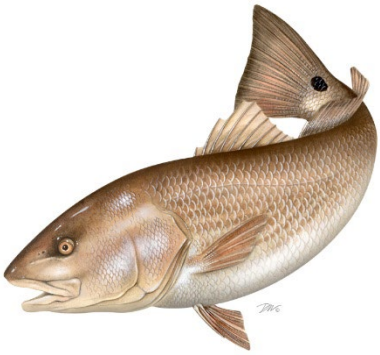
INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Red Drum



Species Range
Historically, Massachusetts through Florida, but few fish have been reported north of Chesapeake Bay in recent years

Management Unit
New Jersey – Florida
Divided into northern (New Jersey – North Carolina) and southern (South Carolina – Florida) regions

Stock Status
The 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report indicates the northern stock of red drum (New Jersey through North Carolina) is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, while the southern stock (South Carolina through the east coast of Florida) is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The two stocks were assessed separately, using different methods.

The southern stock was assessed using the Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment model. Stock status is based on the latest three-year (2019-2021 September-August fishing years) averages of population measures. The three-year average spawning potential ratio (SPR) is less than the 30% SPR threshold, indicating the stock is experiencing overfishing. Spawning potential ratio is a measure of spawning biomass expected under current fishing mortality levels compared to spawning stock biomass expected if no fishing mortality were occurring. The three-year average female spawning stock biomass (SSB) was 8,737 metric tons (19.27 million pounds), less than the SSB threshold of 9,917 metric tons (21.87 million pounds), indicating the stock is overfished. A robust, technically-sound SS model could not be developed for the northern stock, so the stock was assessed using a traffic light analysis (TLA). The TLA assigns a color (red, yellow or green) to categorize relative levels of metrics that reflect the condition of red drum adult abundance and fishery performance (i.e., fishing mortality). Although these metrics were not red in the last three years of the assessment, indicating the stock was not overfished nor experiencing overfishing, consistent yellow fishery performance metrics indicated increasing fishing mortality in recent years. Continued monitoring of the northern stock and the increasing trend in fishing mortality is recommended in future years through updates to the TLA.

The Sciaenids Management Board accepted the benchmark stock assessment and peer review reports for management use in October 2024.

Involved States and Jurisdictions
NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL

Active Boards/Committees
Sciaenids Management Board, Red Drum Technical Committee, Red Drum Plan Review Team, South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel

Chairs
Board, Chair – Ben Dyar (02/2026); Vice-Chair – Ethan Simpson
Technical Committee, Chair –Cara Kowalchyk; Vice-Chair – Vacant
Advisory Panel, Chair – Craig Freeman (11/2019)
Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Chair – Joey Ballenger

Staff Lead
Tracey Bauer, tbauer@asmfc.org

Management Plan History
Fishery Management Plan for Red Drum (October 1984)
Despite being a highly sought after fish, red drum biological and fisheries data were too limited to effectively manage the resource. Additional concerns about user conflict were raised as well. With the major goals of helping the states avoid overfishing and increase data availability, the FMP recommends a 14" TL minimum size limit with comparable mesh size regulations in directed fisheries, a possession limit of two fish greater than 32"TL, a prohibition on purse seining, and data collection for assessment and monitoring.

1990 – The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) adopts a federal FMP for red drum, which establishes a definition of overfishing and optimum yield, prohibits the harvest of red drum in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and recommends that states implement measures necessary to provide the target level of at least 30 percent escapement.

Fishery Management Plan for Red Drum - Amendment 1 (October 1991)
Amendment 1 is adopted in response to the federal FMP. It includes a goal to attain optimum yield, which is defined as the amount of harvest that could be taken while maintaining 30 percent spawning stock biomass per recruit (SSBR). An interim goal of 10 percent SSBR is allowed. Most states implemented or maintained strict regulations. Later, the 2000 stock assessment indicated that the interim SPR goal was met.

1998 – The Council adopts new definitions of optimum yield (harvest associated with a 40 percent static spawning potential ratio, or SPR) and overfishing (F at SPR less than 30 percent, with a threshold of F at 10 percent SPR). Several states implemented substantial changes to their regulations.

Amendment 2 to the Fishery Management Plan for Red Drum (June 2002)
Amendment 2 is adopted to establish a 30 percent SPR threshold and 40 percent SPR target. States are required to implement recreational regulations to achieve the goal, whereas commercial regulations can be maintained or made more conservative. A maximum size limit of 27" is also required. All required states have implemented the plan.

2008 – Effective November 5, management authority for red drum in federal waters is transferred from the Council to the Commission.

Addendum I (August 2013)

The Addendum revises Amendment 2's habitat section to include current information on red drum spawning habitat and habitat by life stage (egg, larval, juvenile, sub-adult, and adult). It also identifies and describes the distribution of key habitats and habitats of concern, including threats, habitat bottlenecks (habitat or habitat characteristics that limit the sustainability or recovery of red drum), and ecosystem considerations.

Addendum II (October 2025)

In October 2025, the Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 2, in response to the 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report. The Addendum updates red drum management, with the goal of improving efficiency, flexibility, and timeliness in implementation of new regulations and providing assessment advice. In addition, the Addendum modifies the fishing mortality for the southern stock (South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) to end overfishing and aligns red drum recreational regulations in Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) given their shared water bodies.

Annual Events

- Red drum compliance reports are due July 1st with a reminder distributed 90 days prior.
- The Plan Review Team reviews state compliance within 30 days of the deadline and the Board determines state compliance within 60 days of the deadline.
- State compliance is reported in the annual Fishery Management Plan Review produced by the Plan Review Team.
- The Advisory Panel receives an update after each Board meeting, and should meet at least once per year.