

## **WEAKFISH**

(06/08 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status - *Depleted*** – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Weakfish Management Board has accepted five conclusions from the most recent stock assessment report for management purposes:

1. The stock is declining;
2. Total mortality is increasing;
3. There is little evidence of overfishing;
4. Something other than fishing mortality is causing the decline in the stock; and
5. There is a strong chance that regulating will not, in itself, reverse the decline. Commercial and recreational landings along the Atlantic coast have plummeted in recent years and are currently at the lowest level on record. In North Carolina, commercial landings have mirrored the coastwide decline while recreational landings have been more stable.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1998-2007** – 1,412,382 lbs./\$810,634

**2007 Commercial Landings and Value** – 175,579 lbs./\$149,191

**Average Recreational Landings 1998-2007** – 153,817 lbs., **2007** – 123,039 lbs.

**Average Number of Citations (6 lbs.) 1998-2007** – 17, **2007** - 2

**Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings 2002-2007** – 673 lbs., **2007** - 221 lbs.

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)** - In North Carolina, weakfish are included in the interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to ASMFC FMP compliance requirements. Weakfish are currently managed under Amendment 4 to the ASMFC FMP, adopted November 2002. Due to weakfish's depleted stock size, Addendum II to Amendment 4 was recently passed with measures to aid in rebuilding the stock. Addendum II takes into account the fact natural mortality, rather than fishing mortality, appears to be the primary cause of the current stock decline. As a result, the Board has implemented modest measures including a more conservative recreational creel limit (6 fish), a reduction in the commercial daily bycatch limit (300 to 150 lbs.), and a coastwide commercial landings limit of approximately 3.7 million pounds (based on 2000 to 2004 average). These management measures will be re-evaluated should coastwide commercial landings exceed 80% of the landings limit or if any single state's landings exceed its five-year mean by more than 25% in any single year. An updated ASMFC stock assessment is scheduled for 2009.

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

**Current Regulations** – recreational: 12-inch total length (TL)/6-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 TL/1 year

**Historical and Current Maximum Age** – 17 years/12 years

**Juvenile Abundance Index (1998-2007)** – 46.3, **2007** – 56.8 - Unvalidated

**Habits and 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](#).