



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Sciaenids Management Board
FROM: Tracey Bauer, FMP Coordinator
DATE: July 22, 2024
SUBJECT: Discussion of the 2023 Fishing Year Traffic Light Analysis of Spot and Atlantic Croaker

Technical Committee Members in Attendance: Somers Smott (Atlantic Croaker Chair, VA), Harry Rickabaugh (Spot Chair, MD), Dawn Franco (GA), Stacy VanMorter (NJ), Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC), Willow Patton (NC), Halie O'Farrell (FL), Margaret Finch (SC), Devon Scott (DE)

Staff in Attendance: Tracey Bauer, Jeff Kipp, Kristen Anstead

Others in Attendance: Ethan Simpson (VA), Chris Batsavage (NC), Brooke Lowman (VA), CJ Schlick (SC), Danny Bryant (GA), Chris McDonough (SC)

This memorandum serves as a summary of the joint Spot and Atlantic Croaker Technical Committees (TCs) call on June 27, 2024. The following outlines the TCs' discussions and recommendations for the Board regarding the Traffic Light Analysis (TLA) for both species.

Background

Annually, the TC conducts a TLA to evaluate a Mid-Atlantic (NJ-VA) and South Atlantic (NC-FL) harvest metric, combining commercial and recreational landings in each region. The TC also evaluates a Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic abundance metric, combining indices of abundance from fishery-independent surveys in each region. Metrics are evaluated using a color proportion of green, yellow, or red based on comparing that year to a 2002-2012 reference period. Addendum III for each species defined 30% red as a moderate concern and 60% red as a significant concern to the fishery. Management action is triggered according to the 30% red and 60% red thresholds if both the adult abundance and harvest thresholds from a region are exceeded in a set number of terminal years.

The TLA for the 2019 fishing year indicated that both species triggered at the 30% red threshold. State implementation plans for management measures were approved in early 2021 and all new management measures were enacted by the end of 2021. These management measures were to remain in place for at least two years for spot and three years for Atlantic croaker to promote consistent measures and allow for sufficient time to evaluate population response, as per Addendum III. Addendum III for both species also stipulates that while

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triggered measures are in effect, only the abundance metrics can be used to evaluate the stock in future updates to the TLA.

In April 2024, the Sciaenids Management Board directed the Spot and Atlantic Croaker TCs to conduct abbreviated TLAs with data through 2023 for both species, focusing on updating only the harvest and abundance composite metrics used to make management decisions, and not the supplemental information which has been provided in the past.

Results of the 2023 FY TLA Update and Recommendations

Spot

Abundance metrics for spot for both regions did not trigger at either threshold in the current update to the TLA. Addendum III states for spot that after two years, if abundance metrics do not exceed either threshold, triggered measures are no longer required and the TC can resume using the harvest metrics to trigger management action.

Although triggered measures are no longer required because abundance characteristics in the spot TLA did not trigger at either threshold, the Spot TC recommends maintaining the current management measures. The TC recognized that if they were to resume using the harvest metrics next year, the TLA could potentially immediately trigger again, requiring the same management action. In addition, there is continued concern with the low spot commercial and recreational harvest, so the TC does not recommend lifting the harvest restrictions at this time.

Atlantic Croaker

For Atlantic croaker, the abundance metric for the Mid-Atlantic region exceeded the 30% threshold in all four terminal years. Addendum III states, in this case, if triggered measures have remained in place for at least four years due to either region's abundance metric exceeding the threshold, the TC must evaluate trends in the stock's abundance to recommend to the Board whether triggered measures should remain in place or more restrictive measures should be considered.

The Atlantic Croaker TC recommends maintaining the current management measures. The TC did not want to recommend more restrictive measures while the Atlantic croaker benchmark stock assessment is currently ongoing and will be completed approximately within the next year.

For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at 703.842.0723 or tbauer@asmfc.org.