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News, Commercial Fisheries, "Commercial Fisheries News - November 2008" (2008). *Documents from Environmental Organizations*. 238.

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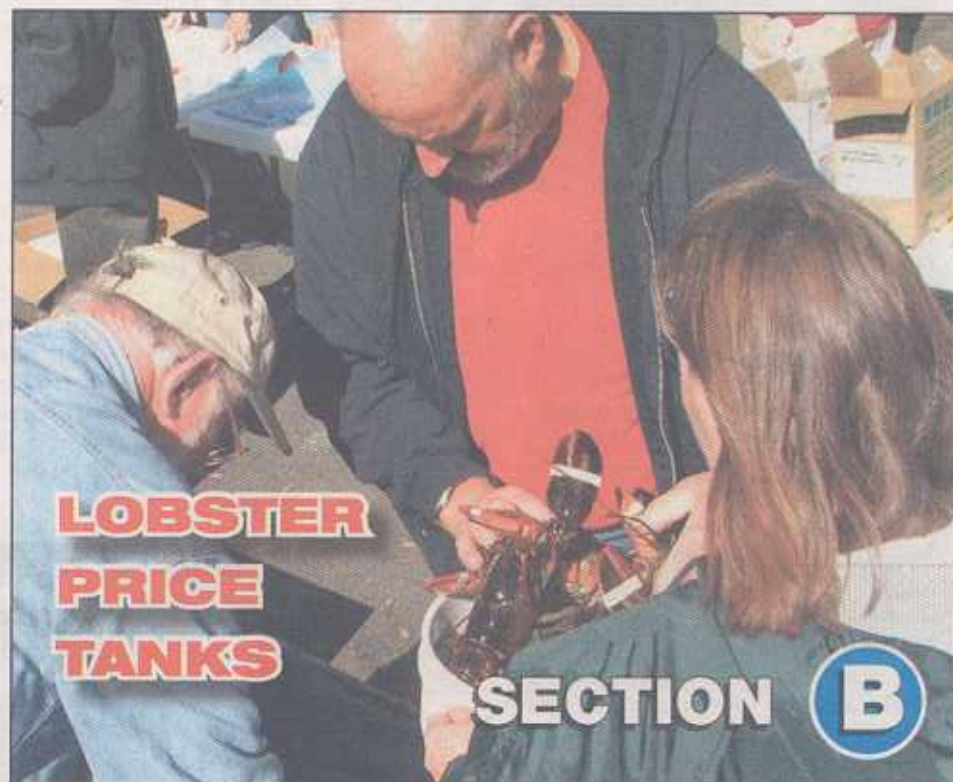
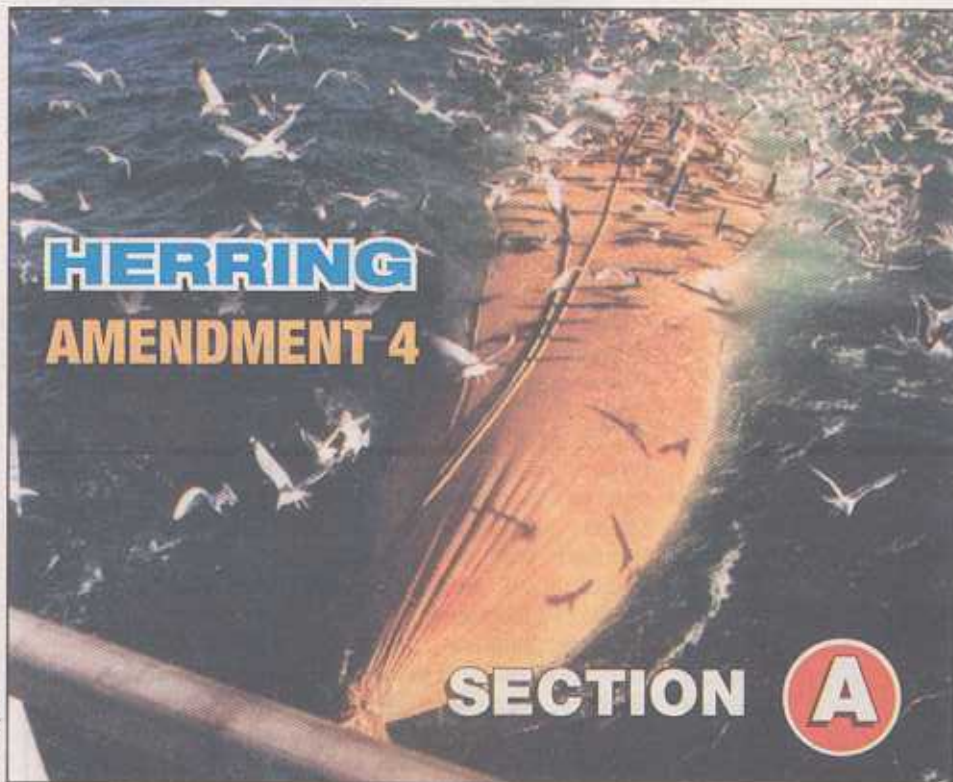
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Commercial Fisheries News

November 2008 • Volume 36 Number 3

A Compass Publication

\$2.75



ASMFC to consider herring Area 1A options

by Janice M. Plante

REHOBOTH BEACH, DE – The Atlantic herring fishery in Area 1A may operate very differently next summer if the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adopts new measures to reduce uncertainty in the fishery and better spread out the available quota.

