

Mid-Atlantic Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Fishing gear type: Purse seine

Current category: Category II*

Basis for current classification on the LOF: Based on analogy to other purse seine fisheries, such as the Category II Gulf of Mexico Menhaden purse seine fishery, and potential interactions with bottlenose dolphins (Northern Migratory coastal and Southern Migratory coastal stocks).

Current list of marine mammal species/stocks injured/killed: Bottlenose dolphin, Northern Migratory coastal; Bottlenose dolphin, Southern Migratory coastal.

Estimated number of current participants: 56

Take Reduction Teams/Plans that affect this fishery: N/A

Year added to the LOF: 1996

Category when originally listed: Category III

Basis for original classification on the LOF: This fishery was grouped with the “Gulf of Maine menhaden purse seine fishery” in the 1996 proposed LOF. However, it was listed separately on the final 1996 LOF because incidental mortality and serious injury of bottlenose dolphins in the Gulf of Maine portion of the fishery was unlikely.

Estimated number of participants when originally listed: 22

Past names, if any: “Gulf of Maine menhaden purse seine fishery” until 1996.

Gear description/method for fishing: This fishery uses purse seine gear for reduction or baitfish. The purse seine net is made of nylon fiber and is about 1 ¾ inch stretched mesh; net length is about 1,000-1,400 ft; and net depth is from 65-90 ft. Soak time is approximately 35-45 minutes from deployment of net until the purse is closed. Fishing vessels are either large (up to 200 ft) carrying two smaller purse seine boats (39 ft), or small snapper rigs (60-75 ft). Schools of menhaden are spotted from larger vessels and/or spotted planes. Purse seines are deployed over schools vertically from large vessel or two smaller boats. The floatline and leadline has a series of rings threaded with a purse line that is winched closed around the school. The net is retrieved by power block.

Target species: Menhaden and thread herring.

Spatial/temporal distribution of effort: Most sets occur within 3 mi (4.8 km) of shore with the majority of the effort occurring off North Carolina from November-January, and moving northward during warmer months to southern New England. Fishing effort is year-round with concentrated migratory peaks from May-September from Virginia northward, and November-January in North Carolina. A majority of the fishing effort by the Virginia fleet occurs in the Virginia portion of Chesapeake Bay, and along the ocean beaches of Eastern Shore Virginia. Most sets in Chesapeake Bay are in the main stem of the Bay, greater than one mile from shore. In summer, the Virginia fleet occasionally ranges as far north as northern New Jersey. Purse-seining for reduction purposes is prohibited by state law in Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey; hence, purse-seine sets in the ocean off Delmarva and New Jersey are by definition greater than 3 miles from shore.

* The fishery is classified by analogy to other gear types or fisheries that are known to cause mortality or serious injury of marine mammals.

Levels of observer coverage each year[†]: There has been very limited observer coverage since 2008.

Management and regulations: The fishery is managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission under the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Menhaden.

History of Changes on the LOF

2012 LOF: Estimated number of participants updated from 54 to 56.

2011 LOF:

- Updated the stock name for bottlenose dolphins killed/injured in this fishery, based on the revised stock structure presented in the final 2008 and 2009 SARs. Replaced bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal) with the following stocks: bottlenose dolphin (Northern Migratory coastal); bottlenose dolphin (Southern Migratory coastal).
- Estimated number of participants updated from 22 to 54.

2006 LOF: Elevated from a Category III to a Category II by analogy to other purse seine fisheries, such as the “Gulf of Mexico Menhaden purse seine fishery,” because of potential interactions with bottlenose dolphins (WNA coastal). Because the fishery was a Category III, no observer coverage was required, and therefore no, observed interactions had been documented. However, according to the 2005 Stock Assessment Reports (SAR), there are typically 1 to 5 incidental takes reported each year. There was documented bycatch of dolphins in purse seine gear in other Category II purse seine fisheries.

2006 LOF: Added a superscript “2” in Table 2 after this fishery, indicating that it is categorized by analogy.

2005 LOF: Humpback whale (WNA) was removed from the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery because interactions had not been documented in recent years.

2001 LOF: Humpback whale (WNA) was added to the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery because a humpback whale was reported by a fisherman as entangled and released alive.

[†] Observer coverage levels include the latest information reported in the most current final Stock Assessment Report (SAR).