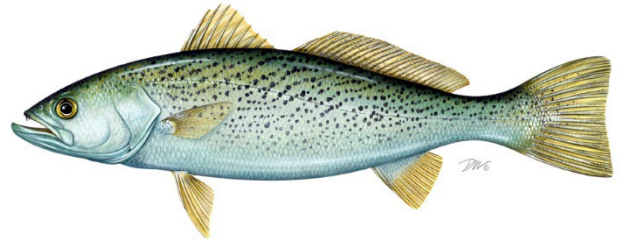


INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Weakfish



Species Range

From Massachusetts through southeastern Florida, occasionally straying to Nova Scotia and into the eastern Gulf of Mexico

Management Unit

Massachusetts through Florida

Stock Status

Depleted, overfishing not occurring. The [most recent benchmark stock assessment](#) was completed in 2016. Results were endorsed by an independent peer review panel. A [stock assessment update](#) was completed in 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 (e.g., the rate at which fish die due to natural causes such as predation, disease and starvation) remained high, averaging 0.92 in the most recent 10 years, compared to 0.16 over the first 10 years of the time series. Therefore, even though harvest has been at low levels in recent years, the weakfish population has been experiencing very high levels of total mortality (including fishing mortality and natural mortality), preventing the stock from recovering.

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.

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. Fishing mortality has increased in recent years but was below the threshold in 2017.

After [a stock assessment update in 2025](#) was not approved for management use, the Weakfish Board has agreed to conduct a new benchmark stock assessment, tentatively scheduled to begin in 2026.

Involved States and Jurisdictions

RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees

Weakfish Management Board, Technical Committee, Plan Review Team, Advisory Panel

Chairs

Board, Chair – Doug Haymans (2/2021); Vice-Chair – Erika Burgess
Technical Committee, Chair – Erin Levesque (1/2017)
Advisory Panel, Chair – Vacant

Staff Lead

Tracey Bauer, tbauer@asmfc.org

Management Plan History

[Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish \(October 1985\)](#)

The Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Weakfish is adopted due to concern about stock status. The major problem addressed is the lack of biological and fisheries data necessary for effective management of the resource. The plan also recommends the use of bycatch reduction devices and to reduce catch of fish less than 1 year to increase yield per recruit.

[Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish \(March 1992\)](#)

Amendment 1 is adopted to address declines in weakfish harvest and spawning stock biomass, and the lack of implementation of the 1985 plan recommendations. The amendment recommends size limits, mesh size restrictions, seasonal closures of fisheries, and other harvest control strategies to reduce annual exploitation.

[Amendment 2 to the Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish \(1995\)](#)

Amendment 2 is implemented after the passage of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act gives the Commission an indirect means to enforce compliance with its FMPs. The amendment was adopted to implement the 12" minimum size limit, fishing mortality reduction, and shrimp trawl bycatch reduction recommended in Amendment 1.

[Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish \(May 1996\)](#)

Amendment 3 is adopted to reduce fishing mortality (F) to 0.50 by 2000, restore an expanded age structure, and restore the fish to their full geographical extent. In 2000, the Board approved Addendum I to Amendment 3 in order to extend the fishery management measures until Amendment 4 could be implemented.

[Amendment 4 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish \(November 2002\)](#)

Amendment 4 is approved, establishing the first biological reference points and requiring a rebuilding schedule if limits are exceeded. The amendment provides a suite of recreational size and creel limit options from which states can choose, and maintains the commercial measures required under Amendment 3, although it increases the plan's bycatch allowance.

[Addendum I \(December 2005\)](#)

Addendum I replaces Amendment 4's mandatory biological sampling program.

[Addendum II \(February 2007\)](#)

The results of the 2006 stock assessment prompt the development and implementation of Addendum II. To control expansion of the fishery when stock status improves, the addendum reduces most states' recreational creel limits, reduces the bycatch allowance, and establishes several management triggers to facilitate prompt response to a change in landings.

[Addendum III \(May 2007\)](#)

Addendum III modifies the bycatch reduction device certification language for consistency with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Shrimp FMP.

[Addendum IV \(November 2009\)](#)

The Management Board responds to the 2009 stock assessment by initiating a "fast-track" addendum. Addendum IV requires states to implement a one fish recreational creel limit, 100 pound commercial trip limit, 100 pound commercial bycatch limit, and 100 undersized fish per trip allowance for the finfish trawl fishery. All other management measures previously adopted to conserve the stock and reduce bycatch remain in effect. The Addendum also removes the fishing mortality reference points and redefines spawning stock biomass reference points as being relative to an unfished stock. The implementation deadline was May 1, 2010 and all states have implemented the requirements of the addendum.

In August 2010, the Board approved a conservation equivalency proposal from North Carolina to implement commercial regulations allowing 10 percent bycatch of weakfish up to 1000 lbs, in place of the 100 lb trip limit. Analysis of North Carolina commercial data for 2005-2008 indicated that the alternative regulations would result in an equivalent landings reduction as the 100 lb commercial trip limit. The methods used in the proposal were the same as those used to develop the estimated landings reduction from coastwide implementation of the 100 lb trip limit for Addendum IV. Concern that the bycatch allowance may not reduce landings the same amount as a trip limit under a rebuilding weakfish stock prompted the Management Board to request that the Technical Committee annually review the fishery to ensure that conservation equivalency is maintained.

Recent Activities

None

Pending Management Action

None

Annual Events

- Weakfish compliance reports are due September 1 each year. State compliance is reported in the annual FMP Review produced by the PRT.
- Benchmark stock assessments are completed approximately every five years.