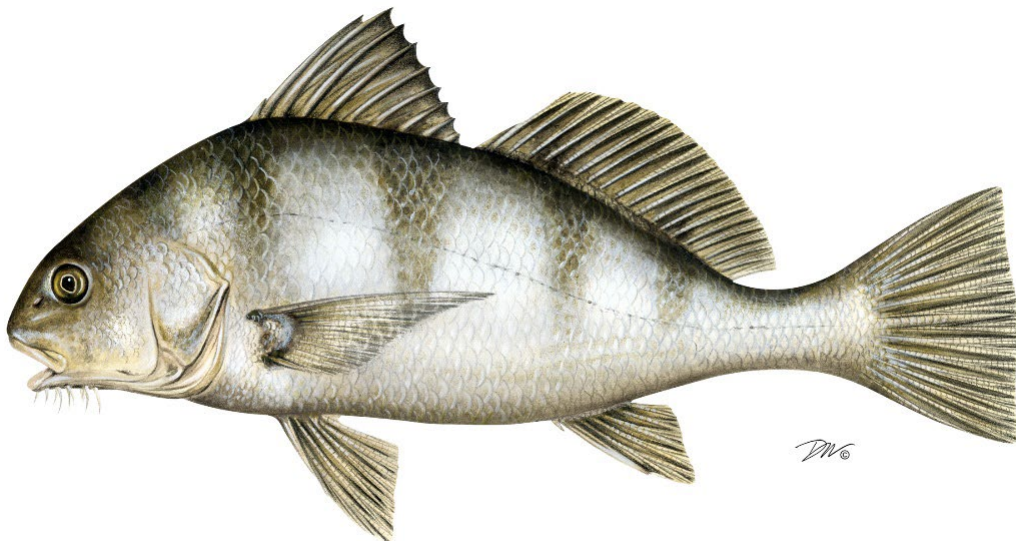


**ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**  
**REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**FOR BLACK DRUM**  
***(Pogonias cromis)***

**2023 FISHING YEAR**



Prepared by the Plan Review Team  
Approved October 2024



*Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

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## I. Status of the Fishery Management Plan

<u>Date of FMP Approval:</u>	Original FMP – June 2013
<u>Addendum:</u>	Addendum I – May 2018
<u>Management Areas:</u>	The entire Atlantic coast distribution of the resource from New Jersey through the east coast of Florida
<u>Active Boards/Committees:</u>	Sciaenids Management Board; Black Drum Technical Committee; Plan Review Team; South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adopted an [interstate Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\) for Black Drum in 2013](#). Prior to the FMP, management was state-specific, from no regulations in North Carolina to various combinations of size limits, possession limits, commercial trip limits, and/or annual commercial quotas from New Jersey to Florida. While the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay was closed to commercial fishing in 1998, it was reopened in 2019 via Addendum 1 which was approved in 2018.

The FMP requires all states with a declared interest in the species to have established a maximum possession limit and minimum size limit of at least 12 inches total length (TL) by January 1, 2014, and to have increased the minimum size limit to at least 14 inches TL by January 1, 2016. The FMP also includes a management framework to adaptively respond to future concerns or changes in the fishery or population.

There are four plan objectives:

- Provide a flexible management system to address future changes in resource abundance, scientific information, and fishing patterns among user groups or area.
- Promote cooperative collection of biological, economic, and sociological data required to effectively monitor and assess the status of the black drum resource and evaluate management efforts.
- Manage the black drum fishery to protect both young individuals and established breeding stock.
- Develop research priorities that will further refine the black drum management program to maximize the biological, social, and economic benefits derived from the black drum population.

The management unit for black drum under the FMP is defined as the range of the species within U.S. waters of the northwest Atlantic Ocean, from the estuaries eastward to the offshore boundaries of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

In 2018, [Addendum I](#) allowed Maryland to reopen their commercial fishery in the Chesapeake Bay, starting in the 2019 fishing year (ASMFC 2018). Prior to this addendum, a commercial moratorium

was in place for these waters due to the FMP's requirement that states maintain measures in place at the time of the FMP's approval.

