



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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Atlantic Striped Bass Addendum II Establishes Measures to Continue Progress Towards Stock Rebuilding

The Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum modifies recreational and commercial measures to reduce fishing mortality in 2024, establishes an expedited response process to upcoming stock assessments, and addresses requirements for recreational filleting. Addendum II builds upon the 2023 emergency action by changing the measures in the FMP to reduce fishing mortality and support stock rebuilding. Addendum II measures will replace the emergency action measures upon its implementation by the states by May 1, 2024.

"First and foremost, thank you to the 2,000 members of the public who submitted public comments. The Board had difficult issues to discuss, and public comments were a crucial part of the deliberations," said Board Chair Megan Ware from Maine. "The Board remains focused on rebuilding the stock by 2029. The upcoming 2024 stock assessment will be an important checkpoint on progress toward rebuilding."

For the ocean recreational fishery, the Addendum implements a 28" to 31" slot limit, 1-fish bag limit, and maintains 2022 season dates for all fishery participants; this maintains the same ocean recreational measures adopted under the recent emergency action. For the Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery, the Addendum implements a 19" to 24" slot limit, 1-fish bag limit, and maintains 2022 season dates for all fishery participants. For the commercial fishery, the Addendum reduces commercial quotas by 7% in both the ocean and Chesapeake Bay.

To address concerns about recreational filleting allowances and compliance with recreational size limits, the Addendum establishes two requirements for states that authorize at-sea/shore-side filleting of striped bass: racks must be retained and possession limited to no more than two fillets per legal fish.

To enable an expedited management response to upcoming stock assessments prior to the 2029 rebuilding deadline, the Addendum establishes a mechanism allowing the Board to respond to a stock assessment via Board action if the stock is not projected to rebuild by 2029.

States must submit implementation plans by March 1, 2024 for Board review and approval, which will take place at a special Board meeting to be scheduled for March 26 from 1 - 3 PM; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/Atlantic-Striped-Bass-Management-Board/2283> for meeting details. All Addendum II measures must be implemented by May 1, 2024.

Addendum II is available at https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/65c54740AtlStripedBass_AddendumII_Am7_Jan2024.pdf. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Upcoming Meetings

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as the deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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March 11 - 12

NEAMAP Annual Meeting, Renaissance Providence Downtown, 5 Ave of the Arts, Providence, RI; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/NEAMAP-Annual-Meeting/2224> for more details

March 12 (9 AM - Noon)

American Lobster Technical Committee; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/American-Lobster-Technical-Committee/2281> for more details

March 14 (2 - 2:30 PM)

American Lobster Management Board; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/American-Lobster-Management-Board-/2284> for more details

March 19 (begins Noon) - 20 (ends Noon)

SEAMAP South Atlantic Annual Meeting, Courtyard by Marriott Charleston Historic District, 125 Calhoun St, Charleston, SC; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/SEAMAP-South-Atlantic-Annual-Meeting/2226> for more details

March 20 (begins 1 PM) - 21 (ends Noon)

SEAMAP Joint Annual Meeting, Courtyard by Marriott Charleston Historic District, 125 Calhoun St, Charleston, SC; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/SEAMAP-Joint-Annual-Meeting/2227> for more details

March 26 (1 - 3 PM)

Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/3/2024/Atlantic-Striped-Bass-Management-Board/2283> for more details

April 9 - 11

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel, 2 Convention Boulevard, Atlantic City, NJ; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2024/april-council-meeting> for more details

April 16 - 18

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, CT; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/april-2024-council-meeting> for more details

April 29 - May 2

ASMFC Spring Meeting, Westin Crystal City, 1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/4/2024/2024-ASMFC-Spring-Meeting/2191> for more details

June 4 - 6

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hyatt Place Long Island/East End Atlantis Banquets & Events, 431 East Main Street, Riverhead, NY; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2024/june-council-meeting> for more details

June 25 - 27

New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Garden Inn, Freeport, ME; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/june-2024-council-meeting> for more details

August 5 - 8

ASMFC Summer Meeting, Westin Crystal City, 1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/8/2024/2024-ASMFC-Summer-Meeting/2192> for more details

August 13 - 15

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, The Westin Philadelphia, 99 South 17th Street at Liberty Place, Philadelphia, PA; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2024/august-council-meeting> for more details

ASMFC 2024-2028 Strategic Plan: Charting the Commission's Course for the Next 5 Years

At our Winter Meeting, Commissioners approved the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, which guides the Commission's programs and activities for the next five years. It is the sixth iteration of this document, beginning back in 1999, and represents the evolution of the opportunities and challenges the Commission and its member states face in safeguarding the future of Atlantic coastal fisheries in the interest of the fishing and non-fishing public.

In adopting the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, the states recognize circumstances today make the work of the Commission more important than ever before. The Strategic Plan articulates the vision, goals, and objectives needed to accomplish the Commission's mission. It serves as the basis for annual action planning, whereby Commissioners identify the highest priority issues and activities to be addressed in the upcoming year. With 27 species/species complexes currently managed by the Commission, finite funding and staff/Commissioner time, as well as a myriad of other factors impacting marine resources, Commissioners recognize the absolute need to prioritize activities, dedicating staff time and resources where they are needed most. Efforts will be made to balance the competing needs of stability and predictability in fisheries management and the necessity for adaptability to respond to changing fishery and environmental conditions. A key to prioritizing issues and maximizing efficiencies will be working closely with our federal partners at NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Geological Service, as well as the three East Coast Regional Fishery Management Councils.

The Strategic Plan acknowledges there are a multitude of factors influencing the Commission and its actions. These factors are constantly evolving and will most likely change over the time period of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. However, the most pressing factors affecting the Commission today are climate-induced changes to the ocean environment, fisheries, and coastal communities; resource allocation; the quality and quantity of scientific information; competing ocean uses; a growing need to address ecosystem functions; and interactions between fisheries and protected species. The Strategic Plan, through its eight goals and broad objectives, seeks to address each of these issues over the next five years.

