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# 2009 monkfish cooperative survey a wrap

WOODS HOLE, MA – Two New-England-based commercial fishing vessels recently carried teams of scientists and successfully completed the 2009 cooperative monkfish survey. The survey was the third of its kind between industry and scientists, following up on similar work done in 2001 and 2004.

The two participating vessels were the 119' Endurance, captained by Armando Estudante, and the 100' Mary K, captained by Henrique Franco. The Mary K took part in both the 2001 and 2004 surveys as well.

By several accounts, the survey went extremely well, with fishermen setting gear and working smoothly alongside scientists from the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Northeast Fisheries Science Center. All told, monkfish were sized, aged, sexed, counted, and dissected at 215 different sampling stations.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the cooperative survey took place during the science center's annual spring bottom trawl survey, which is now conducted by the center's new survey vessel, the Henry B. Bigelow. The Bigelow replaced the

*The Endurance's team of fishermen and scientists included, from left to right, in the front (kneeling): Ian Conboy, Francine Stroman, and Aires Oliveira; and back row: Ellen Johnson, Sean Lucey, Paulo Nano, Capt. Armando Estudante, Philippe Andre, Joe Silva, and Bill Duffy.*



Albatross IV and, according to early reports, catches more monkfish.

"I hope we will be able to compare the results from the cooperative survey with the Bigelow," said Anne Richards, the center's lead assessment scientist for monkfish who also served as chief scientist on the Mary K during Leg 4.

Having the Bigelow and the two industry boats at sea at the same time will give scientists a chance to make some important comparisons, Richards said.

"This way we can ask the question: What do you see on a survey boat vs. what do you see on

*Monkfish were sized, aged, sexed, counted, and dissected during the survey. Here scientist Ellen Johnson works up a fish aboard Endurance.*



a commercial fishing vessel?" she said. "If we use the cooperative survey to help interpret the results of the Bigelow survey, that will be very powerful since the Bigelow does surveys every year."

The cooperative survey was conducted with standard, commercial nets, and the first four legs were devoted to the sampling effort itself. The fifth leg – and an upcoming sixth for the Endurance – was spent primarily testing gear efficiency.

## Underway

The survey began on Feb. 9. The Endurance was assigned to cover the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank, while the Mary K covered Southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic to Cape Hatteras.

Both vessels encountered bouts of

bad weather and gear hang-ups. They saw days when monkfish were plentiful and days when they weren't.

In the south, the Mary K crew had its fair share of dogfish and skates, which clogged the net and slowed operations. But the boat came up with nice hauls of red crab and tilefish as well, which pleased everyone onboard.

Hard bottom and lobster traps made sampling more difficult in the north, forcing the Endurance at times to shift

**The boats and the captains were great. All of the objectives of the survey were met.**  
—Rob Johnston



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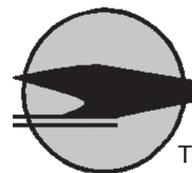


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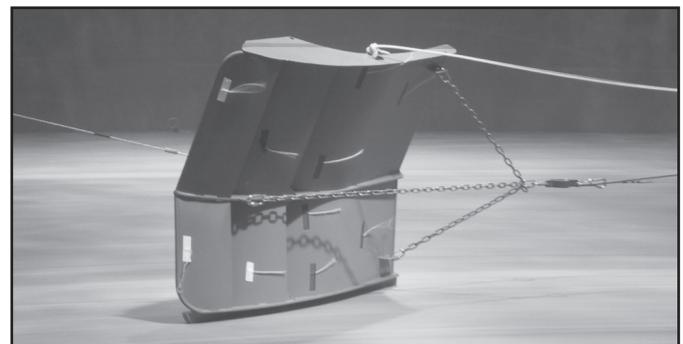
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sampling stations. And one encounter with offshore lobster gear – on Friday the 13th, no less – proved particularly problematic.

A bilge plug on the Endurance became dislodged, triggering an alarm at 1 am. Pumps took care of incoming water, which was limited to one secured compartment in the fish hold. But, as a precaution, the boat pulled into Rockland, ME, where a diver discovered the source of the problem. After replacing a plug, the Endurance was back in service the next day.

Despite minor weather and gear complications, which are part of every survey and routine fishing trips, the Endurance and

Mary K both cranked along from one monkfish sampling station

to another. They had 95% of the stations done and were back in port by April 3.

**Appreciation**

The scientists clearly valued their time at sea with fishermen.

