coverage for inclusion in the ACCSP Bycatch Prioritization Listing. Consult Fishing Gear Technology Work Group regarding ASMFC input to Bycatch Prioritization.

Task 2.2.5 – Coordinate and implement the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP).

Subtask 2.2.5.1 – Assist in securing funding to conduct 2015 NEAMAP Nearshore Trawl Surveys.

Subtask 2.2.5.2 – Support continuation of the NEAMAP Nearshore Trawl Surveys through coordination with survey leads and all NEAMAP committees: NEAMAP Board, Operations, Data Management, Analytical, and Trawl Technical Committees

Subtask 2.2.5.3 – Develop the 2015 NEAMAP Operations Plan.

Subtask 2.2.5.4 – Assist in the refinement of the NEAMAP Data Management Plan.

Subtask 2.2.5.5 – Conduct the NEAMAP Onboard Catch Processing Workshop to compare methods across all state and NEAMAP surveys.

Subtask 2.2.5.6 – Update and maintain the NEAMAP website to provide Program information and Nearshore Trawl Survey results.

Subtask 2.2.5.7 – Include NEAMAP age information in coast wide ageing workshops and exchanges.

Subtask 2.2.5.8 – Provide NEAMAP data to coast wide stock assessments; track and demonstrate data use, and report to the ISFMP Policy Board; ensure NEAMAP products are serving the needs of technical committees.

Subtask 2.2.5.9 – Seek opportunities and resources for NEAMAP sampling to supplement horseshoe crab data collection for Delaware Bay population.

Task 2.2.6 – Coordinate the South Atlantic component of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP)

Subtask 2.2.6.1 – Coordinate all research components of SEAMAP-South Atlantic: Coastal Trawl Survey, Red Drum Longline Surveys, Bottom Mapping, Fish Habitat Characterization and Assessment, Pamlico Sound Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Southeast Regional Taxonomic Center, and the Data Management and Crustacean Work Groups.

Subtask 2.2.6.2 – Assist in developing the 2015 Operations Plan.

Subtask 2.2.6.3 – Participate in the expansion of SEAMAP-South Atlantic to include fishery-independent data coordination and mapping. Support Data Management Work Group refinement and populating of SEAMAP-South Atlantic database (Coastal Survey, Pamlico Sound Survey, Red Drum Longline Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Winter Tagging Cruise), and coordinate with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to complete a database with a searchable web interface.

Subtask 2.2.6.4 – Coordinate South Atlantic activities with the Gulf and Caribbean components of SEAMAP.

Subtask 2.2.6.5 – Update and maintain the SEAMAP website hosted by ASMFC.

Task 2.2.7 – Continue the Tagging Certification Program and improve the use of tagging data in ASMFC species management programs. Develop tagging registration programs, update and maintain the tagging resource website, link acoustic tagging information to the Atlantic Coastal Tagging (ACT) network website, and develop instructional tagging videos to improve the efficiency and quality of tagging efforts along the coast.

Subtask 2.2.7.1. – Provide administrative and at-sea support to the Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise and striped bass hook and line tagging initiative.

Task 2.2.8 – Continue to participate in the development and implementation of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), with ASMFC staff serving on Executive Steering Committee, Operations Team, and Angler Registry Team. Report progress to the ISFMP Policy Board, and scientific oversight committees (MSC, ASC).

Subtask 2.2.8.1 – Determine the appropriate roles of ASMFC and ACCSP in conducting the MRIP intercept survey in the Atlantic states.

Subtask 2.2.8.2 – Coordinate and administer MRIP Angler Registry and Site Registry grants to states.

Subtask 2.2.8.3 – Participate in national MRIP Percent Standard Error (PSE) Workshop to determine best scientific methods for using new catch and effort estimates in assessment and management processes.

Task 2.2.9 – Assist NMFS in conducting the 2014 Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Summit.

Task 2.2.10 – Coordinate FishSmart program activities to facilitate education and implementation of angler ethics and scientifically-based best handling practices.

Task 2.2.11 – Conduct age sample exchanges and an ageing workshop for summer flounder and scup to ensure optimal and consistent methods are being used coast wide. Continue cooperative programs with the states to collect otoliths, scales, and opercula toward improving age data for assessments of striped bass, weakfish, bluefish and other species.

Task 2.2.12 – Distribute ASMFC fish ageing protocols for Atlantic coast species to the states and academia.

