Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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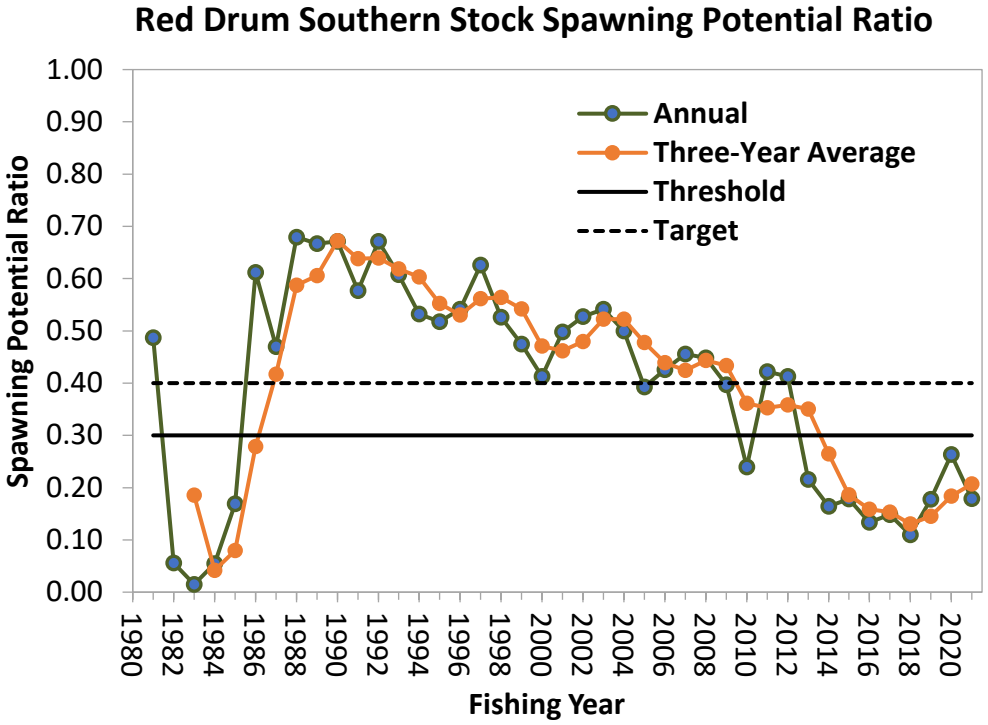
Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds Mixed Results for the Northern and Southern Stocks: *Northern Stock Not Overfishing and Overfishing Not Occurring; Southern Stock Overfished and Experiencing Overfishing*

Annapolis, MD – The 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report indicates the northern stock of red drum (New Jersey through North Carolina) is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, while the southern stock (South Carolina through the east coast of Florida) is overfished and experiencing overfishing.



The two stocks were assessed separately, using different methods. The southern stock was assessed using the Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment model. Stock status is based on the latest three-year (2019-2021 September-August fishing years) averages of population measures. The three-year average spawning potential ratio (SPR) is less than the 30% SPR threshold, indicating the stock is experiencing overfishing. Spawning potential ratio is a measure of spawning biomass expected under current fishing mortality levels compared to spawning stock biomass expected if no fishing mortality were occurring. The three-year average female spawning stock biomass (SSB) was 8,737 metric tons (19.27 million pounds), less than the SSB threshold of 9,917 metric tons (21.87 million pounds), indicating the stock is overfished.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

