

ATLANTIC CROAKER

(06/05 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status -Viable - The Atlantic croaker population in the mid-Atlantic region is currently not overfished and overfishing is not occurring on the spawning stock biomass. Increased commercial CPUE's and expanded age structure suggests the stock is viable. The annual juvenile abundance index is above the 10-year average. 2004 recreational landings have decreased from 2003, but remain above the 10-year average. Recreational harvest in inside waters was below the 10-year average, but the overall number caught increased from the previous year.

Average Commercial Landings and Value - 1995-2004 – 10,650,803 lbs./ \$3,258,240

2004 Commercial Landings Value - 11,992,803 lbs./\$3,527,941

Average MRFSS Recreational Landings - 1995-2004 – 271,870 lbs., **2004** - 273,320 lbs.

Average RCGL Landings - 2002-2004 - 20,584 lbs., **2004** - 13,224 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations - 1995-2004 - 5, **2004** - 9

Status of Fisheries Management Plan - In North Carolina, Atlantic croaker is currently included in the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management Plan, which defers to ASMFC/SAFMC FMP compliance requirements. An ASMFC FMP was initially approved in 1987, with reviews in 1992 and 1998. These reviews determined research needs, including an updated stock assessment and an amendment to the FMP. The most recent stock assessment was approved in 2005. The ASMFC South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board met in August 2004 and approved the development of Amendment 1, which will undergo a second round of public hearings during summer 2005 to receive public comment. Amendment 1 will go to the board for final approval later this year.

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 (2005) - none

Harvest season (2005)- Year round. Indirect regulations to reduce the catch of juveniles include: closure to flynet fishing in ocean waters south of Cape Hatteras in 1994, the introduction of BRDs in shrimp trawls in 1992, minimum mesh requirement, limits on the bait component in trawls since 1991, and culling panels in long haul seines.

Size and Age at Maturity – Males: 5 inches-9 inches/ 2 years–3 years; Females: 7 inches-9 inches/2 years-3 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 15 years/13 years

Juvenile Abundance Index Average - 1995-2004 – 283.1* (number of individuals per unit of effort, excluding 1999 due to time delays), **2004** – 374.7 (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 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, sometime 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](#)