Task 2.2.13 – Continue coordination of the ASMFC Observer Program for Mid-Atlantic small-mesh otter trawl fisheries through the Northeast Fishery Observer Program. Pursue funding with other partners; expand the program to address other ASMFC research priorities, based upon the ACCSP FY2013 Bycatch Prioritization Listing. Evaluate existing funding mechanisms that use industry support.

Task 2.2.14 – Continue to support monitoring and other data collection to improve information available for assessments of spot, kingfish (whiting) and black drum. Support improved monitoring of blue catfish in collaboration with NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office.

Task 2.2.15 – Coordinate the activities of the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences.

Subtask 2.2.15.1 – Cooperate with ACCSP staff on issues requiring socioeconomic data. Provide recommendations on socioeconomic data collection and standards.

Subtask 2.2.15.2 – Report to ISFMP Policy Board on current socioeconomic data collection and analyses used by other Commissions and Councils, including associated costs.

Subtask 2.2.15.3 – Track progress of NEFSC’s development of fishery performance measures and explore development of indicators for use in ASMFC stock assessments.

Subtask 2.2.15.4 – Support socioeconomic assessments in conjunction with stock assessments, as recommended by the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences (CESS) for striped bass and other species, to provide more comprehensive information for managers when making harvest and allocation decisions.

Task 2.2.16 – Coordinate the activities of the Fish Passage Working Group (FPWG) to carry out priority tasks as defined by the ISFMP Policy Board. Promote development of effective fish passage approaches and projects through state and federal collaboration.

Subtask 2.2.16.1 – Develop a coast wide database of dams, fishways, and passage efficiency studies.

Subtask 2.2.16.2 – Develop a protocol for prioritizing fish passage projects; implement strategies to address priorities and develop performance criteria.

Subtask 2.2.16.3 – Establish coast wide fish passage targets and add to diadromous species FMPs as amendments/addenda are developed.

Subtask 2.2.16.4 – Monitor and participate in upcoming FERC relicensing projects; develop guidance for state staff for navigating the FERC dam relicensing process, in order to more effectively improve passage in relicensing prescriptions

Subtask 2.2.16.5 – Continue to develop an East Coast Fish Passage Plan.

Subtask 2.2.16.6 – Evaluate positive and negative consequences of providing fish passage through consultation with the diadromous technical committees.

2.3 Facilitate stakeholder involvement in research initiatives and the stock assessment process

Task 2.3.1 – Facilitate stakeholder participation in the stock assessment and fisheries management processes. Seek stakeholder input at data workshops during development of stock assessments.

Task 2.3.2 – Conduct Fisheries Science 101 webinars to increase stakeholder and public understanding of basic fisheries science principles and concepts. (see Task 5.1.10)

Task 2.3.3 – Continue angler-based age sample collection for striped bass, Spanish mackerel, black drum, and red drum, and expand to weakfish and bluefish.

Task 2.3.4 – Promote scientifically sound tagging practices and certification of angler-based tagging programs through the Interstate Tagging Committee.

Task 2.3.5 – Sponsor and assist in organizing the 2014 American Fisheries Society symposium on recent American eel assessment methodology and pursuit of a joint US-Canada assessment.

Task 2.3.6 – Develop outreach materials that highlight opportunities for public engagement in the Commission’s fisheries management and stock assessment processes. (See Task 5.2.4)

## 2.4 Promote data collection and research to support ecosystem-based management

Task 2.4.1 – Coordinate the BERP Working Group and Multispecies Technical Committee to address ISFMP Policy Board and Atlantic Menhaden Board tasks regarding multispecies interactions. Examine ways to quantify interactions for important prey species such as Atlantic menhaden.

Task 2.4.2 – Continue to improve multispecies modeling efforts to support single-species assessments, including development of a new multispecies statistical catch-at-age model. Examine ecosystem based reference points as an alternative to single species reference points, using Atlantic menhaden as a test species.

Task 2.4.3 – Continue to advance Commission use of ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management using development of Atlantic menhaden alternative reference points as a case study.

Task 2.4.4 – Identify opportunities to collaborate with state, federal, and university researchers to use existing data collection platforms to advance ASMFC ecosystem models (e.g. diet studies, surveys of spawning and nursery habitats).

