

Common Name: Cusk

Scientific Name: *Brosme brosme*

Area of Concern: Throughout the Gulf of Maine
Year First Listed as a "Species of Concern": 2004



(photo credit: Norwegian Seafood Export Council)

Species Description:

Life history: Cusk attain lengths up to 90 cm and weights up to 9.0 kg. They spawn in spring and early summer. Eggs initially rise to the surface where hatching and larval development takes place. Juveniles move to the bottom at 5 cm in length and become sedentary.

Cusk from the Scotian Shelf are relatively slow growing and late maturing. The maximum age of this species is believed to be greater than 14 years, and sexual maturity is reached by age five (males) and seven (females). Little information is known about Gulf of Maine cusk, and the stock structure is unknown.

There are regional variations in this species' diet. Throughout their range, their diet consists primarily of various species of fish, echinoderms, and crustaceans.

Habitat: Deep water species found in rocky, hard bottom areas.

Rationale for "Species of Concern" Listing:

Demographic and Diversity Concerns:

NEFSC autumn bottom trawl survey biomass index has fluctuated considerably, but a declining trend has been evident since the late 1960s. The 1998 index is near zero and is the record low. Mean length has also declined from 62 cm during 1964-1987 to 50 cm 1988-1998.

Ratio of landings to survey indices has been increasing since 1986, which implies increased exploitation.

Factors for Decline:

Principal gears used to catch cusk are line trawl, otter trawl, gill net, and longline. Recreational fishing is insignificant and foreign catches are minor.

Cusk landings were relatively stable at 1700 mt per year in the 1960s and early 1970s. Landings increased in the late 1970s to early 1980s, fluctuated in the late 1980s and early 1990s between 1500 and 2400 mt, and since then declined to a record low of 500 mt in 1998. The 1998 U.S. landings were 354 mt and accounted for 72% of the total harvest. Canadian landings in 1998 were 140 mt. Total U.S. landings in 2001 were 180.3 mt.

The fishery is not presently managed.

Status Reviews/Research Completed or Underway:

For further information on this Species of Concern, or on the Species of Concern Program in general, please contact Ms. Marta Nammack, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 713-1401, x180, Marta.Nammack@noaa.gov; or Kimberly Damon-Randall, NMFS, Northeast Region, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2295, (978) 281-9328, x6535, Kimberly.Damon-Randall@noaa.gov.

References:

Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). 2000. Status of Fisheries Resources off Northeastern United States - Cusk. January 2000. [Homepage of NEFSC] [Online]. Available: <http://www.nefsc.nmfs.gov/sos/spsyn/og/cusk/>.

Last updated 4/13/2004