

North Carolina

South Carolina

Marine Fisheries, 1998

WILMINGTON

South Carolina

CHARLESTON

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Office of Fisheries Management
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Georgia

SAVANNAH

BRUNSWICK

JACKSONVILLE

Florida

ST. AUGUSTINE

DAYTONA BEACH

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of significant events in South Carolina's marine fisheries during 1998. Its objectives are to 1) update and describe trends in the principal fisheries and 2) provide explanatory information relevant to important developments. The discussion is somewhat subjective in interpretive content, but represents consensus views of the supervisory staff of the management programs for the various fisheries. The presentation is directed at a general audience, makes some simplifications, and is not meant to be definitive in the scientific sense.

Publication of landings data for commercial fisheries began in 1957 and was based on a monthly reporting system established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Distribution of information was in the form of monthly bulletins.

Forms were mailed to seafood dealers, on which they were asked to report their landings for that month. Reporting specialists compiled this information and submitted it to the USFWS office in Washington, D.C. The S.C. Division of Commercial Fisheries also provided data. The specialists issued monthly narratives describing conditions and trends, the last in December, 1979.

The current series of annual reports prepared by the Marine Resources Division (MRD) began with an issue that reviewed trends and events for 1977-1986. Individual annual reports commenced with the 1987 issue. The context is similar to that of the USFWS monthly bulletins.

Data on commercial fisheries statistics were obtained through 1) mandatory monthly dealer reports, 2) mandatory shellfish harvest reports, 3) weekly shrimp tickets submitted voluntarily by dock operators, 4) trip tickets for offshore fishing boats submitted voluntarily by fish houses, and 5) reports provided by harvesters in special permit fisheries.

Commercial landings statistics applied to wild stock fisheries only. The mariculture industry again experienced difficulties, but produced \$2.03 M worth of product. In 1998, a virus again caused heavy mortalities at shrimp farms. Although the largest clam producer continued to have problems that curtailed production, a second operation commenced on a significant scale. As a result of these factors, clams were by far the most valuable component of the state's mariculture industry in 1998.

Commercial landings data were subject to confidentiality if less than three sources provided information. Appreciable volumes were involved in some categories. If three or four dealers handled an item, but only one accounted for most of the volume, this information was also treated as confidential. Confidential data

were included in the summaries of total landings.

Reliability of commercial landings data is subject to the perception of under-reporting. State law restricts the use of this information to fishery management purposes only. It has been assumed that providers, particularly in a voluntary situation, have little incentive to submit falsified records. Verification was therefore seldom attempted, except where obvious anomalies were evident.

Health concerns dictated that shellfish landings were reported in detail and closely monitored. This information is considered to be very accurate. Most of the shrimp statistics were obtained from voluntary weekly tickets and were also considered quite reliable.

Federal reporting requirements have been implemented for most offshore finfish fisheries with the percentages of total landings accounted for by the MRD trip ticket system being much reduced as a result. Effort estimation based on MRD ticket data was speculative for these fisheries and was terminated.

Landings for 1998 in most product categories other than shrimp and shellfish were obtained primarily from monthly dealer reports. An increasing amount of the blue crab production has been channeled into the "basket trade" by individual fishermen and under-reporting is suspected. Incidental catches of coastal fish by shrimp trawlers were usually part of the crews' compensation and a portion of the landings was therefore not handled by wholesale dealers. It is suspected that under-reporting of the overall landings occurred as a consequence.

The major source of recreational fishery data was the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS), conducted for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) by a private contractor. This survey applied to hook and line fishing from shore or shore-based facilities, charterboats, and private boats (headboats were not included). The MRD purchased additional interviews from the contractor to augment the basic NMFS quota.

The MRD continued the State Finfish Survey independently of the MRFSS. Coverage was directed at private boat fishermen fishing inland (estuarine) waters. The principal objectives were to obtain length measurements and CPUE data for important inshore sport fish such as red drum, spotted seatrout, and flounders.

State law required operators of piers, charterboats, and headboats to obtain permits and submit monthly reports of their fishing activities. Pier operators reported the numbers of anglers using their facilities each day on a monthly calendar. Charterboat captains completed logsheets for each fishing trip, listing the date, number of anglers, hours fished, and catch data.

Headboat operators were required by federal regulation to submit trip reports to the NMFS (their state obligation was met by providing copies to the MRD). Information elements were similar to those on the charterboat reports. The NMFS Beaufort Laboratory had the federal responsibility for processing these data. As of mid-November, 1999, the summaries for 1998 had not been completed.

No directed effort was made to monitor recreational shellfish gathering. Results of a 1994 survey of buyers of the marine fishing stamp (required for shellfish harvest) indicated that rough estimates of recreational landings could be based on percentages of the commercial production. These are therefore noted under Commercial Fisheries in the Shellfish section.