Task 2.4.5 – Complete the investigation of shifting population distributions in response climate change and report to the ISFMP Policy Board.

Task 2.4.6 – Identify common resource issues - protected species interactions, bycatch/discards, shifting population distributions, ecosystem services – that are cross-cutting among the Commission’s interstate fishery management plans. Develop recommendations for ISFMP Policy Board consideration to address common issues while maintaining sustainable fisheries in state waters.

Task 2.4.8 – Convene the Fishing Gear Technology Work Group to address new ISFMP Policy Board tasking.

Subtask 2.4.8.1 – Evaluate the efficacy of Bycatch Reduction Devices in southern shrimp trawl fisheries to reduce Sciaenid bycatch.

Task 2.4.9 – Participate as members of the Chesapeake Bay Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team and Fisheries Ecosystem Workgroup.

- 2.5 Provide stock assessment training to improve the expertise and involvement of state and staff scientists
- Task 2.5.1 – Conduct intermediate and advanced stock assessment methods training workshops. Conduct a stock assessment training workshop for Commissioners (See Task 7.3.5).
- Task 2.5.2 – Support external stock assessment training opportunities for staff and state scientists.

**Goal 3 – Ensure stakeholder compliance with interstate fishery management plans through effective law enforcement**

**OR**

**Goal 3 – Ensure stakeholder adherence to interstate fishery management programs through effective law enforcement**

**OR**

**Goal 3 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast fisheries**

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with fishery management plans. This requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission’s fishery management plans.

*Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- 3.1 Develop practical compliance requirements that foster stakeholder buy-in
- Task 3.1.1 – Identify and explore fishery management measures that maximize stakeholder buy-in.
- 3.2 Evaluate the enforceability of management measures and the effectiveness of law enforcement programs
- Task 3.2.1 – Work with LEC Coordinator to ensure the input of the LEC throughout the management process on the enforceability of management options proposed in FMPs, amendments, addenda and conservation equivalency proposals.
- Task 3.2.2 – Review effectiveness of the “Guidelines for Resource Managers” to evaluate its ability to inform fishery managers and affect their decisions in the regulatory process.

Task 3.2.3 – Report on the enforceability of existing FMPs as part of the annual compliance review for each species.

Task 3.2.4 – Engage and support NMFS and USFWS Offices of Law Enforcement to improve communication and coordination between states and federal enforcement agencies.

3.3 Promote coordination and expand existing partnerships with state and federal natural resource law enforcement agencies

Task 3.3.1 – Provide a forum to promote interjurisdictional enforcement operations targeting specific fishery resources (e.g. Atlantic striped bass, tautog, American eel).

Task 3.3.2 – Expand efforts to reach out to the law enforcement advisory committees of the regional fishery management councils and interstate commissions to seek opportunities for collaboration and ensure consistent law enforcement strategies.

Task 3.3.3 – Continue to evaluate the states’ use of vessel monitoring system (VMS) data with increased access provided to the states. Determine if current level of access is adequate for state use of VMS data. Provide training opportunities, if necessary and resources permit, for state officers to ensure timely and efficient access to VMS data.

Task 3.3.4 – Appoint ASMFC representative to serve on the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Law Enforcement Committee. Monitor the Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs Association and exchange information as appropriate.

Task 3.3.5 – Exchange information on record keeping of violations, dispatching, and use of real time data to enhance conservation enforcement efforts.

Task 3.3.6 – Exchange information and best practices related to the enforcement of protected and endangered species regulations

Task 3.3.7 – Continue to monitor compliance with state and federal recreational registry requirements.

Task 3.3.8 – Develop strategies to improve communications among state and federal enforcement agencies prior to regional enforcement activities.

Task 3.3.9 – Engage in annual review of NMFS enforcement priorities to ensure state enforcement needs are included. Review and provide feedback to NMFS on the new federal penalty structure.

Task 3.3.10 Provide feedback to NMFS as additional electronic monitoring technologies are considered and adopted.

Task 3.3.10 – Conduct semi-annual presentations, by state and federal agencies, of enforcement actions and facilitate discussions on joint efforts that can assist in fisheries enforcement.

Task 3.3.11 – Share enforcement techniques and law enforcement success stories and provide regional training sessions (if resources allow) to enhance law enforcement efficiency along the Atlantic coast.

