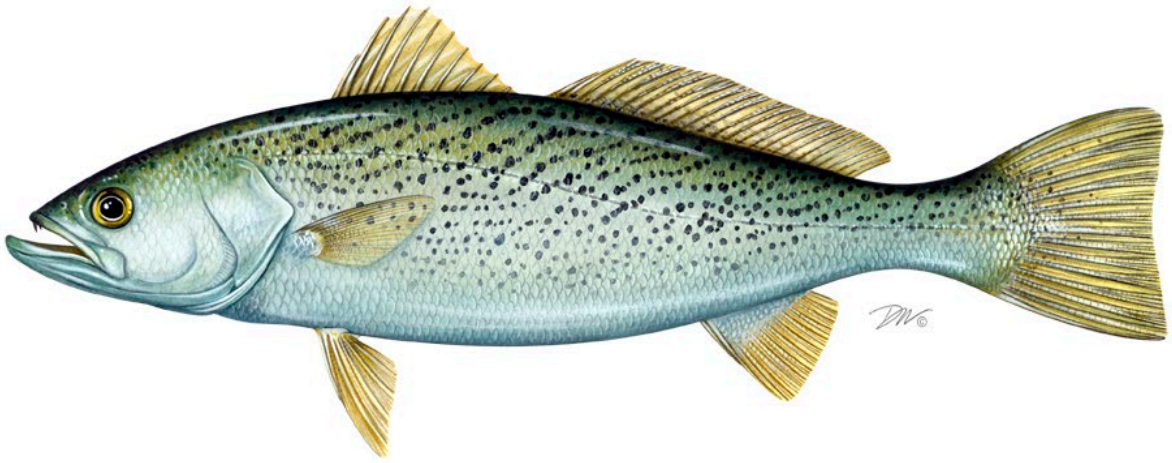
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR WEAKFISH
(Cynoscion regalis)

2023 FISHING YEAR



Prepared by the Plan Review Team
Approved November 2024

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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I. Status of the Fishery Management Plan

Date of FMP Approval:	Original FMP – October 1985
Amendments & Addenda:	Amendment 1 – March 1992 Amendment 2 – December 1994 Amendment 3 – May 1996 Addendum I to Amendment 3– October 2000 Amendment 4 – November 2022 Addendum I – December 2005 Addendum II – February 2007 Addendum III – May 2007 Addendum IV – November 2009
Management Areas:	The Atlantic coast distribution of the resource from Cape Cod, Massachusetts through Florida
Active Boards/Committees:	Weakfish Management Board; Weakfish Technical Committee and Plan Review Team; Weakfish Advisory Panel

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) adopted its first Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Weakfish in 1985. Amendment 1 to the FMP (1992) unsuccessfully aimed to improve the status of Weakfish. Amendment 2 (1995) resulted in some improvement to the stock, but several signs indicated that further improvement was necessary. Thus, Amendment 3 (1996) was implemented to increase the sustainability of the fishery. Addendum I to Amendment 3 was approved in 2000 in order to extend the management program until the next amendment was implemented.

Amendment 4, approved in 2002, strives to establish two goals. One is the utilization of interstate management so that Atlantic coastal weakfish recover to healthy levels that will maintain commercial and recreational harvest consistent with a self-sustaining spawning stock. The second goal is to provide for restoration and maintenance of essential habitat (ASMFC 2002). The management objectives are to:

1. establish and maintain an overfishing definition which includes target and threshold fishing mortality rates and a threshold spawning stock biomass in order to prevent overfishing and to maintain a sustainable weakfish population;

2. restore the weakfish age and size structure to that necessary for the restoration of the fishery;

3. return weakfish to their previous geographic range;

4. achieve compatible and equitable management measures among jurisdictions throughout the fishery management unit, including states' waters and the federal EEZ;

5. promote cooperative interstate research, monitoring, and law enforcement necessary to support management of weakfish;

6. promote identification and conservation of habitat essential for the long-term stability in the weakfish population; and

7. establish standards and procedures for both the implementation of Amendment 4 and for determination of states' compliance with provisions of the management plan.

Amendment 4 established target and threshold fishing mortality rates and a threshold spawning stock biomass level to determine overfishing and overfished stock status. The amendment requires states to implement recreational and commercial management measures to achieve annual fishing mortality targets. Some management measures are specified (e.g., minimum size limit, minimum mesh size, bycatch limit), while the Amendment provides the states flexibility in implementing other regulations (e.g., trip limits, area or season closures). States may request implementation of alternative management plans with conservationally equivalent measures. States deemed to have insignificant landings were exempt from the recreational and commercial requirements, with the exception of the bycatch reduction device requirements.

The Commission adopted Addendum I to Amendment 4 (2005) to replace the biological sampling program in Section 3.0 of Amendment 4. In response to a significant decline in stock abundance and increasing total mortality since 1999, the Commission approved Addendum II to Amendment 4 (2007) to reduce the recreational creel limit and commercial bycatch limit, and set landings levels that when met will trigger a re-evaluation of management measures. Addendum III to Amendment 4 (2007) altered the bycatch reduction device certification requirements in Section 4.2.8 of Amendment 4 for consistency with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Shrimp FMP. The Commission approved Addendum IV to Amendment 4 in 2009 to respond to the results of the 2009 benchmark stock assessment (additional information is provided in Section VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues).

Weakfish are managed under this plan as a single stock throughout their coastal range, all Atlantic coast states from Massachusetts through Florida. Other interested parties include the Potomac River Fisheries Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). See Table 1 for a summary of state-by-state regulations in 2023.

II. Status of the Stock

The most recent benchmark stock assessment, conducted in 2016, concluded that the weakfish stock was depleted and overfishing was not occurring (ASMFC 2016). A stock assessment update was completed in 2019 (ASMFC 2019), applying the Bayesian statistical catch-at-age model from the 2016 benchmark assessment to data through 2017. This update also incorporated the new,

calibrated estimates of recreational catch by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).