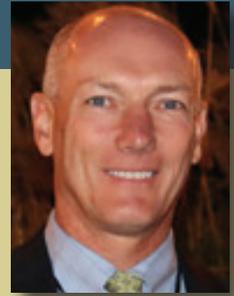
These goals include:

1. Rebuilding, maintaining, fairly allocating, and promoting sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries. This goal focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the

socioeconomic interests and needs of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources benefit stakeholders. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to ending overfishing and working to rebuild overfished Atlantic coast fish stocks, while promoting sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries. Where possible, the Commission will aid in the rebuilding of depleted stocks, while recognizing their recovery is hindered by factors other than fishing pressure.

- 2. Providing robust, actionable science to inform management decisions.** Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. This goal encompasses the development and use of novel and innovative scientific research and modern assessment methodology, and 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 robust science is available as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.
- 3. Producing dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries.** Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data to inform stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program aims to provide timely, accurate catch, effort, and biological data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support fisheries management.
- 4. Protecting and enhancing fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education.** This goal 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 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 Commission will also continue to be both a partner and administrative home to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, a coastwide collaborative



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First Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds Population Abundance Remains Above Historic Lows but Needs to be Closely Monitored

Introduction

Until the early 2000s, Jonah crab was considered a bycatch of the American lobster fishery, often seen as a pest that stole bait from lobster traps. However, in the past 30 years, landings of Jonah crab have increased significantly, from between 2 and 3 million pounds throughout the 1990s to a high of over 20 million pounds in 2018. This rapid rise in landings spurred the development of the Commission's Jonah Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in 2014. Today, a mixed crustacean fishery has emerged that can target both lobster or crab or both at different times of year based on slight gear modifications and small shifts in where traps are fished.

Much is still unknown about the Jonah crab species and fishery. With limited data on life history and abundance, a stock assessment for Jonah crab was not completed until 2023. Due to the mixed nature of the fishery, it is difficult to characterize fishing effort, and there is little literature describing the seasonal dynamics, fishing strategies, and socioeconomic aspects of the fishery.

Life History

Jonah crab are distributed in the waters of the Northwest Atlantic Ocean primarily from Newfoundland, Canada, to Florida. The life cycle of Jonah crab is poorly described and what is known is largely compiled from a patchwork of studies. Female crabs are believed to move nearshore during the late spring and summer and then return offshore in the fall and winter. The reasons for this inshore migration are unknown, but maturation, spawning and molting have all been postulated. Due to the lack of a widespread and well-developed aging method for crustaceans, the age and growth of Jonah crab is poorly described. It is theorized that the size of maturity for Jonah crab in U.S. waters is between 4" and 5" based off of studies on the Scotian Shelf (off of Nova Scotia) and Virginia. Like other cancer crab species, Jonah crab consume a variety of prey including snails, arthropods, algae, mussels and polychaetes.

Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

There are notable differences between the fisheries that operate in each of the four stock areas: inshore Gulf of Maine (IGOM), offshore GOM (OGOM), inshore Southern New England (ISNE) and offshore SNE (OSNE). The vast majority of coastwide landings have come from the OSNE stock, accounting for 70-85% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021. The IGOM stock has supported the second largest fishery, accounting for 9-24% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021. Both the ISNE and OGOM have supported smaller fisheries, never accounting for more than 5% of annual coastwide landings from 2010-2021.

The high proportion of participants contributing to Jonah crab landings indicates a directed fishery in the OSNE stock that targets Jonah crab, yet only a small number of participants account for the large magnitude of landings from this stock. The other three stocks have fisheries that are characteristic of bycatch fisheries that are targeting American lobster. These fisheries have low proportions of participants that land Jonah crabs from pot/trap gears. In the case of the IGOM stock, a relatively high number of participants are targeting lobsters and not landing Jonah crabs. This represents considerable capacity for growth in a Jonah crab fishery if these participants were to switch to targeting Jonah crab.

Landings have shown different trends across stocks, but the landings from OSNE declined steadily from the time series high in 2018 (17.6 million pounds) in the last three years of the time series (2019-2021). This trend is believed to be influenced by factors other than available abundance but should continue to be monitored closely. There was insufficient information to describe fishing mortality or exploitation with confidence and these population parameters remain major uncertainties.

The magnitude of recreational landings is unknown, but is expected to be minimal.

Species Snapshot



Jonah Crab
Cancer borealis

Common Name: Jonah crab, Atlantic Dungeness crab

Species Range: Newfoundland, Canada to Florida

Management Unit: Maine through North Carolina

Family: Cancridae

Interesting Facts

- Exhibits sexual dimorphism with males being larger than females
- Omnivorous scavengers, they feed on a variety of organisms, including bivalves, fish, algae, and detritus
- Jonah crabs are part of the class Malacostraca, which includes around 40,000 diverse species, possibly holding the title for the class with the most varied body forms in the animal kingdom.

Largest and Oldest Recorded

- Maximum carapace width of 8.7 inches for males and 5.9 inches for females

Life Span: Unknown

Stock Status

- Not depleted compared to historic lows; unknown whether overfishing is occurring

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Stock Status

The [2023 Jonah Crab Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report](#), released in October 2023, indicates the range-wide population of Jonah crab remains above historic lows of the 1980s and 1990s. However, evidence of declining catch per unit effort (CPUE) in the fishery presents substantial concern and uncertainty for the status of the stock.

