

Fishing

By Richard Seale

Last month, I posed the question, "Are the current plethora of fishing regulations, both commercial and recreational, supported by scientific facts, or are we suffering from bureaucratic arrogance of some sort?" My promise was to try to shed some light on this question in this month's article. Several calls were made to NC Division of Marine Fisheries, and a lot of time was spent on several Web pages. To be honest, the data volume is simply overwhelming. There is no way I can summarize in this article all that is going on in fisheries management, hence the headline.

On a rainy day, those of you with Internet access can opt to spend time looking up what might interest you. For those without Internet access, many printed documents are available to the public if you visit the NC Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) office at 3441 Arendell Street in Morehead City. This building is just east of the Community College. Louis Daniel is the Director of Marine Fisheries, and Patricia Smith is Public Information Officer. Louis is a busy man, but if time permits, he will talk with you. Patricia is much more accessible and can guide you into the maze of regulatory agencies and information sources.

By Federal law, North Carolina must meet the size, creel and season limits set by Federal Fishery Management commissions. Should North Carolina not abide by these rules within Federal waters, punitive actions would be taken against the State. Federal waters are all waters three miles from shore. On the DMF Web page is the title "Proclamations." You can opt to receive these as they are issued—which I do. However, I normally get 5 to 10 proclamations a week covering such topics as "Waters closed to shellfish harvest due to pollution from runoff" or what the season and poundage limits are for commercial harvest of flounder in the ocean.

One of the cornerstone mandates of the regulations is that each state must create and maintain a Fisheries Management Plan for all finfish and shellfish in its waters. For 25 years, I have been involved on a voluntary basis with the NCDMF Crustacean Advisory Committee. This committee has dealt with crabs and shrimp over the years. These committees take public comments, listen to scientific reports and findings, hear recommendations from commercial and recreational fishers and from the NCDMF. All of these inputs are refined into a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). In the case of the Blue Crab, the NC FMP is a 671 page book. These plans are given final approval by the North Carolina Fisheries Management Commission, members of which are appointed by the Governor. The meetings of this committee are announced in the newspaper. The sites of the meetings move up and down the coast. The public can attend and comment at these meetings.

So what are the regulatory groups that have impacts on our North Carolina fisheries? The most wide ranging one is the Atlantic States Fisheries Management Commission (ASFMC). This is made up of representatives from 14 coastal states and federal bureaucracies such as NOAA. This commission impacts 23 fisheries such as scallops, weakfish, shrimp, striped bass, blue fin tuna, red drum and sharks. Another is the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC). This commission regulates fisheries that occur from Cape Hatteras and south and out 200 miles. Under these regulatory umbrellas, our own Division of Marine Fisheries operates. Our DMF can actually have regulations that are more stringent than commission regulations, but not less stringent.

How does one make sense out of all this? It is not easy. If you have Internet access, perhaps the rainy day approach is best. The ASFM web page is www.asfmc.org. The SAFMC web page is www.safmc.net, and the NCDMF web page is www.ncfisheries.net. There is a lot of informa-

tion on each of these web pages. I am going to limit my guidance to the NCDMF web page. It will open to a home page, running in three columns. The left column has the current recreational size, creel and season information and a listing of artificial reefs. The center column has lots of information headings, but to keep this halfway digestible, note that three titles up from the bottom is a summary of FMP's. Click on this list, and then click on an individual FMP for the species you are researching.

In the right column, there are also many options. Last month's "Fishing" article tried to decipher what kind of "hits" might still be coming in our creel limits, sizes and seasons for the species for which we commonly fish. The regulators will have jurisdiction over our inshore and ocean fishing. Although no future projections are offered, there is information that is indicative. For this article, if you look at the seventh title from the bottom, you will see "Stock Status Reports." Scroll to this title and left click on it. A columnar display opens with the name of the species on the left, a fish silhouette in one of the five middle columns and a "Comments" column. The five middle columns are titled "Viable," "Recovering," "Concern," "Depleted" and "Unknown." There is a link to a page defining the five column titles. If you left click on the name of the species in the left column you are taken to a summary status report of the species. This is a very interesting report and gives, among other things, a 10-year average of commercial landings in pounds and dollars, the number of award citations and the status of the FMP. This even has a nice picture of the fish. This report is really a summary of the FMP for the species.

If you opt to read through one or more of the FMP's, you will find various studies, tables and graphs that give a better sense of the hard science used to generate the regulations we are having to learn to live by. To see these FMP documents, go to the NCDMF home page middle column, scrolling or pointing at the FMP

(Continued on page 10)

Absolutely . . .
Positively . . .



The Best
Spatula
You'll Ever
Use!

Dishwasher Safe
Heat Resistant
Use with
Any Cookware

Cookware • Aprons • Cookbooks
and everything else for the cook...

Since 1982

GINNY GORDON'S

1011 Arendell • Morehead City
252 726 6661