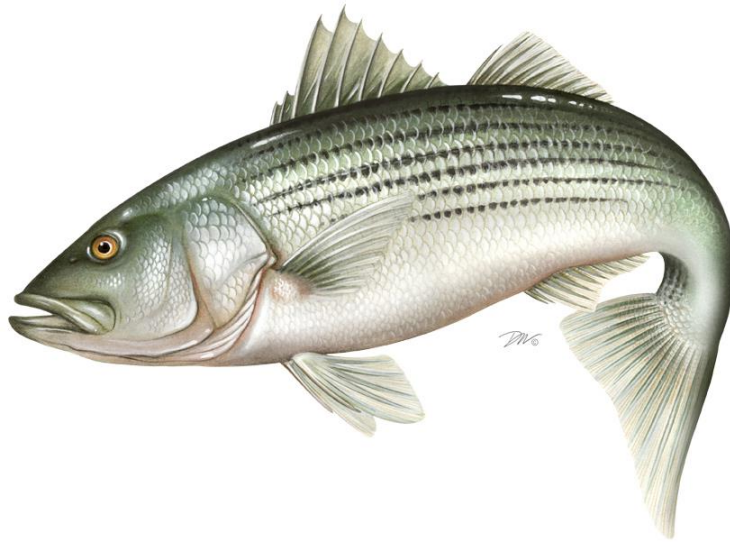


# ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

## DRAFT REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS  
*(Morone saxatilis)*

2019 FISHING YEAR



Prepared by the Plan Review Team

Drafted July 2020



*Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

**DRAFT REVIEW OF THE ASMFC FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR  
ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS (*Morone saxatilis*) FOR THE 2019 FISHERY**

**Management Summary**

<u>Date of FMP Approval:</u>	Original FMP – 1981
<u>Amendments:</u>	Amendment 1 – 1984 Amendment 2 – 1984 Amendment 3 – 1985 Amendment 4 – 1989; Addendum I – 1991, Addendum II – 1992, Addendum III – 1993, Addendum IV – 1994 Amendment 5 – 1995; Addendum I – 1997, Addendum II – 1997, Addendum III – 1998, Addendum IV – 1999, Addendum V – 2000 Amendment 6 – 2003; Addendum I – 2007, Addendum II – 2010, Addendum III – 2012, Addendum IV – 2014, Addendum VI -2019
<u>Management Unit:</u>	Migratory stocks of Atlantic striped bass from Maine through North Carolina
<u>States With Declared Interest:</u>	Maine - North Carolina, including Pennsylvania
<u>Additional Jurisdictions:</u>	District of Columbia, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
<u>Active Boards/Committees:</u>	Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board, Advisory Panel, Technical Committee, Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Tagging Subcommittee, Plan Review Team, and Plan Development Team

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) developed a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Striped Bass in 1981 in response to poor juvenile recruitment and declining landings. The FMP recommended increased restrictions on commercial and recreational fisheries, such as minimum size limits and harvest closures on spawning grounds. Two amendments were passed in 1984 recommending additional management measures to reduce fishing mortality. To strengthen the management response and improve compliance and enforcement, the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act (P.L. 98-613) was passed in late 1984. The Striped Bass Act<sup>1</sup> mandated the implementation of striped bass regulations passed by the Commission and gave the Commission authority to recommend to the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior that states be found out of compliance when they failed to implement management measures consistent with the FMP.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1997 reauthorization of the Striped Bass Act also required the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior provide a biennial report to Congress highlighting the progress and findings of studies of migratory and estuarine Striped Bass. The ninth such report was recently provided to Congress (Shepherd et al. 2017).

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The first enforceable plan under the Striped Bass Act, Amendment 3, was approved in 1985, and required size regulations to protect the 1982 year class – the first modest size cohort since the previous decade. The objective was to increase size limits to allow at least 95% of the females in the 1982 year class to spawn at least once. Smaller size limits were permitted in producer areas than along the coast. Several states, beginning with Maryland in 1985, opted for a more conservative approach and imposed a total moratorium on striped bass landings for several years. The amendment contained a trigger mechanism to relax regulations when the 3-year moving average of the Maryland juvenile abundance index (JAI) exceeded an arithmetic mean of 8.0 – which was attained with the recruitment of the 1989 year class. Also, in 1985, the Commission determined the Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River (A-R) stock in North Carolina contributed minimally to the coastal migratory population, and was therefore allowed to operate under an alternative management program.

Amendment 4, implemented in 1989, aimed to rebuild the resource rather than maximize yield. The amendment allowed state fisheries to reopen under a target fishing mortality (F) of 0.25, which was half the estimated F needed to achieve maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The amendment allowed an increase in the target F once spawning stock biomass (SSB) was restored to levels estimated during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The dual size limit concept was maintained (coastal versus producer areas), and a recreational trip limit and commercial season was implemented to reduce the harvest to 20% of that in the historic period of 1972-1979. A series of four addenda were implemented from 1990-1994 to maintain protection of the 1982 year class.

In 1990, to provide additional protection to striped bass and ensure the effectiveness of state regulations, NOAA Fisheries passed a final rule (55 Federal Register 40181-02) prohibiting possession, fishing (catch and release fishing), harvest, and retention of Atlantic striped bass in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), with the exception of a defined transit zone within Block Island Sound. Atlantic striped bass may be transported through this defined area provided that the vessel is not used to fish while in the EEZ and the vessel remains in continuous transit, and that the fish were legally caught in adjoining state waters.

In 1995, the Atlantic striped bass migratory stock was declared recovered by the Commission (the A/R stock was declared recovered in 1997) and Amendment 5 was adopted to increase the target F to 0.33, midway between the existing F target (0.25) and  $F_{MSY}$ . Target F was allowed to increase again to 0.40 after two years of implementation. Regulations were developed to achieve the target F (which included measures to restore commercial harvest to 70% of the average landings during the 1972-1979 historical period) and states were allowed to submit proposals to implement alternative regulations that were deemed conservationally equivalent to the Amendment 5 measures. From 1997-2000, a series of five addenda were implemented to respond to the latest stock status information and adjust the regulatory program to achieve each change in target F.

In 2003, Amendment 6 was adopted to address five limitations within the existing management program: 1) potential inability to prevent the Amendment 5 exploitation target from being exceeded; 2) perceived decrease in availability or abundance of large striped bass in the coastal migratory population; 3) a lack of management direction with respect to target and threshold biomass levels; 4) inequitable effects of regulations on the recreational and commercial fisheries, and coastal and

producer area sectors; and 5) excessively frequent changes to the management program. Accordingly, Amendment 6 completely replaced the existing FMP for Atlantic striped bass.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of Amendment 6 is “to perpetuate, through cooperative interstate management, migratory stocks of striped bass; to allow commercial and recreational fisheries consistent with the long-term maintenance of a broad age structure, a self-sustaining spawning stock; and also to provide for the restoration and maintenance of their essential habitat.” In support of this goal, the following objectives are included:

1. Manage striped bass fisheries under a control rule designed to maintain stock size at or above the target female spawning stock biomass level and a level of fishing mortality at or below the target exploitation rate.
2. Manage fishing mortality to maintain an age structure that provides adequate spawning potential to sustain long-term abundance of striped bass populations.
3. Provide a management plan that strives, to the extent practical, to maintain coastwide consistency of implemented measures, while allowing the States defined flexibility to implement alternative strategies that accomplish the objectives of the FMP.
4. Foster quality and economically viable recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries.
5. Maximize cost effectiveness of current information gathering and prioritize state obligations in order to minimize costs of monitoring and management.
6. Adopt a long-term management regime that minimizes or eliminates the need to make annual changes or modifications to management measures.
7. Establish a fishing mortality target that will result in a net increase in the abundance (pounds) of age 15 and older striped bass in the population, relative to the 2000 estimate.

Amendment 6 modified the F target and threshold, and introduced a new set of biological reference points (BRPs) based on female SSB, as well as a list of management triggers based on the BRPs. The coastal commercial quotas were restored to 100% of the states’ average landings during the 1972-1979 historical period, except for Delaware’s coastal commercial quota which remained at the level allocated in 2002<sup>3</sup>. In the recreational fisheries, all states were required to implement a two-fish bag limit with a minimum size limit of 28 inches, except for the Chesapeake Bay fisheries, North Carolina fisheries that operate in the A/R, and states with approved alternative regulations. The Chesapeake Bay and A/R regulatory programs were predicated on a more conservative F target than the coastal migratory stock, which allowed these states/jurisdictions (hereafter states) to implement separate seasons, harvest caps, and size and bag limits as long as they remain under that F target. No minimum

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<sup>2</sup> While NOAA Fisheries continues to implement a complete ban on the fishing and harvest of striped bass in the EEZ, Amendment 6 includes a recommendation to consider reopening the EEZ to striped bass fisheries. In September 2006, NOAA Fisheries concluded that it would be imprudent to open the EEZ to striped bass fishing because it could not be certain that opening the EEZ would not lead to increased effort and an overfishing scenario.

<sup>3</sup> The decision to hold Delaware’s commercial quota at the 2002 level is based on tagging information that indicated F on the Delaware River/Bay stock is too high, and uncertainty regarding the status of the spawning stock for the Delaware River/Bay.

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size limit can be less than 18 inches under Amendment 6. The same minimum size standards regulate the commercial fisheries as the recreational fisheries, except for a minimum 20 inch size limit in the Delaware Bay spring American shad gillnet fishery.

States are permitted the flexibility to deviate from these regulations by submitting conservation equivalency proposals to the Plan Review Team (PRT). All proposals are subject to technical review and approval by the Atlantic Striped Bass Management (Board). It is the responsibility of the state to demonstrate through quantitative analysis that the proposed management program is equivalent to the standards in the FMP, or will not contribute to the overfishing of the resource.

Five addenda to Amendment 6 have been implemented. Addendum I, approved in 2007, established a bycatch monitoring and research program to increase the accuracy of data on striped bass discards and recommended development of a web-based angler education program. Also in 2007, President George W. Bush issued an Executive Order (E.O. 13449) prohibiting the sale of striped bass (and red drum) caught within the EEZ. Addendum II was approved in 2010 and established a new definition of recruitment failure such that each index would have a fixed threshold rather than a threshold that changes annually with the addition of each year's data. Addendum III was approved in 2012 and requires all states with a commercial fishery for striped bass to implement a uniform commercial harvest tagging program. The Addendum was initiated in response to significant poaching events in the Chesapeake Bay and aims to limit illegal harvest of striped bass.

Addendum IV was triggered in response to the 2013 benchmark assessment, which indicated a steady decline in SSB since the mid-2000s. The Addendum established new F reference points, and changed commercial and recreational measures to reduce F to a level at or below the new target. Chesapeake Bay fisheries were required to implement lower reductions than coastal states (20.5% compared to 25%) since their fisheries were reduced by 14% in 2013 based on their management program. The addendum maintained the flexibility to implement alternative regulations through the conservation equivalency process. This practice has resulted in a variety of regulations among states (Table 1 and Table 2). All states promulgated regulations prior to the start of their 2015 seasons.

Addendum VI was initiated in response to the 2018 benchmark assessment which indicates the stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing<sup>4</sup>. Approved in October 2019, the Addendum aims to reduce total removals by 18% relative to 2017 levels in order to achieve F target in 2020. Specifically, the Addendum reduces all state commercial quotas by 18%, and implements a 1 fish bag limit and a 28" to less than 35" slot limit for ocean fisheries and a 1 fish bag limit and an 18" minimum size limit in Chesapeake Bay to reduce total recreational removals by 18% in both regions. The Addendum's

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<sup>4</sup> In February 2017, the Board initiated development of Draft Addendum V to consider liberalizing coastwide commercial and recreational regulations. The Board's action responded to concerns raised by Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions regarding continued economic hardship endured by its stakeholders since the implementation of Addendum IV and information from the 2016 stock assessment update indicating that F was below target in 2015, and that total removals could increase by 10% to achieve the target F. However, the Board chose to not advance the draft addendum for public comment largely due to harvest estimates having increased in 2016 without changing regulations. Instead, the Board decided to wait until it reviews the results of the 2018 benchmark stock assessment before considering making changes to the management program.

measures are designed to apply the needed reductions proportionally to both the commercial and recreational sectors, although states were permitted to submit alternative regulations through conservation equivalency that achieve an 18% reduction in total removals statewide. The Board reviewed and approved management options for 2020 on a state-by-state basis in February, and all states promulgated regulations by April 1.

Addendum VI also requires the mandatory use of circle hooks when fishing with bait to reduce release mortality in recreational striped bass fisheries. States are encouraged to promote the use of circle hooks through various public outreach and education platforms to garner support and compliance with this important conservation measure. States must submit implementation plans for circle hook requirements by August 15<sup>th</sup> for review by the Board in October, and promulgate regulations by January 1, 2021.

### Pending Action

In April 2019, following review of the 2018 benchmark assessment and after initiating Draft Addendum VI, the Board postponed a motion that considers initiating an amendment to revisit and address a suite of management issues including fishery goals and objectives, reference points, management triggers, stock rebuilding, area-specific management, and commercial allocation. Following final action on Addendum VI in February, the Board postponed a second motion that considers accountability measures for states that don't hit their projected reductions in 2020. Alongside these motions, the Board had also expressed its intent to revisit the management program's conservation equivalency provision and to pursue accountability measures for recreational striped bass fisheries in the future. The Board was to consider both postponed motions at the May 2020 meeting. However, due to impacts from COVID-19, the decision was made for this meeting to be informational only and action was deferred to the August meeting.

In the interim, the Board decided to form a Work Group (WG) of Board members to further discuss these and any other issues that should be considered in a future management document. The intent of the WG is to allow work to continue on these important issues to the extent practical during these challenging times. The WG will report back to the Board in August.

## **II. Status of the Stocks**

The 2018 benchmark stock assessment for Atlantic striped bass was peer-reviewed at the 66<sup>th</sup> Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW)/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) meeting in November 2018. The assessment addressed several of the recommendations from the 57<sup>th</sup> SAW/SARC, including developing new maturity-at-age estimates for the coastal migratory stock and evaluating stock status definitions relative to uncertainty in biological reference points (NEFSC 2018a). The assessment also made progress on developing a spatially and temporally explicit catch-at-age model incorporating tag-based movement (migration) information. Although the Peer Review Panel did not accept the migration model for management use, it recommended continued work to improve the model for future assessments.

The accepted model is a forward projecting statistical catch-at-age (SCA) model which uses catch-at-age data and fishery-dependent and -independent survey indices to estimate annual population size and fishing mortality (NEFSC 2018b). Indices of abundance track relative changes in the population over time while catch data provide information on the scale of the population size. Age structure data (numbers of fish by age) provide additional information on recruitment (number of age-1 fish entering the population) and trends in mortality.

The biological reference points (BRPs) currently used for management are based on the 1995 estimate of female spawning stock biomass (SSB). The 1995 estimate of female SSB is used as the SSB threshold because many stock characteristics (such as an expanded age structure) were reached by this year and the stock was declared recovered. The SSB target is equal to 125% of SSB threshold. To estimate the associated fishing mortality (F) threshold and target, population projections were made by using a constant F and changing the value until the SSB threshold or target was achieved. For the 2018 benchmark, the BRP values have been updated. The benchmark incorporates the newly calibrated recreational catch estimates based on the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES), resulting in higher estimates of SSB and therefore higher estimates for the SSB threshold and target (refer to *Section III* for more information). The SSB threshold is estimated at 91,436 metric tons (202 million pounds), with an SSB target of 114,295 metric tons (252 million pounds). The new MRIP estimates did not have a large effect on the estimates of fishing mortality, and the updated F threshold and target values are very similar to the previous F reference points. The F threshold is estimated at 0.24, and the target is estimated at 0.20

Based on the results of the 2018 benchmark, Atlantic striped bass is overfished and experiencing overfishing. In 2017, female SSB was estimated at 68,476 metric tons (151 million pounds) which is below the SSB threshold (Figure 1). Female SSB declined steadily since the time series high in 2003 and has been below threshold since 2013. The recent decline in female SSB appears to be attributed to a period of low recruitment since about 2005 (Figure 1). However, the 2011, 2014, and 2015 year classes (representing the 2012, 2015, and 2016 age-1 recruitment estimates) were above average. Total F was estimated at or above F threshold in 13 of the last 15 years, and was estimated above threshold in 2017 at 0.31 (Figure 2).

### **III. Status of the Fishery in the Ocean and Chesapeake Bay**

In 2019, total Atlantic striped bass removals (commercial and recreational, including harvest, commercial discards and recreational release mortality) was estimated at 5.47 million fish, which is a 5% decrease relative to 2018 (Table 3; Figure 5). The recreational sector accounted for 87% of total removals by number. It should be noted that the recreational catch estimates reported here reflect the new, improved MRIP mail-based survey and are not directly comparable to FMP Review reports published prior to 2019.

The commercial fishery harvested 4.20 million pounds (650,511 fish) in 2019, which is a 12% decrease by weight relative to 2018 (4% increase by number) and may be attributed to poor fishery conditions as reported by fishermen in the ocean region (e.g., high catch of fish outside the legal size limits) (Table 4; Table 5). Harvest from Chesapeake Bay accounted for 66% of the total by weight; Maryland landed

37%, Virginia landed 25%, and Massachusetts landed 14% (Table 5; Figure 6). Additional harvest came from New York (9%), PRFC (8%), Rhode Island (3%), and Delaware (3%). The proportion of commercial harvest coming from Chesapeake Bay is much higher in numbers of fish; roughly 87% in 2019 (Table 6). This is because fish harvested in Chesapeake Bay have a lower average weight than fish harvested in ocean fisheries. Commercial dead discards were estimated at 78,990 fish<sup>5</sup>, which accounts for <2% of total removals in 2019 (Table 6).

Total recreational catch (harvest and live releases) was estimated at 30.9 million fish in 2019, which is an 8% decrease from 2018 (Table 7). Total recreational harvest (A+B1) in 2019 is estimated at 2.15 million fish (23.6 million pounds), and represents a 4% decrease relative to 2018 (<1% decrease by weight) (Table 8; Table 9). Maryland landed the largest proportion of recreational harvest in number of fish<sup>6</sup> (36%), followed by New York (23%), New Jersey (19%), Massachusetts (9%), and Rhode Island (5%) (Table 9). The proportion of recreational harvest in numbers from Chesapeake Bay was estimated at 38% in 2019, compared to 47% in 2018.

