

ATLANTIC CROAKER

(06/09 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status - *Concern* - A regular 5 year updated stock assessment is scheduled for 2009-2010. The previous assessment for the mid-Atlantic region showed the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring. Using the ASMFC cautionary trigger for croaker to note when the most recent year's commercial or recreation landings are less than 70% of the previous two year's average landings, this trigger would have been met for the 2008 mid-Atlantic recreational harvest, but not for the commercial. However, in North Carolina commercial landings have dropped each year since 2003, with 2008 being the lowest since 1995. This is a recruitment driven stock where abundance fluctuates in response to large year classes.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1999-2008 – 10,432,991 lbs./\$3,171,115

2008 Commercial Landings and Value – 5,791,858 lbs./ \$3,141,937

Average Recreational Landings 1999-2008 – 213,387 lbs., **2008** – 154,937 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (3 lbs.) – 1999-2008 - 5, **2008** - 0

Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings 2002-2008 - 14,534 lbs., **2008** – 13,480 lbs.

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - In North Carolina, Atlantic croaker is currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)/South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) FMP compliance requirements. An ASMFC FMP was initially approved in 1987, with the most recent review approved in November 2005. The ASMFC approved Amendment 1 to the FMP in November 2005. Amendment 1 recommends the establishment of biological reference points to allow for resource management on a coast wide basis, the restoration and maintenance of essential habitat, and the development of research needs to improve future stock assessments. The next stock assessment is scheduled for 2009-2010, and will have a peer review workshop through the SEDAR process.

Research and Data Needs - continued collection of information on the biology and population dynamics including growth, age structure, reproductive biology, migration, mortality, and stock structure

Current Regulations - none

Harvest Season - year round

Size and Age at Maturity – males: 5-9 inches total length (TL)/ 2 –3 years; females: 7 -9 inches TL/2 -3 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 15 years/13 years

Juvenile Abundance Index 1999-2008 – 287.3, **2008** – 411.4

Habits and Habitats – Atlantic croaker inhabit mud and sand-bottom areas and feed chiefly on crustaceans, worms, mollusks, detritus, and small fishes. Atlantic croakers have a protracted spawning season with a peak during October in North Carolina. The pelagic eggs and recently hatched larvae drift

toward land. Later, the advanced larval stages and juveniles continue their migration inshore by actively swimming into estuarine nursery areas. Maximum recruitment of juvenile fish is usually in the spring, with movement to offshore waters in the fall.

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