"Right now, no one is happy," said Terry Stockwell of Maine, chairman of ASMFC's Atlantic Herring Section. "It seems like it might be time to change the

According to current ASMFC rules, vessels cannot "land" herring during designated "days out" of the fishery. But the commission has nothing in place that bars vessels from "fishing" on designated "days out."

Right now, no one is happy. It seems like it might be time to change the way we do business.

—Terry Stockwell

landscape of the Area 1A fishery. The 1A quota is the lowest it has ever been and a number of vessel owners have invested large sums of money to outfit boats with purse seine capabilities to fish

Days off should apply to fishing and landing, not just landing," he said.

Pierce further said he wanted to avoid situations where fishermen "stockpiled fish on a carrier" and then waited to offload on a designated landing day.

"It's hard to project landings that way," he said.

Vito Calomo, proxy for ASMFC Commissioner state Rep. Tony Verga of Massachusetts, said the section wasn't prepared for what happened this summer because it failed to account for the fact

in the area during the June-September ban

CFN file photo

Rick Martin photo

NEAMAP: Taking stock aboard the Darana R

POINT JUDITH, RI – Jimmy Ruhle's 90' Darana R plowed through 4' seas on the way to an area east of Block Island after leaving Point Judith on Thursday morning, Oct. 2. A group of commercial fishermen, along with a television news team and other media types, came aboard to watch Ruhle and his crew as they worked.

Although the Darana R is a well-known commercial fishing vessel working out of Wanchese, NC, she sometimes fishes for a different purpose than to put food on dinner tables. The boat has been temporarily rigged as a scientific survey vessel for the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program, better known as NEAMAP.

The Darana R looks similar to most fishing trawlers. However, upon closer inspection of the fishing gear and electronics in the wheelhouse, it is obvious that the vessel is much more than a fishing boat. The chatter of the crew is also different than would be expected of veteran fishermen looking for a big haul. That's because on this trip, most of them are scientists.

Ruhle and the scientific crew are interested in determining the variety and biomass of species in a survey area, as well as what they eat, their size, age, and weight.

And Ruhle is not just a fishing boat captain. He has served for years on the

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and as that body's liaison to the New England council. He also is president of the industry advocacy group Commercial Fishermen of America. Ruhle is interested in improving data collected by scientists because it could be vital to the ability of fishermen to earn a living.

Jim Gartland, who earned his masters degree from William & Mary University, is a multispecies survey leader at Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and one of the scientists on the Darana R contracted by NEAMAP. He took time from his duties to talk about the program.

"The VIMS scientists perform data collection and stock assessment from inside the 120' contour from Martha's Vineyard to Montauk, NY and inside the 60' contour from Montauk to Cape Hatteras, NC," he said.

The two-year project takes spring and fall assessments that mirror the federal offshore survey.

"We sample 150 stations that are



Crewman Bobby Ruhle and his dad, Capt. Jimmy Ruhle, in the Darana R wheelhouse.

Jim Gartland, a VIMS multispecies survey leader and one of the scientists contracted by NEAMAP.



Steven Kennedy photos

broken down into 15 regions with one station every 30 square nautical miles," he said.

Gartland added that the net is towed along the bottom for 20 minutes at a speed of 2.9 knots to 3.3 knots. The scientists only work in the daytime, and each cruise takes about a month to complete.

"The Darana R crew, Captain Ruhle, his son Bobby, and mate Rigo Rodriguez deploy and retrieve all the fishing gear. We, meaning me and the other scientists, David Lange, Evan McOmer, Jameson Gregg, and Stef Dukes, record the data," Gartland explained.

More data

The commercial fishermen and media watched with interest when the first catch was brought aboard. The scientists sorted the haul by species and size class. They then recorded the aggregate weights, counts, and individual length measurements of all the species that were collected.

Gartland said that they also recorded the sex, maturity, and eviscerated weight from species of management interest. He said that all data was recorded electronically using Limnoterra fish measuring boards. Data was



Scientist Stef Dukes, foreground, sorts butterflyfish by size class aided by retired NMFS shark scientist Jack Casey.

Peter K. Pryor photos

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also recorded on habitat and invertebrate species caught in the nets.

Veteran fisherman Brian Loftes said, "This is great. Anything that provides accurate, up-to-date data is a good thing."

Chris Brown, captain of the Grandville Davis and president of the Rhode Island Commercial Fishermen's Association, said, "It will be interesting to see how this data compares with government assessments. It's always good to have more information."

According to Gartland, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) managers and scientists had concerns about data collection in the Northeast back in the 1990s. They started SEAMAP – short for Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program – then NEAMAP because they wanted more sampling intensity.

In 2005, ASMFC had \$250,000 in grant money and put out a request for proposals, according to Gartland.

"We won the bid," he said. "We had been doing surveys on the Chesapeake Bay since 2002."

When money became an issue, ASMFC and the Northeast Fisheries Science

Center kicked in the needed funds.

"We started the first full-scale survey in the fall of 2007," Gartland said.

Science to action

NEAMAP collects and disseminates fishery-independent information in the inshore waters of the Mid-Atlantic Bight and Southern New England for use by state and federal fisheries management agencies, the fishing industry, researchers, and others who request such information.

The intent of NEAMAP is not to change existing programs, but to coordinate and standardize procedures and improve data quality and accessibility.

"All of this is well and good, but only if fisheries management pays attention to the data and considers what these scientists have to say when policy is made," Loftes said.

Ruhle added that he wants to see Commercial Fishermen of America become strong enough to force Congress to listen to common sense and science or, he fears, "There won't be a fishing industry to manage."

Sam Bari



Steven Kennedy photo

VIMS scientists, pictured here sorting the catch, record data on all the species collected.