Based on life history and fishery characteristics, the assessment divided the population into four stocks: OGOM, IGOM; OSNE and ISNE. According to the stock indicators, recruit, exploitable, and spawning abundance conditions from 2019-2021 for IGOM, OGOM, and OSNE were neutral or positive relative to historical periods. Indicators generally agree across these stocks that abundance has not been depleted compared to the historic low abundance observed in the 1980s and 1990s. There are no reliable abundance indicators for the ISNE stock so no determination about the condition of this stock's abundance could be made at this time. Young-of-the-year settlement indicators generally show neutral conditions and do not indicate that recruitment in the GOM stocks will decline to historical lows in the near future. Settlement conditions are unknown for SNE stocks.

According to the Peer Review Panel, "Despite the limited availability of current data, there is considerable urgency for the assessment due to a very steep, three-year, decline in landings. Commercial landings have declined 51% in three years, after an unprecedented 30-fold rise in landings. Although the recent decline is not well-detected in fishery-independent stock indicators, there is some evidence of declining CPUE in the fishery, creating substantial concern and uncertainty for the status of the stock. Given the mixed signals, the status of the Jonah crab stock is highly uncertain.

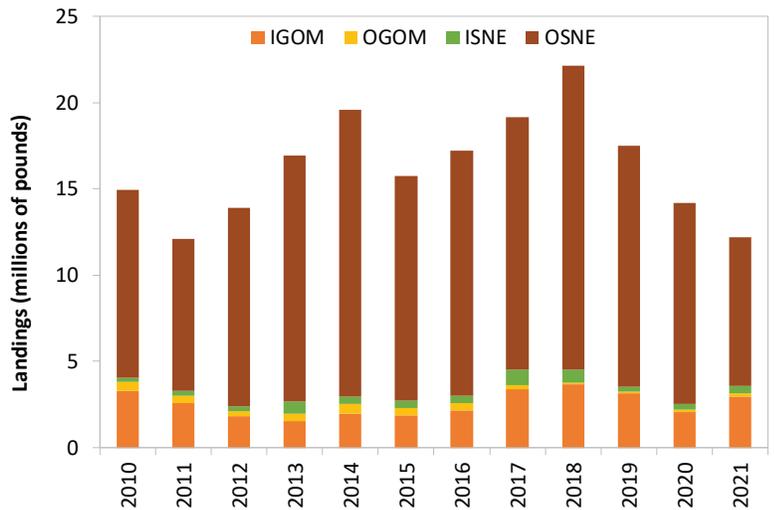
Current conditions closely resemble early stages of the collapse of the Canada Jonah crab fishery in the early 2000s. In the first three years of the crash, Canada landings dropped 58%. Within five years, landings fell 97%, and stock biomass could no longer support a fishery. Fishery-independent trawl indicators had not fully captured the signals of a rapidly declining stock. However, declining fishery CPUE was observable preceding and during the landings crash.

Given the high level of uncertainty in the status of the Jonah crab stock, the Panel strongly recommends close monitoring of annual stock indicators in the next few years. Annual indicators can determine whether sharply declining recent landings are signaling the start of a 'bust' phase of a boom-and-bust arc, or are due to fishery and market-related factors uncoupled with Jonah crab abundance."

Atlantic Coastal Management

Jonah crab are managed under the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Jonah Crab (2015) and its four addenda. The FMP's goal is to promote conservation, reduce the possibility of recruitment failure, and allow full utilization of the resource by the industry. The plan lays out specific management measures

Jonah Crab Commercial Landings by Stock Area
Source: Jonah Crab Benchmark Stock Assessment, 2023



in the commercial fishery, including a 4.75" minimum size with zero tolerance and a prohibition on the retention of egg-bearing females. In the recreational fishery, the FMP sets a possession limit of 50 whole crabs per person per day. Due to the lack of data on the Jonah crab fishery, the FMP implements fishery-dependent data collection.

Addendum I (May 2016) establishes a bycatch limit of 1,000 crabs per trip for non-trap gear (e.g., otter trawls, gillnets) and non-lobster trap gear (e.g., fish, crab, and whelk pots). In doing so, the Addendum caps incidental landings of Jonah crab across all non-directed gear types with a uniform bycatch allowance.

Addendum II (February 2017) establishes a coastwide standard for claw harvest to respond to concerns regarding the equity of the claw provision established in the FMP. Specifically, the Addendum allows Jonah crab fishermen to detach and harvest claws at sea, with a required minimum claw length of 2.75" if the volume of claws landed is greater than five gallons. Claw landings less than five gallons do not have to meet the minimum claw length standard. Fishermen may also harvest whole crabs which meet the 4.75" minimum carapace width. Addendum II also establishes a definition of bycatch based on a percent composition of catch in order to minimize the expansion of a small-scale fishery under the bycatch allowance. Through Addendum II, fishermen harvesting under the bycatch limit must have another species on board of greater weight than landed Jonah crabs.

In February 2018, the Board approved Addendum III to the FMP. The Addendum addresses concerns regarding deficits in existing reporting requirements by expanding the mandatory harvester reporting data elements, improving the spatial resolution of harvester data, establishing a 5-year timeline for implementation of 100% harvester reporting, and prioritizing the development of electronic harvester reporting. In addition, the Addendum

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improves biological sampling requirements by establishing a baseline of ten sampling trips per year in the American lobster/Jonah crab fishery, and encourages states with more than 10% of coastwide landings in either the lobster or Jonah crab fisheries to conduct additional sampling trips.

In March 2022, the Board approved Addendum IV, which expands on the Addendum III reporting improvements by establishing electronic tracking requirements for federally-permitted vessels in the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries. Specifically, electronic tracking devices will be required for vessels with commercial trap gear area permits for Lobster Conservation Management Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and Outer Cape Cod to collect

high resolution spatial and temporal effort data. Through this action the Board seeks to enhance data for the stock assessment, identify areas where fishing effort may overlap with endangered North Atlantic right whales, and document the footprint of the fishery to help reduce spatial conflicts with other ocean uses like wind energy development and aquaculture. For more information see the [FAQ](#) and [requirements document](#).

