

BLACK SEA BASS (North of Hatteras)

(06/09 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status – Concern -The black sea bass population is considered a “data poor stock”. A statistical catch at length model (SCALE) was used to develop estimates of reference points rather than the historically used NEFSC bottom trawl survey index. The current spawning stock size is about 92% of the biomass goal to be achieved by January 1, 2010. The stock is not considered overfished; however, the stock is not yet rebuilt to the goal and fishing harvests need to stay within the annual limits to ensure that it will be. Overfishing status was evaluated with an approximation of fishing mortality based on a relative exploitation rate. The stock is currently experiencing overfishing; therefore, action will need to be taken to reduce the fishing mortality rate on the stock and prevent overfishing. These new reference points and stock status determinations should be used with caution due to the uncertainty in the natural mortality estimate, the model input parameters, and significant uncertainty associated with managing a protogynous species (i.e., individuals change sex from female to male).

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1999-2008 – 244,511 lbs./\$559,935

2008 Commercial Landings and Value – 208,726 lbs./\$590,569 (quota managed)

Average Recreational Landings 1999-2008* - 167,106 lbs., **2008*** – 90,977 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (4 lbs.) 1999-2008* – 124, **2008*** - 35

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - In North Carolina, the stock north of Cape Hatteras is currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission/Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council FMP compliance requirements. Management measures include commercial quotas, minimum mesh sizes for trawls, escape vents for pots, and minimum fish size limits. Amendment 13 to the FMP established the implementation of a state-specific allocation of the coastwide quota. North Carolina’s allocation of the commercial quota is 11%. The Commission and Council approved increases in the minimum sizes for circular vents (now 2.5” in diameter) and the number of vents in traps and pots, and all traps and pots are required to have at least two vents in the parlor portion of the trap to help increase escapement of sub-legal fish (January 1, 2007 implementation).

Research and Data Needs - There continue to be gaps in critical life history information for black sea bass life and the current sampling gear may not be optimal to assess the population. Continue monitoring of catches, continue federal tagging projects, develop age information, additional fishery independent surveys, alternative survey gear (pots or handlines), experimental and field evaluation of spawning behavior.

Current Regulations – recreational: 12 inches total length (TL) minimum size/25-fish bag limit, commercial: 11 inches TL.

Harvest Season - The commercial season closes after quota is met.

Size and Age at Maturity - 7.7 inches TL/2 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age - 20 years/8 years

Juvenile Abundance Index - not available

Habits and Habitats - Black sea bass change sex from female to male between the ages of 2 years and 4 years. Black sea bass north and south of Cape Hatteras are recognized as different stocks. Black sea bass inhabit irregular hard-bottom areas such as wrecks, artificial reefs, reef and rock outcroppings. Black sea bass north of Cape Hatteras move inshore and north in the summer and offshore and south in the winter. Black sea bass south of Cape Hatteras are generally found closer to shore than snappers, groupers, grunts and porgies.

*Includes all landings north and south of Cape Hatteras

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#).