The vast majority of recreational striped bass catch is released alive either due to angler preference or regulation (i.e., undersized or already caught the bag limit) (Figure 7). The assessment assumes, based on previous studies, that 9% of fish that are released alive die as a result of being caught. In 2019, recreational anglers caught and released an estimated 28.8 million fish, of which 2.60 million are assumed to have died (Table 7). This represents an 8% decrease relative to 2018.

The PRT discussed that although recreational catch and harvest decreased at the coastwide level, the ocean and Chesapeake Bay regions experienced very different fishery conditions in 2019. The ocean region saw a 12% increase in harvest in numbers of fish, while the Bay experienced a 23% decrease compared to 2018 (Table 7). According to MRIP, the overall number of trips directed at striped bass (primary and secondary target) were similar from 2018 to 2019 (<1% decrease) on a coastwide scale. However, the Chesapeake Bay fishery experienced a 26% decrease (~683,000 fewer trips) in targeted trips in 2019. This suggests more favorable fishery conditions in the ocean compared to the Chesapeake Bay in 2019, and could reflect increased availability of fish from the strong 2014 and 2015 year classes to the ocean fishery.

#### **IV. Albemarle Sound and Roanoke River Management Area**

##### *Fishery Management Plan*

While striped bass in North Carolina's ocean waters are managed under the Interstate FMP, Addendum IV to Amendment 6 formally defers management of the A/R stock to the state of North Carolina using A/R stock-specific BRPs approved by the Board (NCDMF 2013, 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> Commercial dead discard estimates are derived via a generalized additive model (GAM), and are therefore re-estimated for the entire time series when a new year of data is added

<sup>6</sup> By weight, New York had the largest proportion of harvest (30%), followed by New Jersey (28%), Maryland (13%), Massachusetts (11%), and Rhode Island (10%) (Table 8).



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Estuarine striped bass in North Carolina are currently managed under Amendment 1 to the North Carolina Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and its subsequent revision and recent supplement (NCDMF 2013, 2014, 2019). It is a joint plan between the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (NCMFC) and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). Amendment 1, adopted in 2013, lays out separate management strategies for the Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River (A-R) stock and the estuarine (non-migratory) Central and Southern striped bass stocks in the Tar-Pamlico, Neuse, and Cape Fear rivers. Management programs in Amendment 1 utilize annual total allowable landings (TAL), daily possession limits, open and closed harvest seasons, gill net mesh size and yardage restrictions, seasonal attendance requirements, barbless hook requirements in some areas, minimum size limits, and slot limits to maintain a sustainable harvest and reduce regulatory discard mortality in all sectors. Amendment 1 also maintains the stocking regime in the central and southern systems and the harvest moratorium on striped bass in the Cape Fear River and its tributaries (NCDMF 2013). Striped bass fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean of North Carolina are managed under ASMFC’s Amendment 6 and subsequent addenda to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Striped Bass. Amendment 6 also requires North Carolina to inform the Commission of changes to striped bass management in the A-R System.

Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River Striped Bass Stocks

The most recent A/R benchmark stock-specific assessment utilized the ASAP3 statistical catch-at-age model. The model was peer reviewed by an outside panel of experts and approved for management use by the Board in October 2014. The benchmark assessment produced new BRPs and annual harvest quota to prevent overfishing. The model was most recently updated in 2016 with catch and index data through 2014 (Flowers and Godwin 2016). Based on results of the 2016 update, and in comparison to the BRPs below, A-R striped bass are not overfished and are not experiencing overfishing.

	<i>F</i>	<i>Female SSB</i>	<i>Total Allowable Landings (TAL)</i>
<b>Threshold</b>	0.41	785,150 lbs.	275,000 lb (split evenly between recreational and commercial sectors)
<b>Target</b>	0.33	969,496 lbs.	

In 2014, female SSB was estimated at 2,024,583 pounds which is above the peak in 2003 and the highest value in the time series (Figure 3). In 2014, F was estimated at 0.06 which is below both the F threshold and target (Figure 4). Caution should be used, however, when evaluating the estimates of SSB and F in the terminal year. The estimated SSB value in 2014 is likely an overestimate based on past years of retrospective bias exhibited by the model. Subsequent assessments, incorporating additional years of data, and possibly a revised stock-recruit relationship, will likely reduce the magnitude of the 2014 value (Flowers and Godwin 2016). A/R striped bass experienced a period of unusually strong recruitment (number of age-1 fish entering the population) from 1994-2001 followed by a period of lower recruitment from 2002-2014 (Figure 3).

Overall, the trends in the A-R stock abundance are similar to the Atlantic striped bass stock described above, with a steady decline in female SSB since about 2003. Total stock abundance reached its peak in the early 2000s, declined gradually through about 2009, and then increasing slightly beginning in 2011 through the terminal year. A new benchmark assessment for the A-R stock, which included data through 2017, was peer reviewed by a panel of independent experts via webinar in June, 2020. However, the final assessment and peer-review reports were not available at the time of the report.

Albemarle Sound and Roanoke River Atlantic Striped Bass Fisheries

In 2019, total commercial and recreational harvest in the Albemarle Sound Management Area (ASMA) and the Roanoke River Management Area (RRMA) was 226,886 pounds (59,992 fish). Commercial harvest in the ASMA was 137,156 pounds (33,137 fish). Recreational harvest in the ASMA was 36,351 pounds (10,723 fish), and recreational harvest in the RRMA was 53,379 pounds (16,582 fish).

**V. Status of Research and Monitoring**

Amendment 6 and its Addenda I-IV set the regulatory and monitoring measures for the coastwide striped bass fishery in 2019. Amendment 6 requires certain states to implement fishery-dependent monitoring programs for striped bass. All states with commercial fisheries or substantial recreational fisheries are required to define the catch and effort composition of these fisheries. Additionally, all states with a commercial fishery must implement a commercial harvest tagging program pursuant to Addendum III to Amendment 6.

Amendment 6 also requires certain states to monitor the striped bass population independent of the fisheries. Juvenile abundance surveys are required from Maine (Kennebec River), New York (Hudson River), New Jersey (Delaware River), Maryland (Chesapeake Bay tributaries), Virginia (Chesapeake Bay tributaries), and North Carolina (Albemarle Sound). Spawning stock sampling is mandatory for New York (Hudson River), Pennsylvania (Delaware River), Delaware (Delaware River), Maryland (Upper Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River), Virginia (Rappahannock River and James River), and North Carolina (Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River). Amendment 6 requires NOAA Fisheries, USFWS, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina to continue their tagging programs, which provide data used to determine survivorship and migration patterns.

**VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues**

Coastal Commercial Quota

In 2019, the ocean commercial quota was 2,810,275 pounds and was not exceeded. Table 10 contains state-specific quotas and harvest that occurred in 2019, and final 2020 quotas per Addendum VI and approved conservation equivalency programs.

Chesapeake Bay Commercial Quota

In 2019, the Chesapeake Bay-wide quota was 3,120,247 pounds and was allocated to Maryland, the PRFC, and Virginia based on historical harvest. In 2019, the Bay-wide quota was not exceeded, however, Maryland exceeded its allocation by 3,274 pounds<sup>7</sup> which is deducted from its 2020 quota. Table 10 contains jurisdiction-specific quotas and harvest that occurred in 2019 for Chesapeake Bay, and final 2020 quotas. In 2019, commercial harvest from Chesapeake Bay accounted for 66% of total commercial landings by weight, and averaged 61% annually under Addendum IV (2015-2019).

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<sup>7</sup> MD indicated that due to COVID-19, an internal audit of 2019 commercial landings has not been completed, therefore, landings are considered preliminary. Any changes to the final estimate will be reported to ASMFC, and Maryland will adjust the 2020 quota accordingly.

Chesapeake Bay Spring Harvest of Migrant Striped Bass

Historically, recreational fishermen in Chesapeake Bay are permitted to take adult migrant fish during a limited seasonal fishery, commonly referred to as the Spring Trophy Fishery. From 1993 to 2007 the fishery operated under a quota. Beginning in 2008, the Board approved non-quota management until stock assessment indicates that corrective action is necessary to reduce F on the coastal stock. The Spring Trophy Fishery is currently managed via bag limits and minimum sizes (see *Appendix 1* for state specific measures). The Commonwealth of Virginia closed the spring trophy season beginning in 2019.

The 2019 estimate of migrant fish harvested during the Maryland trophy season was 13,633 fish (937 fish by charter boats; 12,696 fish by private anglers), which is a 20% decrease compared to 2018.

Wave-1 Recreational Harvest Estimates

Evidence suggests that North Carolina, Virginia, and possibly other states have had sizeable wave-1 (January/February) recreational striped bass fisheries beginning in 1996 (NEFSC 2018b). MRIP, formerly the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), has sampled for striped bass in North Carolina during wave-1 since 2004 (other states are not currently covered during wave-1). Virginia harvest in wave-1 is estimated for stock assessment via the ratio of landings and tag returns in wave-6 and regression analysis (refer to the methods described in NEFSC 2018a for more detail).

However, based on fishery-independent data collected by NCDMF, ASMFC and USFWS, striped bass distributions on their overwintering grounds during December through February has changed significantly since the mid-2000s. The migratory portion of the stocks has been well offshore in the EEZ (>3 miles) effecting both Virginia's and North Carolina's striped bass winter ocean fisheries in recent years. Furthermore, North Carolina has reported zero recreational striped bass harvest during wave-1 in the ocean for 2012-2019, and Virginia has reported zero ocean harvest for five of the last six years. Similarly, North Carolina's commercial fishery has reported zero striped bass landings from the ocean during that time.

Addendum II: Juvenile Abundance Index Analysis

The following states are required to conduct striped bass young-of-year juvenile abundance index (JAI) surveys on an annual basis: Maine for the Kennebec River; New York for the Hudson River; New Jersey for the Delaware River; Maryland for the Maryland Chesapeake Bay tributaries; Virginia for the Virginia Chesapeake Bay tributaries; and North Carolina for the A-R stock.

The PRT and the Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) annually review trends in all required JAIs. The definition of recruitment failure is a value that is below 75% (the first quartile, or Q1) of all values in a fixed time series appropriate to each juvenile abundance index (see *Addendum II* for details). If any survey's JAI falls below their respective Q1 for three consecutive years, appropriate action should be recommended by the TC to the Management Board.

For the 2020 review of JAIs, the analysis evaluates the 2017, 2018, and 2019 JAI values. No state met the criteria for recruitment failure in 2019 (Figure 8). However, North Carolina's JAI value was below its respective Q1 in 2018 and 2019, while Maine's and New York's values were below their respective Q1

values in 2019. New Jersey's and Virginia's JAI values in 2019 were both right at their respective long-term average, and Maryland's 2019 JAI was below its long-term average (Figure 8).

Addendum III: Commercial Fish Tagging Program

Addendum III to Amendment 6 includes compliance requirements for monitoring commercial fishery harvest tagging programs. In 2019, all states implemented commercial tagging programs consistent with the requirements of Addendum III. Table 11 describes commercial tagging programs by state.

Law Enforcement Reporting

States are asked to report and summarize law enforcement cases that occurred the previous season in annual compliance reports. In 2019, reported law enforcement cases (e.g., the number of warnings and citations) were similar to those reported in previous years. The most common violations were recreationally harvested fish under the legal size limit and possessing fish in excess of the bag limit. Several states indicated that enforcement and angler education initiatives will increase in 2020 in response to Addendum VI, and new circle hook mandates.

**VII. Plan Review Team Comments and Recommendations**

- In 2019, and based on annual state compliance reports (ASMFC 2020), the PRT determined that all states implemented a management and monitoring program consistent with the provisions of Amendment 6 and Addenda I – IV.
- A summary of 2019 fishery regulations by state is provided in Table 1 and Table 2. Each state's commercial tag monitoring program is described in Table 11, and state compliance with fishery-independent and –dependent monitoring requirements are summarized in Table 12.
- In 2019, Virginia reduced the recreational bag limit in the Chesapeake Bay fishery to 1 fish/day, and implemented a 28" maximum size limit for the Chesapeake Bay spring fishery, and a 36" maximum size limit for the ocean and Chesapeake Bay fall fisheries. These actions are considered more restrictive than what is required by the FMP, therefore, prior Board approval was not required.
- New York's and Delaware's 2020 recreational regulations permit harvest of fish less than or equal to the maximum size limit. Delaware is in the process of adjusting its regulations so that fish equal to the maximum size limit would be released (the adjusted language will take effect in August).
- The PRT notes that while the New York spawning stock monitoring program in the Hudson River does meet the FMP's fishery-independent monitoring requirements, it does not provide an index of relative abundance to characterize the Hudson River stock which was identified as a high priority research recommendation at SAW 66.
- Finally, the PRT notes that many fishery monitoring efforts in 2020 have been (or will be) impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including fishery-independent surveys, APAIS interviews, and sampling of commercial and recreational catch.

## VIII. Research Recommendations

The following categorized and prioritized research recommendations were developed by the 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment Subcommittee and the 66<sup>th</sup> SARC:

### ***Fishery-Dependent Priorities***

#### *High*

- Continue collection of paired scale and otolith samples, particularly from larger striped bass, to facilitate development of otolith-based age-length keys and scale-otolith conversion matrices.
- Develop studies to provide information on gear specific (including recreational fishery) discard mortality rates and to determine the magnitude of bycatch mortality<sup>8</sup>.
- Conduct study to directly estimate commercial discards in the Chesapeake Bay.
- Collect sex ratio information on the catch and improve methods for determining population sex ratio for use in estimates of female SSB and biological reference points.

#### *Moderate*

- Improve estimates of striped bass harvest removals in coastal areas during wave 1 and in inland waters of all jurisdictions year round.

### ***Fishery-Independent Priorities***

#### *High*

- Develop an index of relative abundance from the Hudson River Spawning Stock Biomass survey to better characterize the Delaware Bay/Hudson River stock.
- Improve the design of existing spawning stock surveys for Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay.

#### *Moderate*

- Develop a refined and cost-efficient, fisheries-independent coastal population index for striped bass stocks.
- Collect sex ratio information from fishery-independent sources to better characterize the population sex ratio.

### ***Modeling/Quantitative Priorities***

#### *High*

- Develop better estimates of tag reporting rates; for example, through a coastwide tagging study.
- Investigate changes in tag quality and potential impacts on reporting rate.
- Explore methods for combining tag results from programs releasing fish from different areas on different dates.
- Develop field or modeling studies to aid in estimation of natural mortality and other factors affecting the tag return rate.
- Compare M and F estimates from acoustic tagging programs to conventional tagging programs.

#### *Moderate*

- Examine methods to estimate temporal variation in natural mortality.

#### *Low*

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<sup>8</sup> Literature search and some modeling work completed.

- Evaluate truncated matrices to reduce bias in years with no tag returns and covariate based tagging models to account for potential differences from size or sex or other covariates.

### ***Life History and Biology***

#### ***High***

- Continue in-depth analysis of migrations, stock compositions, sex ratio, etc. using mark-recapture data<sup>9</sup>.
- Continue evaluation of striped bass dietary needs and relation to health condition.
- Continue analysis to determine linkages between the Mycobacteriosis outbreak in Chesapeake Bay and sex ratio of Chesapeake spawning stock, Chesapeake juvenile production, and recruitment success into coastal fisheries.

#### ***Moderate***

- Examine causes of different tag based survival estimates among programs estimating similar segments of the population.
- Continue to conduct research to determine limiting factors affecting recruitment and possible density implications.
- Conduct study to calculate the emigration rates from producer areas now that population levels are high and conduct multi-year study to determine inter-annual variation in emigration rates.

#### ***Striped Bass Research Priorities Identified as Being Met or Well in Progress***

- Evaluate to what extent rising natural mortality among Chesapeake Bay striped bass affects the existing F and female SSB thresholds, which are based on a fixed M assumption ( $M = 0.15$ ).
- Develop simulation models to look at the implications of overfishing definitions relative to development of a striped bass population that will provide “quality” fishing. Quality fishing must first be defined.
- Evaluate the stock status definitions relative to uncertainty in biological reference points.
- Develop a method to integrate catch-at-age and tagging models to produce a single estimate of F and stock status<sup>10</sup>.
- Develop a spatially and temporally explicit catch-at-age model incorporating tag based movement information<sup>11</sup>.
- Develop maturity ogives applicable to coastal migratory stocks.

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<sup>9</sup> Ongoing through Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise and striped bass charter boat tagging trips. See Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise 20 Year Report.

<sup>10</sup> Model developed, but the tagging data overwhelms the model. Issues remain with proper weighting.

<sup>11</sup> Model developed with Chesapeake Bay and the rest of the coast as two stocks. External analysis of tagging data is used to inform the model but is not explicitly incorporated.

## IX. References

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**X. Tables and Figures**

Table 1. Summary of Atlantic Striped bass commercial regulations in 2019. Source: 2020 State Compliance Reports. Minimum sizes and slot size limits are in total length (TL). \*commercial quota reallocated to recreational bonus fish program.

STATE	SIZE LIMITS (TL) and TRIP LIMITS	SEASONAL QUOTA	OPEN SEASON
<b>ME</b>	Commercial fishing prohibited		
<b>NH</b>	Commercial fishing prohibited		
<b>MA</b>	34" minimum size; no gaffing undersized fish. 15 fish/day with commercial boat permit; 2 fish/day with rod and reel permit.	869,813 lbs. Hook & Line only.	6.23 until quota reached, Mondays and Thursdays only. July 3rd, July 4th and Labor Day closed.
<b>RI</b>	Floating fish trap: 26" minimum size unlimited possession limit until 70% of quota reached, then 500 lbs. per licensee per day	Total: 181,572 lbs., split 39:61 between the trap and general category. Gill netting prohibited.	4.1 – 12.31
	General category (mostly rod & reel): 34" min. 5 fish/vessel/day limit.		5.20-6.30, 7.1-12.31. Closed Fridays and Saturdays during both seasons.
<b>CT*</b>	Commercial fishing prohibited; bonus program: 22" to <28" slot size limit (1 fish/year)	17,813 lbs. (3,018 fish)	5.1 – 12.31 (voucher required)
<b>NY</b>	28"-38" slot size; (Hudson River closed to commercial harvest)	795,795 lbs. Pound Nets, Gill Nets (6-8" stretched mesh), Hook & Line.	6.1 – 12.15. Limited entry permit only.
<b>NJ*</b>	Commercial fishing prohibited; bonus program: 1 fish at 24" to <28" slot size limit	215,912 lbs.	9.1 – 12.31 (permit required)
<b>PA</b>	Commercial fishing prohibited		
<b>DE</b>	Gill Net: 20" min in DE Bay/River during spring season. 28" in all other waters/seasons.	Gill Net: 128,385 lbs. No fixed nets in DE River.	2.15-5.31 (2.15-3.30 for Nanticoke River) & 11.15-12.31; drift nets only 2.15-28 & 5.1-31;
	Hook and Line: 28" min	6,757 lbs.	Hook and Line: 4.1–12.31, 200 lbs/day trip limit



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(Table 1 continued – Summary of commercial regulations in 2019).