Estimates of recruitment, spawning stock biomass, and total abundance remained low in recent years. Estimates of fishing mortality were moderately high in recent years, although not near the time-series highs of the mid- to late-2000s, or the earliest years. Natural mortality remained high, averaging 0.92 in the most recent 10 years, compared to 0.16 over the first 10 years of the time series. Total mortality in 2017 was estimated at 1.45, above both the Z target = 1.03 and the Z threshold = 1.43, indicating total mortality on the stock is too high.

Spawning stock biomass in 2017 was estimated at 1,922 mt, below the SSB threshold of 6,170 mt, indicating the stock is depleted. SSB has shown a slight increasing trend in recent years but is still well below the SSB threshold.

III. Status of the Fishery

In 2023, total coastwide landings of weakfish were 809,395 pounds, a 4% increase from 2022 and highest value since 2012. The commercial fishery (247,764 pounds) accounted for 31% of the total 2023 landings, and the recreational fishery (561,631 pounds) accounted for 69% (Table 2).

Commercial Fishery
Commercial data are cooperatively collected and compiled by the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and state fishery agencies from state mandated trip-tickets, landing weigh-out reports from seafood dealers, federal logbooks, shipboard and portside interviews, and biological sampling of catches. In this report, commercial landings from 2022 and earlier are from ACCSP and landings from 2023 are from state compliance reports, unless otherwise stated (see notes for Table 3).

Commercial harvest of weakfish peaked in 1980 at 36 million pounds but has declined since then (Figure 3 & 4). Commercial landings have not exceeded 1 million pounds since 2004, and reached a time series low in 2018 at 88,638 pounds. Landings, including bycatch, in 2023 were 247,764 pounds, which was the highest value since 2013. North Carolina (43%), New York (30%), and Virginia (11%) landed the largest shares of the 2023 coastwide commercial weakfish harvest (Table 3).

Recreational Fishery
Recreational harvest statistics were obtained from MRIP for years prior to 2023 and from state compliance reports for 2023, except as noted in Section VI of this report for Florida's estimates. These landings have been updated to reflect the calibration and transition to the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey. Some states also monitor and report recreational landings through their own sampling and estimation efforts.

The recreational fishery catches weakfish using live or cut bait, jigging, trolling, and chumming. Coastwide recreational landings peaked at 20 million pounds in 1987 but have generally declined since then through the present (Figure 3 & 4). Recreational landings have not exceeded 1 million pounds since 2008. In 2023, recreational landings were 561,631 pounds or 357,822 fish. South Carolina harvested the largest percentage of the 2023 recreational harvest (38% by pounds), followed by New York (22%) and North Carolina (16%).

The number of fish released alive by anglers has typically been above 1 million fish since 1991. In 2023, 2,799,498 fish were released (Figure 4). North Carolina had the largest share of releases (30%), followed by Georgia (24%) and New Jersey (19%).

The size of fish sampled to provide the MRIP weight estimates has historically varied in a latitudinal fashion, with larger fish caught in the north and smaller fish caught in the south. The mean weight per fish sampled throughout the recreational time series (1981-2023) is roughly 1.2 pounds for all states from Florida through Virginia and an average of 2.7 pounds for all states north of Virginia. In 2023, the mean weights for fish caught in New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia (2.8, 2.0, 1.6, 1.2, 1.2, and 1.2 pounds, respectively) were greater than each state's time series mean, and the mean weights for fish caught in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, and Florida (2.0, 3.1, 0.5, 3.8, 1.4, and 0.8 pounds, respectively) were less than each state's time series mean.

IV. Status of Assessment Advice

The 2016 benchmark assessment was completed by the ASMFC Weakfish Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and peer reviewed by the ASMFC Weakfish Stock Assessment Review Panel (ASMFC 2016). The benchmark assessment includes fishery data and survey indices through 2014. An update to this assessment was conducted by the Weakfish TC in 2019, with data through 2017 and updated recreational catch estimates from the MRIP (ASMFC 2019).

Under conditions of time-varying natural mortality, there is no long-term stable equilibrium population size, so an SSB target is not informative for management. The Weakfish TC recommends an SSB threshold of $SSB_{30\%}$ = 6,170 mt that is equivalent to 30% of the projected SSB under average natural mortality and no fishing. When SSB is below that threshold, the stock is considered depleted.

SSB in 2017 was estimated at 1,922 mt (4.24 million pounds), below the SSB threshold of 6,170 mt (13.6 million pounds), indicating the stock is depleted (Figure 1). SSB has shown a slight increasing trend in recent years but is still well below the SSB threshold. As a result, the 2019 stock assessment update indicates that the weakfish stock is depleted.

The TC recommends the use of total mortality (Z) benchmarks to prevent an increase in fishing pressure when F is low but M is high. When Z is below the Z target, F reference points can be used to assess overfishing status.

Total mortality in 2017 was estimated at 1.45, above both the Z target = 1.03 and the Z threshold = 1.43, indicating total mortality on the stock is too high (Figure 1). Overfishing is not occurring due to low levels of harvest in recent years, but high levels of total mortality (fishing mortality and natural mortality) prevent the stock from recovering.

The next stock assessment update is scheduled to be completed in early 2025 and will incorporate data through 2023.

V. Status of Research and Monitoring

Fishery-Independent Data
Young-of-year indices of relative abundance are provided by Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida provide age- 0+ or 1+ indices of relative abundance. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center Groundfish Trawl Survey also produces an age-structured index for the Mid-Atlantic coast, while the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) survey produces another index for the South Atlantic coast. The Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) began spring and fall surveys between Martha's Vineyard and Cape Hatteras in the fall of 2007, and provided an Age 1+ index which is included in the 2016 assessment. Stomach content analysis was also done to assess food habit changes and investigate the possible decrease in preferred food availability as a driver of natural mortality, however results were inconclusive. The Chesapeake Bay Multispecies Monitoring and Assessment Program (ChesMMAP), which began in 2002, collects data on relative abundance, length, weight, age, sex, and trophic interactions in the Bay. See Table 7 for the indices provided in the 2023 compliance reports. While only the most recent years of data are shown, full data sets for each survey are available upon request to the state or Commission.

