

**ATLANTIC CROAKER**  
(06/03 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status** — *Concern*, Increased commercial CPUE's and age suggests the stock is in recovery but the annual juvenile abundance index is below average. The 2002 recreational landings declined overall. Recreational landings in inside waters were above the 10-year average and larger fish were captured.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1993-2002** — 8,796,603 lbs., \$2,857,253

**2002 Commercial Landings and Value** — 10,189,070 lbs., \$3,233,373

**Average Recreational Landings — 1993-2002** — 277,226 lbs., **2002** — 242,233 lbs.

**Average Number of Award Citations — 1993-2002** — 3, **2002** — 2

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan** — An ASMFC FMP was created in 1987. The ASMFC review of the FMP in 1992 and again in 1998 determined research needs. The research needs included an updated stock assessment and an amendment to the FMP. A coastwide stock assessment was completed and reviewed by the ASMFC Atlantic croaker technical committee in 2001. The technical committee agreed the assessment is adequate but there are limitations and uncertainties, so a number of tasks were added for an updated version. The Technical Committee met in April 2003 to ensure all data was consistent between states and included information throughout the entire range along the east coast. Currently, a revised stock assessment is in preparation and a draft is scheduled for completion this summer. The original stock assessment determined Atlantic croaker is a recruitment-driven stock where biomass and landings fluctuate in response to large year classes. Complete acceptance of the updated stock assessment must be decided and will be under review as soon as it is available this year by the South Atlantic Board.

**Research and Data Needs** — Continued collection of information on the biology and population dynamics including (growth, age structure, reproductive biology, migration, mortality, and stock structure).

**Current Minimum Size limit** — none

**Harvest Season** — Year around. Banned flynet fishing in ocean waters south of Cape Hatteras in 1994 along with the introduction of BRDs in shrimp trawls, and culling panels in long haul seines have indirectly reduced the catch of juvenile croaker.

**Size and Age at Maturity** — 5-9 inches and ages 2-3 for males, 7-9 inches and ages 2-3 for females.

**Historical and Current Maximum Age** — 15 years old — 12 years old

**Juvenile Abundance Index Average 1993-2002** — 337.9\* (number of individuals per unit of effort), **2002** — 121.9 (validated)

**Habits/Habitats** — Inhabit mud and sand-bottom areas, feed chiefly on crustaceans, worms, mollusks, detritus, and small fishes. Atlantic croakers have a protracted spawning season with a peak during October in North Carolina. The pelagic eggs and recently hatched larvae drift passively toward land. Later, the advanced larval stages and juveniles continue their migration inshore by actively swimming into estuarine nursery areas. Maximum recruitment of juvenile fish is in the spring; however, sometimes maximum recruitment is only in the fall for the northern Pamlico Sound area.

**Interesting Atlantic Croaker Links -**

[http://www.odu.edu/sci/cqfe/age&growth/Atlantic\\_Croaker/atlanticcroaker.htm](http://www.odu.edu/sci/cqfe/age&growth/Atlantic_Croaker/atlanticcroaker.htm) |  
<http://www.asmfc.org/Programs/Fish%20Mgmt/2002%20Factsheets%20PDF/Atlantic%20Croaker.pdf> |

\*Pamlico Sound Survey arithmetic JAI.

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