In January 2024, in response to the Board tasking the Technical Committee (TC) to recommending possible measures or actions to address the concerns about stock status and recent fishery trends, the TC recommended additional indicators including fishery-dependent catch per

unit effort from Rhode Island, fishery-dependent effort from Massachusetts, and price per pound data for landings of Jonah crab and other crustacean species should be reviewed regularly to monitor the Jonah crab stocks and fishery. The TC did not endorse management action at this time, but recommended indicator data for the offshore Southern New England stock, where the majority of the fishery occurs, be updated annually, while data for the other three stock areas should be updated every five years. It also recommended engaging the Advisory Panel annually to provide information on the market for Jonah crab.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK, continued from page 1

effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes.

5. Promoting compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast resources.

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 through the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies.

6. Strengthening 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. This 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.

7. Advancing 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 fish-

eries 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 this goal seeks to increase the states' role in national policy formulation. Additionally, this goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

8. Ensuring the fiscal stability and efficient administration of the Commission. This goal ensures the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including the development of annual action plans to support the Commission's management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage its resources.

The Strategic Plan and its associated annual action plans ensure the Commission and its member states all operate under a shared mission, goals, and objectives, with annual activities targeted to achieve them. The challenges before us can be daunting, but I am confident that collectively we can accomplish a great deal through our shared vision of *Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*. Links to the plans can be found on the Commission's website at <https://asmfc.org/about-us/guiding-documents>.

An In-depth Look at the First Jonah Crab Stock Assessment

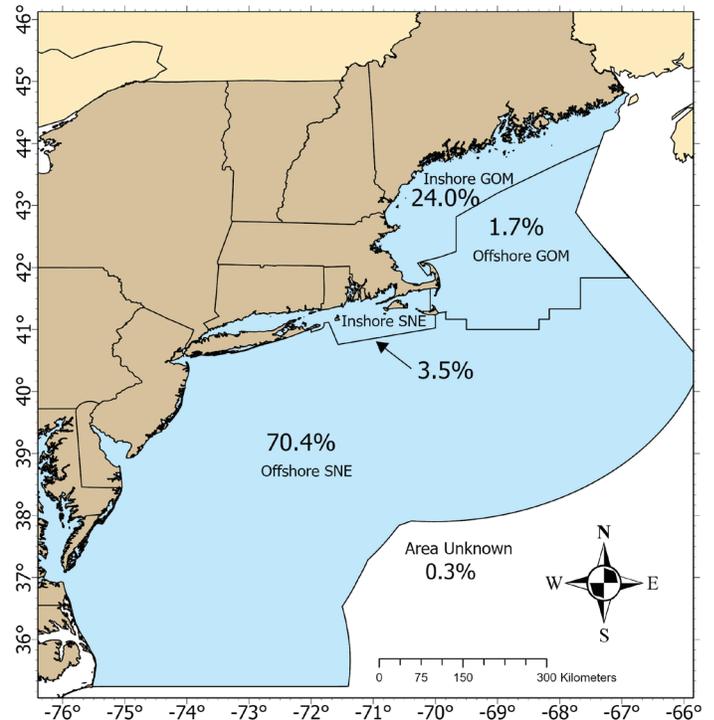
Jonah crab was historically a species with low commercial value that was harvested at low levels as bycatch in American lobster trap fisheries. As the American lobster resource declined in Southern New England waters off the coast of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the trap fisheries adapted to target Jonah crab along with lobster, resulting in a significant increase in Jonah crab harvest. The development of this mixed-crustacean fishery led to the implementation of the Jonah Crab Fishery Management Plan, but concerns remained about lack of a stock assessment to determine stock status and inform management. In 2020, the American Lobster Management Board tasked the Jonah Crab Technical Committee (TC) with evaluating data sources and recommending a path forward on a first-time stock assessment of the US resource. In this initial evaluation of available data, the TC identified limitations and outlined potential assessment approaches with data-poor approaches being most likely for a near-term assessment. Despite the data limitations, the TC did recommend moving forward with an assessment to inform management and identify data needs for future stock assessments.

The first stock assessment was completed in 2023. The assessment identified four stock units for the Jonah crab resource split into regional and inshore and offshore areas, inshore SNE, offshore SNE, inshore GOM, and offshore OGOM. Jonah crab reach maturity at different sizes across these stocks and are also fished differently. The offshore SNE stock is the only stock that is targeted in a mixed-crustacean fishery. Fishery data for the other three stocks indicate bycatch fisheries with potential to evolve into directed fisheries in the future.

The primary data sources used in the assessment were fishery-independent trawl surveys and fishery-dependent data such as landings and catch per unit effort (CPUE). Each of these data sources had limitations for the assessment. Fishery-independent trawl surveys do not catch Jonah crab effectively and factors that contribute to this catchability are poorly understood. Fishery-dependent data are influenced by fluctuating commercial markets for Jonah crab, leading to challenges in interpreting the data for stock status determination. These limitations led to the use of simple, qualitative assessment methods for characterizing the condition of the stock units called stock indicators. Stock indicators provide information on condition relative to broad time periods, but do not provide biological reference points for quantitative stock status determinations. Stock indicators generally showed abundance in recent years that was above the low abundance levels observed in the 1980s and 1990s. The assessment could not determine exploitation rates, or the amount of Jonah crabs removed by the fishery. There was also a decline in landings in the last few years of the assessment and, although the assessment did not determine a cause for this decline, the TC recommended closely monitoring these data in the coming years.

At the conclusion of the stock assessment, a panel of independent

2021 U.S. Jonah Crab Landings By Stock Area



peer reviewers evaluated the assessment for informing management. Reviewers expressed concern with declining trends observed in CPUE data and uncertainty about stock status determinations, particularly in light of a Canadian Jonah crab assessment that showed similar trends in the 2000s and resulted in a closure of the fishery. Declining CPUE can often indicate declining abundance. Reviewers echoed the TC's recommendation to closely monitor the stocks in coming years.