STATE	SIZE LIMITS (TL) and TRIP LIMITS	SEASONAL QUOTA	OPEN SEASON
MD	Chesapeake Bay and Rivers: 18–36"	1,471,888 lbs. (part of Bay-wide quota)	Bay Pound Net: 6.1-12.31, Mon-Sat Bay Haul Seine: 6.1-12.31, Mon-Fri Bay Hook & Line: 6.4-12.31, Mon-Thu Bay Drift Gill Net: 1.1-2.28, 12.1-12.31, Mon-Fri
	Ocean: 24" minimum	Ocean: 90,727 lbs.	1.1-5.31, 10.1-12.31, Mon- Fri
PRFC	18" min all year; 36" max 2.15–3.25 (and 1.1-3.1 for H&L fisheries)	583,362 lbs. (part of Bay-wide quota).	Hook & Line: 1.1-3.25, 6.1-12.31 Pound Net & Other: 2.15-3.25, 6.1-12.15 Gill Net: 1.1-3.25, 11.15-12.31 Misc. Gear: 2.15-3.25, 6.1-12.15
VA	Bay and Rivers: 18" min; 28" max size limit 3.26–6.15	1,064,997 lbs. (part of Bay-wide quota)	1.16-12.31
	Ocean: 28" min	138,640 lbs.	
NC	Ocean: 28" min	360,360 lbs. (split between gear types). Number of fish allocated to each permit holder.	Seine fishery was not opened Gill net fishery was not opened Trawl fishery was not opened

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Table 2. Summary of Atlantic Striped bass recreational regulations in 2019. Source: 2020 State Compliance Reports. Minimum sizes and slot size limits are in total length (TL).

STATE	SIZE LIMITS (TL)/REGION	BAG LIMIT	GEAR/FISHING RESTRICTIONS	OPEN SEASON
ME	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	Hook & line only; circle hooks only when using live bait	All year, except spawning areas are closed 12.1-4.30 and C&R only 5.1-6.30
NH	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	Gaffing and culling prohibited	All year
MA	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	Hook & line only; no high-grading; no gaffing undersized fish.	All year
RI	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	None	All year
CT	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	Spearing and gaffing prohibited	All year
NY	Ocean and DE River: 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	Angling only. Spearing permitted in ocean waters. C&R during closed season.	Ocean: 4.15-12.15 Delaware River: All year
	HR: 18-28" slot limit, or >40"	1 fish/day	Angling only. No C&R during closed season.	Hudson River: 4.1-11.30
NJ	1 fish at 28 to < 43", and 1 fish ≥ 43"		Closed 1.1 – Feb 28 in all waters except in the Atlantic Ocean, and 4.1-5.31 in the lower DE River and tribs	
PA	Upstream from Calhoun St Bridge: 1 fish at ≥ 28" minimum size			
	Downstream from Calhoun St Bridge: 1 fish at ≥ 28" minimum size, 2 fish at 21- <25" slot size limit from 4.1 – 5.31			
DE	28" min, no harvest 38-43" (inclusive).	2 fish/day	Hook & line, spear (for divers) only. Circle hooks required in spawning season.	All year. C&R only 4.1-5.31 in spawning grounds. 20"-25" slot from 7.1-8.31 in DE River, Bay & tribs,

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(Table 2 continued – Summary of recreational regulations in 2019).

STATE	SIZE LIMITS/REGION	BAG LIMIT	GEAR/FISHING RESTRICTIONS	OPEN SEASON
MD	Ocean: 28-38" slot, or >44"	2 fish/day		All year
	Chesapeake Bay and tribs <sup>^</sup>	C&R only	no eels; no stinger hooks; barbless hooks when trolling; circle or J-hooks when using live bait; max 6 lines when trolling	1.1-2.28, 3.1-4.19
	Chesapeake Bay: 35" min	1 fish/day	Geographic restrictions apply	4.20-5.15
	Chesapeake Bay and tribs: 2 fish/day, 19" minimum size and only 1 fish >28"		All Bay and tribs open; circle hooks if chumming or live-lining; no treble hooks when bait fishing	6.1-12.15
PRFC	Spring Trophy: 1 fish/day, 35" minimum size		No more than two hooks or sets of hooks for each rod or line	4.20-5.15
	Summer and Fall: 2 fish/day, 20" min and only 1 fish >28"			5.16-12.31
DC	2 fish/day, 20" min and only 1 fish >28"		Hook and line only	5.16-12.31
VA	Ocean: 28"-36" slot limit	1 fish/day	Hook & line, rod & reel, hand line only. No gaffing.	1.1-3.31, 5.16-12.31
	Ocean Spring Trophy: NO SPRING TROPHY SEASON			
	Chesapeake Bay Spring Trophy: NO SPRING TROPHY SEASON			
	Bay Spring: 20"-28" slot limit	1 fish/day		5.16-6.15
	Bay Fall: 20 - 36"	1 fish/day		10.4-12.31
NC	≥ 28" minimum size	1 fish/day	No gaffing allowed	All year

<sup>^</sup> Susquehanna Flats: C&R only Jan 1 – May 3; 1 fish at 19"-26" slot May 16 – May 31. Northeast River: C&R only May 16 – May 31

Table 3. Total removals (harvest plus discards/release mortality) of Atlantic striped bass by sector in numbers of fish, 1990-2019. Note: Harvest is from ACCSP/MRIP, discards/release mortality is from ASMFC. Estimates exclude inshore harvest from North Carolina.

Year	Commercial		Recreational		Total Removals
	Harvest	Discards*	Harvest	Release Mortality	
1990	93,888	46,912	578,897	442,811	1,162,508
1991	158,491	88,486	798,260	715,478	1,760,714
1992	256,476	184,638	869,779	937,611	2,248,505
1993	314,483	113,410	789,037	812,404	2,029,333
1994	325,401	162,970	1,055,523	1,360,872	2,904,765
1995	537,412	189,819	2,287,578	2,010,689	5,025,498
1996	854,094	263,510	2,487,422	2,600,526	6,205,552
1997	1,076,460	337,085	2,774,981	2,969,781	7,158,307
1998	1,215,219	353,224	2,915,390	3,259,133	7,742,966
1999	1,223,572	339,103	3,123,496	3,140,905	7,827,075
2000	1,216,812	208,415	3,802,477	3,044,203	8,271,906
2001	931,412	175,656	4,052,474	2,449,599	7,609,141
2002	928,085	191,561	4,005,084	2,792,200	7,916,931
2003	854,326	130,646	4,781,402	2,848,445	8,614,819
2004	879,768	158,311	4,553,027	3,665,234	9,256,339
2005	970,403	141,415	4,480,802	3,441,928	9,034,549
2006	1,047,648	153,276	4,883,961	4,812,332	10,897,218
2007	1,015,226	159,830	3,944,679	2,944,253	8,063,988
2008	1,027,837	107,778	4,381,186	2,391,200	7,908,000
2009	1,049,959	130,819	4,700,222	1,942,061	7,823,061
2010	1,031,430	133,970	5,388,440	1,760,759	8,314,599
2011	944,777	85,848	5,006,358	1,482,029	7,519,013
2012	870,606	197,412	4,046,299	1,847,880	6,962,196
2013	784,379	111,580	5,157,760	2,393,425	8,447,144
2014	750,263	113,080	4,033,746	2,172,342	7,069,431
2015	621,952	88,497	3,085,725	2,307,133	6,103,307
2016	606,087	87,827	3,500,434	2,981,430	7,175,777
2017	592,670	91,338	2,939,777	3,420,645	7,044,430
2018	625,177	90,092	2,244,766	2,826,667	5,786,702
2019*	650,511	78,990	2,150,935	2,589,045	5,469,481

\* Commercial dead discard estimates are derived via a generalized additive model (GAM), and are therefore re-estimated for the entire time series when a new year of data is added

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Table 4. Total harvest of Atlantic striped bass by sector, 1990-2019. Note: Harvest is from ACCSP/MRIP. Estimates exclude inshore harvest from North Carolina.

Year	Numbers of Fish			Pounds		
	Commercial	Recreational	Total	Commercial	Recreational	Total
1990	93,888	578,897	672,785	715,902	8,207,515	8,923,417
1991	158,491	798,260	956,751	966,096	10,640,601	11,606,697
1992	256,476	869,779	1,126,255	1,508,064	11,921,967	13,430,031
1993	314,483	789,037	1,103,520	1,800,176	10,163,767	11,963,943
1994	325,401	1,055,523	1,380,924	1,877,197	14,737,911	16,615,108
1995	537,412	2,287,578	2,824,990	3,775,586	27,072,321	30,847,907
1996	854,094	2,487,422	3,341,516	4,822,874	28,625,685	33,448,559
1997	1,076,460	2,774,981	3,851,441	6,077,751	30,616,093	36,693,844
1998	1,215,219	2,915,390	4,130,609	6,552,111	29,603,199	36,155,310
1999	1,223,572	3,123,496	4,347,068	6,474,290	33,564,988	40,039,278
2000	1,216,812	3,802,477	5,019,289	6,719,521	34,050,817	40,770,338
2001	931,412	4,052,474	4,983,886	6,266,769	39,263,154	45,529,923
2002	928,085	4,005,084	4,933,169	6,138,180	41,840,025	47,978,205
2003	854,326	4,781,402	5,635,728	6,750,491	54,091,836	60,842,327
2004	879,768	4,553,027	5,432,795	7,317,897	53,031,074	60,348,971
2005	970,403	4,480,802	5,451,205	7,121,492	57,421,174	64,542,666
2006	1,047,648	4,883,961	5,931,609	6,568,970	50,674,431	57,243,401
2007	1,015,226	3,944,679	4,959,905	7,047,179	42,823,614	49,870,793
2008	1,027,837	4,381,186	5,409,023	7,190,701	56,665,318	63,856,019
2009	1,049,959	4,700,222	5,750,181	7,216,792	54,411,389	61,628,181
2010	1,031,430	5,388,440	6,419,870	6,996,713	61,431,360	68,428,073
2011	944,777	5,006,358	5,951,135	6,789,792	59,592,092	66,381,884
2012	870,606	4,046,299	4,916,905	6,516,868	53,256,619	59,773,487
2013	784,379	5,157,760	5,942,139	5,819,678	65,057,289	70,876,967
2014	750,263	4,033,746	4,784,009	5,937,949	47,948,610	53,886,559
2015	621,952	3,085,725	3,707,677	4,829,997	39,898,799	44,728,796
2016	606,087	3,500,434	4,106,521	4,831,442	43,671,532	48,502,974
2017	592,670	2,939,777	3,532,447	4,816,395	37,961,037	42,777,432
2018	625,177	2,244,766	2,869,943	4,770,463	23,069,028	27,839,491
2019	650,511	2,150,935	2,801,446	4,199,502	23,556,287	27,755,789

Table 5. Commercial harvest by region in pounds (x1000), 1995-2019. Source: ACCSP. ^Estimates exclude inshore harvest.

Year	Ocean								Chesapeake Bay				Grand Total
	MA	RI	NY	DE	MD	VA	NC^	Total	MD	PRFC	VA	Total	
1995	751.5	113.5	500.8	38.5	79.3	46.2	344.6	1,874.3	1,185.0	198.5	517.8	1,901.3	3,775.6
1996	695.9	122.6	504.4	120.5	75.7	165.9	58.2	1,743.2	1,487.7	346.8	1,245.2	3,079.7	4,822.9
1997	784.9	96.5	460.8	166.0	94.0	179.1	463.1	2,244.4	2,119.2	731.1	983.0	3,833.4	6,077.8
1998	810.1	94.7	485.9	163.7	84.6	375.0	273.0	2,287.0	2,426.7	726.2	1,112.2	4,265.1	6,552.1
1999	766.2	119.7	491.8	176.3	62.6	614.8	391.5	2,622.9	2,274.8	653.3	923.4	3,851.4	6,474.3
2000	796.2	111.8	542.7	145.1	149.7	932.7	162.4	2,840.5	2,261.8	666.0	951.2	3,879.0	6,719.5
2001	815.4	129.7	633.1	198.6	113.9	782.4	381.1	3,054.1	1,660.9	658.7	893.1	3,212.6	6,266.8
2002	924.9	129.2	518.6	146.2	93.2	710.2	441.0	2,963.2	1,759.4	521.0	894.4	3,174.9	6,138.2
2003	1,055.5	190.2	753.3	191.2	103.9	166.4	201.2	2,661.7	1,721.8	676.6	1,690.4	4,088.7	6,750.5
2004	1,214.2	215.1	741.7	176.5	134.2	161.3	605.4	3,248.3	1,790.3	772.3	1,507.0	4,069.6	7,317.9
2005	1,102.2	215.6	689.8	174.0	46.9	185.2	604.5	3,018.2	2,008.7	533.6	1,561.0	4,103.3	7,121.5
2006	1,322.3	5.1	688.4	184.2	91.1	195.0	74.2	2,560.2	2,116.3	673.5	1,219.0	4,008.7	6,569.0
2007	1,039.3	240.6	731.5	188.7	96.3	162.3	379.5	2,838.1	2,240.6	599.3	1,369.2	4,209.1	7,047.2
2008	1,160.3	245.9	653.1	188.7	118.0	163.1	288.4	2,817.6	2,208.0	613.8	1,551.3	4,373.1	7,190.7
2009	1,134.3	234.8	789.9	192.3	127.3	140.4	190.0	2,809.0	2,267.3	727.2	1,413.3	4,407.8	7,216.8
2010	1,224.5	248.9	786.8	185.4	44.8	127.8	276.4	2,894.7	2,105.8	683.2	1,313.0	4,102.0	6,996.7
2011	1,163.9	228.2	855.3	188.6	21.4	158.8	246.4	2,862.5	1,955.1	694.2	1,278.1	3,927.3	6,789.8
2012	1,218.5	239.9	683.8	194.3	77.6	170.8	7.3	2,592.0	1,851.4	733.8	1,339.6	3,924.8	6,516.9
2013	1,004.5	231.3	823.8	191.4	93.5	182.4	0.0	2,526.9	1,662.2	623.8	1,006.8	3,292.8	5,819.7
2014	1,138.5	216.9	531.5	167.9	120.9	183.7	0.0	2,359.4	1,805.7	603.4	1,169.4	3,578.5	5,937.9
2015	866.0	188.3	516.3	144.1	34.6	138.1	0.0	1,887.5	1,436.9	538.0	967.6	2,942.5	4,830.0
2016	938.7	174.7	575.0	136.5	19.7	139.2	0.0	1,983.9	1,425.5	519.8	902.3	2,847.5	4,831.4
2017	823.4	175.3	701.2	141.8	80.5	133.9	0.0	2,056.1	1,439.8	492.7	827.8	2,760.3	4,816.4
2018	753.7	176.6	617.2	155.0	79.8	134.2	0.0	1,916.6	1,424.3	478.6	951.0	2,853.9	4,770.5
2019	584.7	144.2	358.9	132.6	82.8	119.2	0.0	1,422.5	1,475.2	353.5	948.4	2,777.0	4,199.5

Table 6. Commercial harvest and discards by region in numbers of fish (x1000), 1995-2019. Source: harvest is from ACCSP, discards is from ASMFC. ^excludes inshore harvest.

