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Atlantic Menhaden Benchmark Assessment Indicates Stock is Not Overfished but Shows Signs of Concern Board Tasks its Technical Committee to Develop Alternative Reference Points

Alexandria, VA – In its report to the Commission’s Atlantic Menhaden Management Board, an independent panel of scientists endorsed the use of the 2010 Atlantic menhaden benchmark stock assessment for management use. The panel also urged the Board to examine alternative reference points to provide more protection to the spawning stock biomass.

Based on the current reference points, the coastwide Atlantic menhaden stock is not overfished nor is it experiencing overfishing. The fishing mortality rate is close to the threshold or the maximum rate at which fishing can occur and still allow the population to replace itself. Population fecundity is slightly below the target, meaning that the spawning stock in 2008 appears to be adequate to produce the target number of eggs. However, the number of young fish in the population has been consistently low in recent decades, indicating that high egg production may not be translating into high survival of young menhaden.

The assessment shows the population has undergone several periods of both high and low abundance over the time series (1955 - 2008). Abundance has declined steadily since the peak observed in the early 1980s and recruitment (age-0 fish) has been relatively low. As a result of these findings and recommendations by the peer review panel, the Board took action to task its technical committee with developing new reference points to increase protection to the spawning stock. In addition, the technical committee will consider alternative reference points that account for predation on menhaden.

A more detailed overview of the Atlantic menhaden stock assessment is available on the Commission website (www.asmfc.org) under Breaking News. It was developed with the intent of aiding media and interested stakeholders in better understanding the Commission's stock assessment results and process. Copies of the Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Report and Assessment Peer Review Report are also available on the Commission website.

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ASMFC Vision: Healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015.