Fishery-Dependent Data
The coastal states and NOAA Fisheries collect data on commercial and recreational landings. Addendum I to Amendment 4 requires the collection of otoliths and lengths to characterize the catch; the number of samples required is based on the magnitude of each state's fisheries. Each fall, through the compliance reports, the states are required to provide the actual sampling levels completed. See Section VII for more information.

VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues

Fishery Management Plan
Addendum IV to Amendment 4 was approved in November 2009 and was implemented in May 2010. In response to the 2009 stock assessment results, the addendum implements more appropriate biological reference points in response to recent stock dynamics and reduces harvest while attempting to minimize unnecessary bycatch waste. Addendum IV requires all states in the management unit (including those that are *de minimis*) to implement a recreational creel limit no greater than 1 fish, commercial trip and bycatch limits no greater than 100 pounds,

and a finfish trawl fishery allowance for up to 100 undersized fish. The addendum adopted percentage based biological reference points with an overfished/depleted threshold of 20% SSB and a target of 30% SSB. The biological sampling requirements under Addendum I are unchanged, and all regulations previously enacted to protect weakfish and reduce bycatch are to remain effective.

No additional amendments or addenda are under development.

Florida Management Area and Landings Data
In November 2009, the Management Board approved a proposal from Florida to reduce the state's weakfish management area to a small area in northeast Florida where pure weakfish are known to occur based on genetics data. The revision is intended to address the misidentification of weakfish, sand seatrout, silver seatrout, and their hybrids, and the consequential law enforcement issue. Inside the newly established weakfish management area (St. Mary's River only), any fish that resembles weakfish will be considered weakfish for enforcement purposes, both for commercial and recreational limits. Outside the weakfish management area, all fish that resemble weakfish will be considered sand seatrout.

As a result of the approved proposal, the commercial and recreational landings data provided in Florida's compliance reports represent the best estimate of pure weakfish landings in the state. Commercial landings data from Florida's trip ticket program and recreational landings from the NMFS's Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey include only weakfish landed in Nassau and Duval counties, as revised on the basis of the genome proportions within the *Cynoscion*-complex found in the counties (48% weakfish in Nassau County and 17% in Duval County).

De Minimis Status
Amendment 4 permits states to request *de minimis* status if, for the last two years, their combined average commercial and recreational landings (by weight) constitute less than 1% of the coastwide commercial and recreational landings for the same two-year period.

Three states requested *de minimis* status in their 2023 compliance reports: Massachusetts, Georgia, and Florida. Massachusetts (0.03%), Georgia (0.79%), and Florida (0.25%) remain below the 1% threshold.

VII. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements for 2023

Mandatory compliance elements for 2023 were provided by Amendment 4 and its four addenda.

Regulatory Requirements
The management program includes regulatory requirements for non *de minimis* states as follows:

- Recreational management measures including minimum size limits and a maximum creel limit of one fish (see Addenda II and IV to Amendment 4)

- Commercial management measures including minimum size limits, minimum mesh size limits, landings limits, trip limits, bycatch limits, closed seasons and areas, and bycatch reduction device requirements (see Section 4.2 of Amendment 4, and Addendum IV)

The PRT found no inconsistences among states regarding the FMP's compliance requirements.

See Table 1 for a summary of state commercial and recreational regulations in 2023.

Monitoring Requirements
Addendum I implemented monitoring requirements for non *de minimis* states as follows:

- Maintenance of at least the 2005 level of recreational sampling of individual lengths through the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey;
- Collection of six individual fish lengths for each metric ton of weakfish landed commercially;
- Collection of three individual fish ages for each metric ton of total weakfish landed, with a maximum of 1000 ages annually per state [Samples may come from commercial and/or recreational fishery as long as they come from the same general area (inshore versus offshore) that those fisheries are prosecuted in.

Table 9 provides the otolith and length collection requirements for 2023. These are based on the best available 2023 landings data provided to the Commission by the ACCSP, NMFS, and the states. Sampling efforts are based on recreational harvests estimated using MRIP. All states except Rhode Island, New York, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina met their biological sampling requirements in 2023, as reported in the state compliance reports.

Rhode Island collected 21 ages and 23 lengths, when 66 ages and 48 lengths were required, respectively. The number of required ages was 3 times higher in 2023 compared to 2022, due to Rhode Island recreational landings estimated by MRIP increasing by 2567% in 2023 from 2022. However, MRIP indicates that estimate is highly uncertain and not significantly different from zero. Rhode Island has noted difficulties in conducting fishery dependent sampling due to low encounter rates, and that, due to the sporadic and unpredictable estimates of weakfish recreational harvest, this increase in number of required ages was not anticipated by Rhode Island.

New York collected 192 ages, when 267 were required. They collected the required number of lengths. New York collects all of its lengths and age structures from fishery dependent sources, as their independent surveys do not frequently encounter adult weakfish, making the collection of the required number of age structures more difficult. The PRT recognizes that New York is making an effort to collect as many age structures as they can as time allows and notes that New York was able to sample a higher number of otoliths compared to the previous year, from 129 ages to 192 ages.

Delaware collected 25 ages when 29 were required. Delaware collected the required number of lengths. Although Delaware didn't collect the required number of ages in 2023, their collection numbers were much improved from the previous year and were only 4 ages short of meeting their age requirement.

Maryland collected 3 ages and 3 lengths, when 42 ages and 4 lengths were required, respectively. As Maryland notes in their compliance report, this is the first year Maryland has not met the minimum number of required samples. The number of commercial pound net sampling trips made in 2023 was similar to previous years, and Maryland sampled every weakfish encountered. Current commercial landings are very low making intercepting landed weakfish at fish dealers very difficult, so no additional dealer samples were obtained in 2023. The age sample requirement was also much higher than recent years, due to a large increase in the MRIP harvest estimate, although MRIP indicates that estimate is highly uncertain and not significantly different from zero.

