

SPOTTED SEATROUT

Stock Status – Depleted – The 2009 North Carolina spotted seatrout stock assessment indicated that the stock in North Carolina and Virginia has been overfished and that overfishing has been occurring throughout the entire 18-year time series (Jensen 2009). Much of the overfishing has been in recent years when recreational fishing effort and number of discards have increased. Recent spawning potential ratio's (SPR) are below the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) recommended criteria of 20%. It should be noted that cold stun events appear to have a large influence on spotted seatrout population dynamics with winter cold shock cited as a primary factor in local and coastwide declines in spotted seatrout.

Average Commercial Landings and Value – 2000-2009 – 241,189 lbs./\$333,533

2009 Commercial Landings and Value – 320,247 lbs./\$528,985

Average Recreational Landings – 2000-2009 – 571,908 lbs., **2009** – 833,577 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (5 lbs./24 inches[^]) 2000-2009* – 493, **2009*** – 434 (3% of the 2009 citations were released)

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) – North Carolina's Spotted Seatrout FMP is the first fishery management plan developed for spotted seatrout in North Carolina. However, spotted seatrout have been managed along the Atlantic Coast through an Interjurisdictional FMP developed by the ASMFC. The ASMFC Spotted Seatrout FMP was initially approved in 1984, and has been reviewed annually since 2001. Amendment 1, approved by the ASMFC Policy Board on November 1991, developed a list of goals for coastwide management but allowed each state that had an interest in the spotted seatrout fishery (Florida through Maryland) to manage their stocks independently.

North Carolina followed the recommendation of the ASMFC Spotted Seatrout FMP Amendment 1 to maintain an SPR of at least 20%. North Carolina's spotted seatrout stock is considered to be overfished if the spawning stock biomass falls below a threshold associated with a 20% SPR and undergoing overfishing if fishing mortality rate rises above a threshold associated with the 20% SPR. North Carolina's management strategy is to reduce fishing mortality to maintain a 20% SPR which will increase the likelihood of sustainability through an expanded age structure and an increase in the spawning stock biomass. North Carolina's Spotted Seatrout FMP is in the final stages of development.

Research and Data Needs – Develop a validated index of juvenile abundance; tagging studies to verify estimates of natural and fishing mortality; size specific fecundity rates; fishery independent data; cold stun research; incorporate cold stun event information into modeling of the population.

Current Regulations – 14 inches total length (TL)/10-fish bag limit/person/day taken by hook and line. On September 24, 2009, the Marine Fisheries Commission authorized an interim management measure to increase the minimum size from 12 inches TL to 14 inches TL to ensure the viability of spotted seatrout while the Spotted Seatrout FMP is being developed. The proclamation (FF-53-2009) was effective October 5, 2009.

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.

^Citation weight requirement reduced from 5 lbs. to 4 lbs. and added 24 inch release category effective 2008

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