**FISHERIES SCIENCE PROGRAM**

The Commission initiated a Fisheries Science Program in the mid-1990s in order to develop the accurate and timely fish stock assessments that are critical for effective fisheries management. The Program’s objective is to ensure the best scientific information available - biological, social and economic - is incorporated into the Commission’s fishery management plans. The Program provides a focal point for coordination and improvement of fishery-dependent and -independent data collection and management; stock assessments and independent peer reviews; multispecies assessments and models; socioeconomic information; fish habitat partnerships; fish passage, and fishing gear technology. Fisheries Science also oversees various research activities among state and federal marine resource agencies and universities on the Atlantic coast. These activities include developing new surveys, establishing protocols for fish ageing, and establishing standards for angler tagging programs.

The Commission’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan charges the Fisheries Science Program to provide the scientific foundation for and conduct stock assessments to 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