The American Lobster Management Board accepted the stock assessment and peer review at its October 2023 meeting but, given the concerns of the peer review, tasked the TC with several tasks to assist with a response to the assessment. From these tasks, the TC recommended additional fishery-dependent and market (price per pound) indicators to monitor. The indicators are intended to complement other indicators recommended in the assessment like fishery-independent trawl survey indices and provide context for interpreting trends observed in the fishery. The TC did not recommend any management action at this time due to changes in Jonah crab markets that would likely have reduced fishing effort. Instead, the TC recommended to monitor indicators on an annual basis. The TC also recommended research that would build capacity for future monitoring and assessment including a video-based survey and collection of molting data to estimate growth. For more detail on the Jonah crab stock assessment, see the [assessment overview](#).

American Eel Board Releases Two Draft Addenda for Public Comment

Draft Addendum VI Considers Maine's Glass Eel Quota for 2025 and Beyond

The Commission's American Eel Management Board released Draft Addendum VI to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel for public comment. The Board initiated the addendum to address Maine's glass eel fishery quota, which expires at the end of 2024. Draft Addendum VI presents options to set Maine's quota as well as the number of years the quota would remain in place once it is implemented, and whether or not an additional addendum would be required to maintain the same quota for subsequent years.

Addendum V, approved in August 2018, maintained Maine's glass/elver eel quota of 9,688 pounds, previously established by Addendum IV, and specified that the quota be set for three years (2019-2021). The quota was extended for an additional three years (2022-2024) through Board action in 2021. Since Maine's current glass eel quota of 9,688 pounds expires after 2024, the Board initiated Draft Addendum VI to establish a quota for the 2025 fishing season and beyond.

Submitting Comments

The Draft Addendum is available at https://asmfc.org/files/PublicInput/AmericanEelDraftAddVI_GlassEelQuota_PublicComment.pdf or via the Commission's website at <http://www.asmfc.org/about-us/public-input>. Public comment will be accepted until **11:59 PM (EST) on March 24, 2024** and should be sent to Caitlin Starks, Senior FMP Coordinator, at 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, Virginia 22201; or at comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: Glass Eel Draft Addendum VI).

Draft Addendum VII Considers Changes to Commercial Yellow Eel Coastwide Harvest Cap

The Commission's American Eel Management Board released Draft Addendum VII for public comment. The Draft Addendum considers management measures to reduce the commercial yellow eel coastwide harvest cap in response to the 2023 benchmark stock assessment, which found the stock remains depleted. The Draft Addendum also considers options to modify monitoring requirements based on recommendations from the stock assessment and Technical Committee.



Top: Glass eels (c) Chris Bowser, NYSDEC. Bottom: Yellow eel (c) Jennifer Pyle, NJDEP

The Board initiated Draft Addendum VII in August 2023 in response to findings of the 2023 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report. The results of the assessment indicate the stock is at or near historically low levels due to a combination of historical overfishing, habitat loss, food web alterations, predation, turbine mortality, environmental changes, and toxins, contaminants, and disease. The assessment and peer review recommend reducing fishing mortality on the yellow eel life stage, while also recognizing that stock status is affected by other factors. The benchmark assessment proposed a new index-based tool for setting the yellow eel coastwide cap, since there is no statistical model for estimating the population size of American eel. This tool, called I_{TARGET} , is an index-based method that needs only catch and abundance data from surveys to provide management advice on coastwide landings.

Draft Addendum VII also proposes options to reduce the requirements for biological sampling during young-of-year surveys conducted by the states, based on the stock assessment finding that individual length and pigment stage data are not useful for evaluating population trends. In addition, it considers changing the requirements for the collection of trip-level harvester data on catch per unit effort, and the policy used to determine if a state qualifies for de minimis status and can be exempt from implementing fishery regulations and monitoring requirements.

Submitting Comments

The Draft Addendum is available at https://asmfc.org/files/Science/AmEelDraftAddendumVII_YellowEelCap_PublicComment_Feb2024.pdf or via the Commission's website at <http://www.asmfc.org/about-us/public-input>. All those interested in the management of American eel are encouraged to provide input either by participating in public hearings, which may be conducted via webinar, or by providing written comment. Public comment will be accepted until **11:59 PM (EST) on March 24, 2024** and should be sent to Caitlin Starks, Senior FMP Coordinator, at 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, Virginia 22201; or at comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: Yellow Eel Harvest Cap Draft Addendum).

Northern Shrimp Section Maintains Fishery Moratorium for the 2024 Fishing Year and Initiates Amendment to Extend Moratorium and Implement Stock Monitoring Tool

The Commission's Northern Shrimp Section (Section) initiated an amendment to consider implementing a new stock monitoring tool, termed the wake-up index, for Gulf of Maine northern shrimp which would inform when an ongoing moratorium should be re-evaluated if there are signs of improved stock condition. While the amendment is under development, the Section maintained the current moratorium through the 2024 fishing year. The Section also passed a motion tasking the Northern Shrimp Technical Committee to evaluate the potential for an industry-based research program given the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) suspension of the Summer Northern Shrimp Survey.