“The boats and the captains were great,” said monkfish survey field coordinator Rob Johnston of the science center. “All of the objectives of the survey were met.”

Geoff Shook, chief scientist aboard the Mary K during Leg 3, wrote in a March 18 Boatrac message to the science center, “I have enjoyed this cruise very much, as well as all the people on it. The camaraderie and teamwork between the scientists and the ship’s crew has been great to see. I think it really defines cooperative research.”

**Valuable info**

Data collected during the survey will be used in the next monkfish stock assessment and will help scientists obtain better information about monkfish growth rates, maturity rates, and abundance levels.

Future genetic work on 2009 samples also will make it possible to take another look at a gnawing key question: Are monkfish in the north biologically different from those in the south?

A previous study

determined that the answer was “no.” Even though monkfish in the north are managed differently from those in the south, they are part of one common stock.

But Richards said, “We want to look at it again because we have a nice set of samples from boats operating in two management areas at the same time,” referring to the Endurance surveying in the north and the Mary K in the south.

Furthermore, survey crews removed otoliths – those tiny inner ear bones – from monkfish, which will be analyzed to determine their chemical composition.

According to Richards, different water bodies vary in chemical nature, so these studies might give scientists a sense of whether a monkfish started off in the Gulf of Maine and then, later in life, traveled to Southern New England, for example.

Johnston said crews on both boats spent an extensive amount of time collecting samples and gathering biological information on monkfish.

“We really focused on that in this survey,” he said. “There’s going to be a great deal learned about the biology of these animals as a result.”

**Gear work**

Following the sampling work, both the Mary K and Endurance spent a fifth leg doing gear experiments primarily to test net efficiency to figure out how well the nets catch monkfish on each tow.

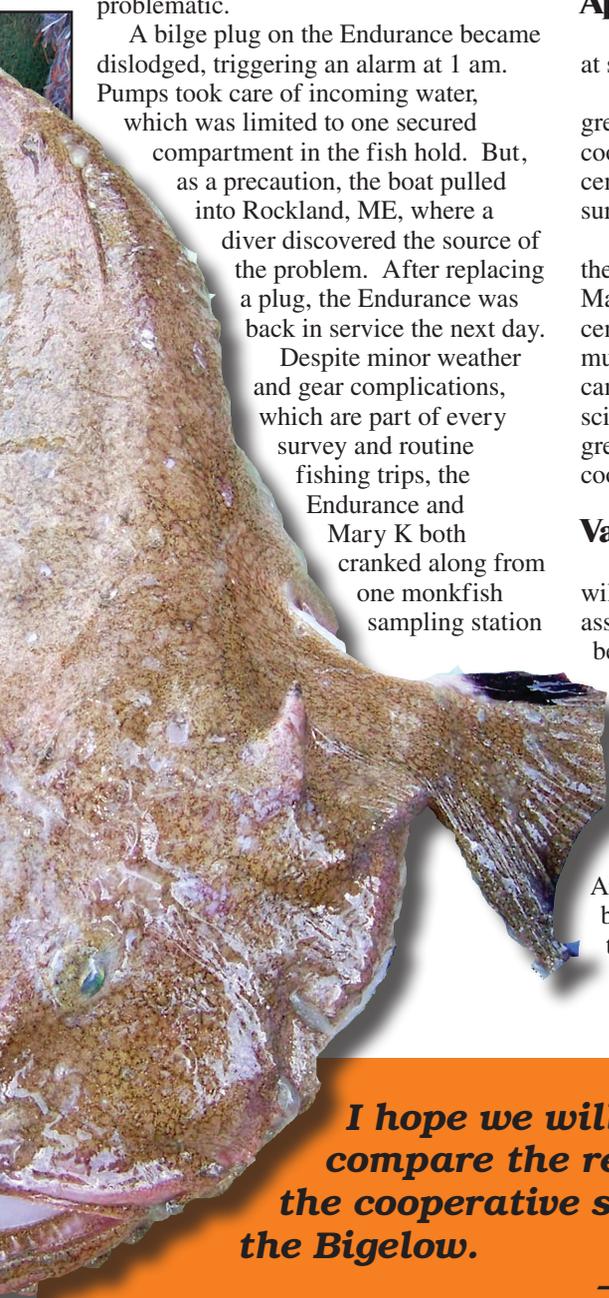
These tests – called “depletion experiments” – are tough to do.

First, a vessel has to find bottom with a good abundance of monkfish. Then, the boat has to make a tow along a specific track line. Once the net is back onboard, monkfish from the haul are counted.

