Recommendations

The Society has identified a set of 10 recommendations to assist decision-makers in closing knowledge and process gaps around state protections like Prime Fishing Areas that can lead to better understanding and protection of fish and fish habitat.

1. New Jersey DEP should develop guidance that includes adopting a process for identifying and protecting Prime Fishing Areas. The guidelines should:

> Identify currently unmapped but known or acknowledged areas that exhibit the characteristics and recreational activity identified in the Rule;

> Develop a definition and set standards for what "significant degree" means in determining non-allowable alteration of fisheries productivity value;

> Define and articulate presumptive uses allowed, prohibited, and discouraged by the Rule;

> Institute periodic reviews of PFAs species presence or absence with recreational anglers given data gaps in real-time information and shifts in population distributions due to climate change and other ecosystem disturbances; and

> Review bathymetric changes to inform evolving PFA conditions.

2. NJDEP should develop a Geographic Location Description for New Jersey's Prime Fishing Areas that can complement the rule as an existing special area enforceable policy, adding an additional layer of analysis and consideration for PFAs outside of state waters.

3. NJDEP should develop a public online repository for coastal and

Miss Barnegat Light, a charter fishing boat out of Long Beach Island, New Jersey (John Gattuso).

A young angler shows off her catch (American Littoral Society).

offshore state or federal projects implicating New Jersey coastal resources. This online repository should contain the department analyses over the life of a project from start to finish. As the New Jersey sand mining analysis shows, many complex offshore projects tier off older, broader analyses, making it imperative that stakeholders have one place to go to understand the actions the state is taking or has taken in developing and permitting a project in order to engage in conversations around new projects, project phases and modifications or changes to existing projects.

4. NJDEP should require applicants to describe Prime Fishing Areas or fishing grounds being considered in or near a state or federal proposed activity by any commonly-known fishing ground name during the environmental review processes to ensure appropriate recreational angler stakeholder engagement.

5. To meet the increasing demands for offshore resources and increasing potential for conflicting uses and impacts to fish and fish habitat:

> Member states must review the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean's (MARCO) purpose and commitments and strengthen them around protecting places like PFAs; and

> The Mid-Atlantic Committee on the Ocean (MACO) must strengthen its work to better coordinate project planning and siting across the region.

6. Mid-Atlantic states should consider developing a mapped geographic information system (GIS) layer for each fish and fish habitat protective mechanism in order to inform potential resource conflicts as early as possible.

7. MARCO should work with its member states to develop a network and engagement plan for recreational anglers throughout the region to ensure opportunities to capture and integrate on the water experience and observations resident in the recreational angling community. Part of the network's scope could be to assist states in developing areas similar to New Jersey's mapped PFAs for inclusion on the Mid-Atlantic Data Portal.

8. MARCO and MACO must facilitate additional engagement of stakeholders with their Offshore Renewable Energy work group by adding public interest member voices.

9. Federal regulators should provide permanent moorings for anglers wishing to anchor near the turbines to conduct stationary fishing. This would provide a safer environment for fishermen, while minimizing any interaction between anchoring gear and the structure or cables.

10. Mid-Atlantic states should increase transparency and public access to decision documents regarding impacts to state coastal resources, including to:

> House and publish federal consistency reviews and on a publicly accessible and searchable web portal; and

> Develop an online repository for coastal and offshore state or federal projects implicating state coastal resources that contains the department analyses over the life of a project from start to finish.