Task 3.3.12 – Evaluate the merits of establishing more timely communication among state and federal law enforcement entities to facilitate more frequent information exchange.

3.4 Enhance stakeholder awareness of management measures through education and outreach

Task 3.4.1 – Highlight the outcomes of law enforcement investigations (penalties and fines) through various outreach tools (website, social media, press releases, fact sheets).

3.5 Use emerging communication platforms to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations.

Task 3.5.1 – Report on enforcement issues associated with differing federal, interstate, and state regulations using social media and timely press releases.

Task 3.5.2 – Provide forum for enforcement agencies to display successful development and use of enforcement technologies.

#### **Goal 4 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education**

Goal 4 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The Commission’s Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat in the absence of specific regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership, and will continue to work cooperatively with the program to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes.

## *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

### 4.1 Identify critical habitat through fisheries management programs and partnerships

Task 4.1.1 – Draft a sciaenid habitat source document working closely with technical committees, other species experts, and staff. For each species, include descriptions of habitat types or areas most critical to restoring or maintaining sustainable stocks. Habitat sections will describe the habitat limitations creating a bottleneck to the recovery of a species of concern.

Task 4.1.2 – Prioritize and publicize important habitat types for Commission-managed species as identified in the ACFHP Strategic Plan.

Task 4.1.5 – Coordinate artificial reef activities among the Atlantic coast states, and between the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions.

### 4.2 Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems

Task 4.2.1 – Facilitate coordination and distribution of information for ecosystem-based management and marine protected area activities, and the potential consequences of significant anthropogenic activities on habitats of concern.

Task 4.2.2 – Participate in regional and national habitat meetings and scientific conferences to facilitate increased communication with agencies and programs that have jurisdiction over habitat.

Task 4.2.3 – Review and improve format of *Habitat Hotline Atlantic* newsletter to enhance the utility and effectiveness of meeting the target audience’s needs. Produce and distribute annual issue of the newsletter.

Task 4.2.4 – Develop next installment of the Habitat Management Series: Nearshore and Estuarine Aquaculture for ISFMP Policy Board review and acceptance. Identify a subsequent topic (e.g. Sand mining, Power plant impingement, climate change impact on fish habitat).

### 4.3 Engage local, state and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs through partnerships

Task 4.3.1 – Highlight local habitat activities in *Habitat Hotline Atlantic* and distribute to local governments.

Task 4.3.2 – Work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals.

Task 4.3.3 – Provide stakeholders with the tools to effectively communicate, promote and accomplish habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement programs at the local level.

Task 4.3.4 Serve as a point of contact and information conduit at the Commission for energy-related issues affecting fish habitat.

Task 4.3.5 – Continue to provide coordination support for ACFHP, under the direction of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP) Board.

Subtask 4.3.5.1 – Facilitate communication and outreach with ACFHP partners, overlapping partnerships, and new partners. Develop outreach materials and maintain the ACFHP website.

Subtask 4.3.5.2 – Coordinate the implementation of the 5-year ACFHP Conservation Strategic Plan, including development of an Implementation Plan outlining tasks by year to achieve the goals, objectives, and actions in the Strategic Plan.

Subtask 4.3.5.3 – Support the completion of priority ACFHP Science and Data projects - acquire and analyze fish population, habitat, and human impact data; make results available to Partners for the purpose of strategic coastal habitat conservation.

4.4 Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage regulatory, political, and financial support

Task 4.4.1 – Provide information or comment on Atlantic coast projects and permits in accordance with ASMFC project review protocol.

Task 4.4.2 –Facilitate funding and partnership opportunities to promote habitat research in the states.

Task 4.4.3 –Identify partnership opportunities and forge additional relationships with organizations – such as non-governmental organizations and the recreational fishing community - to facilitate the promotion of fish habitat through a collaboration of strengths of different stakeholder groups.

Task 4.4.4 – Through ACFHP, and in cooperation with other Fish Habitat Partnerships and the National Fish Habitat Board, work with partners to develop monitoring and data standards for assessment of coastal habitat condition and fishery resource status prior to and following alteration projects.

Task 4.4.5 – Maintain habitat managers database to disseminate information about important habitat areas identified in Habitat Committee products. Use social media to connect with regional and local decision makers.

4.5 Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health

Task 4.5.1 – Review habitat program goals and evaluate accomplishments annually.

