

6.0 Fishery Impact Statement

6.1 Overview

The implementation of a new fishery management plan and its associated regulations changes the environment for fishermen that target the regulated resource, but it can also result in changes for those in fisheries for other species. In many instances, the imposition of regulations to restrict effort and reduce fishing mortality forces fishing effort onto other species. In the complex fishing environment of the northeast region, where there are thousands of vessels participating in a wide variety of fisheries, the impacts of new regulations can have unexpected consequences that complicate fisheries management overall. This section takes a broad overview of fisheries in the region and attempts to gauge the interactions between red crab management and other fisheries.

Obviously, the vessels that will be most affected by the management measures in this plan are those vessels that have been fishing for red crab in recent years. The vast majority of reported landings in recent years have been by a small group of less than ten vessels.²¹ Under the proposed measures, many of these vessels will be able to continue participating in the red crab fishery at directed levels, but some vessels will be excluded. Another 76 vessels landed lesser amounts of red crab in recent years and may also be impacted by these regulations.²² Adoption of this plan may constrain their fishing activity. The impacts of the management plan on the directed and incidental catch level red crab fisheries are described in Section 5.0. Important parts of the fishery are the communities that it supports. The ports that are associated with the red crab fishery are identified in Section 7.1.8. A discussion of the impacts of the proposed management measures and the alternatives on these fishing communities is included in Section 7.1.8. The impacts on other fisheries in the northeast region that the plan may have are described below.

6.2 American Lobster Fishery

The offshore lobster fishery, managed under the NMFS' American Lobster FMP, is a fishery with some history of direct interaction with the red crab fishery. It has been reported that some offshore lobster vessels occasionally target red crab and may land higher than "incidental catch" levels of red crab. Under normal operating conditions, these two fisheries appear to be segregated according to depth, with the lobster fishery occurring in more shallow water. The Red Crab FMP will establish limits on the incidental catch of red crab by any vessel not authorized to participate in the directed red crab fishery. These limits may affect the operations of some vessels in the offshore

²¹ There were seven vessels identified in the NMFS VTR and dealer weighout databases that reported landings of more than 100,000 pounds of red crab in at least one year between 1991 and 2000. There were at least two additional vessels that entered the red crab fishery in 2001 and fished at directed levels under the emergency regulations.

²² These are vessels that reported landing at least one pound, but less than 100,000 pounds, of red crab in at least one year during the years 1991 - 2000 (NMFS VTR and dealer weighout report databases).

lobster fishery if they are prohibited from harvesting and landing as much red crab as they otherwise would. In order to ensure the enforceability of some management measures such as gear restrictions that limit the number of traps that can be fished for red crab, in the future the Council may establish a lobster-red crab fishery demarcation line such that only red crab traps would be allowed to be set deeper than the demarcation line.

6.3 Monkfish Fishery

The monkfish fishery is largely a trawl fishery with some dredge and gillnet fishing also occurring. Most of the monkfish fishery occurs over the continental shelf in conjunction with the groundfish and/or sea scallop fisheries. Some monkfish fishing occurs in deep water where red crabs may occur. The principle interaction between these two fisheries is that there may be some degree of bycatch and discard mortality of red crabs in the monkfish fishery. The Red Crab FMP identifies this potential interaction as a research and information need and a potential management concern. Should future research and data collection provide information confirming this interaction and its severity, the Council may consider taking appropriate action to reduce the bycatch of red crabs in the monkfish fishery. This action may take the form of fishing restrictions on the monkfish fishery.

6.4 Tilefish Fishery

The tilefish fishery occurs in relatively deep water (100 - 300 meters) but is prosecuted almost entirely with bottom longlines (approximately 93% of all landings) (MAFMC 1999). It appears that the red crab and tilefish fisheries may abut one another, but there is probably little interaction between the two with the possible exception of some of the deep-water canyons (Hudson, Block and Veatch Canyons). Because both fisheries primarily use static fishing gear (pots in the case of the red crab fishery and longlines in the case of tilefish), any interactions are expected to be negligible. It is not foreseen that the Red Crab FMP will have any effect on the tilefish fishery, nor vice versa.

6.5 Golden Crab Fishery

The golden crab fishery is identified as occasionally including red crab, but the South Atlantic Council concluded that the populations of golden and red crabs are sufficiently separated from one another to be managed separately (SAFMC 1995). Thus there are very few interactions likely between these two FMPs. Based on the management unit selected by the Council, there will be a geographic area of overlap between the two Council's areas of management jurisdiction. This could be a cause for concern if there were significant landings of red crabs aboard golden crab vessels and/or significant landings of golden crab aboard red crab vessels fishing in this intersection zone. However, based on the South Atlantic Council assessment, this seems unlikely. None of the golden crab vessels are currently fishing in the "northern" management zone (north of 29° 25' North latitude), so there would be no overlap in the fishing activities managed under the two plans.

The Council is aware that up to two golden crab vessels may shift into the northern zone, which includes the waters off the coast of Florida (north of approximately Daytona Beach, Florida), Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina so there may be some overlap if these golden crab vessels begin fishing north of Cape Hatteras and red crab vessels fish south of the Virginia-North Carolina border. These interactions, however, should be minimal due to the relatively small number of vessels involved. The golden crab vessels operating north of Cape Hatteras will be subject to the regulations in this FMP, including the incidental catch limits and the requirement to obtain an open access incidental catch permit.

6.6 Conclusions

Due to the offshore, deep water nature of this fishery, there are very few known interactions between the fishery and other fisheries. This also results in very few interactions expected between this FMP and other fisheries, with the exception of the specific cases identified above. None of these interactions, however, are expected to be significant.