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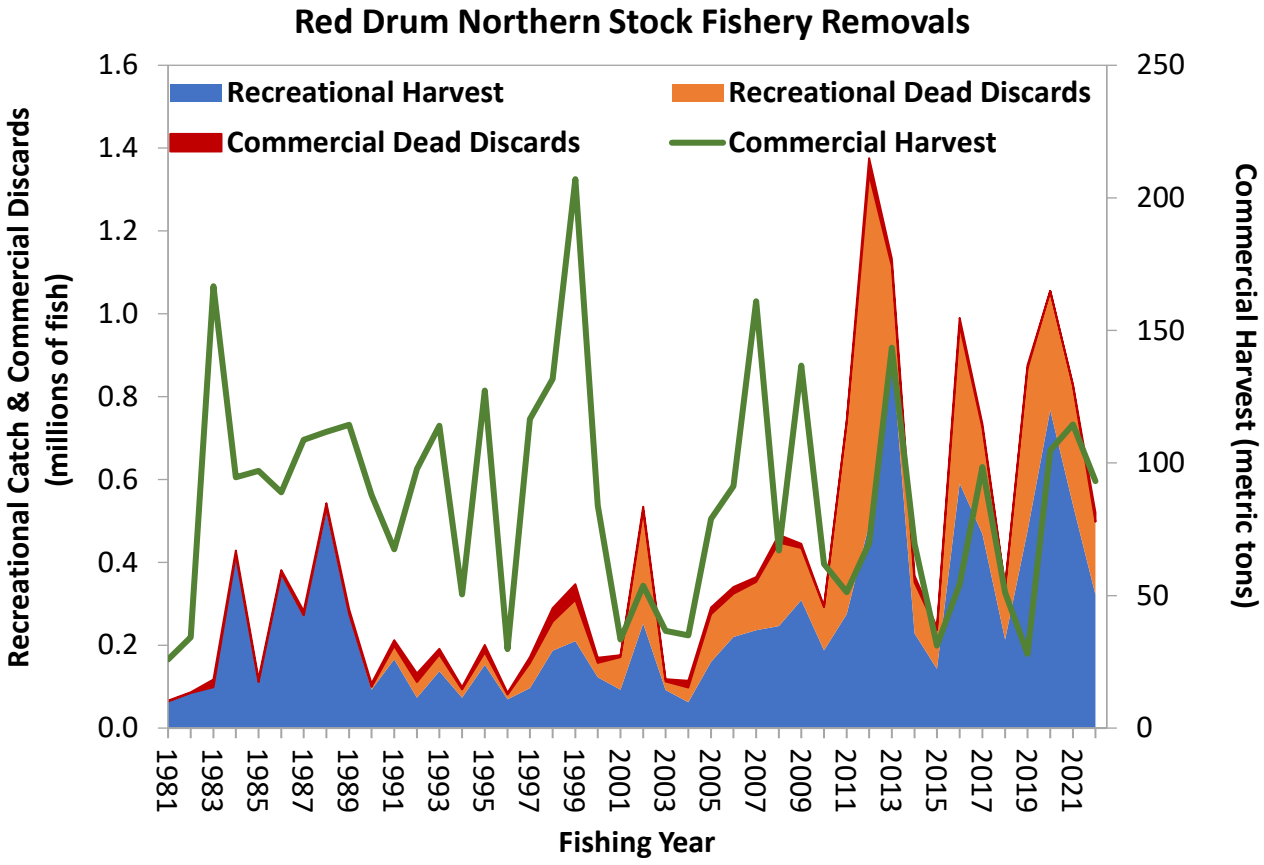
A robust, technically-sound SS model could not be developed for the northern stock, so the stock was assessed using a traffic light analysis (TLA). The TLA assigns a color (red, yellow or green) to categorize relative levels of metrics that reflect the condition of red drum adult abundance and fishery performance (i.e., fishing mortality). Although these metrics were not red in the last three years of the assessment, indicating the stock was not overfished nor experiencing overfishing, consistent yellow fishery performance metrics indicated increasing fishing mortality in recent years. Continued monitoring of the northern stock and the increasing trend in fishing mortality is recommended in future years through updates to the TLA.

Red drum fisheries are predominately recreational. Removals (harvest + dead discards) increased to relatively high levels at the end of the assessment time series for both stocks. In the northern stock, removals have increased to time series highs. In the southern stock, they have increased to levels similar to time series highs observed in the early 1980s.

Commercial landings currently only occur in the northern stock, but are a small proportion of total removals and have fluctuated without trend.

The Commission's Sciaenids Management Board accepted the benchmark stock assessment and peer review reports for management use and tasked the Red Drum Technical Committee with additional analyses to evaluate possible paths forward for red drum management.



A more detailed description of the stock assessment results, as well as the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Reports, will be available on the Commission website at https://asmfc.org/species/red-drum under Stock Assessment Reports.

For more information on the stock assessment, please contact Jeff Kipp, Senior Stock Assessment Scientist, at jkipp@asmfc.org; and for more information on red drum management, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org.

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