Year	Ocean								Chesapeake Bay				Discards*			Grand Total Removals
	MA	RI	NY	DE	MD	VA	NC^	Total	MD	PRFC	VA	Total	Ocean	Bay	Total	
1995	39.9	19.7	43.7	5.6	4.0	9.9	23.4	146.1	267.0	29.3	95.0	391.3	146.9	42.9	189.8	727.2
1996	37.3	18.6	40.5	20.7	9.0	14.1	3.3	143.5	486.2	46.2	178.2	710.6	172.7	90.8	263.5	1,117.6
1997	44.0	7.1	37.6	33.2	8.4	17.3	25.8	173.4	620.3	87.6	195.2	903.1	254.6	82.5	337.1	1,413.5
1998	44.3	8.8	45.1	31.4	10.3	41.1	14.2	195.2	729.6	93.3	197.1	1,020.1	317.1	36.1	353.2	1,568.4
1999	40.9	11.6	49.9	34.8	10.2	48.7	21.1	217.2	776.0	90.6	139.8	1,006.3	305.3	33.8	339.1	1,562.7
2000	42.1	9.4	54.9	25.2	13.3	54.5	6.5	205.8	787.6	91.5	132.0	1,011.0	176.8	31.7	208.4	1,425.2
2001	45.8	10.9	58.3	34.4	11.1	42.3	25.0	227.7	538.8	87.8	77.1	703.7	138.5	37.1	175.7	1,107.1
2002	49.8	11.7	47.1	30.4	10.2	38.8	23.2	211.3	571.7	80.3	64.7	716.8	146.8	44.8	191.6	1,119.6
2003	56.4	15.5	68.4	31.5	11.6	10.5	5.8	199.6	427.9	83.1	143.7	654.7	96.7	33.9	130.6	985.0
2004	63.6	16.0	70.4	28.4	14.1	10.4	31.0	233.9	447.0	92.6	106.3	645.9	110.0	48.3	158.3	1,038.1
2005	60.5	14.9	70.6	26.3	6.1	11.3	27.3	217.1	563.9	80.6	108.9	753.3	85.9	55.5	141.4	1,111.8
2006	70.5	15.4	73.6	30.2	10.9	11.5	2.7	214.9	645.1	92.3	95.4	832.7	98.2	55.1	153.3	1,200.9
2007	54.2	13.9	78.5	31.1	11.6	10.6	16.8	216.7	587.6	86.6	124.3	798.5	94.2	65.7	159.8	1,175.1
2008	61.1	16.6	73.3	31.9	14.0	10.8	13.4	221.0	580.7	82.0	144.1	806.8	63.2	44.5	107.8	1,135.6
2009	59.4	16.8	82.6	21.6	12.5	8.9	9.0	210.9	605.6	89.7	143.8	839.1	60.8	70.1	130.8	1,180.8
2010	60.4	15.7	82.4	19.8	5.4	9.4	13.7	206.7	579.2	90.6	154.9	824.7	41.0	93.0	134.0	1,165.4
2011	58.7	14.3	87.4	20.5	2.1	12.2	10.9	206.0	488.9	96.1	153.7	738.7	35.2	50.6	85.8	1,030.6
2012	61.5	15.0	67.1	15.7	6.9	10.8	0.3	177.3	465.6	90.6	137.0	693.3	25.6	171.8	197.4	1,068.0
2013	58.6	13.8	76.2	17.7	7.6	10.0	0.0	183.8	391.5	78.0	131.0	600.5	37.6	74.0	111.6	896.0
2014	58.0	10.5	52.9	14.9	8.5	10.0	0.0	154.8	362.2	81.5	151.8	595.5	47.6	65.5	113.1	863.3
2015	42.3	11.3	45.6	11.0	2.6	7.7	0.0	120.4	298.3	71.0	132.2	501.5	34.7	53.8	88.5	710.4
2016	48.0	11.7	51.0	8.8	1.2	7.6	0.0	128.3	284.9	70.7	122.2	477.8	42.0	45.8	87.8	693.9
2017	41.2	10.1	61.6	9.5	3.5	7.6	0.0	133.5	263.6	67.5	128.0	459.2	73.0	18.4	91.3	684.0
2018	37.8	10.1	52.2	11.4	3.5	6.9	0.0	121.9	286.4	68.5	148.4	503.3	54.3	38.8	93.1	718.3
2019*	29.6	7.3	29.6	8.2	3.3	6.3	0.0	84.2	356.7	60.6	149.0	566.3	21.4	57.5	79.0	729.5

\* Commercial dead discard estimates are derived via a generalized additive model (GAM), and are therefore re-estimated for the entire time series when a new year of data is added

Table 7. Total recreational catch, releases, and release mortality in numbers of fish by region (x1000), 1995-2019. Source: MRIP.  
 Estimates exclude inshore harvest from North Carolina.

Year	Harvest (A+B1)			Releases (B2)			Total Catch (A+B1+B2)			Release Mortality (9% of B2)		
	Ocean	Bay	Total	Ocean	Bay	Total	Ocean	Bay	Total	Ocean	Bay	Total
1995	1,260	1,028	2,288	16,587	5,754	22,341	17,847	6,782	24,629	1,493	518	2,011
1996	1,362	1,125	2,487	22,384	6,511	28,895	23,746	7,636	31,382	2,015	586	2,601
1997	1,514	1,261	2,775	22,819	10,178	32,998	24,333	11,439	35,773	2,054	916	2,970
1998	1,647	1,268	2,915	29,294	6,918	36,213	30,941	8,187	39,128	2,637	623	3,259
1999	1,758	1,366	3,123	26,139	8,760	34,899	27,897	10,125	38,022	2,353	788	3,141
2000	2,198	1,604	3,802	25,090	8,734	33,824	27,289	10,338	37,627	2,258	786	3,044
2001	2,758	1,294	4,052	21,073	6,145	27,218	23,831	7,440	31,270	1,897	553	2,450
2002	2,756	1,249	4,005	23,653	7,371	31,024	26,409	8,620	35,030	2,129	663	2,792
2003	3,124	1,658	4,781	20,678	10,971	31,649	23,802	12,628	36,431	1,861	987	2,848
2004	3,078	1,475	4,553	27,868	12,857	40,725	30,946	14,332	45,278	2,508	1,157	3,665
2005	3,182	1,299	4,481	28,663	9,580	38,244	31,845	10,879	42,724	2,580	862	3,442
2006	2,789	2,095	4,884	41,239	12,232	53,470	44,028	14,327	58,354	3,711	1,101	4,812
2007	2,327	1,618	3,945	25,135	7,579	32,714	27,462	9,196	36,659	2,262	682	2,944
2008	3,025	1,356	4,381	21,878	4,691	26,569	24,904	6,046	30,950	1,969	422	2,391
2009	2,898	1,803	4,700	16,740	4,838	21,578	19,638	6,641	26,279	1,507	435	1,942
2010	3,906	1,483	5,388	13,606	5,957	19,564	17,512	7,440	24,952	1,225	536	1,761
2011	3,617	1,389	5,006	12,644	3,823	16,467	16,261	5,212	21,473	1,138	344	1,482
2012	3,071	975	4,046	11,242	9,290	20,532	14,314	10,265	24,578	1,012	836	1,848
2013	3,723	1,435	5,158	19,463	7,131	26,594	23,186	8,565	31,751	1,752	642	2,393
2014	2,276	1,758	4,034	15,107	9,031	24,137	17,382	10,789	28,171	1,360	813	2,172
2015	1,770	1,316	3,086	15,419	10,216	25,635	17,189	11,532	28,721	1,388	919	2,307
2016	1,817	1,683	3,500	17,794	15,333	33,127	19,611	17,016	36,627	1,601	1,380	2,981
2017	1,738	1,202	2,940	28,951	9,045	37,996	30,689	10,247	40,936	2,606	814	3,420
2018	1,195	1,050	2,245	22,739	8,669	31,407	23,933	9,719	33,652	2,046	780	2,827
2019	1,342	809	2,151	21,131	7,636	28,767	22,473	8,445	30,918	1,902	687	2,589



Table 8. Recreational harvest by region in pounds (x1000), 1995-2019. Source: MRIP. ^Estimates exclude inshore harvest.

Year	Ocean												Chesapeake Bay			Grand Total
	ME	NH	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC^	Total	MD	VA	Total	
1995	83	127	2,739	1,049	1,331	5,594	8,587	301	0.0	141	232	20,184	3,115	3,773	6,889	27,072
1996	95	183	2,983	1,626	1,405	10,739	3,959	795	0.0	812	392	22,990	2,789	2,847	5,636	28,626
1997	223	538	5,133	1,997	2,263	8,543	2,179	374	0.0	1,096	865	23,211	3,203	4,203	7,405	30,616
1998	305	262	7,359	1,544	1,807	4,889	4,182	645	579	545	636	22,754	3,023	3,826	6,849	29,603
1999	196	181	4,995	1,904	1,327	7,414	9,473	312	3.8	110	339	26,256	2,323	4,986	7,309	33,565
2000	347	109	4,863	2,008	890	7,053	9,768	925	0.0	416	277	26,656	3,503	3,892	7,395	34,051
2001	446	334	7,188	2,044	1,101	5,058	12,314	695	314	382	1,082	30,959	2,928	5,376	8,304	39,263
2002	775	322	10,261	2,708	1,251	5,975	9,621	589	0.0	1,135	998	33,634	2,643	5,563	8,206	41,840
2003	458	466	10,252	4,052	2,666	10,788	12,066	763	14	392	966	42,882	5,246	5,964	11,210	54,092
2004	554	268	9,329	2,460	2,229	6,437	13,303	870	57	1,067	6,656	43,230	4,860	4,941	9,801	53,031
2005	546	384	7,541	3,155	3,133	11,637	14,289	680	7.7	487	3,947	45,808	7,753	3,860	11,614	57,421
2006	610	244	6,787	1,569	2,854	9,845	12,716	586	2.8	921	2,975	39,109	6,494	5,071	11,565	50,674
2007	422	93	7,010	2,077	2,786	10,081	8,390	207	0.0	516	1,965	33,547	5,249	4,027	9,277	42,824
2008	607	182	8,424	970	2,273	18,000	12,407	847	0.0	1,690	750	46,150	5,639	4,877	10,515	56,665
2009	781	222	9,410	2,185	1,458	7,991	17,040	940	138	48	187	40,399	8,672	5,340	14,012	54,411
2010	218	238	9,959	2,102	2,323	18,190	17,454	895	107	206	1,198	52,891	6,482	2,059	8,541	61,431
2011	245	659	11,953	3,066	981	13,151	15,715	605	8.6	308	4,467	51,157	6,220	2,214	8,435	59,592
2012	152	432	14,941	2,096	1,835	13,096	11,551	644	21	1.7	0.0	44,768	3,819	4,670	8,488	53,257
2013	331	831	9,025	4,428	4,236	16,819	19,451	1,073	1,051	67	0.0	57,313	5,137	2,607	7,744	65,057
2014	423	203	7,965	3,402	2,665	13,998	8,886	381	159	0.0	0.0	38,083	8,877	989	9,866	47,949
2015	132	202	7,799	1,394	2,585	8,695	9,982	340	28	0.0	0.0	31,156	7,786	957	8,743	39,899
2016	189	191	3,731	1,776	912	12,053	12,790	86	7.2	0.0	0.0	31,735	10,912	1,024	11,936	43,672
2017	318	394	5,664	1,655	1,560	8,885	10,880	666	0.0	1.8	0.0	30,024	7,309	627	7,937	37,961
2018	142	130	4,925	1,121	1,165	3,453	7,012	33	0.0	0.0	0.0	17,982	4,683	404	5,087	23,069
2019	415	291	2,698	2,300	685	7,072	6,674	44	7.3	0.0	0.0	20,187	3,145	224	3,370	23,556

Table 9. Recreational harvest by region in numbers of fish (x1000), 1995-2019. Source: MRIP. ^Estimates exclude inshore harvest.

Year	Ocean												Chesapeake Bay			Grand Total
	ME	NH	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC^	Total	MD	VA	Total	
1995	4.0	7.4	124.3	70.9	75.8	250.3	671.4	25.8	0.1	13.4	16.5	1,259.8	491.1	536.7	1,027.7	2,287.6
1996	4.1	11.0	156.6	100.6	95.9	511.6	301.2	59.7	0.0	89.6	31.7	1,362.0	564.2	561.3	1,125.5	2,487.4
1997	43.0	29.9	365.6	124.7	149.0	450.5	171.2	29.1	0.0	91.1	60.1	1,514.1	552.4	708.4	1,260.8	2,775.0
1998	65.3	14.8	500.9	91.1	114.1	383.8	289.2	51.0	24.3	71.3	41.2	1,647.0	596.2	672.2	1,268.4	2,915.4
1999	37.5	9.9	327.1	116.6	88.2	450.9	657.1	28.3	1.6	14.1	26.4	1,757.8	530.9	834.8	1,365.7	3,123.5
2000	77.3	6.0	306.2	156.8	84.0	494.6	939.8	88.3	0.0	27.2	18.1	2,198.3	810.9	793.3	1,604.2	3,802.5
2001	91.9	23.5	551.0	149.8	78.2	364.2	1,267.5	70.6	64.1	36.7	60.7	2,758.1	513.3	781.1	1,294.4	4,052.5
2002	135.2	28.1	723.5	181.5	92.5	439.3	957.6	65.7	0.0	76.4	56.3	2,756.1	464.4	784.6	1,249.0	4,005.1
2003	99.7	41.3	797.2	226.4	181.7	678.4	942.8	75.7	0.9	29.3	50.4	3,123.8	816.0	841.6	1,657.6	4,781.4
2004	118.3	22.1	666.7	159.6	134.5	458.1	1,042.1	66.6	11.0	75.9	323.2	3,078.1	657.5	817.4	1,474.9	4,553.0
2005	118.3	35.5	536.1	195.6	202.6	854.6	958.1	48.8	3.6	34.2	194.9	3,182.2	815.5	483.1	1,298.6	4,480.8
2006	140.9	20.9	483.2	129.3	168.3	614.8	972.2	44.5	0.4	80.6	134.2	2,789.0	1,342.0	753.0	2,094.9	4,884.0
2007	95.5	8.1	471.9	135.8	163.9	602.8	722.2	17.2	0.0	28.0	81.8	2,327.1	1,127.3	490.3	1,617.6	3,944.7
2008	133.4	11.9	514.1	73.4	132.8	1,169.9	791.0	67.7	0.0	94.4	36.9	3,025.4	779.7	576.1	1,355.8	4,381.2
2009	146.5	17.3	695.0	138.4	100.3	574.2	1,141.5	64.8	10.2	3.0	6.5	2,897.7	1,094.4	708.1	1,802.5	4,700.2
2010	37.3	21.4	808.2	162.0	170.2	1,449.0	1,091.4	61.4	12.5	25.3	67.1	3,905.9	1,139.3	343.2	1,482.6	5,388.4
2011	48.5	54.2	873.5	202.2	91.1	1,005.3	1,038.9	43.7	0.8	51.2	207.6	3,617.1	1,112.1	277.2	1,389.3	5,006.4
2012	31.4	37.3	1,010.6	130.7	137.1	927.5	742.4	51.3	2.9	0.3	0.0	3,071.5	716.7	258.1	974.8	4,046.3
2013	73.3	63.2	658.7	308.3	269.6	902.5	1,324.2	70.6	48.4	4.4	0.0	3,723.2	1,136.7	297.9	1,434.5	5,157.8
2014	86.4	16.5	523.5	172.0	131.8	804.5	501.9	26.2	12.6	0.0	0.0	2,275.5	1,627.0	131.2	1,758.2	4,033.7
2015	14.4	10.0	485.3	67.0	140.8	406.8	600.3	41.9	3.5	0.0	0.0	1,770.1	1,108.0	207.7	1,315.7	3,085.7
2016	14.2	17.6	230.1	128.4	63.3	697.7	659.6	5.9	0.5	0.0	0.0	1,817.2	1,545.1	138.1	1,683.2	3,500.4
2017	22.0	37.7	392.3	59.8	94.9	477.3	625.9	27.8	0.0	0.1	0.0	1,737.8	1,091.6	110.3	1,201.9	2,939.8
2018	16.0	13.4	389.5	39.2	85.5	181.7	465.3	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,194.6	993.3	56.8	1,050.1	2,244.8
2019	38.0	14.7	195.6	104.1	67.1	498.0	412.9	10.9	1.0	0.0	0.0	1,342.2	764.1	44.6	808.7	2,150.9

Table 10. Results of 2019 commercial quota accounting in pounds. Source: 2020 state compliance reports. 2019 quota was based on Addendum IV, and 2020 quota Addendum VI and approved conservation equivalency programs.

State	2019 Quota	2019 harvest	overage	Add VI (base)	2020 Quota^
<b>Ocean</b>					
Maine*	188	-	-	154	154
New Hampshire*	4,313	-	-	3,537	3,537
Massachusetts	869,813	584,743	0	713,247	735,240
Rhode Island	181,572	144,227	0	148,889	148,889
Connecticut**	17,813	-	-	14,607	14,607
New York	795,795	358,943	0	652,552	640,718
New Jersey**	215,912	-	-	197,877	215,912
Delaware	135,142	132,602	0	118,970	142,474
Maryland	90,727	82,753	0	74,396	89,094
Virginia	138,640	119,191	0	113,685	125,034
North Carolina	360,360	0	0	295,495	295,495
<b>Ocean Total</b>	<b>2,810,275</b>	<b>1,422,459</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,333,409</b>	<b>2,411,154</b>
<b>Chesapeake Bay</b>					
Maryland	1,471,888	1,475,162	3,274	2,588,603	1,442,120
Virginia	1,064,997	948,412	0		983,393
PRFC	583,362	353,468	0		572,861
<b>Bay Total</b>	<b>3,120,247</b>	<b>2,777,042</b>	<b>3,274</b>		<b>2,998,374</b>

\* Commercial harvest/sale prohibited, with no re-allocation of quota.

\*\* Commercial harvest/sale prohibited, with re-allocation of quota to the recreational fishery.

^ 2020 quota changed through conservation equivalency for MA (735,240 lbs), NY (640,718 lbs), NJ (215,912 lbs), DE (142,474 lbs), MD (ocean: 89,094 lbs; bay: 1,445,394 lbs), PRFC (572,861 lbs), VA (ocean: 125,034 lbs; bay: 983,393 lbs)

Table 11. Status of Commercial Tagging Programs by state for 2019.

State	Total Participants	Tags Issued	Tags Used	Point of Tag (sale/harvest)	<sup>1</sup> Biological Metric (Y/N)	Year, State and Unique ID on Tag (Y/N)	Size Limit on Tag (Y/N)	Tag Colors	Annual Tag Color Change (Y/N)
MA	79	51,180	29,564	Sale	Y	Y	Y	one tag color	Y
RI	21	14,872	7,347	Sale	Y	Y	N	two tag colors by gear	Y
NY	438	76,242	29,578	Harvest	Y	Y	N	One tag color	Y
DE*	259	17,686	8,206	Both	Y	Y	N	Harvest: two tag colors by gear Sale: one color	Y
MD	862	466,634	342,775	Harvest	Y	Y	N	Three tag colors by gear and permit	Y
PRFC	865	81,896	60,638	Harvest	Y	Y	N	Five tag colors by gear	N
VA	330	190,100	155,250	Harvest	Y	Y	Y	two tag colors by area	Y
NC^	378	44,414	33,229	Sale	Y	Y	Y	Three tag colors by area	N

<sup>1</sup> States are required to allocate commercial tags to permit holders based on a biological metric. Most states use the average weight per fish from the previous year, or some variation thereof. Actual biological metric used is reported in Annual Commercial Tag Monitoring Reports.

\*The number of tags issued represent the combined total from tags used by harvesters and weigh stations, such that each fish has two tags.

^ All commercial tags were used in the internal waters of North Carolina.

