

WEAKFISH

(06/03 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status— *Viable*. The weakfish stock has recovered with the most recent stock assessment showing continued positive trends in the population as a result of the criteria set forth in Amendment #3 to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Plan. Amendment #4 to the Weakfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) has recently been completed and aims to continue building upon the achievements of Amendment 3. Spawning stock biomass, population biomass, and recruitment levels are at all time highs while fishing mortality continues to decline and is well below the target. The number of year classes in the population continues to increase with fish up to age 10 sampled in 2002.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1993-2002— 3,108,008 lbs./\$1,676,589

2002 Commercial Landings and Value— 1,827,980 lbs./\$1,051,030

Average Recreational Landings 1993-2002— 122,183 lbs.

2002 Recreational Landings— 82,867 lbs.

Average Number of Citations 1993-2002 and Current Number (Weight = 6 lbs.)— 5/0

Status of Fisheries Management Plan— Weakfish are currently managed under the recently passed Amendment #4 to the ASMFC FMP, adopted November 2002. Similar to Amendment 3, the current plan manages weakfish 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. One major change in Amendment 4 allows for an increase in the bycatch allowance for commercial fisheries during closed seasons to 300 pounds provided that there is at least an equal poundage of other species on board the vessel.

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— 12 inch TL size limit with a 7 fish bag limit for recreational fishermen. 12 inches TL for commercial fishermen with a seasonal, 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/ 10 years old

Average and Current Juvenile Abundance Index (1992-2001)— 22.7/11.4- 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](#)