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NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA Awards Grant for Ocean Trawling Program to Improve Stock Assessment Data for Mid-Atlantic Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries Service has awarded a \$295,000 grant to the Virginia Institute of Marine Science to conduct a near-shore ocean trawling program to help assess single and multispecies fish stock in the waters between Martha's Vineyard, Mass. and Cape Hatteras, N.C.

Approximately 150 stations, each representing about 30 square miles of ocean and in depths generally between 20 and 60 feet, will be sampled each spring and fall. The survey also will include a number of stations in the somewhat deeper waters of Block Island Sound and Rhode Island Sound.

The survey will supplement and complement ongoing NOAA survey work. The scientific trawl gear to be used was designed by the New England Fishery Management Council's Trawl Advisory Panel which consists of industry advisors, gear manufacturers and scientific personnel working cooperatively to improve assessment data collection efforts. Similar trawl gear will be used on NOAA's new survey vessel, the *Henry B. Bigelow*.

"This project will provide significant stock assessment data improvements for species including summer flounder, scup, black seabass, loligo squid, butterfish, and bluefish," said Christopher Bonzek, a principal investigator with the Virginia Institute, along with Robert Latour and James Gartland. "It will also provide stock assessment-quality data for weakfish, Atlantic croaker, spot, several skate and ray species, smooth dogfish, horseshoe crab, and several unmanaged but important forage species."

Catch allocations allowed under this grant include 150,000 pounds of summer flounder, 50,000 pounds of loligo squid, 150,000 pounds of scup, 50,000 pounds of black sea bass, and 50,000 pounds of bluefish for a total allowable catch of 450,000 pounds.

For each fishing year, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council may set aside up to three percent of the total allowable landings in certain Mid-Atlantic fisheries to be used for research purposes under its 2008 mid-Atlantic research set-aside program, which provides a mechanism to fund research and compensate vessel owners through the sale of fish harvested under the research quota.

The grant is one of three awarded under the program by NOAA Fisheries Service through its cooperative research program to further the understanding of the nation's fisheries, enhance information used in fisheries management decision-making, and foster collaborations among marine fisheries interests.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA's Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities. To learn more, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

Cooperative Research Program: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/coopresearch/rsa.html>

Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program: <http://www.neamap.net/>

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