A survey of holders of the marine recreational fisheries stamp was conducted during 1997 to obtain information on their crabbing activity. The results provided percentage estimates applicable to recreational crabbing during July-October. Since these were based on commercial landings, they are contained in the discussion of the commercial blue crab fishery to facilitate comparison of utilization by each sector.

A survey of the shrimp baiting fishery has been conducted each year since 1987. Results of the 1998 survey are described in MRD Data Report Number 32. A brief summary is included with the discussion of the commercial shrimp fishery, again because of the emphasis on comparative harvests.

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

Product categories were composed as follows. Shrimp landings included whole (heads-on) weights of penaeid species (there were no rock shrimp landings). Crab landings included live weight of blue crab in various product categories (e.g. hard, soft, and peeler), live weight of horseshoe crab, and pounds of stone crab claws. Shellfish volumes were expressed as meat weights with other units (bushels of oysters and whelks, 250-count bags of clams) noted where appropriate.

Most fish landings were converted into round (whole) weights. Shark landings taken on offshore gear were categorized as "offshore" and those by inshore gear (almost entirely shrimp trawl) were designated "inshore." "Offshore fish" included wreckfish, king mackerel, oceanic pelagics (dolphin, wahoo, tunas), swordfish, and reef fish (e.g. groupers, snappers, sea bass, porgies, and tilefishes). "Coastal fish" consisted of mullet, inshore groundfishes, e.g. spot, whiting (kingfish), and flounders. Riverine fish in 1998 were exclusively American shad, although historical landings often included blueback herring.

Except where noted otherwise, all value figures refer to ex-vessel value, i.e., the amount paid to the harvester. For trend analyses, these have been adjusted for inflation by weighting factors based on the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI). All figures shown are expressed in 1998 dollars.

South Carolina is not a major producer of seafood, typically ranking 20th in volume and value of overall production (including mariculture) among the coastal states. The seafood industry consists largely of harvesting with little processing to add value to the raw product. Most of the landings are shipped out of state as raw or unprocessed product.

State law requires that any seafood product offered for sale must initially be sold to a licensed wholesale dealer. In FY 1997/1998, there were 267 licensed wholesale seafood dealers, about average for recent years (Fig. 1). A description of wholesale operating characteristics is contained in the 1994 report and there appear to have been few significant changes since then. Processing was largely limited to initial handling, such as shrimp heading, shellfish shucking, crab picking, and fish cutting. The 1996 and 1997 processors' surveys included the large wholesale dealers only and no survey was done in 1998. The most recent employment figures (for 1995) are contained in MRD Data Report Number 26.

The number of commercial fishermen was unknown, but presumably was between 1,500 and 2,000. In order to legally land product, an individual had to possess either a Trawler Captain's license or a Land and Sell license. In 1997, the law was amended so that the Trawler Captain's license could only be used to sell trawl-caught product with a Land and Sell license required for all other gears. In FY 1997/1998, there were 1,048 Trawler Captain licenses issued, the most since 1992. The number of Land and Sell licenses sold was 738, by far the most in the last ten years and continuing the general upward trend of recent years (Fig. 1). Presumably, this was a result of the law change.

Additional licenses were required for units of gear and/or participation in various fisheries. Since some persons obtained several of these gear licenses in addition to the Land and Sell or Trawler's Captain licenses, the totals were not additive. Crew in most fisheries were not required to have any type of license and could therefore not be documented.

Total landed weight from wild stocks was 17.269 M pounds, up slightly from the previous year's production (Fig. 2) due to an appreciable increase in blue crab landings; there were declines in most other categories. Fig. 3 illustrates the status of the 1998 landings volume vs the 15-year averages. The two major inshore fisheries, i.e., for shrimp and blue crab, continued to do relatively well vs historical standards.



Fig. 1. Sales of commercial licenses.



Fig 2. Total weight of commercial marine fisheries products.

