



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Weakfish Technical Committee Report on Board Task to Evaluate Commercial Discard Data and Trips Meeting or Exceeding the 100 lb Trip Limit

October 3, 2018

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At the February 2018 meeting, the South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board (Board) tasked the Weakfish Technical Committee (TC) with the following motion:

Move to task the Technical Committee to review weakfish discard data from the Northeast Federal Observer Program and from vessel trip reports (VTRs), analyze landings data to see if the occurrences of commercial trips approaching the 100-lb trip limit have increased, and to characterize the fisheries with substantial weakfish discards to see if different trip limits could be implemented to turn discards into landings and/or if fishing modifications could be made to minimize discards.

Motion by C. Batsavage, second by J. Clark.

To accomplish this task, the TC or a subcommittee of the TC met four times via conference call and carried on discussions between calls via email.

During the first call a subcommittee was formed, data sources were identified, and subcommittee members were tasked with making data requests to state and federal agencies. It was determined that although the group would summarize data, some of the data required to complete the task was confidential, so subcommittee members applied for confidential data access through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). The second call was used to begin initial review of state data. At this point the group determined that finer-scale detail was required, so a request was made to state natural resource agencies to send revised data in a uniform format. Once all members of the sub-committee had confidential data access, the data were distributed, and two final calls were used to review data for trips that met or exceeded the 100 lb limit. The subcommittee determined how to best summarize data over the course of the time period (2009 – 2017) to identify potential trends.

There were no clear trends evident in either the number of trips meeting or exceeding the trip limit or the amount of weakfish discarded in any of the data sources examined. The subcommittee does note that the states reporting potential increases, which motivated this task, Virginia and North Carolina, did show notable one-year increases in number and percentage of trips at or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit toward the end of the time series. For

Virginia, this increase occurred in 2016, but was followed by a decline to more typical levels in 2017. For North Carolina, the increase occurred in 2017, but there is no way of knowing, with current information, whether this is the beginning of a trend or a single-year phenomenon. Therefore, the Weakfish TC does not recommend any changes to the current management plan. In the future these data can be revisited to include successive years of trip data to determine if a trend develops. Some of the summarized data that the subcommittee investigated are shown below.

Objective: To address the ASMFC Weakfish Management Board tasks to 1) investigate the occurrence of trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit and 2) to examine discard data from the NMFS observer program.

Data sources: Data were from 2009-2017 and came from state agencies, Vessel Trip Reports (NMFS), and the Fishery Observer Program (NMFS).

Task 1

Investigate the occurrence of trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit.

In 2010, a 100 lb trip limit was established as a part of Addendum IV to Amendment 4 (2009) in the Weakfish Management Plan. The Weakfish Technical Committee requested trip level data from state natural resource agencies and NMFS Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) in order to summarize the number of trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit and quantify the weight of weakfish harvested during those trips. Data provided by individual states did not show any clear trends in either increases or declines in the percentage of trips that were equal to or exceeded the 100 lb limit (Figure 1). Vessel Trip Report data from the NMFS similarly did not indicate any trending in the number of commercial trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb limit (Figure 2). The percentage of pounds reflected in trips \geq the 100 lb trip limit similarly did not show any patterns in either state (Figure 3) or VTR (Figure 4) data. Peaks and declines were not synchronized among the states and individual states did not reflect an upward trend in catch. A summary of number of trips and weight of weakfish for all states combined in each of the two data sources is shown in Table 1. *De minimis* states (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Georgia, and Florida) were not included in analyses due to minimal impact on the commercial fishery and to avoid portrayal of confidential information from the small number of commercial trips catching weakfish in these states. Additionally, South Carolina was not included due to their lack of commercial weakfish harvest during the time series investigated. Trips and landings reported by the Potomac River Fisheries Commission are included with Virginia or Maryland.

