

ATLANTIC CROAKER

(06/02 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status – *Concern*. Increased commercial CPUE's, landings, and age structure suggests the stock is in recovery, but the annual juvenile abundance index is below average and landings in the inside waters show no improvement. The 2001 recreational landings have increased, but the actual number of fish are below the 10-year average, which indicates people are catching bigger fish but fewer than previous years.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1992-2001 -- 8,056,624 lbs., \$2,585,064

2001 Commercial Landings and Value -- 12,017,424 lbs., \$3,080,205

Average Recreational Landings -- 1992-2001 -- 276,740 lbs., **2001** -- 353,704 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations -- 1992-2001 -- 3, **2001** -- 5

Status of Fisheries Management Plan – An Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Fishery Management Plan (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. 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 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 stock assessment must be decided and is still under review by the South Atlantic Board of the ASMFC.

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 1991-2001 -- 350.4* (number of individuals per unit of effort), **2001** -- 156.9 (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.

*Pamlico Sound Survey arithmetic JAI.

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