South Carolina collected 77 ages when 294 were required. South Carolina notes in their compliance report that this was 2.6 times the required age samples compared to 2022. This increase in required age samples was due to a 160% increase in weakfish recreational landings in South Carolina in pounds compared to 2022. Weakfish recreational landings in South Carolina in 2023 were the third highest in the time series (1981-2023), which the PRT recognizes would have been difficult to plan for when sampling for ages in 2023.

Given the sampling efforts made by Rhode Island, New York, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina and unprecedented increases in MRIP harvest estimates of weakfish in 2023 for several states, the PRT does not recommend that any state be found out of compliance for failing to meet sampling requirements in 2023.

VIII. Recommendations of the Plan Review Team

Research recommendations can be found in the 2019 Stock Assessment Update Report.

Management and Regulatory Recommendations

- The PRT recommends the Board approve the *de minimis* requests from Massachusetts, Georgia, and Florida.
- Increased collection of information regarding discards and bycatch of weakfish in both commercial and recreational fisheries by way of increased observer coverage, logbook reporting, and other fishery-dependent data collection methods.
- The PRT recommends focusing on better understanding the potential range expansion and additional research into links between weakfish population dynamics and life history variability in response to environmental factors such as land use patterns, climate change, etc. This includes a better understanding of their winter migration offshore based on a recent tagging studies (Krause et al. 2020a, 2020b).

IX. References

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X. Tables

Table 1. Summary of state regulations for weakfish in 2023.

	Commercial	Recreational	Implementation Date
MA	16", open 1/1-12/31, 100 lb possession limit.	16", 1 fish	June 2010
RI	16"; open 6/1-6/30 & 8/7-11/8, 100 lb possession limit. Other times of year: 100 pound bycatch limit with at least an equal poundage of other species as weakfish. Trawl codend mesh size >=4.5" diamond or 4.0" square.	16", 1 fish	April 28, 2010
CT	16"; open 1/1-12/31, 100 lb possession limit.	16", 1 fish	April 25, 2010
NY	16" (12" dressed & 10" filleted); Hook and line open 4/1-6/24 & 8/28-11/15; 0 lb bycatch limit. All other gears open 4/1-6/24 and 8/28-11/15; 100 lb bycatch limit.	16" (12" dressed, 10" fillet), 1 fish	By May 1, 2010
NJ	Gill net: 13"; open 1/1-5/20 & 9/3-10/19 & 10/27-12/31, 100 lb possession limit; mesh ≥ 3.25" stretched except 2.75 - 3.25" allowed within 2nm for permitted fishermen doing monthly reporting. Otter trawl: 13"; open 1/1-7/31 & 10/13-12/31, 100 lb possession limit; mesh ≥ 3.75" diamond or 3.375 square. Pound net: 13"; open 1/1/-6/6 & 7/1-12/31, 100 lb possession limit. 100 lb bycatch limit & 50% rule. Hook & line: 13", 1 fish, open 1/1-12/31.	13", 1 fish	March 25, 2010
DE	Gill net: 12"; only nets with stretch mesh ≥ 3.125" allowed in water 4/1-6/30, none permitted weekends and legal holidays 5/10-9/30, 100 lb possession limit. Drift gill net: open 1/1-12/31 except 34 specified days of gear out of water in May and June. Anchor gill net: open 1/1-5/9 and 10/1-12/31, otherwise gear out of water. Hook & line: 13"; 100 lb possession limit 4 days/week during 5/1-10/31, 1 fish creel limit all other times.	13", 1 fish	April 11, 2010
MD	12". Ocean all gears: 100 lb bycatch limit & 50% rule. Chesapeake Bay hook & line: open 8/1-9/30, 50 lb possession limit, 0 lb bycatch. Chesapeake Bay all other gears: 50 lb bycatch limit & 50% rule. Gillnet: mesh ≥ 3.0" stretched. Trawl: mesh ≥ 3.375" square or 3.75" diamond.	13", 1 fish	June 28, 2010
PRFC	12"; open 7/28-12/31, 50 lb possession limit; 50 lb bycatch limit & 50% rule for certified pound nets with approved cull panels, and 0 lb bycatch for all other gears. Pound net: limited entry.	12", 1 fish	January 1, 2010

Table 1. (continued)

State	Commercial	Recreational	Implementation Date
VA	Gill net: 12"; open 3/16-5/13 & 10/21-12/30, 100 lb possession limit. Pound net: no minimum size; limited entry; open 4/1-4/30 & 5/23-9/12 unless exempted by license forfeit, 100 lb possession limit. Haul seine: no minimum size; open 4/16-6/10 & 8/21-9/24, 100 lb possession limit. Out of state trawl: 12" except 100 undersized fish allowed; open 4/1-9/25, 100 lb possession limit; codend mesh ≥ 3.0". Hook & line: 12”; open 1/1-12/31, 100 lb possession limit. 100 lb bycatch limit (per vessel), 50% rule for all gears during closed seasons.	12”, 1 fish	May 1, 2010
NC	12", except 10" for long haul seines & pound nets in internal waters 4/1-11/15; open 1/1-12/31, 100 lb trip limit. Gill net: mesh ≥ 2.875” stretch. Gill nets and flynets that do not meet mesh requirements can only take weakfish as bycatch provided the weight of weakfish doesn’t exceed 50% of catch up to 100lb, 100lb limit in shrimp or crab trawl. BRDs in shrimp trawls.	12”, 1 fish	August 20, 2010
SC	12", 1 fish. BRDs in shrimp trawls.	12", 1 fish	July 1, 2010
GA	13", 1 fish. BRDs in shrimp trawls.	13", 1 fish	June 3, 2010
FL	12", 100 lb possession limit. BRDs in shrimp trawls.	12", 1 fish	July 27, 2010

Table 2. Commercial and recreational Atlantic coast weakfish landings from 2014 to 2023 (see Tables 3 and 4 for source information and state-specific landings).