## **II. Status of the Stocks**

The most recent coastwide benchmark stock assessment for black drum, which incorporated data through 2020, was accepted in 2023 by the Sciaenids Management Board for management use. Based on assessment results, the black drum stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. Management action was not taken because there are no major concerns with the stock.

The assessment model, JABBA-Select, uses recreational CPUE as an index of abundance, total fishery removals (commercial landings, recreational harvest, and recreational dead discards), life history information, and selectivity information to estimate black drum spawning biomass and exploitation (i.e., the proportion of stock biomass removed by fishing), as well as their associated thresholds. The assessment model estimated increasing spawning biomass, which has remained above the spawning biomass threshold throughout the time series (Figure 1). Exploitation has remained below the exploitation threshold throughout the time series. Exploitation was estimated to be relatively high in the mid-1980s, followed by lower levels throughout the 1990s. Exploitation increased around 2000 and remained at a higher, stable level throughout the remainder of the time series. Overall, black drum remains a data poor stock and the assessment acknowledges a relatively high level of uncertainty in available data sets and population estimates, although there is greater certainty in qualitative stock status determinations.

Due to data limitations and assessment uncertainty, a suite of indicators from black drum data sets developed as part of this assessment will be used to annually monitor the stock for any concerning trends and identify the need for an expedited stock assessment. Indicators include eight indices of abundance, one index of range expansion, and six indices of fishery characteristics (i.e., regional catch time series). The assessment reviewed the indicators through 2020. The indicators show increased fishery removals in the last twenty years and less frequent large recruitment events in the Mid-Atlantic in the last ten years. There are no clear indications of a declining trend in abundance from abundance indicators, but there is a declining trend in the final two years of the recreational releases time series that may be reflective of abundance in addition to other factors. There is some indication of northern range expansion. Overall, stock indicators did not appear negative.

After the assessment was complete, the indicators were updated with data through 2022. Overall, indicators show mixed signs of stability and declines since the assessment. Despite some observed declines in a few of the indicators, in each case the two additional years of data were still within the historical range of that indicator. The TC did not express concern at this time and recommended no changes to the current black drum stock assessment schedule, but to continue to closely monitor the indicators. The Board agreed with the TC's recommendations.

## **III. Status of the Fishery**

Total black drum landings from New Jersey through the east coast of Florida are estimated at 5.5 million pounds in 2023, a 6% increase from total harvest in 2022 (Tables 2 and 3; Figure 2). The 2023 harvest is slightly below the previous ten-year (2013-2022) average. The commercial and recreational fisheries harvested 6% and 94% of the 2023 total, respectively.

Commercial landings of black drum in 2023 spanned from New York through Florida. Although landings from outside the management unit (i.e., north of New Jersey) were less than 1% of the coastwide total, commercial landings in states north of the management unit have increased marginally and become more frequent in the last 10-15 years; black drum have been observed spawning in areas northward of Great Bay, NJ. Coastwide commercial landings show no particular temporal trends, ranging from approximately 82,000 pounds in 1985 to 556,000 pounds in 2002 annually since 1981 (Figure 2). Black drum commercial landings in 2023 were 347,506 pounds, a 42% increase from 2022. North Carolina led commercial harvest with 69% of the landings, followed by Virginia with 21% (Table 2).

Recreational harvest of black drum peaked by weight in 2008 at 10.7 million pounds (Table 3) and by numbers of fish in 2003 at 2.9 million (Table 4). Overall, landings have ranged between 650 thousand pounds in 1988 and 10.7 million pounds in 2008, and numbers of fish have fluctuated between 260,000 in 1989 and 2.9 million fish in 2003 (Figures 3 and 4).

The 2023 recreational harvest (1.2 million fish or 5.2 million pounds) represents a 46% increase in numbers and a 5% increase in pounds from 2022. Florida anglers landed the largest share of the coastwide recreational harvest in numbers (60%), followed by North Carolina (19%). No recreational harvest was estimated in New Jersey in 2023, the first time since 2000.