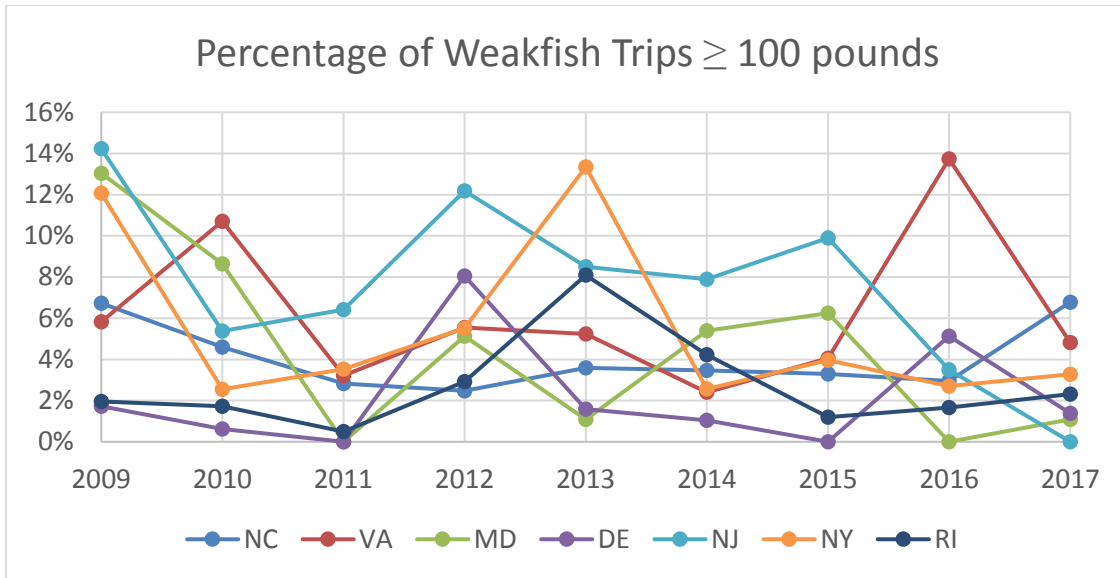


Figure 1. Percentage of commercial trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit as provided by states.

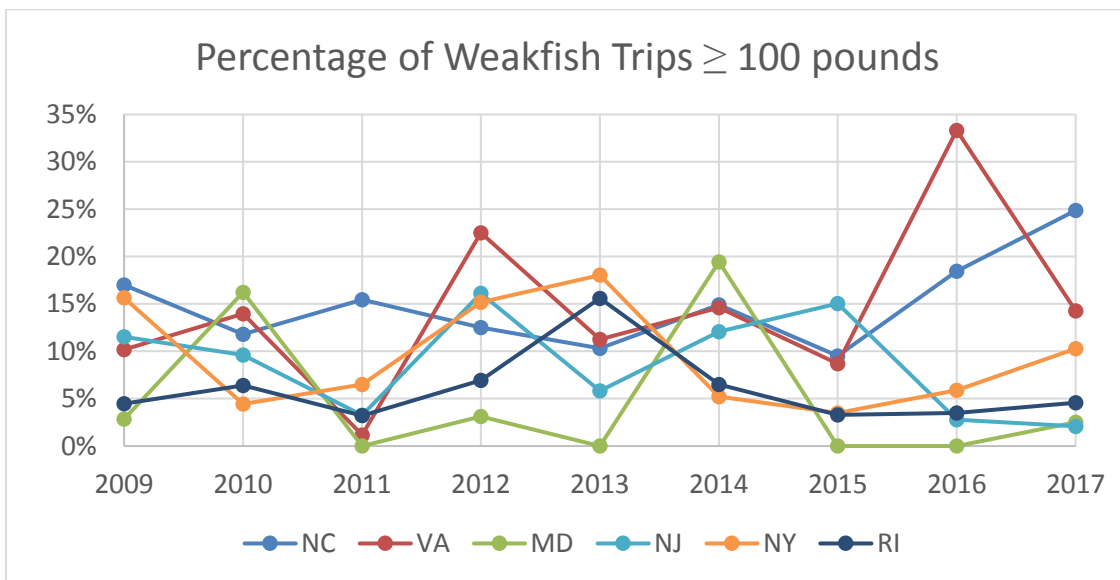


Figure 2. Percentage of commercial trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb trip limit as provided by the NMFS in Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs). Note that Delaware is absent from the VTR data since there were no VTRs from the time period used in this analysis.