Table 12. Status of compliance with monitoring and reporting requirements in 2019. JAI = juvenile abundance index survey, SSB = spawning stock biomass survey, tag = participation in coastwide tagging program, Y = compliance standards met, N = compliance standards not met, NA = not applicable, R = recreational, C = commercial

Jurisdiction	Fishery-independent Monitoring		Fishery-dependent Monitoring		Annual reporting Status
	Requirement(s)	Status	Requirement(s)	Status	
ME	JAI	Y	-	NA	Y
NH	-	NA	-	NA	Y
MA	tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y
RI	-	NA	composition (C&R), catch & effort (R), tag program	Y	Y
CT	-	NA	composition, catch & effort (R)	Y	Y
NY	JAI, SSB, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y
NJ	JAI, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (R)	Y	Y
PA	SSB	Y	-	NA	Y
DE	SSB, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C), tag program	Y	Y
MD	JAI, SSB, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y
PRFC	-	NA	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y
DC	-	NA	-	NA	Y
VA	JAI, SSB, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y
NC	JAI, SSB, tag	Y	composition, catch & effort (C&R), tag program	Y	Y

Figure 1. Atlantic striped bass female spawning stock biomass and recruitment, 1982-2017. Source: 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment.

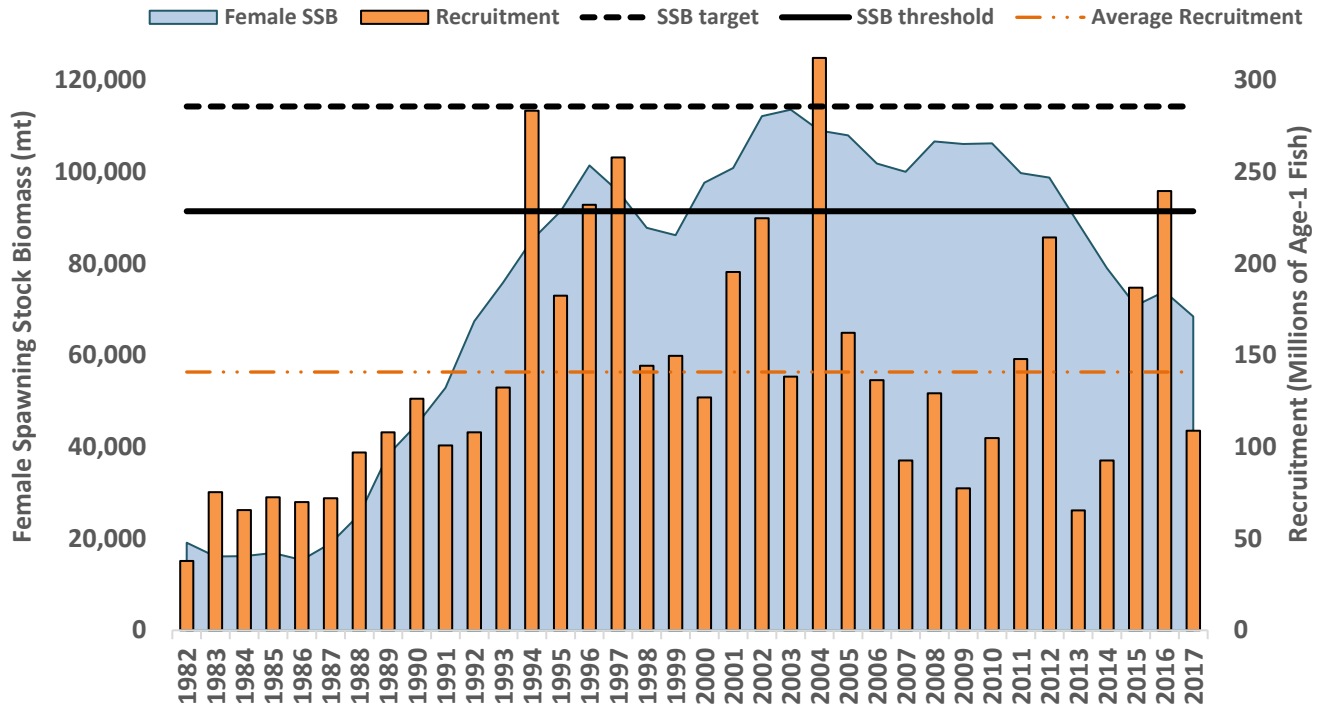


Figure 2. Atlantic striped bass fishing mortality, 1982-2017. Source: 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment.

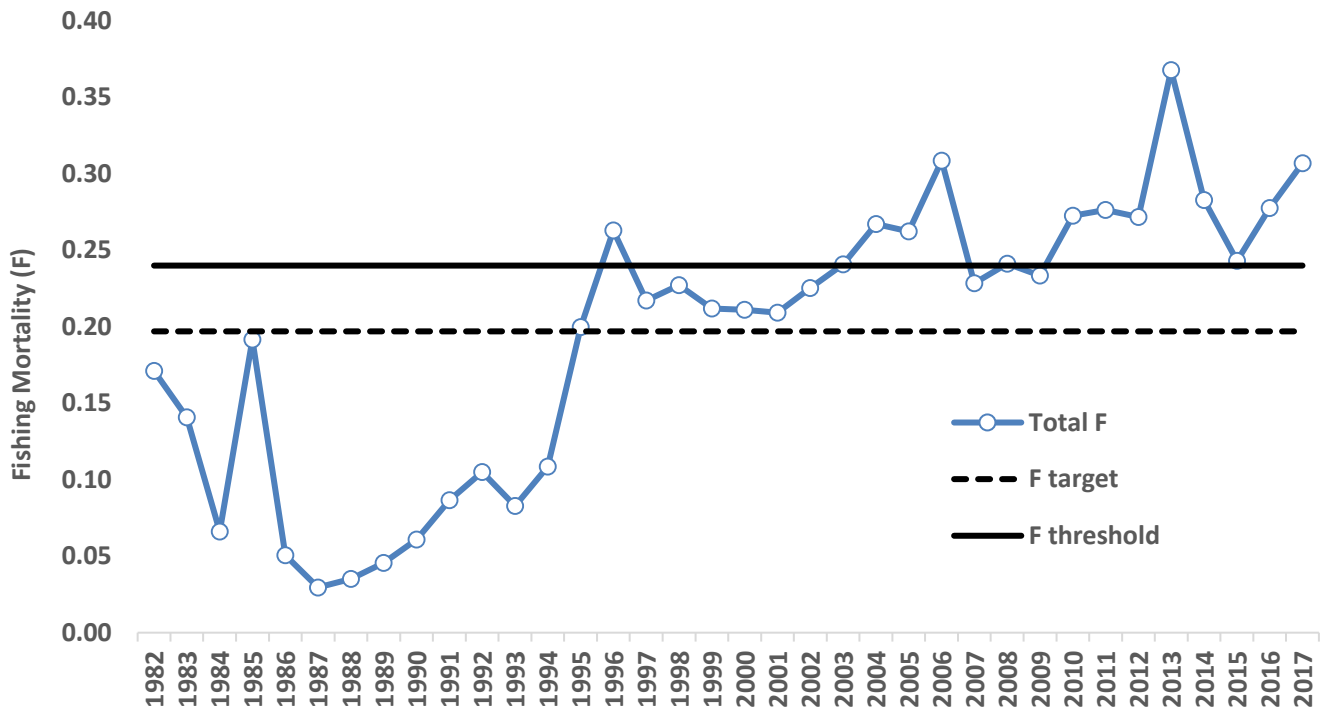


Figure 3. Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River striped bass female spawning stock biomass and recruitment (abundance of age-1), and biological reference points, 1982-2014. Source: Stock Status of Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River Striped bass, 2016.

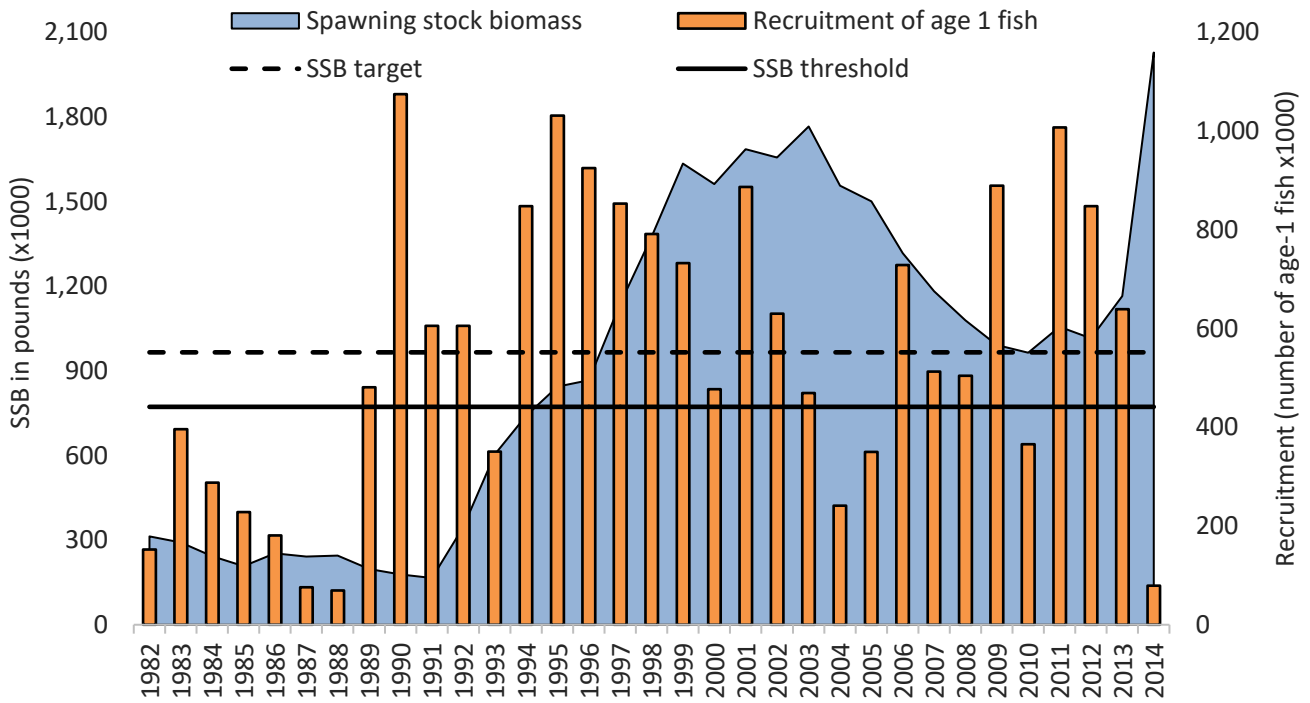


Figure 4. Albemarle Sounds-Roanoke River striped bass fishing mortality (F) estimates, and biological reference points, 1982-2014. Source: Stock Status of Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River Striped bass, 2016.

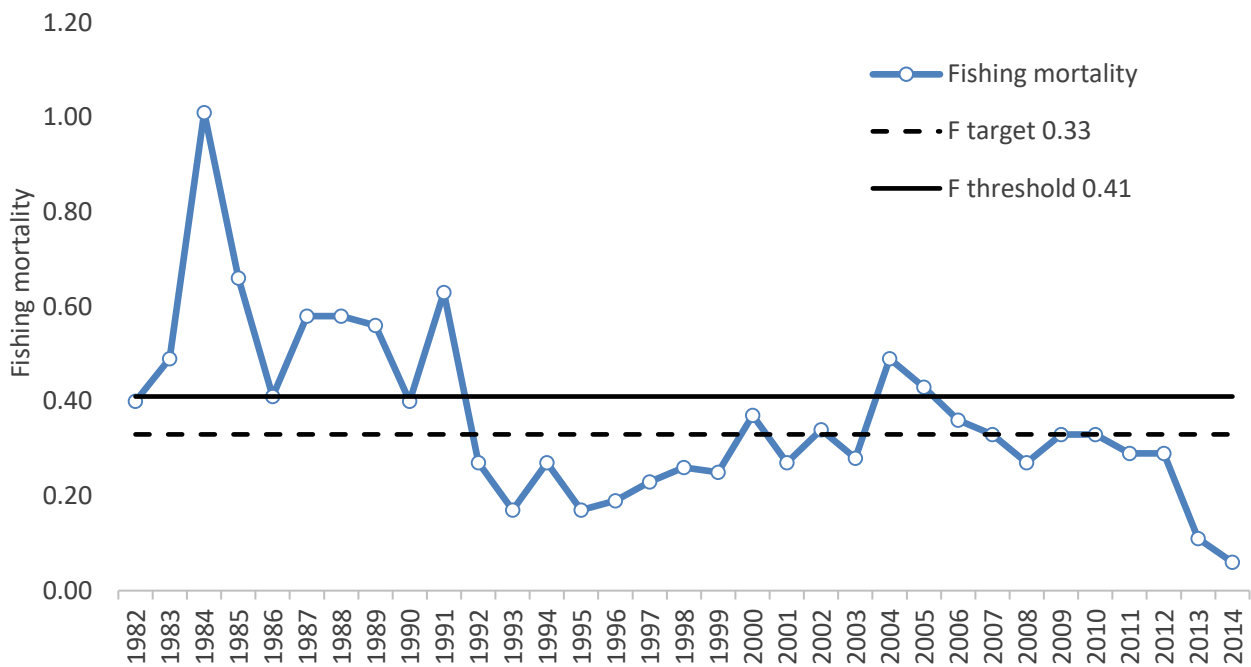


Figure 5. Total striped bass removals by sector in numbers of fish, 1982-2019. Note: Harvest is from ACCSP/MRIP, discards/release mortality is from ASMFC. Estimates exclude inshore harvest from A/R.

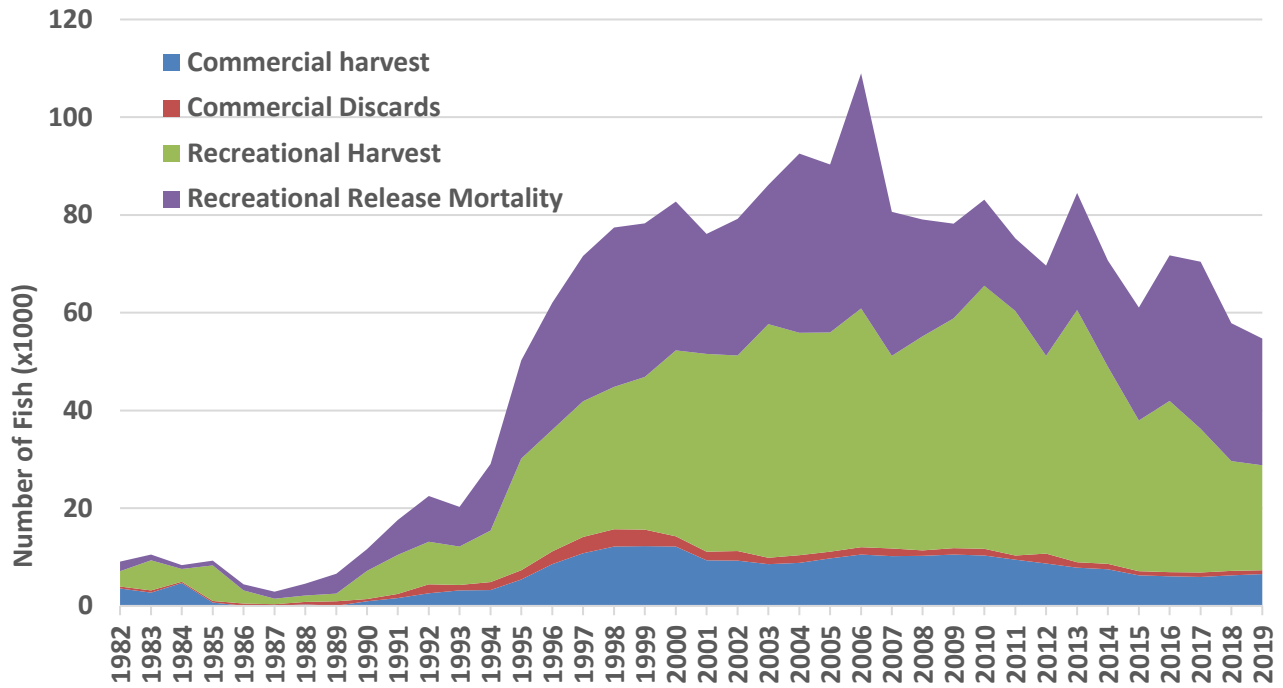


Figure 6. Commercial Atlantic striped bass landings by state in pounds, 1990-2019. Source: ACCSP. Commercial harvest and sale prohibited in ME, NH, CT, and NJ. NC is ocean only.

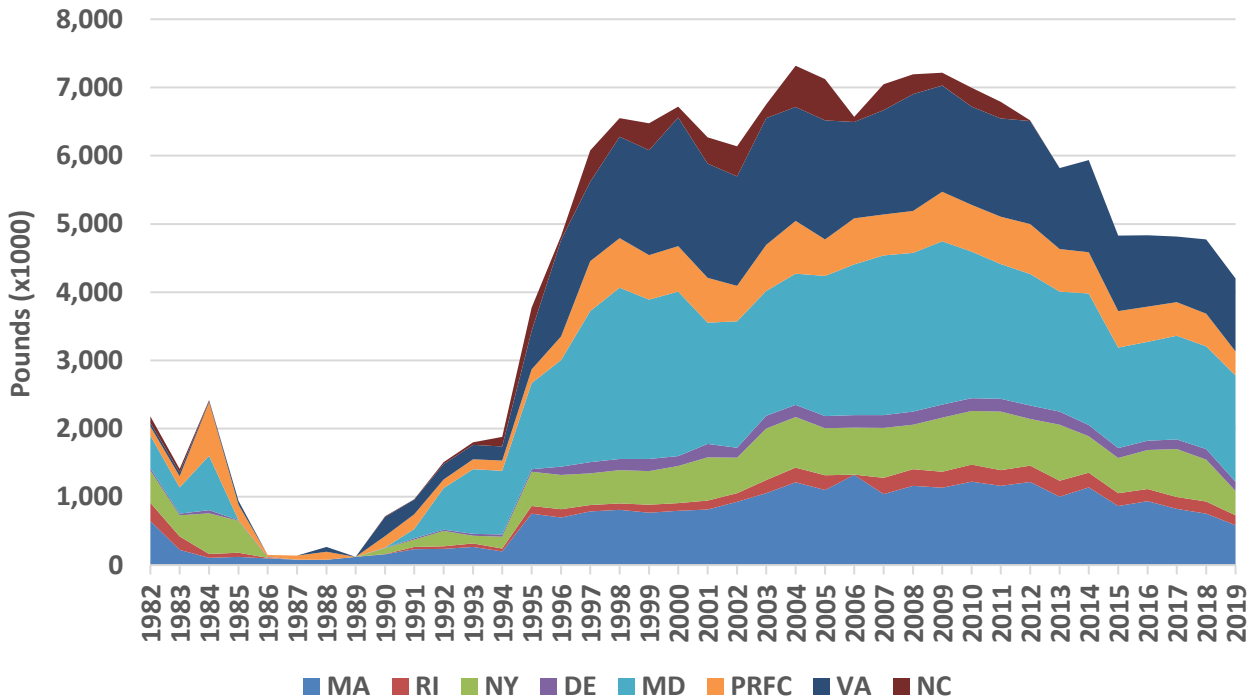




Figure 7. Total recreational catch and the proportion of fish released alive, 1982-2018. Source: MRIP/ASMFC. Estimates exclude inshore harvest from A/R.

