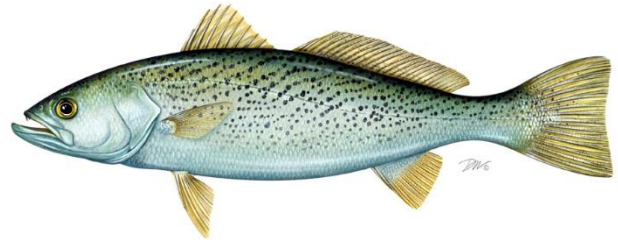


INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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 weakfish stock assessment](#) was completed in 2016. Results were endorsed by an independent peer review panel. The assessment found spawning stock biomass in 2014 (5.62 million pounds) to be well below the threshold of 15.17 million pounds. While fishing mortality has decreased, due in large part to the strict regulations placed on the species, natural mortality has increased since the mid-1990's from approximately 0.16 in the early 1980s to an average of 0.93 from 2007-2014. This high level of total mortality (fishing and natural mortality) has prevented the stock from recovering. The assessment does indicate some positive signs in the weakfish stock in the most recent years, with a slight increase in abundance and spawning stock biomass. Given the current regulations on the species and the potential signs of improvement, the Board decided not to take further management action at this time.

A stock assessment update will occur in 2018.

Involved States and Jurisdictions

MA, 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 – Rob O'Reilly (2/2018); Vice-Chair – Vacant
Technical Committee, Chair – Erin Levesque (1/2017)
Advisory Panel, Chair – Billy Farmer (1/2006)

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 every five years. On non-assessment years, the Technical Committee should meet at least once, as long as funding allows.