Year	Recreational Landings (lbs)	Commercial Landings (lbs)	Total Landings (lbs)	% Com
2014	218,581	183,442	402,023	46%
2015	451,266	131,296	582,562	23%
2016	228,857	156,350	385,207	41%
2017	436,521	160,794	597,315	27%
2018	130,627	88,638	219,265	40%
2019	299,310	193,460	492,743	39%
2020	481,238	211,149	692,387	30%
2021	518,366	194,098	712,464	27%
2022	585,359	190,176	775,535	25%
2023	561,631	247,764	809,395	31%

Table 3. Commercial landings (pounds) of weakfish by state, 2014-2023 (Source: ACCSP for 2022 and earlier and state compliance reports for 2023, except as noted below). "C" values are confidential.

Year	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD
2014	918	15,583	3,343	33,303	8,415	C	2,126
2015	473	6,327	1,666	24,487	9,655	C	1,394
2016	882	12,022	2,731	30,714	6,596	C	914
2017	2,175	17,243	3,956	36,671	5,875	C	858
2018	1,190	8,785	2,004	23,070	7,693	800	555
2019	289	7,107	3,568	21,012	3,542	C	906
2020	197	24,276	7,026	41,338	5,876	C	1,620
2021	C	15,746	6,481	64,231	8,054	1,644	590
2022	222	14,955	9,460	64,813	7,021	1,302	1,044
2023	C	17,558	10,284	73,787	8,723	2,421	1,493

	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL	Total
2014	10	9,633	105,246	C	C	557	179,133
2015	3	4,843	80,230	C	C	741	129,819
2016	C	12,610	83,958	C	C	621	151,047
2017	5	5,560	85,442	C	C	1,680	159,464
2018	C	22,882	35,133	C	C	381	102,492
2019	C	39,723	115,665	C	C	140	193,465
2020	C	41,326	87,645	C	C	328	211,340
2021	C	28,088	59,534	C	C	297	194,098
2022	0	28,967	62,196	0	0	196	190,176
2023	C	26,918	106,131	0	0	C	247,764

N**otes:** FL: state-reported landings (NMFS-reported landings limited to Nassau and Duval Counties and adjusted on the basis of the genome proportions of weakfish within the *Cynoscion*-complex in those counties' waters).

Table 4. Recreational landings (pounds) of weakfish by state, 2014-2023 (Source: MRIP FES-calibrated estimates, except as noted below).

Year	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD
2014				14,916	61,426	7,118	2,808
2015				5,852	53,485	2,293	68,225
2016	571		4,240	29,573	26,616	3,601	1,947
2017	3,108			20,962	225,225	2,385	5,926
2018	756		1,404	19,593	24,407	4,199	
2019			8,238	75,405	38,886	13,941	9,602
2020	8,692	20,575	528	91,682	14,716	6,231	34
2021	11,429	812	15,347	244,689	27,769	19,547	2,029
2022		1,161	2,307	207,878	32,221	7,816	2,092
2023	79	30,964	1,851	122,696	27,038	18,812	29,493

	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL		Total
2014	26,220	70,988	28,773	5,570	762		218,581
2015	66,528	157,269	96,416	1,096	102		451,266
2016	44,242	83,702	29,448	4,264	653		228,857
2017	15,649	55,944	58,510	47,776	557		436,042
2018	6,788	29,924	23,591	17,856	2,109		130,627
2019	30,573	43,252	72,949	4,538	1,926		299,310
2020	30,398	105,729	191,454	10,897	302		481,238
2021	6,356	103,449	84,892	1,679	368		518,366
2022	141,037	105,060	83,000	2,109	678		585,359
2023	12,598	89,115	215,795	10,455	2,735		561,631

Notes: FL: state-reported landings 1983-present (NMFS-reported, FES-calibrated estimates limited to Nassau and Duval Counties and adjusted on the basis of the genome proportions of weakfish within the *Cynoscion*-complex found in those counties' waters.

Table 5. Recreational landings (numbers) of weakfish by state, 2014-2023 (Source: MRIP FES-calibrated estimates, except as noted below).

Year	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD
2014				1,838	16,146	6,624	1,542
2015				2,123	73,062	1,511	12,567
2016	327		1,601	4,626	12,344	1,440	2,100
2017	1,880		0	16,534	78,831	1,365	9,175
2018	393		466	9,086	16,177	1,782	
2019			2,535	36,672	35,089	9,565	7,191
2020	3,584	6,840	174	33,819	10,157	5,329	44
2021	4,292	243	4,098	83,999	31,829	9,891	1,116
2022		658	759	58,895	28,813	5,729	1,290
2023	40	9,951	3,624	32,346	9,707	9,342	21,455

	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL		Total
2014	32,380	71,912	24,733	7,896	905		163,976
2015	10,286	143,543	74,085	1,673	143		318,993
2016	37,664	77,341	22,843	5,328	1,251		166,865
2017	14,405	51,795	45,836	55,471	848		276,140
2018	5,556	30,935	10,705	13,805	1,404		90,309
2019	38,292	39,061	57,772	3,961	2,180		232,318
2020	16,597	82,124	155,637	8,305	196		322,806
2021	7,196	91,032	38,383	1,586	320		273,985
2022	46,864	112,095	76,100	2,055	646		333,904
2023	7,926	75,329	176,118	8,403	3,581		357,822

Notes: FL: state-reported landings 1983-present (NMFS-reported, FES-calibrated estimates limited to Nassau and Duval Counties and adjusted on the basis of the genome proportions of weakfish within the *Cynoscion*-complex found in those counties' waters).

Table 6. Recreational releases (numbers) of weakfish by state, 2014-2023 (Source: MRIP FES-calibrated estimates, except as noted below). Atlantic coastal releases that occurred outside the management area (ME-NH) are included in the Total though not shown at the state level.