Since the beginning of the time series (1981), recreational anglers have released increasing percentages of black drum, with percentages of fish released exceeding 70% seven times in the past ten years. In 2023, 69% (2.7 million fish) of the recreational catch was released (Figure 3; Table 5). It is worth noting that release rates increased substantially after 2013, when the FMP established minimum sizes in every state and required that undersized drum be released for the first time. Recent high release rates can be attributed to these measures, as well as encouragement of catch and release practices.

#### **IV. Status of Assessment Advice**

Current stock status information comes from the 2023 benchmark stock assessment (ASMFC 2023) completed by the ASMFC Black Drum Stock Assessment Subcommittee and Technical Committee, peer reviewed by an independent panel of experts, and approved by the Sciaenids Management Board for use in management decisions. It has a terminal year of 2020.

The [assessment report](#) outlines several data and research needs that would improve the next benchmark assessment, such as the need for a fishery-independent adult survey and associated biological data, expansion of current tagging programs, and increased biological sampling in commercial and recreational fisheries.

The favorable stock status estimates from the 2023 benchmark stock assessment indicate that no immediate management action is needed. However, black drum remains a data-poor stock and the assessment acknowledges a relatively high level of uncertainty in available data sets and quantitative population estimates despite greater certainty in qualitative estimates of stock status (i.e., overfished vs. not overfished and overfishing occurring vs. overfishing not occurring). Due to this uncertainty, the stock assessment recommends that stock indicators as established in the Black Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report be reviewed annually by the Sciaenids Management Board to closely monitor the stock for any concerning trends between stock assessments. It is recommended that the next benchmark assessment should be conducted in five years.

## **V. Status of Research and Monitoring**

There are no monitoring or research programs required annually of the states except for the submission of a compliance report. The following fishery-dependent (other than catch and effort data) and fishery-independent monitoring programs were reported in the 2024 reports. Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and National Marine Fisheries Service have fishery-dependent monitoring for black drum. States that encounter fish through fishery-independent monitoring include New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

## **VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues**

### *Fishery Management Plan*

The Black Drum FMP required all states with a declared interest in the species to have established a maximum possession limit and minimum size limit of at least 12 inches TL by January 1, 2014, and to have increased the minimum size limit to no less than 14 inches TL by January 1, 2016.

### *De Minimis*

The black drum FMP allows states to request *de minimis* status if, for the preceding three years for which data are available, their average combined commercial and recreational landings (by weight) constitute less than 1% of the average coastwide commercial and recreational landings for the same three-year period. A state that qualifies for *de minimis* will qualify for exemption in both their commercial and recreational fisheries.

### *De Minimis Requests*

No state requested *de minimis* status through the annual reporting process.

### *Recent Changes to State Management*

None in 2023.

## **VII. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements for 2023**

The PRT found no inconsistencies between state compliance reports and requirements of the Fishery Management Plan.

## **VIII. Recommendations of the Plan Review Team**

Research recommendations can be found in the [2023 Black Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report](#).

### Management and Regulatory Recommendations

- Begin or continue biological sampling to collect age and size composition from both recreational and commercial fisheries as well as fecundity data. Data gaps include size and age of discards, catch and release mortality, age and size-specific fecundity, spawning frequency, and spawning behaviors by region.
- Continue and expand current tagging programs to obtain mortality and growth information and movement at size data, and consider conducting a high reward tagging program to obtain improved return rate estimates. Tagging studies that utilize implanted radio tracking tags compatible with coastal tracking arrays along the Atlantic coast in order to track movement and migration of adults and juveniles would also help fill the data needs.

## **IX. References**

ASMFC. 2013. Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Black Drum. Arlington, VA. 72 p.

ASMFC. 2015. Black Drum Stock Assessment for Peer Review. Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Stock Assessment Report. 352 p.

ASMFC. 2018. Addendum I to the Black Drum Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Arlington, VA. 4 p.

ASMFC. 2023. [Black Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report](#). Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Arlington, VA. 299 p.

