

SPOTTED SEATROUT

(06/08 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), landings in 2006 (306,494 lbs.) & 2007 (374,708 lbs.) increased to levels similar to those landings not seen since 1998. Recreational landings have increased from an all time low in 2003 (175,521 lbs.) to a record high in 2007 (961,167 lbs.). The number of citations issued in 2007 (1,000) was the most issued since 1991.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1998-2007 – 264,154 lbs./\$339,092

2007 Commercial Landings and Value – 374,708 lbs./\$524,447

Average Recreational Landings 1998-2007 – 507,045 lbs., **2007** – 961,167 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (4 lbs.) 1998-2007 – 509, **2007** –1,000

Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings 2002-2007 – 13,000 lbs., **2007** – 14,749 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 has been reviewed annually since 2001. 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. A NCDMF FMP was initiated in July 2007 and is currently in the process of being developed.

Research and Data Needs - validated index of juvenile abundance; fishery independent data; commercial and recreational mortality estimates; stock assessment

Current Regulations – 12-inch total length (TL) /10-fish bag limit/person/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](#).