Year	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD
2014			724	794	193,962	55,077	27,392
2015				14,459	598,126	33,522	340,850
2016	4,130		1,932	8,767	278,043	62,864	161,159
2017	557		791	138,156	146,036	38,219	41,674
2018	8,072	1,139	2,206	124,349	40,600	26,657	5,029
2019		735	13,257	310,830	202,390	105,288	19,260
2020	3,210	1,208	4,641	245,752	90,689	57,257	5,186
2021	233	668	128,087	277,955	219,201	129,947	27,429
2022		1607	2,346	154,893	156,697	68,374	8,196
2023	640	13,328	14,122	244,415	522,443	123,276	31,359

	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL		Total
2014	374,944	1,067,230	568,787	7,640	614		2,297,164
2015	232,363	1,608,036	215,117	48,052			3,090,525
2016	1,467,470	1,091,422	118,374	16,152			3,210,313
2017	454,456	351,433	186,547	95,061			1,452,930
2018	233,912	299,496	95,701	35,586	512		873,259
2019	817,168	244,643	117,236	33,313	1,014		1,865,134
2020	316,620	342,015	93,047	16,239	15		1,175,879
2021	281,452	1,028,640	83,039	32,762	295		2,209,708
2022	337,075	1,921,985	180,593	7,248	1,767		2,840,781
2023	271,814	833,559	678,493	63,818	2,231		2,799,498

Notes: FL: state-reported landings 1983-present (NMFS-reported, FES-calibrated estimates limited to Nassau and Duval Counties and adjusted on the basis of the genome proportions of weakfish within the *Cynoscion*-complex found in those counties' waters).

Table 7. Indices of relative weakfish abundance from 2014 to 2023. (Source: State compliance reports)

Year	MA Tr BB & VS YOY	MA Tr BB & VS 1+	RI Tr Coast YOY	CT Tr LIS YOY	CT Tr LIS 1+	NY Tr Coast YOY	NJ Tr DE Bay YOY	NJ Tr Ocean 1+	DE Tr DE Bay YOY	DE Tr Inland YOY	DE Tr DE Bay 1+
	mean#/ tow	mean#/ tow	mean#/ tow	GM#/ tow	GM#/ tow	AM#/ tow	GM#/ tow	mean#/ tow	GM#/ tow	GM#/ tow	#/ nm
2014	0.99	0.00	1.27	41.53	0.08	97.70	4.87	63.54	13.67	4.71	38.01
2015	0.10	0.00	46.47	30.91	0.46	56.00	2.27	94.60	10.22	3.88	76.46
2016	22.64	0.26	4.14	5.87	0.81	57.60	2.34	77.21	7.47	3.00	154.40
2017	0.30	0.00	32.25	8.20	0.43	59.20	4.13	186.59	5.18	1.44	101.98
2018	3.89	0.03	60.85	25.66	0.56	139.90	7.19	141.15	6.92	2.45	133.19
2019	0.50	0.00	7.19	14.33	1.26	42.3	5.9	64.92	7.02	3.05	213.02
2020	*	*	44.51	*	*	129.9	*	*	5.80*	5.09*	89.46*
2021	27.08	0.37	54.42	27.94	1.50	41.0	*	*	5.93	1.41	109.33
2022	2.72	0.06	86.61	34.38	0.60	90.9	9.02	210.49	6.73	2.18	54.09
2023	4.25	0.4	11.43	12.96	0.63	28.3	2.93	94.55	5.84	0.95	94.34

*Some surveys did not run or were impacted in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7 (continued). Indices of relative weakfish abundance from 2014 to 2023. (Source: State compliance reports)

Year	MD Tr ChesBay YOY	MD Tr Coast YOY	VA Tr ChesBay YOY	NC Tr Pamlico YOY	NC Tr Pamlico 1+	NC Gn Pamlico 1+	SC Tr Inshore YOY	SC SEAMAP Summer 0+/1+	SC SEAMAP Fall 0+/1+	GA Tr Coast 0+	FL Tr Jax YOY	FL Tr IR & Jax 1+
	GM#/ tow	GM#/ ha	GM#/ tow	#/ tow	#/ tow	#/ set	#/ tow	#/ tow	#/ tow	#/ obs hr	med/ tow	med/ tow
2014	2.95	1.28	3.77	32.83	50.26	0.50		12.00	7.60	64.16	0.62	0.19
2015	2.23	0.88	3.77	43.30	24.51	0.30	19.30	18.20	257.80	89.84	1.08	0.03
2016	0.71	1.69	1.44	43.00	34.46	0.30	22.60	14.50	24.30	62.40	0.69	0.21
2017	0.65	0.54	2.41	41.90	19.11	0.31	26.60	1.46	5.73	44.30	0.49	0.27
2018	1.03	1.48		16.68	14.39	0.23	20.16	4.00	38.70	94.90	0.00	0.23
2019	2.11	0.19	1.02	24	18.88	0.29	37.00	15.4	17.8	35.6	0.00	0.31
2020	2.03	1.73	2.36*	33.2*	37.42*	*	10.00*	*	*	61.2	0.00	0.25
2021	0.98	0.64	0.66	1.05*	41.80*	0.32	26.10	8.4	7.6	65.6	0.00	0.21
2022	1.18	0.67	1.57	14.71	12.35	0.43	143.6	3.9	5.8	41.2	0.00	0.25
2023	1.26	1.06	2.35	51.75	43.1	0.84	24.3	14.0	23.6	55.2	0.00	0.23

*Some surveys did not run or were impacted in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 8. Biological sampling of weakfish in 2023, Massachusetts-Florida. Sampling requirements are based on Addendum I to Amendment 4 and 2023 landings data and are reported in state compliance reports.

