

## PROFILE: SUMMER FLOUNDER (from page 30)

This means that total mortality is removing more fish than the stock can produce (recruitment) over the long-term to sustain itself, resulting in declining abundance.

To a large extent, increases in MRIP catch estimates from the new survey method have led to an increase in estimates of abundance relative to earlier stock assessments. Summer flounder recruitment, or the number of age-0 fish, has experienced significant variability since 1982, the first year included in the age-structured stock assessment model. Recruitment has averaged 53 million fish over the 36 year time span, with higher levels in the 1980s and earlier 1990s and below average levels since 2011. Recruitment in 2017 was estimated at 42 million fish. The assessment indicates increasing relative abundance of older fish and an expanding age structure since about 2000. However, the assessment also shows decreasing trends in average lengths and weights-at-age for both sexes, suggesting slower growth and delayed maturity.

Lastly, the assessment found the spatial distribution of the resource is continuing to shift northward and eastward. The next benchmark stock assessment is tentatively scheduled for completion in 2021.

### Atlantic Coastal Management

The Commission approved the first Summer Flounder Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in 1982, followed by a similar FMP approved by the Council in 1988. Since then, both groups have made significant revisions to the plan, from allowing states to craft regional recreational management measures through conservation equivalency, to instituting accountability measures for evaluating annual landings to coastwide catch limits.

The commercial fishery is managed by annual state-by-state quotas that are controlled through trip limits, gear specifications, and permit requirements. On the recreational side, annual harvest limits are managed through the implementation of minimum size limits, possession limits, and season lengths. In recent years, a regional management approach has allowed states within a region to implement consistent measures and improve equitable access to the resource. This approach has come with tradeoffs, where the boundary waters of neighboring regions have created situations where anglers are subject to different regulations while fishing within the same waterbody. The Commission is continuing to seek solutions to address this dilemma.

Based on the 2018 stock assessment findings, the

Commission and the Council revised the 2019 specifications and set new specifications for 2020 and 2021, with the intent to maintain regulatory stability. For the 2019-2021 fishing seasons, the commercial quota is set at 11.53 million pounds and the RHL is set at 7.69 million pounds. Specifications for fishing seasons beyond 2019 may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information. While the revised RHL represents an approximate 49% increase over the previously set 2019 RHL, the Board chose to maintain recreational measures, which are projected to achieve a harvest level close to the revised RHL based on the calibrated MRIP recreational harvest data. Under authority of Addendum XXXII, New Jersey and Rhode Island made minor adjustments to their recreational measures, which still holds projected 2019 harvest at 2018 levels.

In May 2019, the Board and Council approved the Summer Flounder Commercial Issues Amendment. The Amendment revises the management program's goals and objectives specific to summer flounder and implements new state-specific commercial allocations.

The new state commercial allocations are based upon a 9.55 million pound trigger point. When the annual coastwide commercial quota is at or below 9.55 million pounds, the formula for allocating the quota to the states will remain status quo, i.e., the same state-specific percentages that have been in effect since 1993.

When the annual coastwide quota exceeds 9.55 million pounds, additional quota above 9.55 million pounds will be distributed as follows: 0.333% to the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Delaware and 12.375% to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. As a result, state allocations will vary over time based on overall stock status and the resulting coastwide commercial quotas. These measures are expected to go into effect for the 2021 fishing season.

The Board and Council will meet in October to revisit previously established catch limits for 2020, and consider whether any changes are needed. In addition, the decision to continue recreational regional management for 2020 will be considered at the joint meeting in December.

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## ecoRI: ELECTRIC CABLES (from page 24)

"They hired a consulting company to produce a public document about our studies, and they minimized EMF as a concern and misinterpreted our study," he said. "We didn't say that we saw something that needed to be addressed immediately, but we also didn't say that what we saw is OK and not to worry about it."

King believes more studies need to be done before any conclusions can be drawn about the effect of electromagnetic fields from power cables on marine life.

"From a marine spatial planning context, it probably makes sense to have cable corridors rather than randomly distribute the cables all over, and that would probably have different results than studies of just a single cable. So we still have some questions to answer."

*Rhode Island resident and author Todd McLeish runs a wildlife blog: [narshaleslefttooth.blogspot.com](http://narshaleslefttooth.blogspot.com)*

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