

## **WEAKFISH**

(06/02 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status**-----*Viable*. The weakfish stock has recovered, based upon all the criteria set forth in Amendment #3 to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Plan. 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 2001. Amendment #4 to the Weakfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) will be taken out for public comments in 2002.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1992-2001**-----3,411,465 lbs./\$1,819,822

**2001 Commercial Landings and Value**-----1,960,324 lbs./\$1,037,169

**Average Recreational Landings 1992-2001**-----116,632 lbs.

**2001 Recreational Landings**-----158,345 lbs.

**Average Number of Citations 1992-2001 and Current Number (Weight = 6 lbs.)**-----5/8

**Status of Fisheries Management Plan**----- Currently managed under Amendment #3 to the ASMFC FMP for Weakfish, adopted May 1996. Weakfish are 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. Studies to define spawning locations and habitat preferences.

**Current minimum size limit**-----14 inches total length (TL) with a 10 fish bag limit **OR** a 12 inch TL size limit with a 4 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)**-----23.6/15.3- 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](#)