

WEAKFISH

(06/01 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status-----*Viable*. The weakfish stock has recovered, based upon all the criteria set forth in Amendment #3 to the 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 2000 and early 2001. Amendment #4 to the Weakfish FMP will be developed by the ASMFC over the next year to develop a plan to insure that the stock status remains at a viable level.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1991-2000-----3,745,907 lbs./\$1,946,132

2000 Commercial Landings and Value-----1,869,034 lbs./\$1,089,954

Average Recreational Landings 1991-2000-----110,796 lbs.

2000 Recreational Landings-----82,368 lbs.

Average Number of Citations 1991-2000 and Current Number (Weight = 6 lbs.)-----4/8

Status of Fisheries Management Plan----- Currently managed under Amendment #3 to the ASMFC Fishery Management Plan 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 (1991-2000)-----23.6/59.6- 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](#)