The vessel then has to make a second tow over the very *same* bottom. By comparing the number of monkfish in tow #1 to the number in tow #2, researchers get an indication of how many fish escaped from – or weren’t caught at all – by the net on the first pass, which is how they gauge net efficiency. More tows are made until the monkfish are “depleted” and final net efficiency calculations can be made.

The Mary K and Endurance carried out most of this work at the end of April, although the Endurance was expected to head back to sea in the near

See *MONKFISH SURVEY*, next page



***I hope we will be able to compare the results from the cooperative survey with the Bigelow.***

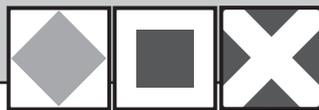
**—Anne Richards**



The Mary K’s team of fishermen and scientists included, from left to right, in the front row: Capt. Henrique Franco, Alcindo Franco, Anne Richards, and Katie Anderson; and back row: Jose Soares, Antonio Pinto, Chris Tholke, Tyler Maikath, and Dan Syriala.

NEFSC photos

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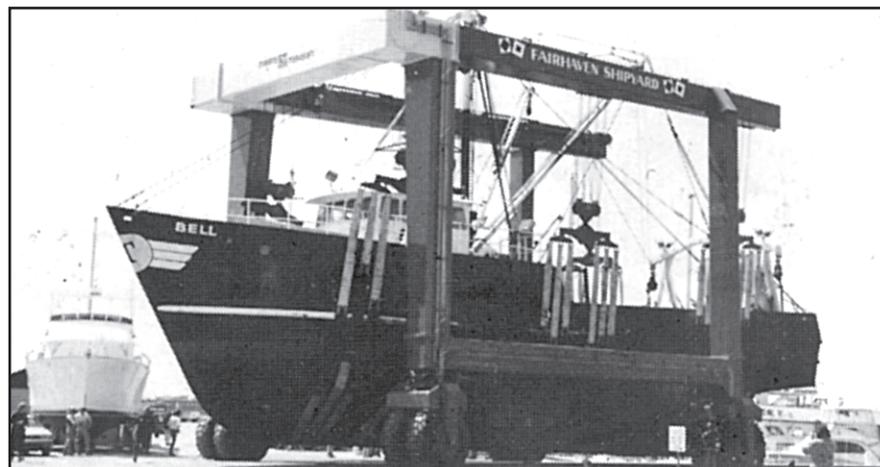
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## Monkfish survey Continued from previous page

future for another five days of depletion experiments.

### Memorable moment

While the survey overall had its share of memorable moments for both boats and crews, one of the best was aboard the *Endurance* on Feb. 27.

With a spell of bad weather approaching, the *Endurance* was headed to Gloucester to ride it out. However, Capt. Estudante made a slight detour when he learned from survey coordinator Johnston that the research vessel *Gloria Michelle* had lost an entire trawl and associated electronic gear off Cape Ann last August during the northern shrimp survey.

In November, the *Albatross IV* attempted to recover the gear but failed, and so *Estudante* was up for the challenge.

After obtaining the lost gear's coordinates, *Estudante* easily found the trawl on radar in about 75 fathoms of water in Scantum Basin.

The *Endurance* put out a grapple and made a pass, catching the edge of the gear, which slipped off. But on the second pass, the crew caught the gear "squarely in the middle" and recovered it all, said Johnston.

"In less than two hours, they had located and safely recovered about \$40,000 worth of equipment for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center," he said.

Added Anne Richards, "That made people here at the center *really* happy."

NMFS was so pleased to have the gear back that Acting Director Jim



*The 2009 monkfish survey was a cooperative research effort bringing together the fishermen aboard the Mary K and Endurance and scientists from the NEFSC to accomplish the survey objectives.*

Balsiger publicly thanked *Estudante* and crewmembers Filipe Andre, Jose Silva, Noel Silva, and Aires Oliveira, noting their "great skill" in retrieving the rig.

"This was not an easy task by any means," wrote Balsiger in an April 4 letter. "Several attempts by others to recover the gear were unsuccessful. ... Retrieving the gear saved the agency replacement costs."

Janice M. Plante

## ASMFC awards Continued from page 11B

He has represented the state of Virginia on the commission's Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel since 2000 and was instrumental in developing the male-only strategy that became a key provision of the interstate horseshoe crab fishery management plan.

"The strategy accommodates the science regarding horseshoe crab spawning and population dynamics, addresses the needs of migratory bird conservation, and allows management of the resources for multiple users," the commission said.