Task 4.5.2 – Work with state and federal agencies, the Councils, and non-governmental organizations to build on existing efforts to develop a coast wide GIS of fish habitat

resources, to identify important fish habitats for Commission managed species as defined in the ACFHP Species-Habitat matrix.

- 4.6 Engage in state and federal agency efforts to ensure climate change response strategies are included in habitat conservation efforts

Task 4.6.1 – As revisions to habitat sections of FMPs are made include recommendations to mitigate climate change impacts on habitat

Task 2.4.7 – Identify inconsistencies in state coastal regulatory planning programs and develop recommendations for improvements to the ISFMP Board.

## **Goal 5 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission**

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making processes. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- 5.1 Increase public understanding and support of activities through expanded outreach at the local, state, and federal levels

Task 5.1.1 – Publish bi-monthly issues of *Fisheries Focus*. Continue to reduce mailing/printing costs through greater electronic distribution.

Task 5.1.2 – Use website to promote ASMFC activities to state and federal partners and stakeholders.

Task 5.1.3 – Promote ASMFC through attendance at fisheries-related trade shows and conferences.

Task 5.1.4 – Promote Commission activities regarding recently assessed and/or high profile species, habitat and law enforcement activities, as well as emerging issues such as species allocations and shifting populations due to climate change, to a broader constituency through mechanisms such as targeted press releases, informational brochures, webpage highlights and conference/trade show participation.

Task 5.1.5 – Develop and distribute youth-based educational materials designed to increase awareness of fisheries science and understating of fisheries management to key

venues (e.g., teacher kits, Eco-camps, charter boat operations, aquatic educators) to help promote marine stewardship and ocean literacy.

Task 5.1.6 – Develop performance measures to track success of outreach activities (new website, outreach materials, social media platforms).

Task 5.1.7 – Collaborate with three East Coast Aquaria (MD, VA and NC) and relevant partners to promote interstate fisheries management and science activities at the aquaria.

Task 5.1.8 – Promote Commission’s mission and programs through outreach meetings with various marine policy and marine science graduate programs.

Task 5.1.9 – Participate in the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils Marine Resource Education Program.

Task 5.1.10 – Conduct Fisheries Science 101 webinars to increase stakeholder and public understanding of basic fisheries science principles and concepts. (See Task 2.3.2)

5.2 Clearly define Commission processes to facilitate stakeholder participation, as well as transparency and accountability

Task 5.2.1 – Publish and distribute 2013 Annual Report to Congress, state legislators, and stakeholders to provide overview of our activities and progress in carrying out the Commission’s mission and public trust responsibilities.

Task 5.2.2 – Prepare Stock Assessment Briefs (in simplified terms) for major benchmark stock assessments to facilitate stakeholder understanding of the science behind our management decisions. Focal species for 2014 are American lobster, Atlantic menhaden, black drum, bluefish, northern shrimp and tautog.

Task 5.2.3 – Reinvigorate advisory panel membership and participation through solicitation of new members, including non-traditional stakeholders (See Tasks 1.6.1 and 1.6.3).

Task 5.2.4 – Develop outreach materials that highlight opportunities for public engagement in the Commission’s fisheries management and stock assessment processes (See Task 2.3.6).

5.3 Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions

Task 5.3.1 – Track media communications and coverage through ASMFC-related news clippings and media tracking sheet.

Task 5.3.2 – Conduct media training for key staff members, with an emphasis on live interviews.

Task 5.3.3 – Conduct annual meeting of Atlantic Coast Fisheries Communication Group, comprised of Public Information Officers from the Councils, states and federal agencies, to share successful tools, identify key media contacts and work cooperatively on joint projects.

- 5.4 Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission’s activities and actions

Task 5.4.1 – Develop procedures and guidelines for the use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

Task 5.4.2 – Fully launch the use of social media tools.

Task 5.4.3. – Use new website capabilities (e.g., video clips) to promote Fisheries Science 101 webinars, videos of fisheries surveys and state on-the-ground projects.

Task 5.4.4 – Evaluate the success of new website and social media platforms in reaching broader constituency and effectively communicating ASMFC mission, programs and activities.

