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NOAA Awards Grant to National Fisheries Institute and Rutgers University to Evaluate Summer Flounder Discard Mortality

NOAA Fisheries Service has awarded a \$110,500 grant to the National Fisheries Institute Scientific Monitoring Committee, in partnership with Rutgers University, to determine the percentage of summer flounder that die when discarded from trawl fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic region. Summer flounder is one of the most economically important species in the Mid-Atlantic Bight, an area of the continental shelf from Cape Cod, Mass. to Cape Hatteras, N.C.

Scientists estimate that 80 percent of all summer flounder that are discarded from commercial trawl fisheries die, while the mortality of flounder caught and released by recreational fishermen is much lower, six to 11 percent. However, neither estimate has been tested to determine its accuracy. This study provides a new approach by tracking tagged summer flounder to determine that percentage.

Kenneth Able, one of the three principal investigators on the project, funded under the NOAA Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Program, along with colleagues Thomas Grothues and Eleanor Bochenek of Rutgers University, plan to determine discard mortality as it varies with length, age, reproductive status and predation for this species. They will do this by combining observations on a commercial trawler in the Mid-Atlantic Bight with tagging, tracking, and scuba diver assessment of discarded summer flounder.

These studies will be conducted as part of the inshore fishery in August or September in order to capture fish as they are beginning to move out of estuaries and across the continental shelf during the fall offshore migration. Observations planned for 2008 are designed to complement the extensive observations done in 2007.

The amount of summer flounder allotted under this grant includes 81,192 pounds of summer flounder and 11,790 pounds of black sea bass, for a total allowable catch of 92,982 pounds to be harvested by NFI-SMC fishing vessels.

For each fishing year, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council may set aside up to three percent of the total allowable landings in certain mid-Atlantic fisheries to be used for research purposes under the research set-aside program, which provides a way to fund research and compensate vessel owners through the sale of fish harvested under the research quota.

The grant is one of three awarded under the program by NOAA Fisheries Service through its cooperative research program to further the understanding of the nation's fisheries, enhance information used in fisheries management decision-making, and foster collaborations among marine fisheries interests.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and

healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

Cooperative Research Program: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/coopresearch/rsa.html>

Summer Flounder: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sos/spsyn/fldrs/summer/>

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