ASMFC further noted that Robins worked with a range of interest groups "to effectively build consensus on this difficult management issue."

Robins manages seafood exporting operations for Chesapeake Bay Packing LLC in Newport News, VA and owns a whelk processing business on Virginia's Eastern Shore. He also is a member of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

He was elected Mid-Atlantic council chairman last fall.

ASMFC also honored:

- Roy Miller of the Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife with a "management and policy" award for his work on striped bass, horseshoe crab, weakfish, and other species;
- Dave Smith of the US Geological Survey with a "scientific, technical, and advisory" award for his contributions to striped bass tagging work and horseshoe crab monitoring; and
- Wayne Hettenbach of the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division and the agents and officers of the Interstate Watershed Task Force from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Marine Police, and Maryland Natural Resources Police with a "law enforcement" award for the successful culmination in 2008 of a joint federal investigation of illegal striped bass harvest in the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. /cfn/

## ASMFC authorizes big harvesting cuts for inshore winter flounder

ALEXANDRIA, VA – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Winter Flounder Management Board has approved a plan to drastically cut winter flounder harvest in state waters.

During its May 5 meeting here, the board approved Addendum I to Amendment 1 of the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for the Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder.

For the Gulf of Maine stock, the addendum calls for a 250-pound possession limit for commercial fishermen who have only a state permit, not a federal permit. This is expected to result in a commercial harvest reduction of approximately 31%. Additionally, states will be required to reduce recreational fishing mortality by 11% through possession limits, seasons, or other measures.

For the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock, nonfederally permitted fishermen who hold only state permits will be limited to possessing 50 pounds of winter flounder, which is expected to result in an approximately 65% reduction in harvest. Recreational fishermen will be restricted to a two-fish bag limit and current minimum sizes and seasons for an approximate harvest reduction of 50%.

The goal of the addendum is to compliment the federal interim rule for groundfish, which will significantly reduce fishing mortality on federally managed groundfish stocks beyond three

miles. In the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic area alone, the interim rule is expected to cut winter flounder fishing mortality by an estimated 62%.

According to ASMFC, cooperative management between state and federal agencies is especially important for winter flounder because of the "unique migration patterns and spawning site fidelity of this species."

Winter flounder are well known for migrating to inshore state waters spawning grounds and then schooling up, making them easy to catch.

"Concentrated effort on spawning females, which are the most productive part of the population, can result in a larger net loss to the population than the landings may suggest," ASMFC said. "The addendum's measures seek to enhance stock rebuilding efforts throughout the species range by reducing fishing-related mortality on inshore stocks."

Each state is required to submit a proposal for meeting the required harvest reductions by mid-June. The ASMFC winter flounder board will meet in August to review its technical committee's evaluations of the state proposals and take final actions. The states are required to implement the new regulations by Nov. 1.

For more information, call Chris Vonderweidt at (202) 289-6400 or e-mail him at <cvonderweidt@asmfc.org>. /cfn/

## Fisheries observers to meet in Portland for July conference

PORTLAND, ME – The US will be the host nation for the 6th International Fisheries Observer & Monitoring Conference, which will be held July 20-24 in Portland.

The purpose of the conference is to allow at-sea observers and the people who process and utilize observer data to exchange information and share ideas for improving observer programs worldwide.

Roughly 350 people are expected to attend, including participants from Canada, Australia, Peru, Belgium, New Zealand, and the US. All of these countries have representatives on the event's steering committee.

The conference is aimed at people directly involved in the observer industry, but several sessions should be of particular interest to commercial fishermen, including those addressing the

following questions:

- How can fishery monitoring information be used to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations?
- What factors should be considered when addressing access to fishery monitoring information?
- What are the major factors impacting fisheries observers?
- How can self-reported data by the fishing industry, including the use of study fleets, be improved for use in assessments and management?
- What specific issues are important to nongovernmental organizations, referred to as NGOs, regarding fishery monitoring?
- How can observer capacity be developed and/or expanded? And
- What specific issues are important to the fishing industry regarding fishery monitoring? Amy VanAtten, head of the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Northeast Fisheries Observer Program, will lead this session.

### More info

Although the conference will be heavily focused on hands-on, practical observer training and data usage, anyone interested is welcome to attend.

Registration is required. The fee, which covers almost everything except hotel reservations, is \$575.

At the very least, organizers encourage industry members and interested parties to visit the conference web site at <www.IFOMC.com>. Instructions for registering are on the site, as is the full agenda. /cfn/

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