	Samples Required		Samples Completed		Fisheries Sampled
	Ages	Lengths	Ages	Lengths	
MA*	0	0	0	0	NA
RI	66	48	21	23	RIDFW Trawl Survey
CT	17	28	55	1,496	fishery independent
NY	267	201	192	463	commercial (GN, TR, PN, H&L)
NJ	49	24	160	162	Fishery independent
DE	29	7	25	25	commercial (GN), fishery independent
MD	42	4	3	3	commercial (PN)
PRFC	0	0	0	0	NA
VA	54	73	281	432	commercial (GN, PN, HS), recreational
NC	266	289	664	375	commercial (SN, GN, PN, HS, TR, H&L), recreational, fishery independent
SC	294	0	77		fishery independent, recreational
GA*	3	0	0	0	NA
FL*	1	1	0	0	NA

**de minimis* in 2023; not required to conduct sampling; sample numbers provided to show from what states were exempt

NA=not applicable, GN=gill net, PN=pound net, H&L=hook and line, HS=haul seine, SN=sink net

XI. Figures

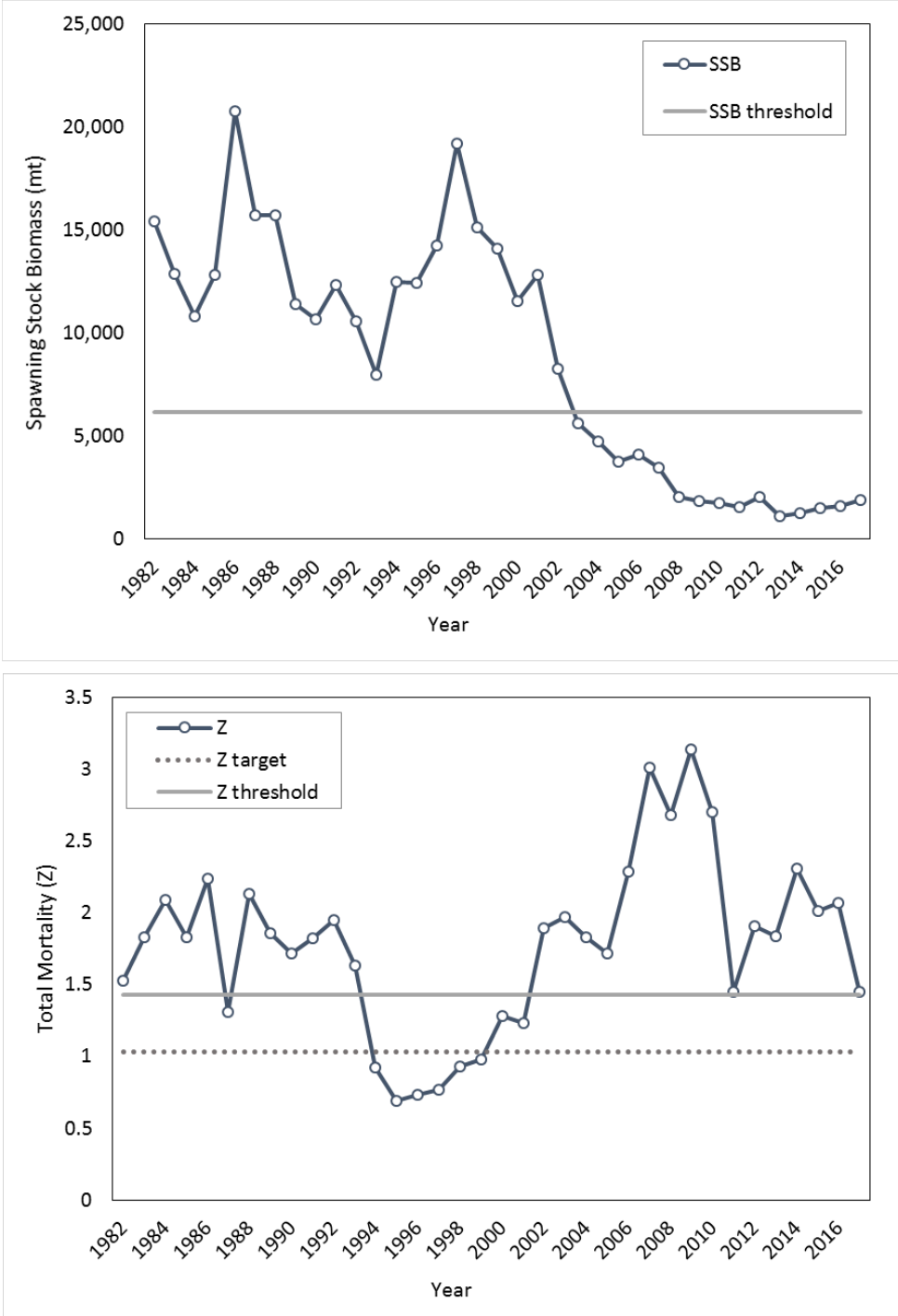

Figure 1. Spawning stock biomass (top) and total mortality (bottom) plotted with their respective targets and thresholds, where defined (ASMFC 2019).

