

SPOTTED SEATROUT

(06/07 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status - *Viable* – Spotted seatrout are one of the few species that depend on estuaries throughout their life cycle, resulting in concerns about environmental impacts on the stock. Variability in annual reported catch is typical for this species, and seems to parallel the climatic conditions of the preceding winter and spring, i.e., low catches following severe winters, with winter cold shock of juveniles and adults cited as a primary factor in local and coastwide declines in spotted seatrout. Although commercial landings have been reduced in recent years (2001-2005), 2006 landings (306,494 lbs.) increased to levels similar to those landings not seen since 1998. Recreational landings increased steadily and exponentially from an all time low in 2003 (175,521 lbs.) to a record high in 2006 (925,612 lbs.). The number of citations issued in 2006 (686) was second only to those issued in 1995 (695).

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1997-2006 – 249,322 lbs./\$314,172

2006 Commercial Landings and Value – 306,510 lbs./\$402,512

Average Recreational Landings 1997-2006 – 440,558 lbs., **2006** – 925,612 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (4 lbs.) 1997-2006 – 422, **2006** – 686

Average Recreational Commercial Gear License Landings 2002-2006 – 12,642 lbs., **2006** – 12,897 lbs.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - In North Carolina, spotted seatrout are currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) FMP compliance requirements. The ASMFC FMP for Spotted Seatrout was initially approved in 1984, and is reviewed every three years. Updates to the plan incorporate new data and research findings, and assess the status of stocks and the fisheries. Amendment 1, approved by the ASMFC Policy Board on November 1991, added the objective of maintaining a spawning potential ratio (SPR) of at least 20% to minimize the possibility of recruitment failure.

Research and Data Needs - Validated index of juvenile abundance, fishery independent data, commercial and recreational mortality estimates, and stock assessment.

Current Regulations (2007) – 12-inch/10-fish bag limit per person per day taken by hook and line

Harvest Season - year round. Peak catches occur in the fall, although May and June are also productive months.

Size and Age at Maturity – 7-9 inches fork length (FL)/less than 1 year
(Males mature at a younger age, smaller size, and earlier in the season, than females).

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 12 years/9 years

Juvenile Abundance Index - unknown

Habits and Habitats – Estuarine dependent member of the *Sciaenidae* family that includes kingfish, spot, croaker, red drum, black drum, and weakfish. Peak catches occur in the fall, although May and June are also productive months. North Carolina spotted seatrout have a protracted spawning season which extends from late April through early October. Juveniles are dependent on estuarine seagrass habitat as critical nursery

areas. Catastrophic mortalities of spotted seatrout have been attributed to cold shock, hurricanes, excessive fresh water and red tide conditions.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#)