Winker, H., F. Carvalho, J.T. Thorson, L.T. Kell, D. Parker, M. Kapur, R. Sharma, A.J. Booth, and S.E. Kerwath. 2020. JABBA-Select: Incorporating life history and fisheries' selectivity into surplus production models. Fisheries Research 222.

X. Figures

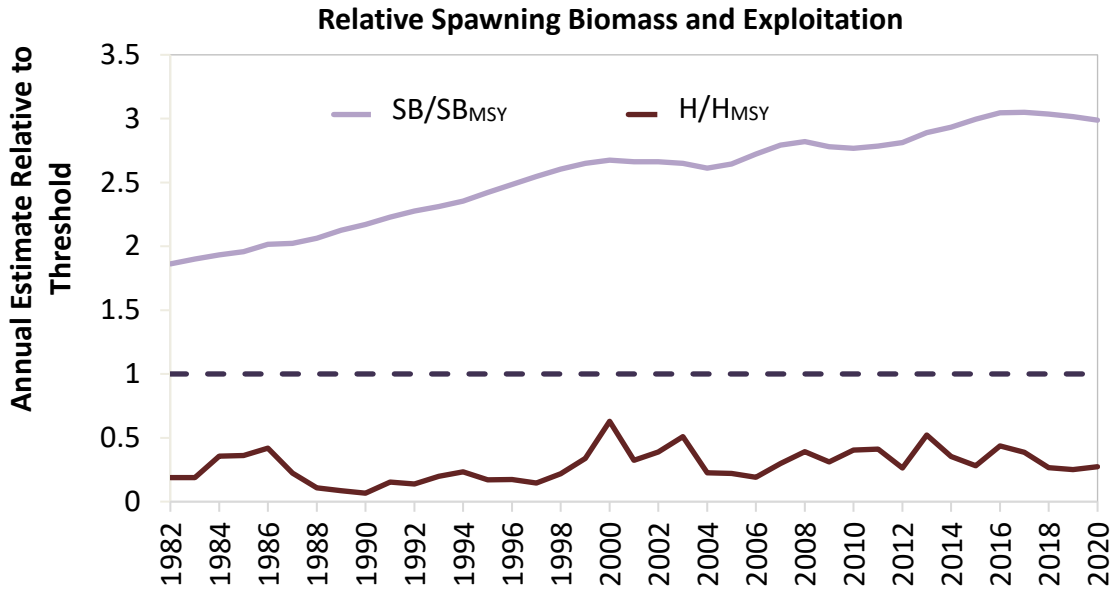


Figure 1. JABBA-Select annual estimates of spawning biomass ( $SB/SB_{MSY}$ ) and exploitation ( $H/H_{MSY}$ ) relative to the threshold (dashed line), from 1982-2020 (Source: ASMFC 2023).

