New collaborative process can help improve management of marine recreational fisheries

September 21 2010

In an era when fisheries management is rife with controversy, new research led by a team of University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science fisheries scientists shows that a new, stakeholder-driven process can improve the way we manage fisheries targeted by both commercial and recreational interests.

In the September issue of the journal *Fisheries*, the team documents how this innovative process resulted in more content stakeholders while implementing more conservative harvest measures for the king mackerel fishery in the Southeast United States.

The "FishSmart" program works with a wide diversity of fishery stakeholders to develop a set of protective harvest measures agreeable to recreational anglers, conservation organizations, commercial fishermen and managers. Unlike the traditional fisheries management process in which the views of stakeholders are considered after harvest limits have been proposed, the FishSmart process involves the stakeholders from the outset to come to consensus on a shared vision of a "successful fishery" for the target species.

"By developing recommendations for the king mackerel fishery in the southeast Atlantic, our research shows that this process can work in our nation's more contentiously managed fisheries," said lead researcher Dr. Thomas Miller of the UMCES Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. "As one of the top ten marine recreational species in the nation, king mackerel is heavily targeted by both commercial and recreational

interests. There is a lot at stake when developing management plans for this important species."

Over an eight-month period, the stakeholders used a model developed in collaboration with the research team to weigh how alternative management regulations would impact the fishery. The stakeholders recommended three specific approaches involving changes in size and bag limits to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. All of the workgroup's recommendations were more conservative than those developed by the Council's own deliberative process.

"By first deciding on the ultimate goal - a healthy and sustainable fishery - stakeholder groups are better able to understand how changes in management measures are able to both protect the anglers' interests and the long-term health of the species," said Chesapeake Biological Laboratory fisheries biologist and co-author Dr. Michael Wilberg. "FishSmart encourages stakeholders to come to consensus on a set of management measures that protect the fish and are agreeable to everyone at the table."

"FishSmart clearly shows that when management gives stakeholders the tools and responsibility of making decisions, they can and will work to ensure the long term sustainability of a fishery," Miller added.

Provided by University of Maryland