



Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program 2005 Fishing Year

04-RSA-002 – NFI, “*Loligo Squid Mesh Study to Reduce Bycatch of Juvenile Loligo Squid and Other Species.*” Principal Investigator – Sarah Elizabeth King.

Project Description: This project will address the need to increase escapement of submarket size silver hake, butterfish, and *Loligo* in the *Loligo* fishery using larger cod end mesh sizes. Codend mesh sizes to be tested, of approximate knot-to-knot dimensions, are 2” (51mm), 2.375” (60mm), and 2.75” (70mm).

RSA Amount: 161,740 lbs of summer flounder
120,000 lbs of scup
30,000 lbs of black sea bass,
281,000 lbs of *Loligo*

Project Period: January 1 – December 31, 2005. Amend. #1 - Extended to June 30, 2006. Amend. #2 and again to February 28, 2007.

Award Status: **Active:** Testing of larger codend mesh sizes in the directed *Loligo* fishery are ongoing. Nets used thus far have been 1.875” and 2.5” mesh. The project has applied for a no-cost time extension so this project can be extended thru December 2007 to allow the use of 2005 funds in their 2007 continuation of this project. The data collected so far has been analyzed and sent to both the NMFS RO and NERSC. Preliminary data analysis revealed that substantial losses of market-sized *Loligo* squid occurred with the experimental 2.5” and therefore, a smaller mesh of 2.5” was selected to test during the 2007 program. .

04-RSA-003 – NFI, “*Development of a Supplemental Finfish Survey Targeting Mid-Atlantic Migratory Species.*” Principal Investigator – Eric N. Powell.

Project Description: To obtain third year support for the development/refinement of a commercial-vessel based survey program in the Mid-Atlantic region that tracks the migratory behavior of selected recreationally and commercially important species. Information gathered would supplement the NMFS finfish survey databases and will include development of ways to better evaluate how seasonal migration of fish in the Mid-Atlantic influences stock abundance estimates.

RSA Amount: 161,740 lbs of summer flounder
120,000 lbs of scup
30,000 lbs of black sea bass,
281,000 lbs of *Loligo*
363,677 lbs of bluefish

Project Period: January 1 – December 31, 2005

Award Status: **Completed:** The supplemental finfish survey (SSF) sampling program is conducted four times during the year: January, March, May, and November. The Final Report has been received and is undergoing technical review. Baltimore and Hudson Canyons transects were sampled during all cruises. In March, Poor Man's Canyon transect was sampled as was a newly created transect near Alvin Canyon. Information provided in the report includes the station sampling protocol, gear utilized, sample processing protocol, and the results of each tow. Height, weight measures were taken for the following species: *Loligo* squid, summer flounder, spiny dogfish, offshore hake, silver hake, black sea bass, *Illex* squid, monkfish, scup, rosette skate, American lobster, thorny skate, barndoor skate, clearnose skate smooth skate, smooth dogfish, and bluefish. Numerous tables and graphs were provided detailing information derived from completed tows.

04-RSA-005 – Charles Borden, “2005 Fishery Independent Survey of Selected Hard Bottom Areas in Southern New England.” Principal Investigator – Laura Skrobe, University of Rhode Island.

Project Description: This project continues efforts to develop a fishery independent scup survey that utilizes unvented fish traps fished on hard bottom areas in southern New England waters to characterize the size composition of the population. Survey activities will be conducted at eight hard bottom study sites that are located offshore, which are un-sampled by current state and federal finfish trawl surveys. Study results will expand the current understanding of the scup resource.

RSA Amount: 3,675 lbs of scup
18,000 lbs of black sea bass,

Project Period: May 1 – December 31, 2005

Award Status: **Active:** The researchers surveyed six separate hard bottom sites utilizing standard fish traps (2'x2'x2') made with 1 ½ x 1 ½ inch coated mesh wire with double entry wire heads. 15 traps were baited with clams (fish very quickly) and fished for two one hour soaks at each site which are visited once during each three-week cycle. This resulted in 30 trap hauls on each sample site once each three-week cycle. The date, area, depth, and catch were recorded utilizing standard NMFS Sea Sampling protocols. Each captured scup was measured for total length.

Approximately 5300 scup were measured as part of the sampling program. This is a significantly higher number than in 2004 (2341 scup). The researchers have found that scup seemed to be widely distributed this year instead of being concentrated as normal. The fishermen involved with the project noticed that the density of scup was far lower on the sampling stations than during prior years and the short soak times, which historically have been effective ways to harvest scup in large numbers, are no longer sufficient. There was no explanation for this change. Researchers also found that their experimental gear was almost impossible to use in areas of high current, such as the spawning grounds, and the heavier pots used in the black sea bass fishery had to be used to collect the samples. On two occasions, NMFS employees traveled with the fishermen and tagged 450 scup the first trip and 350 scup on the second.

A final accounting of all RSA landed and funding generated is pending.