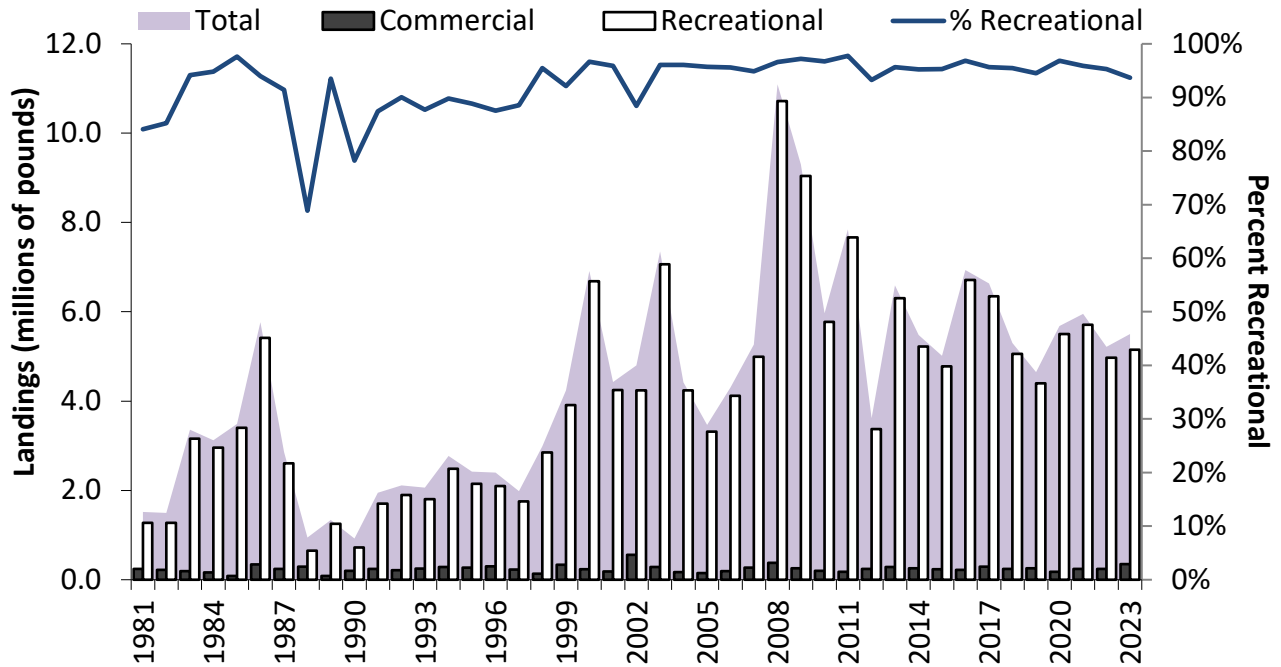


Figure 2. Commercial and recreational landings (pounds) of black drum, 1981-2023. See Tables 2 and 3 for values and data sources.



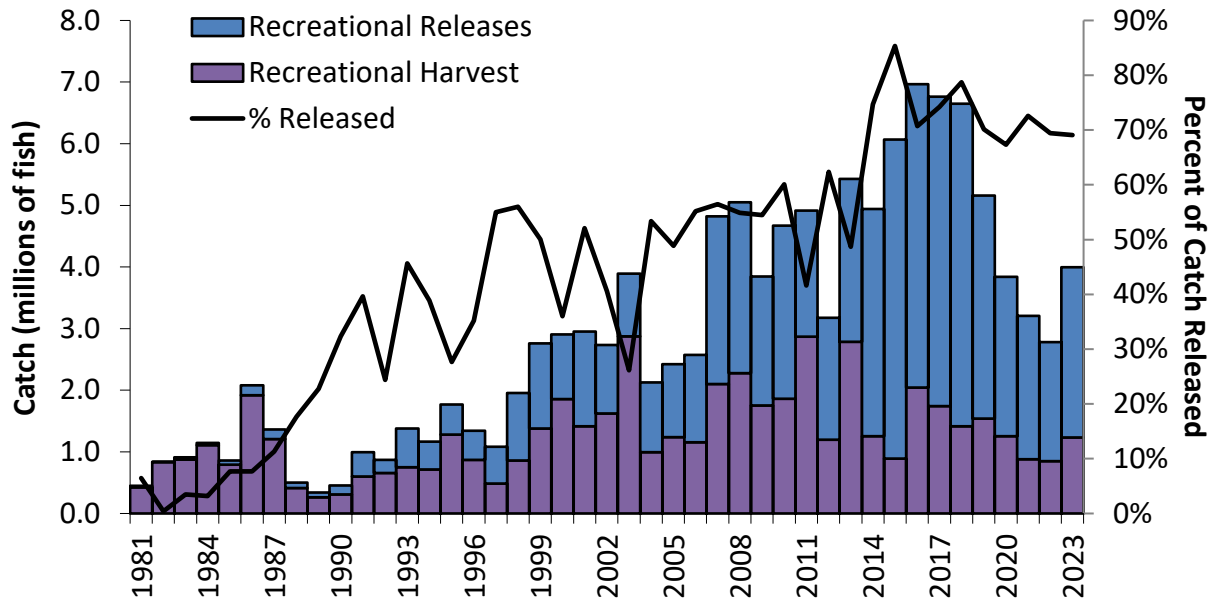


Figure 3. Recreational catch (harvest and alive releases) of black drum (numbers) and the proportion of catch that is released, 1981-2023. See Tables 4 and 5 for values and data sources.