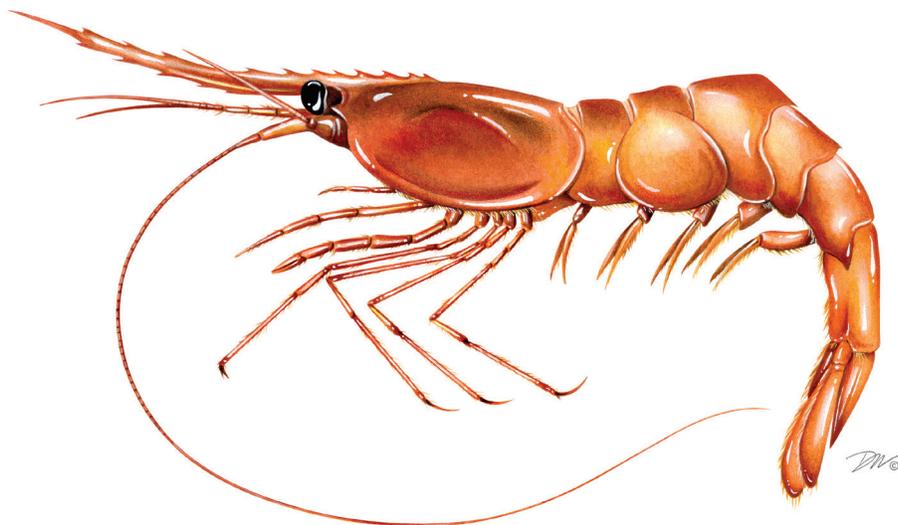
This action is in response to the northern shrimp stock remaining at low levels of biomass over the past decade despite the fishing moratorium, first implemented in 2014. The 2023 data update revealed new time series lows for indices of abundance, biomass, and recruitment. Additionally, environmental conditions for the species remain unfavorable with high water temperatures and increased predation in recent years compared to historical levels.

The current management plan for northern shrimp requires specifications to be set and reviewed on an annual basis. However, given the continued poor condition of the stock, the Section supported initiation of a new plan amendment to consider extending the current moratorium until signs of recovery are indicated as opposed to taking action each year to continue the moratorium. To monitor signs of stock recovery, the draft amendment will propose the use of Northern Shrimp Technical Committee-proposed wake-up index, a tool comprised of biological indicators to serve as a trigger to indicate when the northern shrimp stock approaches a healthy population level that may be able to support a viable fishery. If the wake-up index were to be triggered, it would prompt a more thorough evaluation of stock health to inform the Section's consideration of reopening the northern shrimp fishery.

Although NEFSC suspended the long-running Summer Northern Shrimp Survey after the 2023 sampling season, two other surveys in the Gulf of Maine will continue to provide information on northern shrimp stock status and inform the wake-up index: the Maine-New Hampshire Inshore Trawl

Survey and the NEFSC Fall Bottom Trawl Survey. The Commission's Northern Shrimp Advisory Panel proposed an industry-based sampling program due to the suspension of the NEFSC Summer Survey. The Section supported exploring an industry-based research program, acknowledging that some Section members expressed concerns about the impact of allowing any level of removals when the stock was in such poor conditions. The Section tasked the Technical Committee with investigating methods, research goals, cost, and catch caps for an industry-based research program to ensure that such a program could provide useful scientific and management information with minimal risk to the stock. The Technical Committee will consult with the Advisory Panel for industry input and report back to the Section at its next meeting.

The Section also elected Doug Grout of New Hampshire as Section Chair. The 2023 Data Update is available at https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/656e083bNShrimp_2023DataUpdate.pdf. For more information, please contact Chelsea Tuohy, Fishery Management Coordinator, at ctuohy@asmfc.org.

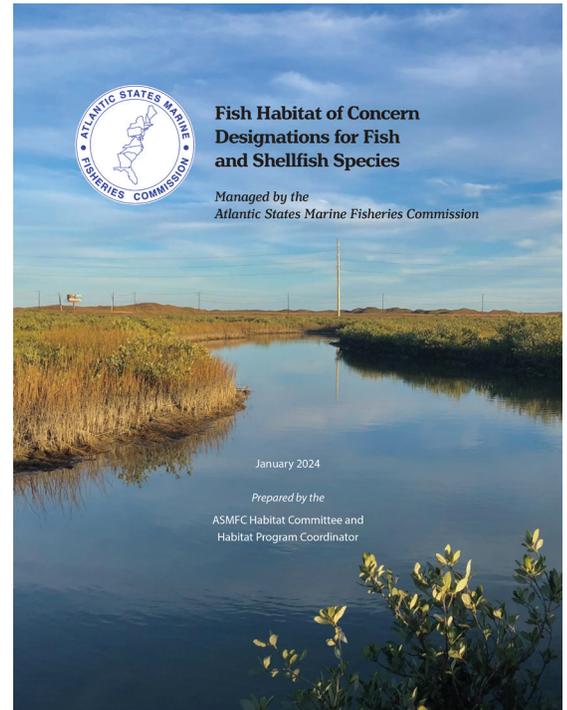


ASMFC Releases Fish Habitat of Concern Designations for Commission-managed Fish and Shellfish Species

In recognition of the importance of protecting, restoring, and enhancing fish habitats along the Atlantic coast for the sustainability of fisheries, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission announces the release of its newest habitat document: *Fish Habitat of Concern Designations for Commission-managed Fish and Shellfish Species*. This document focuses on identifying Fish Habitat of Concern (FHOC) for fish and shellfish species managed solely by the Commission, aiming to concentrate conservation efforts on specific habitats that are ecologically invaluable and necessary to support each life stage of these species. It offers a comprehensive overview of the regulatory and policy framework for habitat descriptions in Commission fishery management plans and will serve as the primary habitat guidance document for Commission-managed species.

FHOCs constitute a subset of fish habitat, such as submerged aquatic vegetation, spawning grounds, or types of nearshore estuarine habitat, that are of high ecological importance, rare, sensitive, or vulnerable to development threats. These areas are defined based on criteria similar to federally-designated Habitat Areas of Particular Concern under the purview of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). However, since species solely managed by the Commission do not fall under the MSA, their habitats currently lack federal legal protection, and consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service is not required.

