

WEAKFISH

(06/00 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status-----*Recovering*. The weakfish stock continues to recover under Amendment #3 to the ASMFC Plan. Fishing mortality continues to decline and the number of year classes in the age structure is expanding. Commercial catches continue to decline in relation to the long term average due, in part, to regulations. Recreational harvest declined in 1999, partly as a result of increasing the minimum size limit from 12 to 14 inches and decreased effort.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1989-1999-----4,682,212 lbs./\$2,364,517

1999 Commercial Landings and Value-----2,612,773 lbs./\$1,319,450

Average Recreational Landings 1989-1999-----110,336 lbs.

1999 Recreational Landings-----162,512 lbs.

Average Number of Citations 1989-1999 and Current Number (Weight = 6 lbs.)-----4/6

Status of Fisheries Management Plan----- Currently managed under Amendment #3 to the ASMFC Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish, adopted May 1996. Weakfish are currently managed by minimum size limits, bag limits, minimum mesh sizes, bycatch reduction devices in shrimp trawls and long haul seines, and the closure south of Cape Hatteras to flynets. A rebuilding schedule set forth in Amendment #3 requires management to reach the target fishing mortality rate during the year 2000. This target was reached in the 1999 stock assessment. The ASMFC will be discussing how to manage a recovering or recovered stock during meetings this year.

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

Current minimum size limit-----14 inches total length (TL) for recreational fishermen with a 10 fish bag limit. 12 inches TL for commercial fishermen with a 10 inch (TL) size limit for estuarine pound net and long haul seine fishermen.

Harvest Season-----Open year round

Size and Age at maturity-----7-8 inches TL/ 1 year old

Historical and Current Maximum Age-----17 years old/ 7 years old

Average and Current Juvenile Abundance Index (1988-1998)-----17.9/32.2- 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 near shore coastal 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](#)