

## **STRIPED MULLET**

(06/04 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock status** -- *Concern*. Consistently large, yearly commercial landings (> 2 million lb) rank the striped mullet among the top seven finfish fisheries in the state. Rapid surges in roe value in the late 1980s, followed by rising commercial fishing effort and landings through the mid 1990s caused the initial concern for the North Carolina stock. Most of the commercial exploitation is targeted on pre-spawned, roe carrying adults, which directly reduces the yearly reproductive output of the stock. Recreational exploitation of juveniles for bait also contributes to concerns of overfishing.

**10-Year Average Commercial Landings and Value (1994-2003)** -- 2,127,530 lb, \$1,258,845.

**2003 Commercial Landings and Value** -- 1,629,314 lb, \$779,570.

**Average Recreational Landings** -- Approximately 350,000 striped mullet per year, used as bait by recreational fishermen, and on average, 46,427 striped mullet (43,534 lb) harvested with gill nets by recreational-commercial gear license holders.

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)** -- Draft preparations of the North Carolina FMP are in progress. There is no inter-jurisdictional management over the Atlantic coastwide striped mullet population.

**Data/Research Needs** – Further life history information regarding maturity, age-growth, identification of spawning locations, and larval and juvenile movements. Continued improvements in estimating recreational hook and line and bait harvests. Length and age compositions and catch-per-unit-effort of the commercial, recreational, and recreational-commercial gear fisheries, as well as from all relevant fishery-independent surveys. Improved juvenile abundance indices.

**Current Size Limit** -- No restrictions.

**Harvest Season** -- No restrictions, other than area and season closures for the commercial stop-net beach seine fishery in Bogue Banks.

**Size and Age at Maturity** -- Males: 11.2 inches total length (TL); Females: 13.4 inches TL; 2 years old.

**Current Maximum Age** – Males: 7 years; Females: 11 years.

**Juvenile Abundance Index** -- None Available.

**Habitats and Habits**– Striped mullet are found in a wide range of depths and habitats primarily in freshwater to estuarine environments, until a spawning migration into marine waters occurs during the fall. Aside from its considerable economic importance, striped mullet also serve as an important ecological link between some of the smallest aquatic organisms and the highest-level predators in the marine food chain. Mullet feed on microorganisms such as bacteria, unicellular diatoms, and unicellular algae found on aquatic plants, in mud, silt, and sand, and in decaying plant material. In turn, striped mullet are prey to top predators such as birds, fish, sharks, and porpoises. Striped mullet are highly fecund (upwards of 4 million eggs for a large female) and spawn in large aggregations near inlets to offshore areas. Spawning individuals have been reported from September to March, however peak spawning activity occurs in October to early December.

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