This document addresses this gap in protection by emphasizing the critical role habitats play in fisheries production and ecosystem function. FHOC descriptions will be updated regularly as new information becomes available. The Commission believes that by highlighting the importance of these habitats for the species under its management, stakeholders and policymakers will better understand the need for targeted conservation efforts to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of Atlantic coast fisheries. The document is available at http://asmfc.org/files/Habitat/FHOC_Designations_January2024.pdf. For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, Habitat Coordinator, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.



Comings & Goings

COMMISSIONERS



MARTY GARY

Ongoing proxy: John Maniscalco

No stranger to the Commission process, Marty Gary has been involved in fisheries management along the Atlantic coast since he first joined the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) back in the mid-1980s. He worked for MD DNR for 27 years, serving as Fisheries Service Program Manager for at least the last decade. He was Executive Secretary for the Potomac

River Fisheries Commission for the past 10 years. With his appointment as Director for Marine Resources for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation last fall, he now serves as New York's Administrative Commissioner to the ASMFC, bringing a wealth of experience and expertise in fisheries management and science within the Mid-Atlantic region. Please join in welcoming Marty in his new capacity.



BLAIK KEPPLER

Ongoing proxy: Ben Dyar

With Mel Bell's well-deserved retirement after nearly four decades of service to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR), Blaik Keppler, the state's Administrative Commissioner to ASMFC, has become increasingly active in the Commission's activities and is a welcome participant around

continued on next page

the species board table. Blaik has been with SC DNR since 2007. Prior to becoming the Marine Resources Deputy Director in 2022, she served as the Director of the Coastal Reserves and Outreach Section and the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve Manager. Blaik received her Master's in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston and a Bachelor of Science in Coastal and Marine Resources from North Carolina State University. When not attending our meetings, Blaik will be represented by Ben Dyar. Please join us in welcoming Blaik.



ASSEMBLYMAN FRED W. THIELE, JR.

This past fall, Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. became New York's Legislative Commissioner to ASMFC. He replaces Senator Todd Kaminsky who served as the state's Legislative Commissioner from 2019-2023. Assemblyman Thiele, who is serving his 13th term in the New York State Assembly, has numerous accomplishments as an Assemblyman. He authored legislation which created the Peconic Bay Community Preservation Fund Act and since its enactment 20 years ago by public referendum, the fund has generated more than \$1.4 billion and has resulted in the preservation of more than 10,000 acres of sensitive lands. Other environmental initiatives have included state funds for improving water quality, Peconic Bay and South Shore Estuary projects, farmland preservation, and state acquisition of critical environmental parcels.

Assemblyman Thiele has also been very involved in transportation issues, affordable housing, and efforts to insure fiscal responsibility at all levels of government. He Chairs the Assembly Local Governments Committee and serves as a member of the Rules Committee; Environmental Conservation Committee; Oversight, Analysis and Investigation Committee; and Transportation Committee.

A lifelong resident of Sag Harbor, New York, he and wife Nancy Lynn have three children -- Michael, Jeffrey and Josephine -- and three grandchildren. He attended Cornell University and is a 1976 graduate of Southampton College of Long Island University. He received a Bachelor of Arts, summa cum laude, in Political Science and History. In 1979, he received his law degree from Albany Law School. In 1980, he was admitted to the Bar in the State of New York. Please join us in welcoming Assemblyman Thiele and thanking Senator Kaminsky for his contributions to the Commission.



SENATOR WILLIAM DeSTEPH

Ongoing proxy: John Cosgrove

In January, Senator William DeSteph was elected to represent Virginia's District 20, which includes all of Accomack and Northampton Counties, as well as parts of Norfolk City and Virginia Beach City. He has been a Senator since 2016 and was a Member of Commonwealth's House of Representatives from 2014 to 2016. With his election, he now serves as the Commonwealth's Legislative Commissioner to ASMFC, replacing Senator Monty Mason, who served in that capacity since 2018. Senator DeSteph is a member of the Commerce and Labor, Privileges and Elections, Rehabilitation and Social Services, and Transportation Committees. He was born in Hartford, Connecticut and received a Bachelor of Science, Finance from the

University of Maryland. He is a retired Navy Reservist. Please join us in welcoming Senator DeSteph and thanking Senator Mason for his contributions to the Commission.

STAFF



MIKE RINALDI

In January, after seven years with the Commission, ACCSP Data Team Lead Mike Rinaldi left to work as an Oracle application program developer position with BAE systems. Mike started with the ACCSP as an hourly staff to process paper forms for the Marine Recreational Information Program Access Point Angler Intercept Survey. He was promoted to full time data team member in 2018 and to Data Team Lead in 2021. Mike approached his position with eagerness, dedication, honesty, and a focus on programmatic success, seeking greater responsibility along the way. In his time with the Commission, Mike's accomplishments included supporting ACCSP commercial data requests, SEDAR stock assessments, and functioning as the ACCSP spatial data expert. Mike's supported the lobster VMS trackers by developing the interface in SAFIS Management System for agency administrators, SAFIS eTRIPS maps and fishing area data

sets, and ArcGIS web portal and applications. Mike was integral to completing broader efforts on the ACCSP data warehouse web queries redesign, database infrastructure and user access changes, and commercial data completeness in the annual data load process. We wish Mike the very best in all his future endeavors.

ACCSP Updates Recreational Data Access and Website

Have you ever wanted to access comprehensive landings data for the Atlantic coast? The Data Warehouse is an online database populated with Atlantic coast fishery-dependent data supplied by the ACCSP's 23 program partners. The Data Warehouse includes commercial landings and recreational catch estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), harmonizing data into one set of codes for variables such as species, gear, and fishing area. This makes it possible to combine datasets from different sources for larger scale analyses.

ACCSP has recently completed an update to the ACCSP Public and Login Data Warehouse system to align with MRIP direction on the presentation of cumulative and wave level data.

