

## Purpose

The Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 requires the division to prepare fishery management plans for adoption by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission for all commercially and recreationally significant species or fisheries that comprise state marine or estuarine resources. The goal of these plans is to ensure long-term viability of these fisheries. Each plan shall:

- Contain necessary information pertaining to the fishery or fisheries, including management goals and objectives, status of the relevant fish stocks, stock assessments of multi-year species, fishery habitat and water quality considerations consistent with the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, social and economic impact of the fishery to the State, and user conflicts.
- Recommend management actions pertaining to the fishery or fisheries.
- Include conservation and management measures that will provide the greatest overall benefit to the State, particularly with respect to commercial and recreational opportunities, protection of marine ecosystems, and sustainable harvest.
- Specify a time period, not to exceed 10 years from the date of the adoption of the plan, for ending overfishing and achieving a sustainable harvest. The subdivision shall only apply to a plan for a fishery that is overfished. This subdivision shall not apply to a plan for a fishery where the biology of the fish or environmental conditions make ending overfishing or achieving a sustainable harvest within 10 years impracticable

# North Carolina Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan Advisory Committee

## Commercial

Dennis Altman—Lowland

Glen Montgomery—Straits

Paul Rose—Moyock

Charles Van Salisbury—Engelhard

## Recreational

Doug Bolton—Morehead City

George Gilbert—Morehead City

Jerry James—Beulaville

Ira “Duke” Spencer—Manteo

## Scientist

Harry Daniels—Raleigh

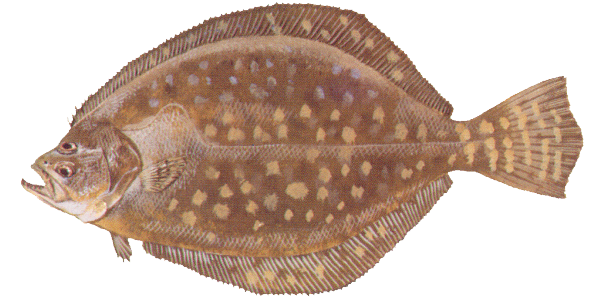
Chris Taylor—Morehead City



*N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries*

---

## ***Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan Amendment I***



## **The FMP Process**

This document provides information concerning an upcoming fishery management plan amendment for southern flounder. The amendment will be developed by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, with the aid of an advisory committee consisting of representatives of the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, as well as the scientific communities.

The initial draft management plan amendment will include a list of issues associated with the fishery and possible solutions to resolve those issues. As this draft progresses, the division will hold advisory committee meetings to obtain public input on the issues. The division and the advisory committee will then review and incorporate comments received, as necessary, and produce a final draft of the management plan. A series of public meetings will be held for the public to comment on the final draft prior to adoption by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission. Public hearings will be held prior to adoption of permanent rules to implement the final management plan recommendations.

# N.C. Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan

## Goals and Objectives

The goal of Amendment 1 to the N.C. Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan is to end overfishing and rebuild the spawning stock of southern flounder for long-term sustainable harvest and maintain the integrity of the stock.

To achieve this goal, the following objectives must be met:

- Ensure that the spawning stock biomass of southern flounder is adequate to produce recruitment levels necessary to increase spawning stock biomass and expand age distribution.
- Implement management measures that will achieve sustainable harvest.
- Promote harvesting practices that minimize bycatch.
- Continue to develop an information program to educate the public and elevate their awareness of the causes and nature of problems in the southern flounder stock, its habitat and fisheries, and explain the rationale for management efforts to sustain the stock.
- Address social and economic concerns of all user groups, including issues such as user conflicts.
- Promote the protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitats and environmental quality for the conservation of the southern flounder population.
- Initiate, enhance, and/or continue studies to improve the understanding of southern flounder population ecology and dynamics.
- Initiate, enhance, and/or continue studies to collect and analyze the socio-economic data needed to properly monitor and manage the southern flounder fishery.

## Stock Status

Southern flounder (*Paralichthys lethostigma*) are estuarine dependent members of the left-eyed flounder family that include summer flounder and Gulf flounder. Southern flounder migrate offshore and south during late fall and winter, while returning inshore and moving north during late spring and summer. Southern flounder spawn in near shore continental shelf waters from November through March. Young fish enter inlets and settle on muddy bottoms in lower-salinity areas of estuaries.

North Carolina's southern flounder stock is listed as depleted, based on the 2009 stock assessment that determined that the stock is still overfished and overfishing is still occurring. An improvement in the spawning stock biomass and age class expansion occurred since the 2005 fishery management plan was implemented, but further harvest reductions are necessary to rebuild the stock. The commercial and recreational fisheries heavily rely on the harvest of age-1 and age-2 fish, which are the ages when female southern flounder begin to sexually mature. Based on the selectivity patterns of the fisheries, consecutive years of low recruitment can result in decreased spawning stock biomass and increased fishing mortality in subsequent years. Depleted stocks are those stocks where the spawning stock abundance is below a predetermined threshold or where low stock abundance precludes an active fishery.

## Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Southern flounder are landed commercially year round with much of the harvest occurring from September through November. Peak landings occurred in 1994 at more than 4.8 million pounds and have generally decreased since then (Figure 1). Gill nets and pound nets account for over 90 percent of the annual commercial landings with gill nets being the prominent gear since the mid 1990s. Much of the recreational harvest of southern flounder occurs in the summer and fall (July-October) by hook and line and gigs. Recreational harvest has increased in recent years with peak

harvest in 2004 at more than 850,000 pounds (Figure 1).

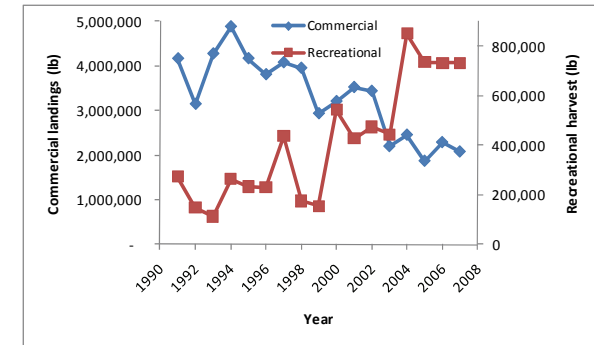


Figure 1. North Carolina commercial and recreational southern flounder landings, 1991-2007.

## Management Issues

Management measures to achieve a sustainable harvest of southern flounder by ending overfishing and rebuilding the spawning stock by 2015 are the most important issues to be addressed in the management plan amendment. Management options include size limit increases, season closures, and creel limit decreases. Other management issues include gear requirements for the flounder gill net and pound net fisheries, user conflicts, protected species interactions, southern flounder bycatch in the crab pot fishery, minimum distance between pound nets and gill nets in Currituck Sound, recreational discards, ocean harvest of southern flounder, and differential size limits for the recreational fishery.

## Contact Information:

Chris Batsavage  
NC Division of Marine Fisheries  
3441 Arendell St.  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252-808-8088 or 800-682-2632  
[Chris.Batsavage@ncdenr.gov](mailto:Chris.Batsavage@ncdenr.gov)  
[www.ncdmf.net](http://www.ncdmf.net)