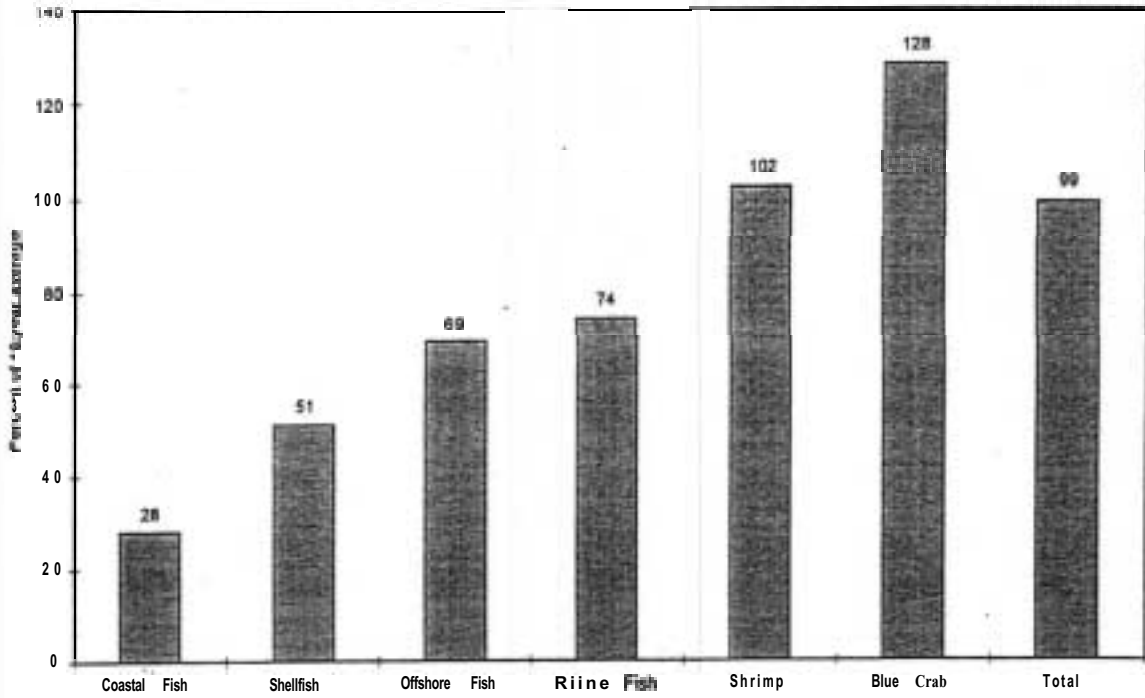


Fig. 3. Production volume compared to 15-year averages.

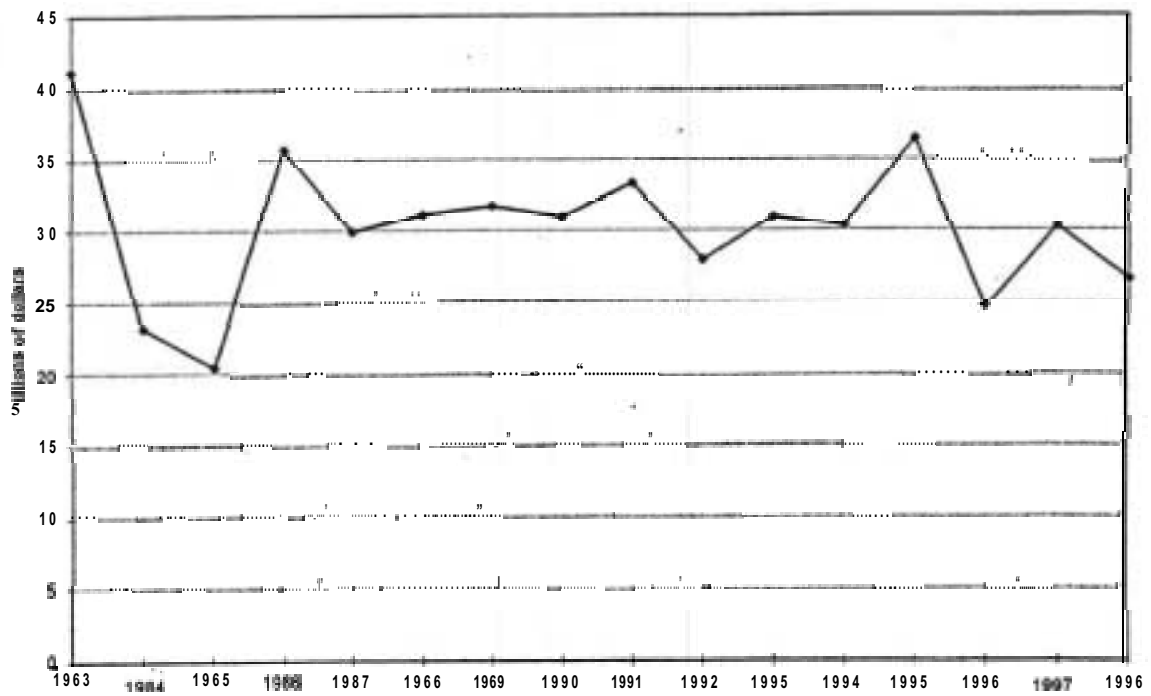


Fig. 4. Total ex-vessel value adjusted for inflation in 1998 dollars. [Click here to continue](#)