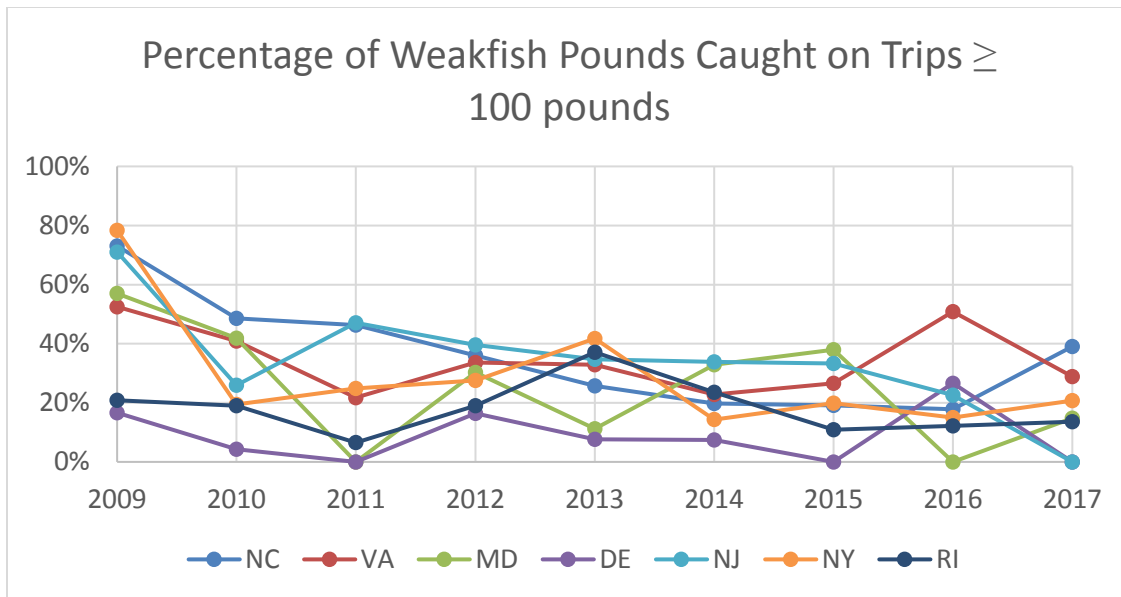


Figure 3. Percentage of weakfish pounds harvested on trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb limit as provided by states.

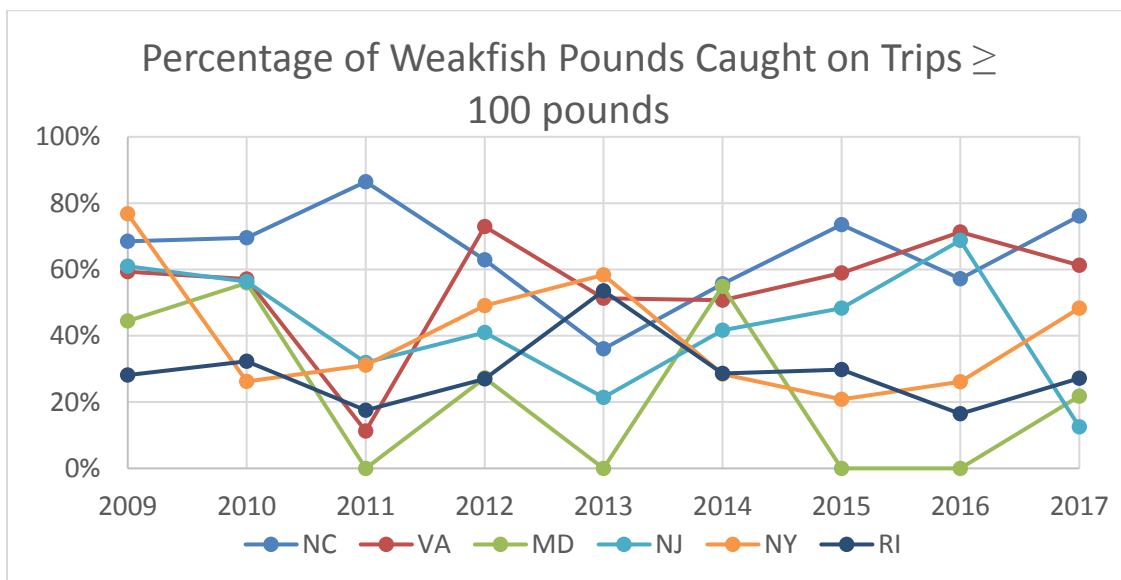


Figure 4. Percentage of weakfish pounds harvested on trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb limit as provided by the NMFS in Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs). Note that Delaware is absent from the VTR data since there were no VTRs from the time period used in this analysis.

