

Atlantic Striped Bass Management History

Increased fishing pressure in the 1970s, coupled with degradation and loss of habitat, led to stock collapse and stimulated the development of a cooperative interstate fisheries management plan (FMP). While a notable first step, the first FMP (1981) and Amendments 1 and 2 to the plan (1984) only provided recommendations on how to manage the resource. States could take voluntary actions under these management plans but there was no statutory requirement that ensured unified management actions by all the involved states. The passage of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act in 1984 (Striped Bass Act) changed this by requiring the states, through the Commission, to develop and implement management plans that included mandatory conservation measures. Amendment 3 (1985) was the first plan under the Striped Bass Act with such measures, including regulations to protect the 1982 year class, the first modestly-sized cohort for nearly a decade. Some states elected for an even more conservative approach and imposed a total moratorium to protect the 1982 year class. The Amendment contained a mechanism to relax fishery regulations based on a juvenile abundance index. The mechanism was triggered with the recruitment of the 1989 year class and led to the implementation of Amendment 4 (1989), which aimed to rebuild the resource rather than maximize yield. In 1995, with adoption of Amendment 5, the Commission declared Atlantic coastal striped bass stocks fully recovered.

Amendment 6 (2003) introduced a new set of biological reference points based on female spawning stock biomass (SSB), and a suite of management triggers based on the reference points. It also restored the commercial quota for the ocean fishery to 100% of average landings during the 1972-1979 historical period, and recreational fisheries were constrained by a 2-fish bag limit and a minimum size limit of 28 inches, except for the Chesapeake Bay fisheries, Albemarle-Roanoke (A/R) fisheries, and fisheries with approved conservation equivalency proposals. From 2007 to 2014, a series of four Addenda (I-IV) to Amendment 6 were implemented. These addenda addressed a range of issues, including implementation of a bycatch monitoring program, modifying the definition of recruitment failure, implementation of a mandatory commercial harvest tagging program, and establishing one set of F reference points for the coastal migratory population in all management areas. Addendum IV (2014) also formally deferred management of the A/R stock to the State of North Carolina, under the auspices of the Commission, since the A/R stock was deemed to contribute minimally to the coastal migratory population.

In 2019, a new benchmark assessment which used updated recreational catch estimates, changed our understanding of stock status. The benchmark assessment found the stock to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. As a result, Addendum VI to Amendment 6 was initiated to end overfishing, and bring F to the target level in 2020. Specifically, the Addendum reduced all state commercial quotas by 18%, and implemented a 1-fish bag limit and a 28" to less than 35" recreational slot limit for ocean fisheries and a 1-fish bag limit and an 18" minimum size limit for Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries. These measures were implemented in 2020 and designed to achieve at least an 18% reduction in total removals at the coastwide level. The Addendum maintained flexibility for states to pursue alternative regulations through conservation equivalency and the Board approved CE programs for

multiple states. Since catch and release practices contribute significantly to overall fishing mortality, the Addendum mandated the use of circle hooks when fishing with bait to reduce release mortality in recreational striped bass fisheries.

As it considered its actions under Addendum VI, the Management Board also discussed the development of a new Amendment to the FMP, one that reflected our understanding of the resource and the fisheries that depend on it. This led to the development and approval of Amendment 7 in 2022.