(06/05 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status - *Overfished* - The current cause of the weakfish decline is in question. While fishing mortality rates appear to be too low to cause the current rapid decline in spawning stock biomass, other ecosystem effects such as predation and competition are being investigated. Management measures implemented through Amendments 2, 3, and 4 resulted in an initial positive response to rebuilding the overfished stocks of weakfish along the Atlantic coast. Spawning stock biomass and the age structure up to the late 1990s indicated a recovering stock. However, landings along the Atlantic coast have declined since 1998 and are currently at historic lows. As a result, the ASMFC has initiated an Addendum to Amendment 4 of the weakfish FMP to look at appropriate action to rebuild the spawning stock biomass.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1995-2004 - 2,481,514 lbs./\$1,362,557

2004 Commercial Landings and Value - 685,408 lbs./\$488,860

Average Recreational Landings 1995-2004-142,307 lbs., 2004-271,260 lbs.

Average Number of Citations 1995-2004 – 17, 2004 - 9

Average RCGL Landings 2002-2004 - 907 lbs., 2004 - 494 lbs.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan - In North Carolina, weakfish is currently included in the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management Plan, which defers to ASMFC FMP compliance requirements. Weakfish are currently managed under Amendment 4 to the ASMFC FMP, adopted November 2002. An addendum to the plan is currently being developed because the most recent stock assessment indicates the SSB has fallen below the level necessary to sustain the population. The addendum will determine what regulatory measures are necessary to begin rebuilding the stocks.

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

Current Minimum Size Limit (2005) – Recreational: 12-inch TL size limit/ 7-fish bag limit; Commercial: 12 inches TL with a seasonal, 10-inch (TL) size limit for estuarine pound net and long haul seine fishermen.

Harvest Season (2005)- Open year round

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

Historical and Current Maximum Age - 17 years/12 years

Average and Current Juvenile Abundance Index (1995-2004) - 48.2, 28.8 - 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 <u>DMF Species Leads page</u>