



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Connie Barclay
(301) 713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 8, 2006

OFFSHORE MARINE WATERS TO REMAIN CLOSED TO STRIPED BASS FISHING

After carefully examining a proposal to re-open offshore marine waters in the Atlantic Ocean for striped bass fishing, NOAA has announced it will maintain the 1990 federal closure.

NOAA closed marine areas between three and 200 miles offshore to recreational and commercial striped bass fisheries to complement a rebuilding plan instituted in 1981 by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The rebuilding plan, supported by the federal closure, was successful and scientists declared striped bass populations fully rebuilt in 1995. In April 2003, the Commission asked NOAA to evaluate available scientific information to determine if the federal ban should be lifted.

After a 2005 stock assessment confirmed that the species is at a sustainable population size and not being over-harvested, NOAA issued an options paper in April 2006 outlining potential management strategies to allow striped bass fishing to resume in offshore waters. These strategies included a range of options, from re-opening the fisheries with minimum size and catch limits, to maintaining the federal ban.

NOAA's proposal did not call for an increase in the annual catch quota for striped bass, established by the Commission to maintain the population size. Even though the annual cap on catches would have remained the same, regardless of whether the fish were caught in nearshore or offshore waters, the majority of those who commented believed that re-opening offshore fisheries would result in higher catches.

NOAA based the decision on a review of trends in the fishery and the species' population. The data show that there has been an increase in fishing mortality of striped bass and a decrease in female spawners since the Commission requested a reevaluation of the federal ban. Although the stock as a whole is not being over-harvested, any increased fishing pressure would likely result in over fishing before NOAA and the Commission could respond with a new regulation. Since these issues would undermine the long-term conservation of Atlantic striped bass, the agency has determined that offshore waters should remain closed at this time.

- more -

“The recovery of the striped bass stock is one of the most important fishery success stories of our time, but it was a team effort,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Service Director. “The Atlantic coastal states, Federal partners and the fishing community shared in the rebuilding process and now in maintaining a healthy, viable fishery. NOAA will continue to work with the Atlantic coastal states and user groups to reverse the current fishing mortality and female spawning stock trends. “

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. Starting with the establishment of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA. The agency is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

###

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>