

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Spot

Species Range

Gulf of Maine through Florida, although they are most abundant from Chesapeake Bay to South Carolina

Management Unit

Delaware through Florida



Stock Status

In August 2017, the Commission's South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board received the findings of the 2017 Spot Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report and agreed with the general results of the assessment that immediate management actions are not necessary. The Panel recommended continued use of the annual traffic light analysis (TLA), established in 2014 to monitor fishery and resource trends, and implementation of management measures as needed, for spot.

A key issue causing uncertainty in the results of the assessment was the disagreement between recent trends in harvest and abundance. Trends in stock abundance for spot are estimated through several federal and state fishery-independent surveys. Typically, if these surveys catch a relatively large number of spot, that would indicate a greater number of spot available to be harvested by their directed fisheries. Thus, scientists and managers would expect a greater abundance of spot would also be reflected through an increase in harvest for that year. Similarly, a decrease in abundance would be expected to be coupled with a decrease in harvest. However, for spot, recent harvest numbers are declining while estimated abundance is increasing.

In 2020, the annual TLA indicated that spot harvest and adult abundance composite metrics exceeded thresholds outlined in Addendum III. Management response was triggered at the 30% level, or a moderate level response. Non *de minimis* states are required to implement a 50 fish bag limit for recreational fisheries, and reduce commercial harvest by 1% of the state's 10-year average. In 2020, the TLA for the 2019 fishing year indicated that both species triggered at the 30% red threshold. State implementation plans for management measures were approved in early 2021 and all new management measures were enacted by the end of 2021. The measures must be in place for at least two years for spot before management can be reevaluated.

In the 2025 update of the Spot TLA with data through 2024, abundance metrics in the spot TLA did not trigger at any threshold in the past three years. In this case, Addendum III states the measures that were put into place in 2020 are no longer required for spot. However, the Board agreed with the Technical Committee's (TC) recommendation to maintain the current spot

management measures. This decision was due in part to continued concern with low spot commercial and recreational harvest and that results from a benchmark stock assessment expected in the next couple of years..

Involved States and Jurisdictions

DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees

Sciaenid Management Board, Spot Plan Review Team, Spot Technical Committee, Atlantic Croaker and Spot Stock Assessment Subcommittee, South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

Chairs

Board, Chair – Doug Haymans (02/2024); Vice-Chair – Ben Dyers
Technical Committee – Harry Rickabaugh (09/2020); Vice Chair – Vacant
Advisory Panel, Chair – Craig Freeman (11/2019)

Staff Lead

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Management Plan History

[Fishery Management Plan for Spot \(October 1987\)](#)

The Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Spot is adopted. 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 the limitation of catch of fish less than 1 year to increase yield per recruit.

Early 1990s – Management Board reviews the FMP and recommends an amendment to define a management program capable of achieving the goals of the FMP.

[Omnibus Amendment to the Interstate Fishery Management Plans for Spanish Mackerel, Spot, and Spotted Seatrout \(August 2011\)](#)

The Omnibus Amendment updates the Spot FMP with the requirements of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act of 1993 and the Interstate Fishery Management Program Charter, initially passed in 1995. The amendment adds *de minimis* criteria, compliance reporting, and adaptive management measures. The amendment also includes the Management Triggers, developed by the PRT, to annually monitor the stock status of spot until a coastwide stock assessment can be completed.

[Addendum I \(August 2013\)](#)

This Addendum pertains only to Spanish mackerel.

[Addendum II \(August 2014\)](#)

The Addendum establishes a new management framework (i.e., Traffic Light Analysis) to evaluate fisheries trends and develop state-specified management actions (i.e., bag limits, size restrictions, time & area closures, and gear restrictions) when harvest and abundance thresholds are exceeded over two years. Management measures would remain in place for two years.

[Addendum III \(February 2020\)](#)

Addendum III adjusted the TLA to incorporate additional fishery-independent indices, age information, use of regional characteristics, and changes to the management triggering mechanism. Management triggers and responses include bag limits for the recreational fishery and percentage harvest reductions from a 10-year average for the commercial fishery. The response is defined by which percentage threshold (30% or 60%) that was exceeded in any of the 2 out of 3 terminal years.

Annual Events

- Spot compliance reports are due November 1st with a reminder distributed 90 days prior.
- The Plan Review Team produces an annual Spot FMP Review. The Plan Review Team, beginning in 2012, also performs the annual trigger exercise.
- The Advisory Panel receives an update after each Board meeting, and should meet at least once per year.
- In July of all non-assessment years, the Technical Committee evaluates the fishery using the Traffic Light Analysis and management framework to evaluate whether management action should be taken.