Table 1. A summary of trips and weight for all states combined by data source.

<u>State Data</u>						
Year	Total Trips	Trips >= 100 lbs	% Trips >=100 lbs	Total Pounds	Pounds from Trips >=100 lbs	% Pounds from Trips >=100 lbs
2009	9,128	635	6.96%	304,568	206,349	67.75%
2010	8,529	487	5.71%	195,691	82,243	42.03%
2011	7,615	224	2.94%	123,196	45,609	37.02%
2012	12,157	529	4.35%	245,557	75,449	30.73%
2013	15,119	928	6.14%	317,826	102,672	32.30%
2014	10,649	356	3.34%	184,086	36,860	20.02%
2015	7,555	270	3.57%	135,642	28,104	20.72%
2016	9,030	403	4.46%	170,378	41,830	24.55%
2017	8,919	463	5.19%	160,481	49,344	30.75%

<u>Vessel Trip Reports (NMFS)</u>						
Year	Total Trips	Trips >= 100 lbs	% Trips >=100 lbs	Total Pounds	Pounds from Trips >=100 lbs	% Pounds from Trips >=100 lbs
2009	1,167	145	12.43%	61,479	41,478	67.47%
2010	1,079	94	8.71%	40,321	21,775	54.00%
2011	1,131	64	5.66%	31,699	14,584	46.01%
2012	1,754	233	13.28%	60,911	28,304	46.47%
2013	2,059	275	13.36%	68,075	34,153	50.17%
2014	1,355	132	9.74%	36,294	15,052	41.47%
2015	902	59	6.54%	26,822	13,070	48.73%
2016	1,301	133	10.22%	40,825	18,723	45.86%
2017	1,251	127	10.15%	33,754	16,232	48.09%

Task 2

Examine discard data from the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program.

As with the number of commercial trips meeting or exceeding the 100 lb limit, the percentage of discarded pounds of weakfish does not show a clear temporal trend (Figure 5). Years that demonstrate extreme high or low values are not reflected among states.

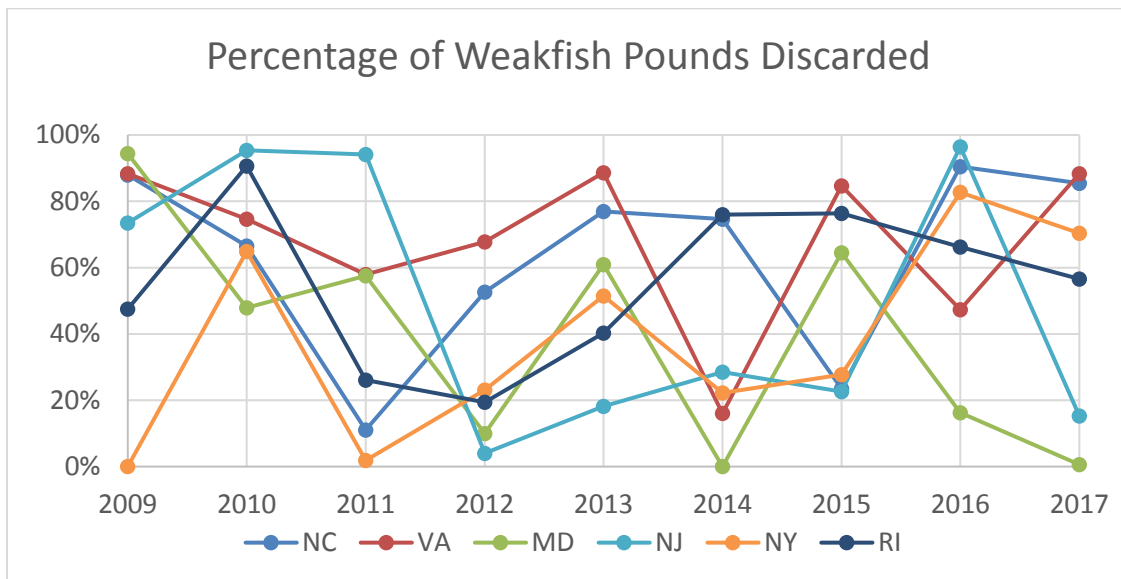


Figure 5. Percentage of weakfish discarded as observed on commercial trips by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program.