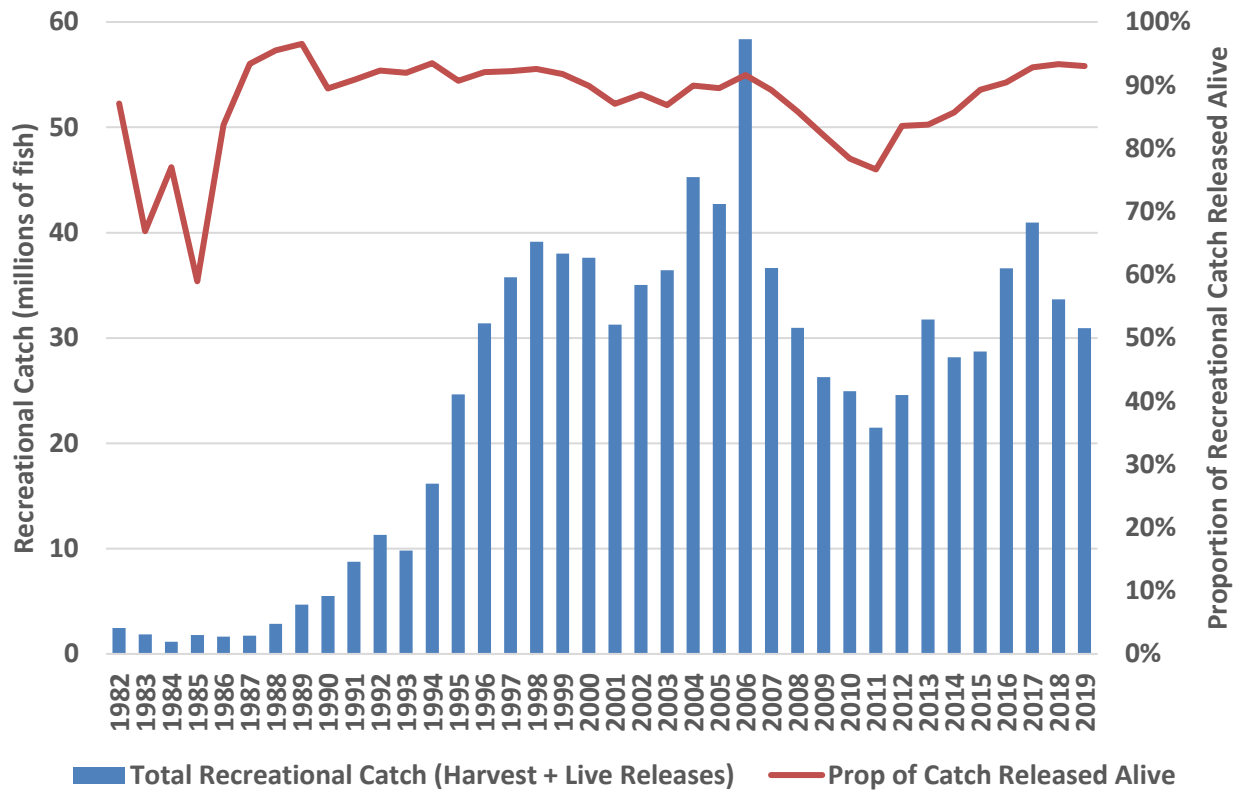
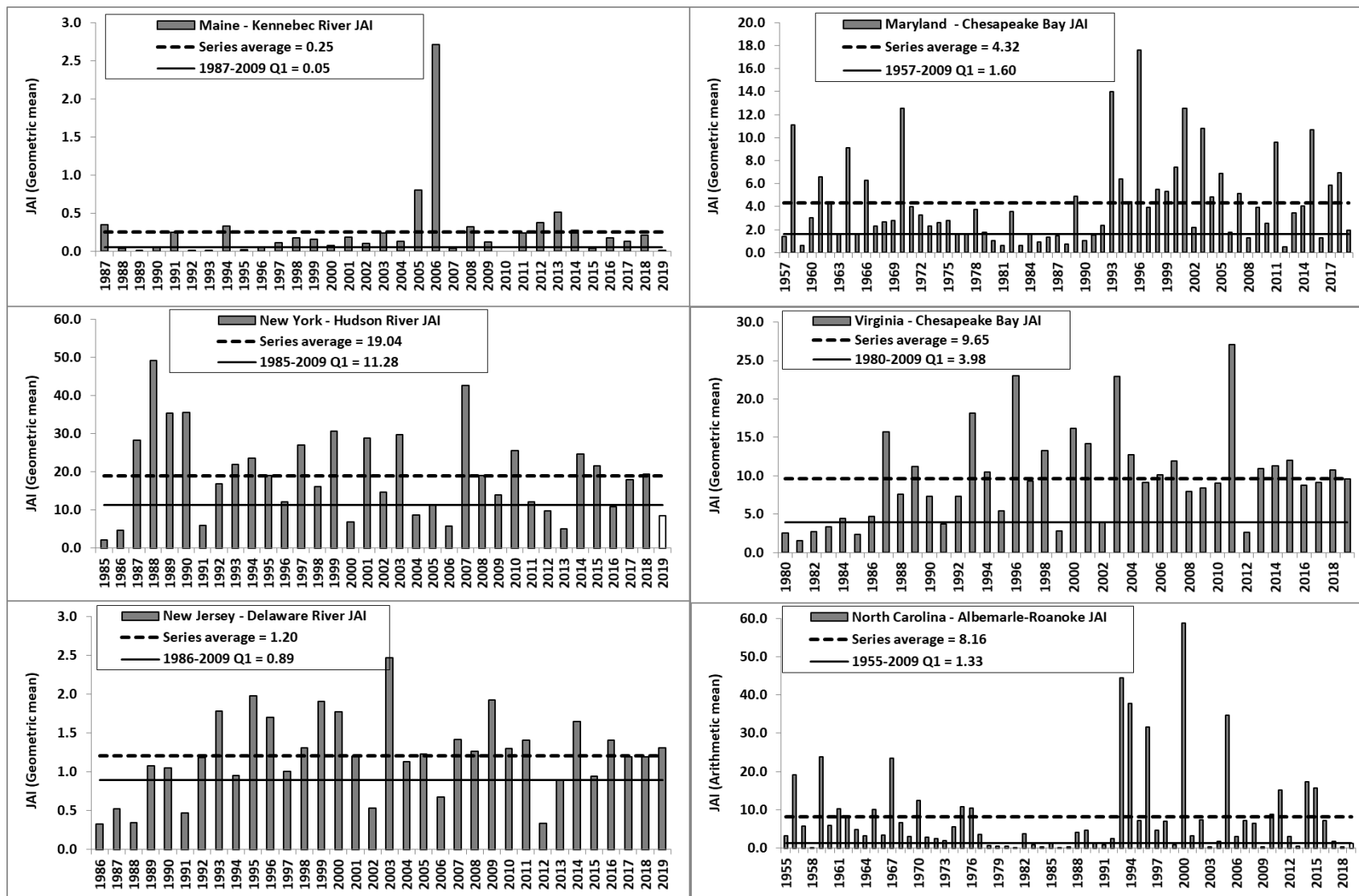


Figure 8. Juvenile abundance index analysis for Maine, New York, Jew Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, 2019. Source: Annual State Compliance Reports. Q1 = first quartile. An open bar in the last three years indicates a value below the Q1 threshold.





# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

July 28, 2020

**To: Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board**  
**From: Striped Bass Work Group**  
**RE: Discussion on Issues that Could be Considered in the Next Management Action**

At its May 2020 meeting, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board (Board) agreed to form a work group (WG) of Board members to begin exploring issues that could be included in a public information document should the Board initiate a management action in August. The following volunteers participated on the WG, and were selected to create a balance of different backgrounds, perspectives, and regional representation. Membership changed from the May 20<sup>th</sup> memo sent to the Board; however, a balance of different perspectives was maintained on the WG.

WG Membership: Martin Gary (PRFC, Co-Chair), Megan Ware (ME, Co-Chair), Ritchie White (NH – Dennis Abbott, proxy), Michael Armstrong (MA), Joe Cimino (NJ), Michael Luisi (MD)

The WG was tasked with compiling and discussing a list of issues related to current concerns with the management of striped bass, with the WG reporting back to the Board in August. An initial list of issues that had been raised during previous Board meetings were compiled, and included: stock rebuilding timeframe, management triggers, biological reference points, fishery goals and objectives, commercial allocation, conservation equivalency, regional management, recreational accountability, and recreational dead discards.

The WG met four times in June and July via webinar to discuss these and any other issues that could be considered in a future management document. Recognizing the WG is not a decision-making body and that management action has not yet been initiated, the WG acknowledged the difference between the WG task and a Plan Development Team, which would be responsible for developing management alternatives. Accordingly, WG discussions focused on identifying challenges or concerns with the current FMP, potential areas of improvement, pros and cons of differing management strategies, and identifying potential areas for feedback from the public.

This memo provides a summary of the WG's discussions, followed by individual meeting summaries organized by meeting date and management topic.

## Striped Bass Work Group Report

### Executive Summary

In the post moratorium era (ending 1990), the management of Atlantic Striped Bass has largely been a story of success. The species was declared recovered in 1995 and the fishery experienced relative stability well into the 2000's. However, several years of poor recruitment coupled with declining spawning stock biomass beginning around 2006 raised concerns, and resulted in the implementation of coastwide reductions to fishing mortality in 2015 through Addendum IV to the interstate Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). More recently, concerns for the well-being of the stock have been brought forward after the 2018 benchmark stock assessment indicated the stock was overfished and overfishing was occurring. The adoption of Addendum VI to the interstate FMP further reduced fishing mortality coastwide.

Currently, striped bass are managed through Amendment 6 to the FMP (2003). Managers and stakeholders have discussed revising and updating the FMP for a long time as fishery goals and objectives may have changed, new management challenges have emerged, and research has filled many knowledge gaps. Most prominently, the 2018 benchmark stock assessment dramatically changed our understanding of stock status due to the change in MRIP estimates (i.e., recreational catch and harvest estimates are much higher than previously thought, which scaled biomass up, but also resulted in higher fishing mortality estimates throughout the time series and a steeper decline in SSB in recent years). Some other challenges facing striped bass management include an extremely complex fishery due to unequal contributions of the primary stocks (i.e., Hudson River, Delaware Bay, and Chesapeake Bay) to the mixed stock fishery along the Atlantic coast; current data and modeling techniques which limit the Board's ability to implement biologically, socially, and economically sound regulations for all stakeholders; geographically disparate and often conflicting goals and objectives, depending upon where and how fishermen interact with the resource; fisheries which are executed very differently depending on the size and availability of fish, and regional culture; fishing mortality rates which are variable from year to year due to a predominantly recreational fishery with limited effort controls; and challenges associated with MRIP given that, although it provides best available recreational catch estimates on a coastwide scale, state-level and finer scale estimates are uncertain and variable, and limit the Board's ability to execute a flexible management program while maintaining accountability and transparency with the angling public.

The Striped Bass Work Group (WG) discussed a suite of nine issues that have been previously identified by the Board, along with other management topics raised during a series of four meetings. Those issues and topics are described in detail below. Three themes which emerged from the WG's discussion included management stability, flexibility, and regulatory consistency. The scope of the issues discussed by the WG may prove to be a formidable challenge to address comprehensively in a single document. As a result, the WG had a discussion on prioritizing the issues to provide the Board with a sense of what issues might be combined, or addressed by different processes.

## **Striped Bass Work Group Meeting Summaries**

### **Meeting #1, June 12**

#### ***Stock Rebuilding (Target and Schedule)***

Due to overfished status of the stock, the Board is required to take action to rebuild spawning stock biomass (SSB) to the target level. The FMP requires that the rebuilding timeline cannot exceed 10-years. Based on latest projections, there is a 41% probability of being at or above SSB target in 2029. An assessment update is scheduled for 2021 with data through 2020.

The WG began its discussion with a question regarding the evaluation of management success: how do we incorporate known variability into management decisions and our view of success? Many striped bass management decisions are rooted in stock projections, the results of which are taken at face value. Establishing management regimes that achieve a particular stock condition based on projections is therefore misleading because those decisions don't often recognize their uncertainty. The concept of management uncertainty was first raised during this discussion and was brought up under other topics as well. Comments were made about the Board being criticized for not letting management strategies or regimes play out over long enough periods of time before taking action.

As a result, the theme of management stability emerged on this call. The WG noted that management stability should be thought of as a two-way street where management stays the course in good and bad years (i.e., avoid knee-jerk reactions if fishing mortality (F) goes above or below target for 1-year). The WG also noted that the idea of success is different for many managers and stakeholders. As a result, it is important for the Board to identify sound goals and objectives to define management success.

In its discussion on the rebuilding timeframe, some WG members indicated that a 10-year rebuilding timeframe is a long time, but it may be appropriate considering the biology of striped bass (i.e., late maturing, long lived species, and recruitment is variable and dependent on favorable environmental conditions). Also, when thinking about initiating an amendment, the WG noted the challenge of discussing stock rebuilding, management triggers, and reference points separately since they are all interconnected. If one of these issues is to be part of the amendment, it may be prudent for all three to be included.

#### ***Management Triggers***

There are five management triggers in Amendment 6. Four are tied to the F and SSB targets and thresholds, and one is based on recruitment failure. If any trigger is reached, the Board is required to take appropriate action. The management triggers are paraphrased below:

1. If F threshold is exceeded, the Board must act to reduce F to F target within 1-year.
2. If SSB is below threshold, the Board must act to rebuild SSB to SSB target (rebuilding timeline not to exceed 10-years).

3. If F target is exceeded for two consecutive years, and SSB is below target in either of those years, the Board must act to reduce F to F target within 1-year.
4. If SSB falls below target for two consecutive years, and F exceeds F target in either of those years, the Board must act to rebuild SSB to SSB target (rebuilding timeline not to exceed 10-years).
5. If any juvenile abundance index (JAI) shows recruitment failure (per Addendum II), the Board will review the cause and determine appropriate action.

There was strong support from WG members to revisit the management triggers. The concept of management stability was the focal point of this discussion. The triggers require constant change, although this frequent action does not recognize that F can be variable under the same management regime. Several WG members commented that management triggers should be developed which require less frequent change, striking a balance between management stability and accountability. Some felt that incorporating more flexibility to the management triggers could give managers the ability to make adjustments that make sense while still being accountable for their management actions.

The differing timeframes that are required by the triggers also generated discussion. For example, there is a 1-year response required for exceeding the F-threshold, while other triggers are based on two consecutive years of SSB and F estimates, and a 3-year timeframe for recruitment failure. These different timeframes are in conflict with the goal of management stability and make the current triggers complicated. Some stakeholders support the 1-year requirement for change while others believe that it promotes 'knee-jerk' reactions that may not always be necessary. It was discussed that there could be a goal to find balance that promotes conservation while also considering the impacts that changes in regulations have on commercial and recreational industries.

Lastly, it was acknowledged that the new MRIP numbers changed the Commission's understanding of stock status, and given the shift in magnitude of removals, the degree of required action and its effects on stakeholders should be considered carefully. Other Board members and the public weighed in at the conclusion of the discussion and asked the following questions:

- What's more important, rebuilding the stock quickly, or mitigating impacts to fishers?
- How should the Board balance the magnitude of change in an action vs. the time to get our targets?

### ***Biological Reference Points***

Current biomass reference points are based on historical stock performance. The 1995 estimate of SSB is used as the threshold, and the target is set at 125% of the threshold. The F reference points were redefined in the 2013 benchmark assessment and are designed to achieve the SSB target and threshold, respectively, over the long term. Model-based reference points, such as MSY or SPR, are not available due to current data and modeling limitations, although other

empirical reference points can be considered. The SAS is developing a 2-stock model that incorporates stock composition and migration information, which could produce reasonable SPR-based reference points. However, the model is not ready for management use at this time. The current statistical catch-at-age (SCAA) model does separate removals into two fleets; an ocean fleet and a Chesapeake Bay fleet. These fleet components could be used to explore regional F targets and threshold for the respective regions, although this raises a number of policy and management issues that need to be thought through carefully (e.g., regional management triggers, and the appropriate allocation of F between the Bay and ocean regions).

There was support by several WG members to revisit the reference points, and WG members noted that reference points have been a core issue in striped bass management for a long time. Some WG members acknowledged that 1995 may have been an appropriate reference year at the time; however, improved data and advancements in assessment modeling over the years has changed our understanding of historical stock performance, and 1995 may not be an appropriate reference year anymore (i.e., 2018 benchmark indicates the SSB target has never been achieved). That said, the WG acknowledged that the SSB target may not have been achieved because the F target has not been maintained for a significant period of time (i.e., F is variable, and has been above threshold most years going back to the early 2000s).

The WG discussed challenges of implementing an equitable management program for all regions and user groups due to ongoing data and modeling limitations (i.e., management is currently operating under a coastwide assessment model, but in reality there are multiple stocks, each with unique biological characteristics and contributions to the coastwide population). The current assessment fails to capture the complexities of stock structure and varying rates of removals from the different stocks, thus adding uncertainty to aspects of striped bass management and modeling work. This can lead to inefficient and possibly faulty management decisions. Accordingly, the WG strongly supported continued development of the 2-stock assessment model and regional reference points. Lastly, WG members commented that reference points for striped bass should reflect clear management goals and objectives.

