



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Sciaenids Management Board
FROM: Tracey Bauer, FMP Coordinator
DATE: July 21, 2025
SUBJECT: Discussion of the 2024 fishing year Traffic Light Analysis of spot and Atlantic croaker

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

Staff in Attendance: Tracey Bauer, Samara Nehemiah, Jeff Kipp

Others in Attendance: Chris Batsavage, Chris McDonough, Alan Bianchi, Paul G., Travis Williams

This memorandum serves as a summary of the joint Spot and Atlantic Croaker Technical Committees (TCs) call on July 8, 2025. The following summary outlines the TCs' discussions and recommendations for the Board regarding the 2024 fishing year (FY) Traffic Light Analysis (TLA) for both species.

Background

Annually, the TCs conduct a TLA to evaluate Mid-Atlantic (NJ-VA) and South Atlantic (NC-FL) harvest metrics, combining commercial and recreational landings in each region for each species. The TCs also evaluate Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic abundance metrics, 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 each 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

triggered measures are in effect, only the abundance metrics can be used to evaluate the stock in future updates to the TLA. Triggered measures are no longer required and the TC can resume using the harvest metrics to trigger management action if abundance metrics do not exceed either threshold after a minimum of two years and three years, for spot and Atlantic croaker respectively.

Results of the 2024 FY TLA Update and Recommendations

Spot

Adult abundance metrics for spot for both regions did not trigger at either threshold in the current update to the TLA. As it has been more than two years since the harvest restrictions went into effect and abundance metrics did not exceed either threshold, the TC has resumed consideration of the harvest metrics to trigger management action. Harvest metrics for spot exceeded the 30% threshold in all three terminal years in both regions, and exceeded the 60% threshold in two of the three terminal years in the South Atlantic. Since Addendum III requires both the harvest and adult abundance metrics to exceed thresholds in a single region to trigger management action, management action was not triggered for spot in this year's update of the TLA.

However, the Spot TC recommends maintaining current management measures due to continued concern with low spot commercial and recreational harvest. The Spot TC concluded that although the 2021 harvest restrictions were meant to lower commercial and recreational spot harvest, it is unlikely that the minimal restrictions implemented by the states in 2021 would have caused the continued decline in spot harvest observed. In addition, the Spot TC recognizes that work on a spot benchmark stock assessment will resume once the Atlantic croaker benchmark stock assessment is complete, which is currently estimated to occur next year. The assessment will provide spot stock status estimates to inform next steps for management.

Atlantic Croaker

For Atlantic croaker, the adult abundance metric for the Mid-Atlantic region exceeded the 30% threshold in three of the 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 current management measures. There is no indication that more restrictive measures are necessary at this time since the adult abundance metric did not reach the 60% threshold in the Mid-Atlantic and did not reach either the 30% or 60% threshold in the South Atlantic. In addition, the TC did not want to recommend more restrictive measures while the Atlantic croaker benchmark stock assessment is currently ongoing, and is expected to be complete approximately within the next year. The assessment will provide Atlantic croaker stock status estimates to inform next steps for management.

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