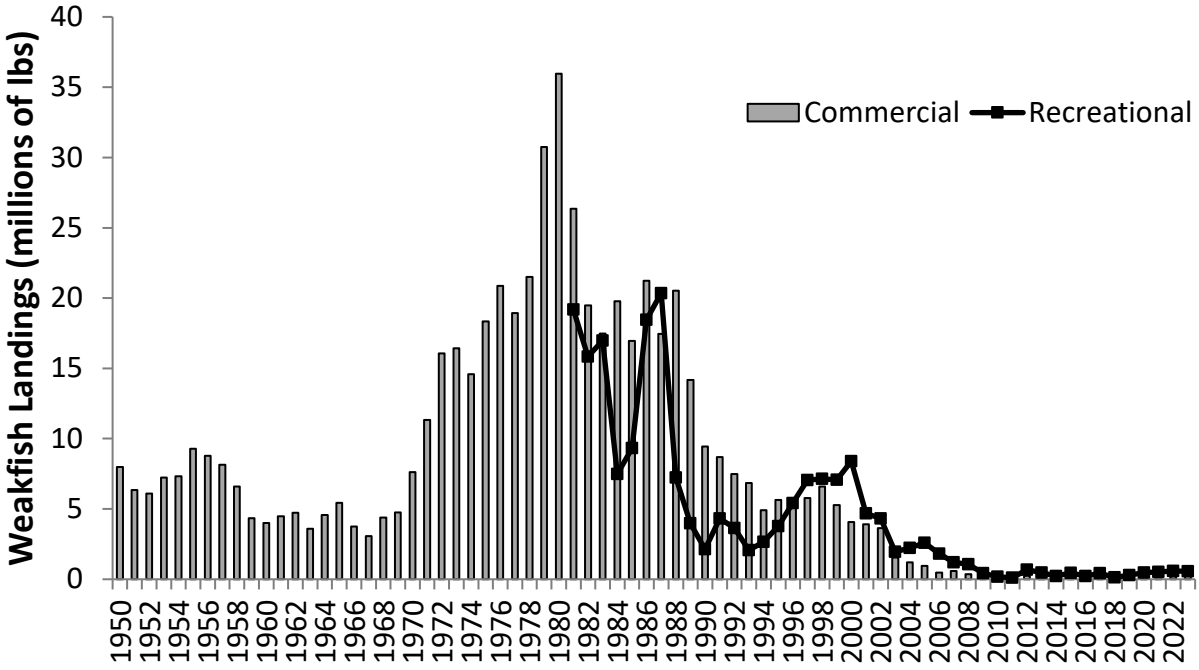

Figure 2. Commercial and recreational weakfish harvest (pounds), from 1950 to 2023 (see Tables 3 and 4 for source information and values). Recreational data is unavailable prior to 1981.

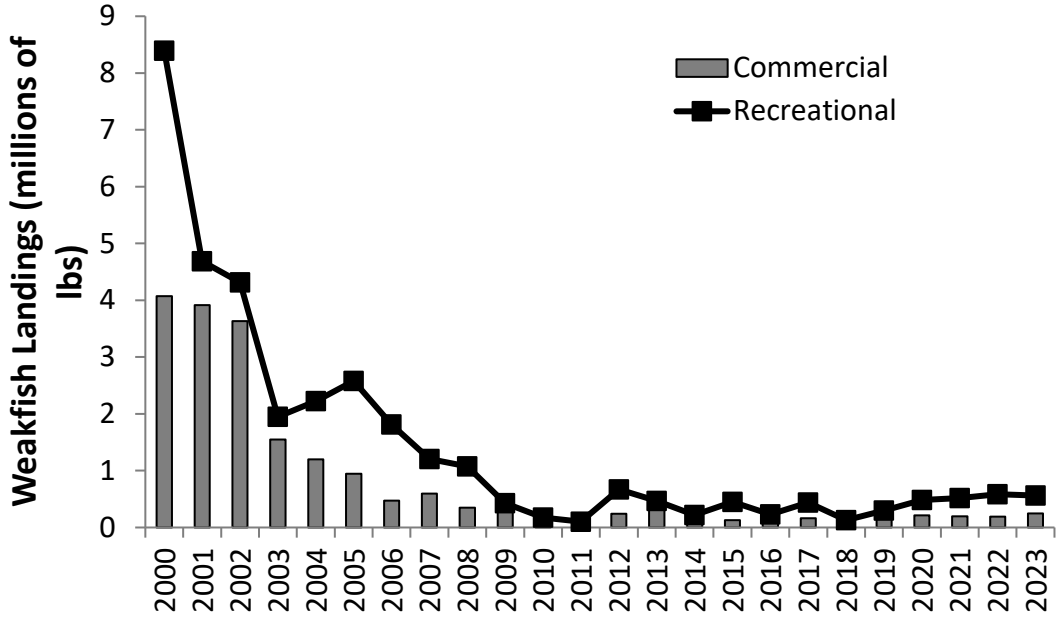

Figure 3. Commercial and recreational weakfish harvest (pounds), from 2000 to 2023 (see Tables 3 and 4 for source information and values).

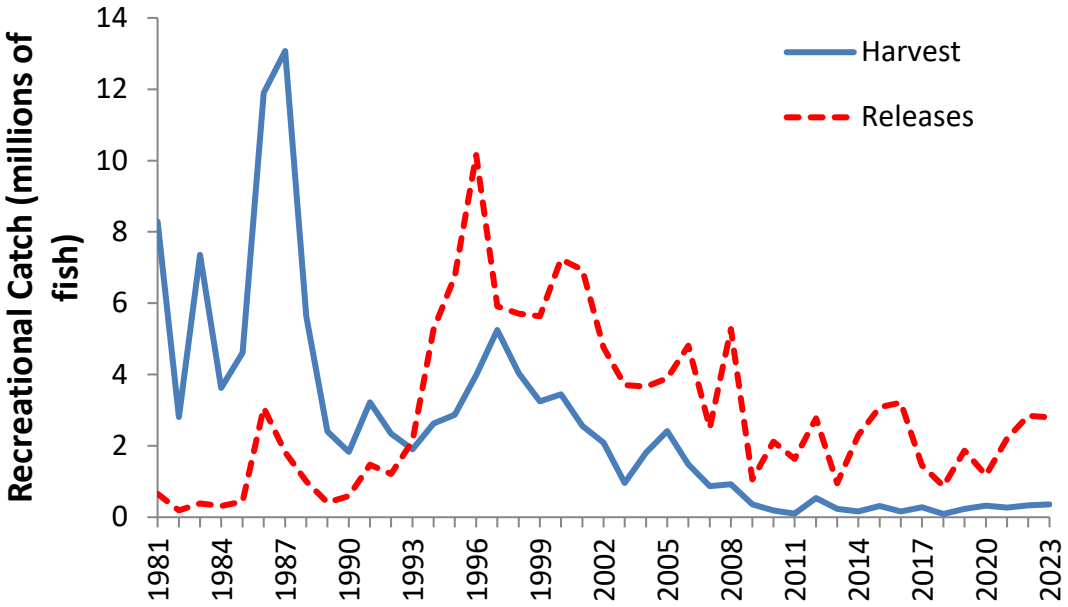

Figure 4. Recreational weakfish harvest and releases (number of fish), from 1981 to 2023 (see Tables 5 and 6 for source information and values).