Pros and Cons of different reference point strategies were discussed under this topic and are summarized below:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<b>Current Reference Points</b>	Represent the middle ground of conflicting management goals and objectives (i.e., the middle of who/what we are managing for)	The SSB target may not be achievable based on current state of ecosystem and understanding of past stock performance
	Empirical-based reference points are based on verifiable observation or experience rather than theory	Hard to manage separate stocks of the population and achieve different

	Appears to meet the goals of certain recreational angler communities that see 1995 reference year as an appropriate target level	regional goals under a coastwide reference point
<b>2-Stock Model</b>	Incorporates stock composition and migration information and can provide a tool for regional management	Not currently available for management use, and will require a lot of time and resources to fully develop
	Allows to manage more accurately, but perhaps less conservatively as well	
<b>2-fleet, non-migration model</b>	Improvement over previous 3-fleet model; models removals from the ocean and Chesapeake Bay fisheries separately	F doesn't capture true complexity of the fisheries and population dynamics
	Provides a tool for regional management	Regional management raises challenging questions about how to allocate F between the two fleets

**Meeting #2, June 21**

***Goals and Objectives***

As a part of considering fishery goals and objectives, the WG reviewed existing goals and objectives in Amendment 6 as well as results from a Board and Advisory Panel (AP) questionnaire, or survey in 2018. The primary goal of the survey was to solicit guidance from the Board regarding the type of reference points to pursue for the 2018 benchmark, but also to solicit Board and AP member satisfaction with the existing management program and understand what is most valued in the striped bass fishery (e.g. economically viable fisheries, broad age structure, maintaining SSB at or above the target, etc). Results of the survey were split, and there was no clear majority in terms of satisfaction with striped bass management; this result likely reflected the diverse set of stakeholders in the striped bass fishery.

In light of the survey results, the WG discussed that a potential goal of the Striped Bass FMP should be to improve relationships between the various groups, whether that be between the commercial and recreational sectors or between the coastal states and the Chesapeake Bay region. Others noted that while striped bass is currently managed as a single stock, it is important to recognize the regional differences in the fishery which results in different visions,



priorities, and management practices. As a result, management goals and objectives should be broad and not constraining over time.

The WG also brainstormed several goals and objectives which may be missing from the existing list in Amendment 6. These included:

- Reflecting stock complexity in the assessment science
- Consistent management and monitoring
- Recognizing potential impacts of climate change
- Improving catch accounting for the recreational sector
- Promoting “responsible fishing” practices and stewardship (through things such as circle hooks)

The WG did not highlight any existing goals and objectives in Amendment 6 which should be eliminated and instead noted that many are still relevant. These include the reference to maintaining essential habitat in the Amendment 6 goal, the aim of management stability (Objective 6), and the desire to balance coastwide consistency with flexibility (Objective 3).

### ***Commercial Allocation***

As part of the WG’s discussion on commercial allocation, ASMFC staff provided a retrospective on striped bass commercial allocations. This included a review of Amendment 6 which restored coastal commercial allocations to 100% of average landings from 1972-1979, except for Delaware which was maintained at its 2002 level. In contrast, Amendment 6 set the Chesapeake Bay commercial allocations based on F so that quotas scaled annually with biomass. Since then, commercial allocations have been reduced in Addenda IV and VI, with the Chesapeake Bay allocations switching to a poundage value (as opposed to being based on an F-rate).

WG members expressed concern that commercial allocations are a poundage not a percentage, and as a result are not inherently linked to the status of the stock. This means that changes to the commercial allocations must occur through an Addendum or Amendment. In contrast, WG members noted that other FMPs allocate commercial quotas as a percentage of a total allowable catch or annual catch limit, which means that allocations scale as biomass increases or decreases. One WG members noted that the Chesapeake Bay region originally had a commercial allocation based on an F-rate in Amendment 6 but that this was lost in Addendum 4 when quota reductions were implemented as a 20.5% cut from catch in a single year (2012). This WG member noted that, as a result, they lost the ability to manage based on exploitable biomass, which means making reductions when biomass is low but also providing for increases when stock biomass is high.

WG members also noted that different criteria have been applied to different regions and states. For example, Delaware’s quota is based on a different time-period than other states. Further, while the 1972-1979 time period has been used for a long time, there were questions as to whether this is still an appropriate timeframe, especially given potential concerns about

the accuracy of striped bass harvest reporting during this time. The WG noted that, should an Amendment be initiated, it would be helpful to understand when states required reporting in the striped bass commercial fishery and the degree of confidence in historical landings records.

The WG also discussed potential influence of climate change on the stock and how this could impact commercial allocations. Some WG members noted that not all states are meeting their quotas and that could be indicative of climate change impacts. Others noted that populations seem to be shifting into federal waters and this may be impacting state's ability to fully harvest their quotas.

Finally, WG members noted that a general challenge with the commercial fishery is that it only accounts for ~10% of total annual removals. However, it is subject to some of the stricter effort controls. This speaks to the ability to control catch and effort in the striped bass fishery as a whole.

### ***Conservation Equivalency***

The WG identified some pros and cons of conservation equivalency (CE) programs. Pros included having the flexibility for states to craft regulations that match its fishery and needs, and the ability for a single FMP to consider the regional differences in the fishery. Cons included reduced consistency between states; greater imprecision in the data used to evaluate the impact of bag limits, size limits, and seasons; and (in Addendum VI) a decrease of the overall percent reduction.

During its discussion, the WG reflected on the Addendum VI process. Some WG members noted that the result of the Addendum VI CE approval process was that the sum of the parts did not equal the whole; this likely reflected the Board's decision to require CE proposals to achieve an 18% reduction as opposed to the reduction projected to be achieved by states under the coastwide measures. Other WG members commented that Addendum VI resulted in several states taking on the brunt of the reduction and so CE was a way for states to remedy a situation where they felt they were being unfairly limited. Others noted that the Addendum VI CE process resulted in a one-way valve, where states (through CE) ultimately adopted regulations which resulted in smaller reductions as opposed to other states also using it to implement measures that were more restrictive than the FMP. As a note, a CE proposal and Board action is not required for a state to be more restrictive than the FMP.

Moving forward, one WG member said that it was critical for the purpose of CE to be identified, including a better definition of how and when CE is applied. This WG member felt that a clear biological benefit should be demonstrated in a CE proposal. Other WG members felt it was important to modify but not end the CE program, as a way to increase trust in the program. This could include greater guidelines on the CE program or a different structure. Some ideas included:

- Restricting CE proposals to certain times, abundances, or stock status, and not allowing CE during a period of stock rebuilding

- Greater boundaries on the management tools that can be used, and whether reductions in the recreational and commercial can be “swapped” within a state
- Different guidelines for the recreational and commercial sector given differences in the data uncertainty and accountability measures
- Limit the number of CE options a state can submit for technical review and Board approval

The WG also talked about accountability with implemented CE programs. One WG member thought that a CE program should be amended so that if, after the first year, the CE measures do not achieve the expected outcome, an accountability measure is tripped. Another WG member noted that accountability is hard because the CE process moves away from coastwide accounting to state-by-state accounting, which results in increased imprecision in the data and greater uncertainty in the anticipated outcome. Another WG member asked how accountability would work if year class strength and availability differ from year to year and between regions. This WG member also noted that all states should be held accountable to the management program, not just CE states.

### **Meeting #3, July 12**

#### ***Regional management***

The WGs discussion on regional management touched upon several different ideas: regional management which is supported by stock specific reference points, regional management that looks at producer vs. coastal areas, and regional management in which latitudinal areas have uniform regulations.

The WG recognized that regional management with distinct reference points is still a goal for this species. As noted previously, the SAS developed a 2-stock model during the 2018 benchmark, which brought the concept of multiple reference points further along than the previous assessment, but data limitations prevented peer review endorsement for management purposes. Therefore, the WG discussed regional management approaches with one set of coast-wide biological reference points continuing into the near future.

The WG and several members of the audience discussed the importance of producer areas and their unique consideration in management due to the smaller size of fish. Some noted that Delaware Bay and the Hudson River are also producer areas; however, they are managed differently than the Chesapeake Bay. There were questions as to why this is. Other WG members commented that they consider regional management to be focused on a grouping of states rather than producer vs. coastal areas and perhaps regional management doesn't have a place in striped bass management.

Next, the WG discussed regional management in terms of discrete areas having matching regulations. For example, while some areas have achieved regulatory consistency via Addendum VI, other areas such as Delaware Bay and Chesapeake Bay have disparate measures

across jurisdictions. This led into a discussion about the connection between consistent regulations and the current CE program. One WG member noted that when a state implements a CE measure, it has an impact on adjacent states. As a result, regional management may have a place in the striped bass fish through the CE process. Others noted that if CE is something the Board wishes to include in an amendment, there can be a review of the regional approach to regulations (compared to one coastwide measure).

### ***Recreational accountability***

At the onset of the discussion, it was acknowledged that some members of the Board and public may be using the terms 'accountability' and 'accounting' interchangeably. There is widespread, perhaps universal, desire for more accurate recreational harvest estimates. Recreational harvest accounts for 90% of annual removals, and harvest varies year to year based on availability and effort. Harvest estimates are also subject to variability in the MRIP survey, making it difficult to parse out what impact management efforts may have when regulations are changed as the variabilities are confounded.

Regarding accountability, the WG noted that in other species' FMPs, this topic has been discussed mainly as payback for overages of an annual harvest target. Several members of the WG expressed deep concern over doing this based on point estimates provided by MRIP, especially at the state level where uncertainty in the data is higher. As a result, one WG member noted that if recreational accountability is pursued, it should be at a regional or aggregate level to reduce uncertainty in the data. There was also discussion that striped bass management should not follow in the footsteps of federal FMPs such as summer flounder and black sea bass where there are regulatory changes every year to try to match harvest targets. It was noted that this was also a concern expressed at several public hearings for Addendum VI.

WG members expressed concern over the lack of precision of MRIP estimates and questioned what modifications would be needed to achieve greater precision. One WG member noted that PRFC and DC do not have MRIP estimates, which could complicate discussions on recreational accountability. The WG did not put forward the notion that better accounting (e.g., mandatory recreational reporting) should be pursued at this time but did acknowledge the challenges associated with MRIP estimates. The WG also discussed impacts of year class strength on catch and harvest, and managers' inability to predict or control effort. One WG member noted that it is difficult to have fishermen follow the rules and then be faced with further reductions. Another WG member noted that we need to improve the incorporation of year class strength, and associated changes in effort, in our estimates.

### ***Recreational Dead Discards***

Multiple members of the WG indicated that recreational dead discards may be the single most important issue at this time, and addressing (or reducing discards) is the most important action

that can be taken going forward. Many WG members pointed to the fact that recreational discards accounted for just under 50% of the fishing mortality as basis for the critical need to address this issue. Others noted that, particularly in states with primarily catch and release fisheries, the Board is running out of ways to control removals in the fishery.

The WG acknowledged that angler behavior varies significantly on both a local and regional level. In some parts of New England, many fish are released, while in Chesapeake Bay, anglers often wish to keep their allowable catch. The WG also touched on the possibility of determining regional differences in release mortality, and the need to collect better data on this topic.

There was a lengthy discussion on what addressing discard mortality could mean. Some noted that other regulatory measures (in addition to the use of circle hooks) may still exist such as banning gaffing or the use of treble hooks. The WG also discussed potential benefits of reaching out to gear manufacturers. Many WG members pointed to the importance of angler education, and how to communicate with the recreational sector to apply best practices and emerging research. While there was an acknowledgement that angler education is not necessarily a regulation, including the topic of recreational dead discards in a future management document raises angler awareness of the issue.

Overall, while the scale and geographic scope of this issue makes addressing it a daunting challenge, the WG clearly felt that the pursuit to lower recreational dead discards would be worthy of the time and resources invested.

#### **Meeting #4, July 21, 2020**

##### ***Management Stability, Flexibility, and Regulatory Consistency***

At the WG's last meeting, the group discussed three themes which emerged through previous discussion: management stability, flexibility, and regulatory consistency. The WG acknowledged that there are inherent elements in these themes which are in harmony with one another, and others which are in conflict. For example, regulatory consistency and stability can be easily linked (regulatory steadiness in both space and time) while flexibility is a somewhat conflicting theme. That said, using an analogy of a Venn diagram, the WG acknowledged there is likely a point of balance between all of these elements; it is the amount of overlap between these three elements which makes attaining that balance more or less difficult. WG members also acknowledged that these themes are not unique to striped bass; several other species management boards and the federal Councils are also grappling with how to balance these themes.

When speaking of flexibility, one WG member noted that because the striped bass FMP is not jointly managed with a federal Council, there is more opportunity for flexibility in the management of the species. This WG member felt it was important not to lose sight of this opportunity for flexibility outside of a federal FMP. Another WG member noted that flexibility

can be incorporated into a stable and consistent regulatory program by including flexibility as part of a management action, as opposed to allowing for flexibility after a management decision (akin to how CE currently works).

Overall, the WG felt that the themes of stability, flexibility, and consistency could be guiding principles for future management changes.

***Other Topic: Protecting Larger, Older Fish***

The WG also used the last meeting to discuss any topics which were not included in the specific list of items developed by the Board. One WG member brought up the topic of protecting larger, older striped bass. This WG member noted that stakeholders often talk about the need to protect older striped bass since they can produce more eggs and thus more recruits, and that larger fish are often “revered” in the fishery. He noted that many states did not have a maximum size limit until the latest management action (Addendum VI). He also noted that an objective of Amendment 6 is to ensure a broad age structure in the striped bass population and wondered if this conflicts with the desire to also protect older fish.

The WG discussed whether having a broad age structure and protecting older fish are compatible objectives. One WG member noted that the maximum size limit in Addendum VI provides greater protection to older, larger fish but that the creation of a slot limit can also result in fewer striped bass reaching a larger size. It was also noted that discard mortality, which is almost half of fishing mortality, is pervasive across all sizes of striped bass. The WG asked Stock Assessment Team Lead, Dr. Katie Drew, about the tension between a broad age structure and the protection of older fish from both a regulatory and stock assessment perspective. She noted that the two topics are linked because it is hard to protect older, larger fish without a broad age structure; however, achieving a large number of older fish is all about fishing effort and protecting a given cohort through time until it reaches older ages (e.g., you cannot create new age-10 fish; the number of age-10 fish in a population reflects the fishing effort placed on that cohort throughout its life).

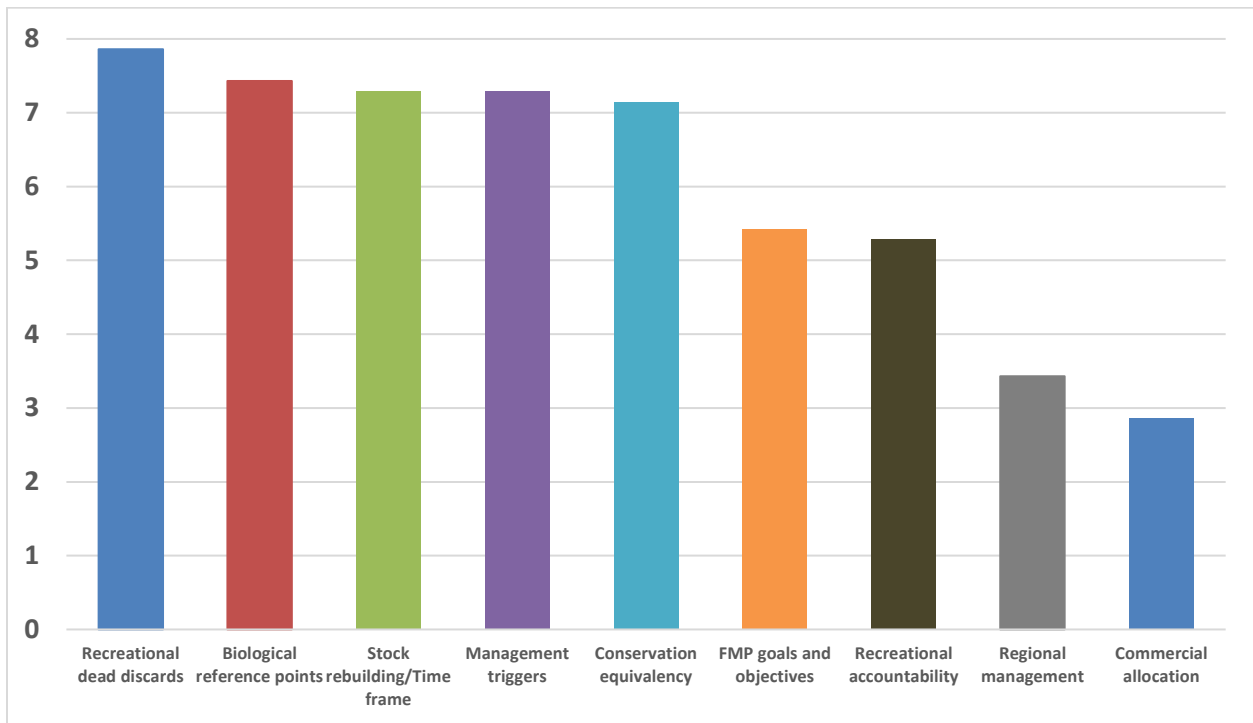
Several WG members supported continued discussion on this topic by the Board. One WG member noted that, in northern New England, many anglers seem to support the maximum size limit as a way to protect these older fish. Another WG member noted that under Addendum VI, most states now have a maximum size limit and considering a protection for older fish across all states would get at the theme of regulatory consistency.

***Prioritization of Topics in a Potential Management Document***

Next, the WG discussed potentially prioritizing the list of management topics discussed over the first three webinars. This conversation was prompted by the recognition that including nine complex and controversial topics in a single management document may result in a slow and complicated regulatory process. As a result, it may behoove the Board to break up the topics into different management documents.

To help prompt this discussion, WG members decided to anonymously rank the nine topics discussed using Survey Monkey. Given the topic of ‘protecting older, larger fish’ was discussed on the fourth call, it was not included in the ranking. WG Co-Chairs noted that giving a topic a lower ranking does not mean it is not important. Further, it was noted that the ranking was not intended to be decisional, merely a way to facilitate a conversation.

Results of the anonymous ranking were shown to the WG on the webinar (Figure 1, Table 1). Topics with a higher value in Figure 1 were given a higher overall ranking by the WG. When looking at the results, it is important to note that respondents only included WG members, so the sample size is small.