The new ACCSP interface includes options to search the data as:

- Annual or partial year cumulative calendar or fishing years to start at any of the 2-month waves

- Continued ability to query by wave (see optional parameters)
- Visual stoplight (low, medium, warning) highlighting of data based on precision standards (percent standard error)
- Inclusion of upper and lower 95% confidence intervals
- Identification of final or preliminary status of estimates
- Selection of default and alternate detailed reports for viewing and downloading
- Expanded text explanations of data query contents

ACCSP's new data search interface, the Public and Login Data Warehouse can be accessed at <https://www.accsp.org/what-we-do/data-warehouse/>.

ACCSP is committed to providing data to support stock assessments, fisheries

management, and public information through the collaborative efforts of NOAA and state partners. ACCSP also provides a forum for the states to develop coordinated regional guidance to MRIP and ACCSP participates on MRIP national committees.

The ACCSP website recreational pages <https://www.accsp.org/what-we-do/recreational-fisheries/> house additional information on how ACCSP works with its state and federal partners to coordinate recreational fisheries data collection and identify opportunities for future integration across jurisdictions. Updated and expanded content is now available on these pages, including regional planning and coordination, information on MRIP, and ACCSP recreational projects.

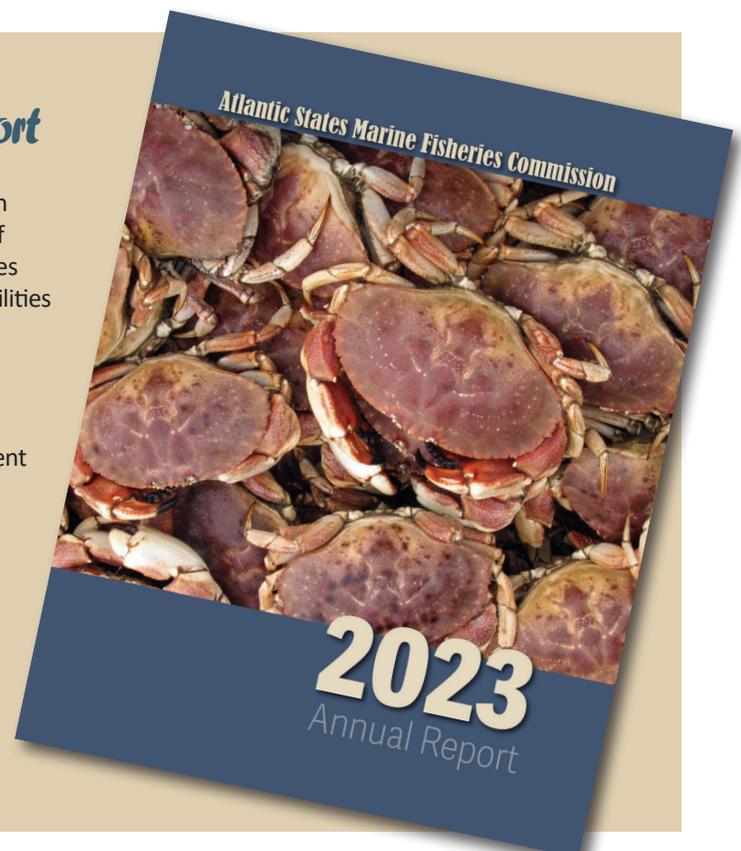
For more information, please contact Julie DeFilippi Simpson, ACCSP Deputy Director, at julie.simpson@accsp.org.

ASMFC Releases 2023 Annual Report

In February, the Commission released its 2023 Annual Report, which fulfills our obligation to inform Congress on the Commission's use of public funds, and provides stakeholders with an overview of activities and progress in carrying out our cooperative stewardship responsibilities for the marine, shell, and diadromous species under our care.

The report includes a quick guide to stock status for the 27 species groups the Commission manages; a fisheries management section, which focuses on species which had the most significant management or stock assessment activities in 2023; and sections highlighting our major accomplishments in 2023 in the areas of fisheries science, habitat conservation and fishery data collection and management.

Please visit the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org for additional information on any of our programs or activities. The report is available at https://asmfc.org/files/pub/2023ASMFCAnnualReport_web.pdf



Lisa Hartman and Jayran Farzanegan Named Employees of the Quarter

Late last year, the Commission's Accounting Team of Lisa Hartman and Jayran Farzanegan were named the Commission's Employees of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2023. Both were instrumental in ensuring the Commission's FY23 audit was successfully completed on time. This is particularly noteworthy given it was a challenging audit with four of the Commission's cooperative agreements being audited at the same time.

With Lisa having been with the Commission for 12 years and Jayran for 10 years, they have become a well-established, effective team. They consistently process a myriad of payables, including thousands of fisheries disaster payments and travel vouchers. They know what needs to be done and take pride in the quality of their work, understanding what they do reflects directly on the Commission. The results of their efforts are grateful state directors, who have confidence the Commission can disburse funds efficiently and much faster than agencies and organizations, and satisfied



From left: Staff Assistant Lisa Hartman, ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal, and Accounting Manager Jayran Farzanegan

travelers who receive their reimbursement almost as soon as they submit their travel vouchers.

In addition to their collective responsibilities, Lisa assists with onboarding new commissioners and their proxies, as well as managing orientation materials. She also is our behind-the-scenes graphic designer, working on the Commission's outreach materials. As Accounting Manager, Jayran manages the general ledger, handles payroll and retirement benefits, and assists with the Commission's grants and cooperative agreements.

As a result of their individual and collective efforts, Lisa and Jayran have significantly contributed to the Commission's Finance and Administration Department and, in turn, to the Commission's vision of

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries. As EOQ recipients, they received a cash award and a letter of appreciation to be placed in their personal record. In addition, their names are on the EOQ plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Lisa and Jayran!