**XI. Tables**

**Table 1. Black drum regulations for 2023.** The states of New Jersey through Florida are required to meet the requirements in the FMP. All size limits are total length.

State	Recreational		Commercial			Notes
	Size limit	Bag limit	Size limit	Trip Limit	Annual Quota	
ME - NY	-	-	-	-	-	
NJ	16" min	3/person/day	16" min	10,000 lbs	65,000 lbs	
DE	16" min	3/person/day	16" min	10,000 lbs	65,000 lbs	
MD	16" min	1/person/day 6/vessel	16" min (ATL) 28" min (Bay)	10/vessel/day (Bay)	1,500 lbs (ATL)	
PRFC	16" min	1/person/day	16" min	1 fish possession		
VA	16" min	1/person/day	16" min	1/person/day*	120,000 lbs	*without Black Drum Harvesting and Selling Permit
NC	14" min - 25" max; 1 fish > 25" may be retained	10/person/day	14" min - 25" max; 1 fish > 25" may be retained	500 lbs/trip		
SC	14" min - 27" max	5/person/day	14" min - 27" max	5/person/day		Commercial fishery primarily bycatch
GA	14" min	15/person/day	14" min	15/person/day		
FL	14" min - 24" max; 1 fish >24" may be retained	5/person/day	14" min - 24" max	500 lbs/day		

**Table 2. Commercial landings (pounds) of black drum by state, 2014-2023.** (Totals include coastwide landings outside of the management area, NJ-FL. Sources: 2024 state compliance reports for 2023 fishing year; for years prior to 2023, personal communication with ACCSP, Arlington, VA)

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA
2014	9,270	C	C	C	88,402
2015	6,478	39,282	C	C	87,011
2016	2,210	49,109	C	C	49,832
2017	21,248	699	423	C	42,695
2018	C	32,375	734	C	76,337
2019	C	6,030	8,025	C	129,556
2020	C	C	4,767	C	50,318
2021	1,057	C	821	0	63,340
2022	C	C	2,462	C	51,087
2023	C	C	2,097	C	71,855
	NC	SC	GA	FL	Total
2014	51,217	C	C	91,587	259,650
2015	51,073	C	C	50,477	234,727
2016	90,715	C	C	26,978	219,350
2017	182,882	C	C	41,280	289,431
2018	109,757	C	C	19,465	239,124
2019	80,036	C	C	21,954	256,051
2020	98,118	C	C	26,895	188,410
2021	131,724	C	C	45,300	243,278
2022	144,339	C	0	42,563	244,198
2023	240,814	C	0	30,486	347,506

C: Confidential landings

**Table 3. Recreational harvest (pounds) of black drum by state and coastwide average weight, 2014-2023.** (Sources: 2024 state compliance reports for 2023 fishing year; for years prior to 2023, personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division)

<b>Year</b>	<b>NJ</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>MD</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>NC</b>
<b>2014</b>	11,476	22,070	18,684	97,043	230,834
<b>2015</b>	443,907	16,992	16,575	25,216	780,876
<b>2016</b>	159,589	2,180	8,924	77,672	1,322,547
<b>2017</b>	406,068	22,998	3,001	81,275	856,081
<b>2018</b>	814,965	179,071	53,599	29,120	428,273
<b>2019</b>	172,735	8,117	59,912	101,535	404,452
<b>2020</b>	535,249	90,950	53,825	251,724	612,932
<b>2021</b>	1,851	14,659	80,563	345,108	359,481
<b>2022</b>	190,561	1,412	19,580	18,130	1,710,528
<b>2023</b>	0	115	10,697	351,895	973,869
	<b>SC</b>	<b>GA</b>	<b>FL</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>2014</b>	238,616	249,118	4,353,686		5,221,527
<b>2015</b>	82,484	88,698	3,325,410		4,780,158
<b>2016</b>	623,449	226,558	4,292,398		6,713,317
<b>2017</b>	681,976	187,698	4,105,686		6,344,783
<b>2018</b>	652,179	392,380	2,511,235		5,060,822
<b>2019</b>	899,976	557,714	2,191,274		4,395,715
<b>2020</b>	493,001	298,894	3,163,767		5,500,342
<b>2021</b>	345,225	178,803	4,386,989		5,712,731
<b>2022</b>	319,324	295,514	2,395,463		4,969,409
<b>2023</b>	433,013	285,898	3,097,376		5,152,863

