

Atlantic menhaden public hearings underway for draft Addendum V

ARLINGTON, VA – As summer drew to an end, states from Maine to North Carolina were holding public hearings on Draft Addendum V to the interstate fishery management plan for Atlantic menhaden (see box previous page for dates and locations).

The addendum, which was developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Atlantic Menhaden Management Board, is divided into three major sections: one related to the fishing mortality (F) threshold reference point for menhaden; one related to the F target; and another regarding potential management tools to regulate the fishery down the road.

To get the discussion going, ASMFC said management tool possibilities might include items such as: trip limits, gear restrictions, season closures, area closures, quotas, effort controls, limited entry, and recreational fishery options.

"The public comment received will be used to narrow the scope of tools that will be addressed in a future addendum," the Draft Addendum V public hearing document explained.

The document further stated, "This is the public's opportunity to inform the commission about changes observed in the fishery, things you feel should or should not be done in terms of management, regulation, enforcement, research, development, enhancement, and any other concerns you have about the resource or the fishery, as well as reasons for your concerns."

F threshold

The current F threshold used by ASMFC is set at a level that allows the menhaden stock to replace itself. If fishing mortality goes above the threshold, corrective management action must be taken.

The board is proposing to shift over to a maximum spawning potential (MSP) F threshold. The MSP approach would identify the F rate needed to "maintain a given level of stock fecundity, meaning number of mature eggs, relative to the potential maximum stock fecundity under unfished conditions."

The two F threshold options in Draft Addendum V are:

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Steven Kennedy photo

Manny Cruz offloads pogies at Fall River, MA in July 2007.

- Option 1 – Status quo, whereby ASMFC would continue to use the current F threshold; and
- Option 2 – 15% MSP.

According to ASMFC, a 15% MSP would "equate to a fishing mortality rate threshold required to maintain approximately 15% of the spawning potential of an unfished stock."

The 2010 Atlantic menhaden harvest for reduction purposes alone was 183,085 metric tons (mt). Total reported 2010 menhaden bait landings were 43,875 mt.

Based on the 2010 stock assessment, overfishing would be occurring under the 15% threshold, and a 23% reduction in landings from the 2010 level would be required, resulting in a total harvest level of 174,332 mt.

F target

Targets are considered to be "safer" levels of fishing effort. As the MSP – maximum spawning potential – targets get higher, more emphasis is placed on the ecological role of menhaden as a forage species.

The four F target options in Draft Addendum V are as follows.

- Option 1 – Status quo.

- Option 2 – 20% MSP. A 27% reduction in 2010 landings would be needed to reduce F to the target, bringing total harvest down to 165,850 mt.
- Option 3 – 30% MSP. A 37% reduction in 2010 landings would be needed to reduce F to the target, bringing total harvest down to 143,234 mt. And,
- Option 4 – 40% MSP. A 45% reduction in 2010 landings would be needed to reduce F to the target, bringing total harvest down to 124,388 mt.

Option 4 is closest to what is recommended for forage fish under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act's (MSA) National Standard 1 guidelines. However, ASMFC is not bound to follow those guidelines because the MSA only applies to fisheries that primarily take place in federal waters. ASMFC is an organization made up of states that have agreed to cooperate on state-waters fisheries management and operates under different rules.

The way the menhaden plan is set up, the board would not necessarily have to keep fishing mortality at the target level. It is only required to act if F goes above the threshold cap. If F exceeds the threshold, then ASMFC must initiate steps to reduce effort to the target.

However, if the current level of fishing mortality is *below* the threshold but above the target, the board may "consider" taking action.

In the event that F is below the target, no action is necessary.

How to comment

The comment deadline for Draft Addendum V is Nov. 2. Comments can be submitted to ASMFC by e-mail, fax, or snail mail.

The fax number for comments is (703) 842-0741. The e-mail address is <tkerns@asmfc.org>. Write "Menhaden Draft Addendum V" in the e-mail subject line.

Written comments may be mailed to: Toni Kerns, ASMFC, 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201.

For more information, call Kerns at (703) 842-0740.

ASMFC's menhaden board will review public comments and could act on Draft Addendum V during ASMFC's annual meeting, which will be held Nov. 7-10 in Boston at the Langham Hotel on Franklin St. /cfn/