## **Goal 6 – Advance Commission and member states’ priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda**

Although states are positioned to achieve many of the national goals for marine fisheries through cooperative efforts, state fisheries interests are often underrepresented at the national level. This is due, in part, to the fact that policy formulation is often disconnected from the processes that provide the support, organization, and resources necessary to implement the policies. The capabilities and input of the states are an important aspect of developing national fisheries policy, and the goal seeks to increase the states’ role in national policy formulation. Additionally, the goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress in all phases of policy formulation. Several important fishery-related laws will be reauthorized over the next couple of years (i.e., Atlantic Coastal Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act). The Commission will be vigilant in advancing the states’ interests to Congress as these laws are reauthorized and other fishery-related pieces of legislation are considered.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

- 6.1 Increase the Commission’s profile and support in the U.S. Congress by developing relationships between Members and their staff and Commissioners, the Executive Director, and Commission staff

Task 6.1.1 – Provide opportunities for in person Commissioner interactions with Members and congressional staff at our Winter and Spring Meetings.

Task 6.1.2 – Provide opportunities for the Executive Director to meet with congressional staff on a regular basis.

Task 6.1.4 – Focus interactions on Members of Congress from Atlantic coast states that serve on committees of importance to the Commission:

- House and Senate Commerce Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittees
- House Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs Subcommittee of the Natural Resources Committee
- Senate Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard Subcommittee of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee

6.2 Communicate the Commission’s federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations

Task 6.2.1 – Clearly convey our funding needs as part of our communication with congressional staff.

Task 6.2.2 – Justify the use of federal dollars by the Commission through demonstrating the social, economic, and ecological benefits of Commission activities.

Task 6.2.3 – Work with Commissioners to identify funding needs and develop a strategy to secure funding for priority programs (Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, Atlantic Coast Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act Grants, Stock Assessments line item, Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration, and Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership).

Task 6.2.4 – Demonstrate the value of the Commission as an effective management entity and resource to Members of Congress and their staffs.

Task 6.2.5 – Provide state-specific perspectives to staff and Members in meetings, especially management successes and challenges.

Task 6.2.6 – Contact home state Commissioners before communicating with Members or Congressional staff to get a local perspective.

Task 6.2.7 – Coordinate with the Gulf, Pacific, and Great Lakes Commissions to pursue increased funding opportunities for all Commissions.

Task 6.2.8 – Coordinate with NOAA Fisheries to pursue increased funding opportunities for Commission programs.

### 6.3 Engage Congress on fishery-related legislation affecting the Atlantic coast

Task 6.3.1 – Monitor federal legislation affecting the Commission, including policy and annual appropriations bills and develop Commission positions on pending federal legislation (e.g., Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act).

Task 6.3.2 – Update Commissioners on pending congressional actions that may affect fisheries management as appropriate.

Task 6.3.3 – Coordinate with the Legislative Committee and Government Relations firm to identify relevant policy and legislative issues.

Task 6.3.4 – Monitor congressional hearings related to fisheries issues, and testify or provide statements for the record when appropriate.

Task 6.3.5 – Engage Commissioners in the formulation of the Commission’s position on federal legislative policy.

Task 6.3.6 – On issues of mutual interest, present Congress with a unified message from the Atlantic, Gulf, Pacific, and Great Lakes Commissions.

### 6.4 Promote member states’ collective interests at the regional and national levels

Task 6.4.1 – Communicate member states’ needs to Congress and our management partners.

Subtask 6.4.1.1 – Contact Commissioners before and after congressional meetings.

Subtask 6.4.1.2 – Work with the Legislators and Governors’ Appointees to develop a plan for Commissioners to communicate directly with their Legislators and staff.

Task 6.4.2 – Participate with national organizations and management partners to address issues of mutual interest.

Subtask 6.4.2.1 – Conduct interagency coordination meetings (Memorandum of Understanding) under ACFCMA to improve state-federal partnerships.

Subtask 6.4.2.2 – Continue to serve as an advisor to Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC).

Subtask 6.4.2.3 – Continue to participate as a member on the Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN) panel.

Subtask 6.4.2.4 – Coordinate with NOAA Fisheries and the other Interstate Commissions to present a unified message to Congress on funding and legislative priorities.

6.5 Promote economic benefits of the Commission’s actions (return on investment)

Task 6.5.1 – Provide state-specific economic and jobs statistics related to commercial and recreational marine fishing to lawmakers and staff.

Task 6.5.2 – Use specific examples to show successful management can be linked to economic success and increased jobs.