**Table 4. Recreational harvest (numbers) of black drum by state, 2014-2023.** (Sources: 2024 state compliance reports for 2023 fishing year; for years prior to 2023, personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division)

<b>Year</b>	<b>NJ</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>MD</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>NC</b>
<b>2014</b>	482	1,052	1,690	10,676	109,307
<b>2015</b>	10,793	462	1,091	1,600	276,126
<b>2016</b>	6,008	138	250	5,807	459,078
<b>2017</b>	18,435	1,214	828	16,700	355,544
<b>2018</b>	40,153	9,211	1,262	3,721	134,624
<b>2019</b>	7,506	931	4,897	6,600	156,401
<b>2020</b>	27,594	5,207	14,092	17,000	213,320
<b>2021</b>	382	1,115	2,724	17,607	121,454
<b>2022</b>	8,594	54	2,945	1,231	264,634
<b>2023</b>	0	7	1,202	18,587	348,374
	<b>SC</b>	<b>GA</b>	<b>FL</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>2014</b>	96,967	47,807	983,582		1,251,563
<b>2015</b>	37,186	48,229	514,606		890,093
<b>2016</b>	256,158	96,351	1,217,913		2,041,703
<b>2017</b>	241,832	64,240	1,044,752		1,743,545
<b>2018</b>	185,648	114,263	925,794		1,414,676
<b>2019</b>	344,933	265,364	755,638		1,542,270
<b>2020</b>	198,239	100,973	678,484		1,254,909
<b>2021</b>	92,232	65,955	577,906		879,468
<b>2022</b>	92,122	111,492	367,912		849,406
<b>2023</b>	142,438	67,430	657,786		1,235,824

**Table 5. Recreational alive releases (numbers) of black drum by state, 2014-2023.** (Sources: 2024 state compliance reports for 2023 fishing year; for years prior to 2023, personal communication with NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division)

<b>Year</b>	<b>NJ</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>MD</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>NC</b>
<b>2014</b>	37,364	11,243	0	269,648	1,964,749
<b>2015</b>	545,613	17,109	25,115	164,322	1,791,758
<b>2016</b>	9,399	361	114	46,494	2,530,596
<b>2017</b>	111,739	3,689	2,809	137,987	2,336,352
<b>2018</b>	51,148	15,249	27,849	169,204	1,450,855
<b>2019</b>	1,953	29,878	6,346	151,074	756,749
<b>2020</b>	10,474	8,301	1,997	142,394	704,357
<b>2021</b>	41,807	19,517	92,542	168,208	681,121
<b>2022</b>	59,745	7,064	10,268	44,621	647,304
<b>2023</b>	18,252	29,231	3,908	71,964	591,980
	<b>SC</b>	<b>GA</b>	<b>FL</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>2014</b>	335,600	21,581	1,047,833		3,688,018
<b>2015</b>	1,483,956	55,773	1,096,185		5,179,831
<b>2016</b>	1,268,667	54,266	1,012,670		4,922,567
<b>2017</b>	692,616	85,365	1,648,030		5,018,587
<b>2018</b>	1,087,536	167,974	2,265,550		5,235,365
<b>2019</b>	998,869	339,599	1,333,745		3,618,213
<b>2020</b>	678,836	239,371	797,425		2,583,155
<b>2021</b>	304,632	94,097	922,962		2,324,886
<b>2022</b>	647,853	168,502	345,227		1,930,584
<b>2023</b>	791,140	291,336	960,813		2,758,624