

WEAKFISH

(06/06 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status - *Concern* – There is currently no accepted peer-reviewed stock assessment for Atlantic coast weakfish and the current stock status is being debated. Commercial and recreational landings along the Atlantic coast have plummeted in recent years and are currently at the lowest level on record. It is unclear whether current declines in commercial and recreational landings are attributable to fishing mortality, natural mortality or changes in behavior among the various fisheries. In North Carolina commercial landings have mirrored the coastwide decline while recreational landings have been above average.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1996-2005 – 2,112,335 lbs./\$1,182,007

2005 Commercial Landings and Value – 421,467 lbs./\$356,781

Average Recreational Landings 1996-2005 – 151,598 lbs., **2005** - 159,931 lbs.

Average Number of Citations (6 lbs.) 1996-2005 – 17, **2005** - 9

Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings 2002-2005 – 842 lbs., **2005** - 647 lbs.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - In North Carolina, weakfish are included in the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management Plan, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) FMP compliance requirements. Weakfish are currently managed under Amendment 4 to the ASMFC FMP, adopted November 2002. Although the current decline in harvest has caused much concern for the ASMFC Weakfish Management Board the unclear status of the stocks has made management decisions very difficult. The Board will meet later in 2006 to determine if additional management measures may be needed.

Research and Data Needs - Stock identification studies to determine coastal movements and the extent of stock mixing. Studies to define spawning locations and habitat preferences.

Current Regulations (2006) – Recreational: 12-inch total length (TL)/7-fish bag limit; Commercial: 12 inches TL with a seasonal, 10-inch TL for estuarine pound net and long haul seine fishermen.

Harvest Season – year round

Size and Age at Maturity – 7-8 inches/1 year

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 17 years/12 years

Juvenile Abundance Index (1996-2005) – 46.3, **2005** - 28.6 - Unvalidated

Habits/Habitats - Weakfish are estuarine dependent members of the drum family that include Atlantic croaker, spot, red drum, black drum and spotted seatrout. Weakfish migrate south and offshore during winter months and inshore and north during spring and summer. Weakfish spawn throughout the spring and summer and the larvae and juveniles are dependent on estuarine habitat as critical nursery areas. During winter, young-of-the-year move offshore into nearshore ocean waters to overwinter. Following their first winter, the one-year-old fish move into the inlets and sounds to spawn for the first time.

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