Task 6.5.3 – Demonstrate the differences between federal and state fishery management tools and the economic benefits of the state management approach (flexibility, closer to stakeholders, quicker response time).

## **Goal 7 – Ensure the fiscal stability & efficient administration of the Commission**

Goal 7 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission’s management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage ~~it’s the resources it currently receives and develop strategies for finding new funding sources to carry out its programs.~~ The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners and Commission staff to maintain and increase the institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

### *Strategies to Achieve Goal*

**7.1 ~~Maintain or increase long term funding for Commission programs~~ Conservatively manage the Commission’s operations and budgets to ensure fiscal stability.**

Task 7.1.1 – Monitor and update as necessary guidelines for cost effective meeting locations and meeting attendee travel policies.

Task 7.1.2 – Responsibly manage and review as necessary the Commission’s reserve fund according to the approved investment policy. Review investments annually with AOC.

Task 7.1.3 – Submit a Certification of Indirect Cost to the Department of Commerce.

Task 7.1.4 – Monitor expenditures on a monthly basis and project variances to ensure complete and timely use of available funds relative to grant cycles. Distribute monthly financial report to Senior Staff.

Task 7.1.5 – Prepare for and work cooperatively with CPA firm to conduct annual audit.

Task 7.1.6 – Update physical inventory.

Task 7.1.7 – Pay-off remaining balance on the floating portion of the office mortgage.

Task 7.1.11 - Provide administrative support to the ACCSP, including human resource and meeting management, grant and financial monitoring and office space.

Task 7.1.12 – Continue to provide administrative support to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), including logistical support for committee meetings and other Partnership activities.

Subtask 7.1.12.1 – Assist in obtaining future funding to support ACFHP operations and fish habitat conservation projects.

7.2 Utilize new information technology to improve meeting and workload efficiencies, and enhance communications

Task 7.2.1 – Attend information technology seminars/trade shows to remain abreast of current and future technologies.

Task 7.2.3 – Provide targeted staff training for full use of office equipment and software.

Task 7.2.4 – Document standards for electronic record retention and develop site map of Commission electronic filing system for internal use.

Task 7.2.5 – Conduct audit of Commission databases to verify contacts and relevant information.

7.3 Refine strategies to recruit professional staff, and enhance growth and learning opportunities for Commission and state personnel

Task 7.3.1 – Promote Commission’s programs and activities and recruit new talent by conducting seminars to graduate level marine programs.

Task 7.3.2 – Strengthen new employee orientation to clearly define the various staff roles and responsibilities.

Task 7.3.3 – Review and revise position descriptions as necessary.

Task 7.3.4 – Review vacancy announcement distribution list and update as necessary.

Task 7.3.5 – Conduct stock assessment methods training workshops. (See Task 2.5.1)

Task 7.3.6 – Conduct Commissioner workshop to enhance leadership, decision making, and strategic thinking skills.

Task 7.3.7 – Conduct meeting management training for committees chairs.

Task 7.3.8 – Facilitate staff participation at national and regional conferences; provide professional training opportunities.

Task 7.3.9 – Seek educational opportunities targeted to specific staff based on job responsibilities and facilitate participation.

Task 7.3.10 – Explore subscriptions to online access to fisheries journals in order for state and Commission staff to keep up to date with the latest scientific, management, and policy literature.

Task 7.1.7 – Conduct annual meeting with financial advisor to review retirement program performance with staff and provide opportunities for staff and provide opportunities for staff to meet individually with financial advisor to match financial goals with investment choices for retirement.

7.4 Fully engage new Commissioners in the Commission process and document institutional knowledge.

Task 7.4.1 – Work with Executive Committee to determine the appropriate transition and orientation program for new Commissioners.

Task 7.4.2 – Update and distribute, as necessary, the Commissioner Manual.

Task 7.4.3 – Continue to provide orientation materials for new members of Commission supporting committees.

7.5 Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary.

Task 7.5.1 – Respond as needed to litigation regarding challenges to Commission FMPs.

Task 7.5.2 – Work with Commission attorney to develop a potential information request policy for consideration by full Commission (FOIA equivalent).

Task 7.5.3 – Consider establishment of 501(c)3 arm of Commission to solicit funding for Habitat work.

Task 7.5.4 – Clarify and potentially strengthen Commission’s Conflict of Interest Policy.