**Figure 1:** Results of the prioritization survey by WG members. Topics with a higher value (i.e. those on the left) received a higher overall ranking.

**Table 1:** Results of the prioritization survey by WG members. The table shows how WG members ranked each of the different topics. For example, reading across the first row, two WG members ranked recreational dead discards as the highest priority, two WG members ranked it as the second highest priority, one WG member ranked it as the fourth highest priority, one WG member ranked it as the fifth highest priority, and one WG member ranked it as the seventh highest priority.

Management Topics	Overall Ranking	Individual Responses								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Recreational dead discards	1	2	2		1	1		1		
Biological reference points	2	2		1	2	1		1		
Stock rebuilding/Time frame	3	1	1	2	1	1			1	
Management triggers	4		3	1	1		1	1		
Conservation equivalency	5	2	1	1			2		1	
FMP goals and objectives	6				2	2	2			1
Recreational accountability	7			2		1		3	1	
Regional management	8						2	1	2	2
Commercial allocation	9					1			2	4

Overall, the survey results show the WG ranked recreational dead discards as the highest priority, followed closely by reference points, stock rebuilding, management triggers, and conservation equivalency. FMP goals and objectives and recreational accountability were ranked in the middle, and regional management and commercial allocation received the lowest rankings. Table 1 shows that there was variability among individual WG member responses. Several WG members commented that all the topics are important but that WG conversations had impacted their ranking. Others noted that while FMP Goals and Objectives were ranked sixth, perhaps because it is not as “glamorous” a topic, it is still critically important to review these if a management document is initiated. Others noted that some topics are related and can be combined. For example, regional management may be linked to conservation equivalency.

Finally, the WG had a brief discussion on which management topics can be completed in an addendum versus an amendment. Commission staff indicated that except for goals and objectives, all of the topics discussed can be addressed in an addendum. However, an amendment can sometimes be more appropriate if the topics are controversial and/or if there are a large number of topics being addressed. Generally, WG members commented that given the breadth of issues, an amendment was potentially a better fit because it provides more opportunity for public discourse, and more time to think through the issues. However, it was also noted that an amendment is a slower regulatory process than an addendum. The WG did not provide a recommendation on whether an amendment or an addendum is more appropriate given this was not part of their specific charge.



## Max Appelman

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**From:** BRIAN LIPSKY <BRIAN.LIPSKY@Longandfoster.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 22, 2020 7:15 PM  
**To:** Max Appelman  
**Subject:** [External] Stiped Bass Management

Mr. Appelman,

We respectfully demand that the agencies charged with striped bass management make designing and funding a comprehensive study on striped bass mortality in the Chesapeake Bay, especially catch-and-release mortality, a top priority. Businesses depending on recreational fishing, the lives of recreational anglers, and the health of the striped bass population up and down the coast from North Carolina to Maine are being adversely affected by a current lack of science and poor management decisions, and this must be remedied immediately.

Sincerely,

Brian C. Lipsky

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1075 Tooker Avenue  
West Babylon, NY 11704  
July 28, 2020

David V. D. Borden, Chair  
Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N  
Arlington, VA 22201-0740

Dear Mr. Borden:

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board ("Management Board") will be addressing two postponed motions at its August meeting, one addressing state accountability for failures to adequately reduce striped bass fishing mortality, one addressing whether the Management Board should move forward on a new Amendment 7 to the striped bass management plan.

I am taking this opportunity to comment on both issues.

!

**STATES WHICH ELECT CONSERVATION-EQUIVALENT MANAGEMENT MEASURES SHOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE WHEN THOSE MEASURES FAIL TO MEET THE REQUIRED FISHING MORTALITY REDUCTION**

Due to the impacts of COVID-19 on the Marine Recreational Information Program ("MRIP"), this issue has probably been rendered academic, as 2020 landings data will probably be inadequate to assess whether state management measures were able to achieve the desired reductions. However, because the issue will probably arise again, perhaps in discussions related to any proposed Amendment 7 to the management plan, I provide the following comments.

Striped bass do not respect state boundaries. They engage in long coastwide migrations, transiting the waters of many states as they move north in the spring and south in the fall. Under such circumstances, a unified set of regulations, applicable everywhere along the migration route, is the most efficient and effective way to manage the species.

However, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter ("Charter") explicitly provides for conservation equivalency, which allows states to adopt alternate measures *if* such measures will have the same conservation effect as the management measures recommended by a management board.

Unfortunately, the impact of regulations is difficult to predict in advance, as many different factors, including angler behavior, are out of the control of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (“ASMFC”). The best that the Management Board can do is to adopt measures that, on paper, appear adequate to do the job, and then amend such measures should they not do so.

Because of such uncertainty, states that adopt the Management Board’s recommended measures should not face any potential sanction should they not meet the fishing mortality, landings, or other target. Any such failure is a collective failure of the Management Board, and needs to be addressed on a collective, coastwide basis. And as any Management Board member ought to know, MRIP is most accurate when used on a coastwide basis, incorporating as many angler intercepts as practicable, so coastwide measures have the greatest likelihood of success. Trying to break down MRIP data by state, wave, and/or sector will inevitably reduce its precision and increase the likelihood for significant error.

When a state adopts conservation equivalent measures, that state is knowingly adopting measures based on data that is significantly less precise than the data underlying the coastwide measures, and so data more likely to lead to management measures that do not achieve their intended goal. If a state’s supposedly conservation equivalent management measures fail to achieve the desired reduction in fishing mortality, that failure does belong to the state. However, such failed state regulations undercut the effectiveness of the entire fishery management plan.

Thus, it makes sense to hold states accountable for their failures. While one must assume that a state adopts conservation equivalent measures in good faith, and intends them to meet the common objective, a state is not acting in good faith when it discovers that its supposedly conservation equivalent regulations are not “equivalent” in fact, and does nothing to correct the situation.

After Addendum IV required that the Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions reduce fishing mortality by 20.5%, compared to fishing mortality in 2012, the states could be excused for miscalculating the increase in angler effort in 2015, which led not to a reduction, but to a more than 50% increase in F. However, there can be no excuse for allowing Maryland, in particular, to allow its anglers to continue to fish at that and even higher rates for an additional four years, a level of fishing mortality that may well have harmed the very 2011 year class that Addendum IV was supposed to protect.

Allowing such excessive fishing mortality to continue, and the inadequate “conservation equivalent” regulations to remain in place through 2019, was inexcusable, a travesty for which both Maryland and the entire Management Board share blame.

The only way to prevent such travesties from reoccurring is to create a disincentive for states to maintain supposedly conservation equivalent regulations that do not achieve management goals, and which shift the burden of conservation onto other states’ shoulders.

It would be reasonable to merely require states, in the first instance, to revise their conservation equivalent management measures for the following year, so that they achieve the intended reductions. However, serial failures, particularly at a time when the striped bass stock is overfished, should carry stiffer penalties, including at a minimum a pound-for-pound/fish-for-fish payback of any overage when conservation equivalent regulations fail to meet management goals in two consecutive years.

States may argue that MRIP data, particularly when used at the state level, lacks the precision needed to impose such paybacks. However, if a state makes the argument that the MRIP state-level data is

adequate to support a conservation equivalent regulation, the same data must be deemed adequate to demonstrate that a supposedly equivalent set of management measures has not met its management goals. A state should not be able to reap the benefits of equivalent regulations while eschewing the consequences of getting such regulations wrong.

## II

### WHAT THE MANAGEMENT BOARD SHOULD CONSIDER IN ANY PROPOSED AMENDMENT 7

Given that the Fishery Management Plan Coordinator has already informed the Management Board that most changes to the striped bass management plan can be made in an addendum, and that an amendment would only be needed to change the goals and objectives of such plan, the need for a new Amendment 7 is not immediately obvious. However, many Management Board members seem intent on moving forward with such amendment, and assuming that they will prevail when the postponed motion is finally put up for a vote, I make the following comments.

I apologize in advance if any such comments are redundant with, or in direct opposition to, the recommendations contained in the Work Group report, but given that such report will not be available until the Supplementary Materials are released, I must put together my comments without benefit of the Work Group's thoughts.

To begin, I sincerely recommend that the existing goals and objectives of the management plan not be changed. The "long-term maintenance of a broad age structure," endeavoring to "maintain stock size at or above the target female spawning stock biomass," and managing "fishing mortality to maintain an age structure that provides adequate spawning potential to sustain long-term abundance" represent the only rational way to manage a species such as striped bass, which regularly experiences wide swings in recruitment, is very dependent upon having favorable spawning conditions in natal rivers, and has been known to experience below-average recruitment for periods that can extend for a decade or more.

There is always a temptation to favor the short-term benefits that a higher fishing mortality rate, and lower biomass target, might bring. But given the striped bass' life history, the price of such short-term benefits will inevitably be a perilous decline in the stock when a period of sub-par recruitment occurs, and the resultant social and economic costs of such decline will more than offset the benefits of prior excess.

A well-stratified age and size structure, in a spawning stock that contains adequate numbers of older, more fecund females, is a critical component of a sustainable striped bass population. Such structure, which includes significant numbers of older and larger fish, provides a buffer against consecutive sub-par year classes that see few younger females entering the spawning stock. Increasing the fishing mortality rate, at the expense of the older females, is not a viable long-term management strategy.

Having said that, there is one objective of the plan that needs changing, and lies at the root of many management problems. That is the objective to "Adopt a long-term management regime that minimizes or eliminates the need to make annual changes or modifications to management measures."

There is no question that stability in regulations is a desirable goal. However, a stable striped bass stock should take priority over stable regulations. The Management Board's reluctance to amend management measures in the face of declining recruitment, unexpectedly high mortality, or similar unforeseen circumstances, has not served the striped bass stock well. That might be best seen in the proceedings of the November 2011 Management Board meeting when, despite declining recruitment and an updated stock assessment which warned that the female spawning stock biomass would fall below threshold by 2017, the Management Board decided to take no action because the management triggers had not **yet** been tripped.

With respect to management triggers, the triggers adopted in Amendment 6 should be maintained in any new amendment. However, I make that recommendation in the expectation that the Management Board will actually pay attention to such triggers, and follow the dictates of the management plan when a trigger is tripped.

I, and many other striped bass anglers, were dismayed in 2014 when, after information contained in the 2012 benchmark assessment tripped Management Trigger 4, the Management Board failed to adopt a 10-year rebuilding plan, despite the seemingly mandatory language of Amendment 6. We were less surprised, but no less dismayed, when the latest benchmark assessment's finding that the stock was overfished tripped Management Trigger 2, but no 10-year rebuilding plan was initiated.

When the Management Board fails to comply with clear and explicit provisions of its own management plan, it not only fails its duty to the striped bass; it breaches its covenant with stakeholders and with the greater public, who not unreasonably expect that the Management Board will actually perform the tasks that it has publicly stated it will do. I would advise that, if the Management Board has no intention of taking a particular action, it should not raise false hopes by including such action in the management plan.

Over the years, the Management Board has demonstrated a clear bias toward maintaining or increasing harvest, and avoiding harvest reductions. That bias has been demonstrated in its willingness to approve state proposals that do not comply with the terms of the management plan (something that New Hampshire's Legislative Appointee, Dennis Abbott, at the October 2008 Management Board meeting, to suggest that "striped bass management as becoming death by thousand cuts").

Such pro-harvest bias, and a failure to fully implement mandated management measures, has led many anglers to question the Management Board's willingness to be guided by the science and the Charter's injunctions to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks, and to act as responsible stewards of the striped bass resource. Its failure to adopt mandated rebuilding plans, not just once, but twice, when the relevant management triggers were tripped bring its willingness to maintain a fishery that is sustainable in the long term into question.

Many Management Board members may have been surprised when Maine's Pat Kelliher said, at the February 2020 meeting, that

At a recent public hearing just held last week in Maine...I attended just to listen in to understand kind of where our constituents in Maine are. Frankly, it wasn't even a conversation about our regulations, it was a long drawn out conversation, very editorialized about ***the failures of this body.***

...There were tremendous opposition to [conservation equivalency], the intent of how they're being used, **failures of the Board across the spectrum.**

The fact that ***we need to be in a rebuilding mode, and we're not moving in that direction***, the points that have just been brought up that we will not achieve the 18 percent reduction, and a question from Mr. Luisi, are state's [*sic*] willing to do more? I can tell you the ***people in that public hearing in the state of Maine were willing to do much more, including moratorium conversations***, which just kind of shocked me.

I think those are coming up based on their ***concerns that we are not going to do the right thing for the species...*** [emphasis added]

However, few active striped bass fishermen would have been surprised by such comments at all, because they reflect a common view within the striped bass fishery: A large percentage of striped bass anglers feel that Management Board has allowed the stock to become overfished again, because, in the face of opposition from a small minority of stakeholders, it lacked the political will to impose needed landings reductions even when the science, and the language of the management plan itself, clearly indicated that such reductions should occur.

While it is true that new MRIP data, not available until 2018, contributed to the conclusion that the stock was overfished, and that overfishing was occurring, the data available at the time of the 2011 stock assessment update was enough to signal that the stock would become overfished by 2017. Despite that clear signal, the Management Board declared that striped bass was still a "green light fishery" and declined to take action to head off the problem.

As someone who has run boats of various sizes on various waters, both inshore and offshore, I learned a long time ago that it is best to slow down and change course early on, to avoid a suspected shoal, rather than maintaining course and speed until the boat runs aground, and then worrying about how to hopefully salvage the vessel. Yet the Management Board seems committed to the latter course when managing striped bass. Precautionary course changes seem alien to its way of thinking.

Thus, I suggest that, before embarking upon Amendment 7, the Management Board ask itself whether it has acted as a responsible steward of the striped bass resources, consistently basing its actions on the best available science, acting quickly to end overfishing, and rebuilding stocks with an eye toward long-term sustainability, as the Charter requires, or whether it allowed short-term social and economic considerations to cloud its decision making and push the bass stock into decline.

Most striped bass anglers will agree that that Management Board was not a good steward, particularly over the past decade.

About 90 percent of striped bass fishing mortality is attributable to the recreational sector, and recreational fishermen release about 90 percent of the striped bass that they catch. Fewer than 5 percent of all striped bass trips are taken on for-hire vessels. When one manages a primarily recreational, overwhelmingly surf and private boat, and predominantly catch-and-release fishery, one should not manage for yield. Such fisheries are managed for abundance, with managers seeking to maximize the number of live fish in the water, and not the number of dead bass on the dock.

Not everyone will agree on that point, as there are still businesses focused on striped bass harvest, and some of them loudly oppose harvest cuts. However, as we approach the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is time for the Management Board to look forward, and consider how the striped bass fishery ought to look in 2050, and stop clinging to the obsolete paradigms of the 1950s, when demographics, population and the health of our coastal waters were much different than they are today. As all of our fish stocks, including striped bass, experience greater stresses, the Management Board can no longer accede to the outdated, yet too often-heard claim that anglers all need "a fish to take home."

What striped bass anglers need and want today, and what they will need and want in the future, is an abundance of this that they can catch. Some of those fish will be taken home, but most will be released, with anglers hoping that they will be caught, and released, more than once.

So Amendment 7, should the Management Board decide to move forward with such a document, should stress abundance, not harvest. "Moving the goal posts," by reducing the biomass target in order to increase short-term landings, might please a small minority of stakeholders, but it would be viewed by most striped bass anglers as the Management Board's final abdication of its responsibilities to both stakeholders and to the striped bass stock.

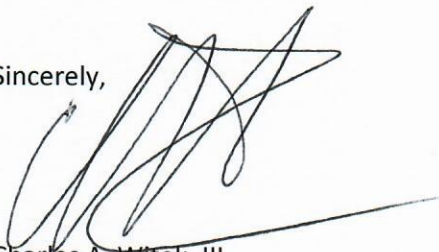
Dr. Michael Armstrong, Assistant Director of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and former Chair of the Management Board, noted in a recent webcast sponsored by the American Sportfishing Association, "Fishing effort skyrockets" when striped bass are abundant. "If the stock doubles, the fishing effort does not double, it quadruples...It behooves everyone to keep the stock healthy."

Those are true words.

Abundance drives effort in the striped bass fishery, and in a recreational fishery, it is effort, not landings, that drive economic activity. The more people who fish, and the more often people fish, the greater the fishery's economic value. To the extent that landings significantly reduce abundance, they also reduce effort, and economic returns as well.

I ask the Management Board to keep that truth in the front of everyone's mind should it decide to move forward with Amendment 7.

Sincerely,



Charles A. Witek, III

## Max Appelman

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**From:** pfallon mainestripers.com <pfallon@mainestripers.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 23, 2020 9:09 PM  
**To:** Comments  
**Subject:** [External] Comment for Distribution to Striped Bass Board

Please add the following to the electronic distribution of public comments to the Atlantic Striped Bass Board prior to their meetings on August 3 and 4, 2020.

Dear Members of the Atlantic Striped Bass Board,

I'm writing as President of the Maine Association of Charterboat Captains to express our organization's strongest support for the motion originally made by Commissioner Keliher at the February, 2020 meeting to permit the board to require modifications in a state's measures if they fail to meet their targeted mortality reduction in a season.

As the motion currently reads, permitting the board to require modification of measures in the next fishing year is a critical component of the much needed step forward and we don't want to see the motion watered down by pushing the requirement for change out to two years.

As we've addressed in previous comments, the ASMFC and the Striped Bass Board in particular, face a crisis of confidence with the angling public across many stakeholder groups. Recent decisions have started the process of restoring faith in the ability of this group to successfully manage the incredibly important species in the Northeast fishery. Passing this motion is an important and needed next step.

Conservation Equivalency is a management tool that provides the Board with significant flexibility. Unfortunately, it has been misused and under regulated in the past. Public sentiment is building to restrict or eliminate CE's. Adding accountability to CE's is long overdue and could stem the tide of opinion looking to do away with CE's altogether.

Here in Maine, we are at the end of the line for striped bass as they migrate up and down the East Coast. Our recreational saltwater fishery is almost wholly dependent upon this one species. What happens in other states regarding striped bass mortality directly affects our fishing and our livelihoods. On behalf of our members and many of our clients, we urge you to pass this motion at this meeting.

Sincerely,

Capt. Peter Fallon, President

Maine Association of Charterboat Captains

824 Main Rd

Phippsburg, ME 04562

207-522-9900