



Menhaden Fisheries Coalition
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New assessment confirms Atlantic menhaden is not overfished, invalidates previous models and data, and calls into question subsequent harvest cuts and job losses

Today, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission released the 2014 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment, vetting the health of the Atlantic menhaden stock. The new assessment overhauled the models and data sources used in the last assessment in 2012 with improved, more accurate methods.

Earlier today, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) released the [2014 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment](#), the first assessment since the [highly contentious](#) 2012 stock assessment. The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition is pleased that the 2014 assessment process evaluated and addressed the issues in the previous assessment. The results determined that the Atlantic menhaden stock is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. The 2014 assessment also corrects [problems](#) in the 2012 assessment report and invalidates that assessment's methods and results, replacing them with more accurate models and data sources and setting a new standard in menhaden stock analyses.

Harvest cuts enacted in 2012 yielded economic hardship and job losses in many fishing communities, and proponents for these cuts have [already cited](#) this new assessment as justification for their agendas. But only one year affected by these cuts, 2013, factors into the date range used in this overhauled assessment. This new stock assessment is not a before-and-after comparison of conditions from 2012 before the harvest cuts to conditions in 2013 following their enactment. The 2014 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Report is a reevaluation of the species' status dating all the way back to the beginning of its recorded history in the 1950s. [The report](#) finds that the stock's healthy status appears largely unrelated to harvest cuts.

To improve the model, the assessment team first created two new regional adult abundance indices, generated using nine fishery-independent survey data sources. To better reflect fishery catches, the assessment modeled the northern bait, northern reduction, southern bait, and southern reduction components of the fishery separately, and applied dome-shaped selectivity to each of the fisheries to provide the best-possible information on the age of fish caught by the commercial fishery. Previously assumed menhaden maturity schedules were also reanalyzed and corrected. Finally, the draft assessment underwent, and comfortably passed, a rigorous peer-review.

According to the new assessment, the fishery is experiencing some of its lowest levels of fishing mortality recorded since 1955. In addition, the stock is projected to be about 170 percent of its target abundance level measured in terms of fecundity—that is, annual egg production. In terms of spawning stock biomass, or the total estimated weight of the mature population, the menhaden population is near record levels and is currently well above historic averages. A comparison of estimates published in the 2012 and 2014 assessments, such as estimations of abundance or fecundity, demonstrates the vast differences between the flawed 2012 assessment and the more comprehensive 2014 assessment.

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition supports this revitalized approach to understanding the Atlantic menhaden stock. The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition strongly advocated for several of these changes to stock assessment science in 2012, including corrections to retrospective patterns, addressing inconsistencies in collectively evaluating the four distinct fisheries, and using the dome-shaped selectivity curve, [among other revisions](#).

This new assessment exemplifies the impact of pursuing and incorporating the best available science in menhaden management. By reevaluating the science, this new assessment reveals that the previous 2012 assessment was far too pessimistic and the subsequent cuts were perhaps unnecessary, when gauged against management objectives the Commission had identified. If these models and data sources were available in 2012, it appears the assessment would have yielded significantly different results. The report's new models and data sources uncovered the discrepancies underlying the 2012 stock assessment report, and now addresses these issues and disparities, setting an exemplary precedent for future stock assessments of this species.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The [Menhaden Fisheries Coalition](#) is a collective of menhaden fisherman, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of over 30 businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.