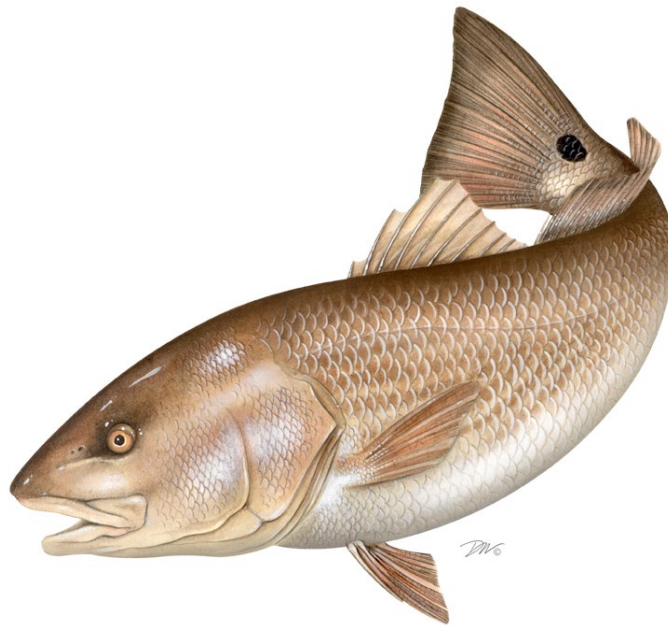


Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ADDENDUM II TO AMENDMENT 2 TO THE RED DRUM FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Modifications to Red Drum Management



October 2025



Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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1.0 Introduction

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) maintains primary coordination responsibility for red drum in state waters (0-3 miles), under the authority of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA). The Commission defines the red drum management unit as the resource throughout the range of the species within US Atlantic coast waters of the estuaries eastward to the offshore boundaries of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The management area is the entire Atlantic coast distribution of the resource from Florida (east coast) through New Jersey. The management area is divided into a southern stock and a northern stock. The southern stock includes the waters of the Atlantic coast of Florida north to the North Carolina/South Carolina border. The northern stock extends from the North Carolina/South Carolina border north through New Jersey.

State water fisheries for red drum are currently managed under Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP; ASMFC 2002) and its Addenda (I and II). Harvest of red drum in the EEZ has been prohibited by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service since 1990 (SAFMC 1990).

This addendum establishes a process for the states to propose changes to regulations to meet the plan's fishing mortality (F) objectives; establishes a method for states to propose methods to estimate fishing mortality for the evaluation of future regulation changes; establishes a fishing mortality level for southern states to meet through implemented regulations to end overfishing; establishes a single bag and size limit to be implemented by Virginia, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC), and Maryland; and updates red drum *de minimis* provisions.

2.0 Overview

2.1 Statement of the Problem

The Board initiated Draft Addendum II to consider changes to the management programs for the southern and northern stocks in response to the 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report in May 2025. The 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, approved for management use in October 2024, indicated the southern stock of red drum was overfished and experiencing overfishing, while the northern stock was not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.

Amendment 2 does not provide the means for states to make changes to their bag and size limits to meet the required fishing mortality level using any methodology other than tables from Vaughan and Carmichael (2001). Following the 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment, Vaughan and Carmichael (2001) is no longer the best scientific information available to inform red drum management. However, instead of Addendum II specifying a new methodology, the Board expressed interest in allowing for future flexibility by developing a process for states to propose changes to regulations in response to new information on the stock. As a part of this process, new methodologies to estimate the impact of regulation changes on fishing mortality could be proposed and approved. Crucially, the process in this Addendum allows southern stock states to address the negative stock status indicated by the

2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment. The process is also available for northern stock states in the future, if needed.

The Board also expressed interest in proactively addressing a concern that delays to future assessments may delay re-evaluation of red drum management by the states or force the states to use outdated or obsolete methodologies to provide management advice. Current Commission guidelines do not allow any analyses submitted outside the benchmark process to be considered for management use until the next Commission benchmark assessment. As a result, the Board requested development of an alternative pathway to allow for new methodologies to estimate fishing mortality outside of the Commission's assessment process.

In addition, the Board requested Draft Addendum II to clearly define the threshold and target, and the level of fishing mortality management measures must not exceed. It is important to note these changes do not affect the biological reference point (BRP) defined in Amendment 2 used to define stock status with respect to overfishing (30% SPR or $F_{30\%}$, see BRP definitions in Section 2.2 below), nor alters the BRP proposed in the 2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report used to define overfished stock status ($SSB_{30\%}$). Instead, Addendum II proposes a new definition of the required fishing mortality level for states to not exceed for state compliance with the Red Drum FMP when an assessment determines overfishing is occurring.

Northern Stock

Although the northern stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing, an increasing trend in fishing mortality was observed in the northern stock during the stock assessment. The increased effort observed in the northern stock may indicate current management in this stock is no longer conservative enough to restrain harvest to appropriate levels. Historically, red drum abundance has been low north of North Carolina. However, red drum numbers have increased in the Chesapeake Bay in recent years, an indication the northern stock may be experiencing a range expansion. Managers and stakeholders expressed concern that red drum's increasing abundance and declines in abundance of other traditional sportfish in the Chesapeake Bay (e.g., striped bass) may exacerbate the increasing trend in red drum fishing mortality already observed in the stock.

In addition, current red drum regulations in the northern stock vary between jurisdictions, particularly within the Chesapeake Bay, where bag limits range from one fish to five fish per person per day and jurisdictions all have different maximum size limits. Differing regulations for a species between neighboring jurisdictions, especially for those that share waterbodies like the Chesapeake Bay, causes confusion for anglers and can lead to enforcement and compliance issues.

For all of these reasons, the Board wishes to consider changes to the jurisdictions' recreational bag and slot limits for the northern region to 1) act preemptively and precautionarily to control fishing mortality before a fishery for red drum in states north of North Carolina is fully

developed and 2) provide the northern region jurisdictions with the opportunity to align their differing regulations, particularly in the Chesapeake Bay.

De Minimis Policy

The Commission includes *de minimis* provisions in interstate FMPs, like Amendment 2 to the Red Drum FMP, to reduce the management burden for states whose measures would have a negligible effect on the conservation of a species. Currently, Amendment 2 does not provide any specific guidelines for evaluating whether a state should be considered *de minimis* nor does it establish any measures for *de minimis* states.

In 2022, the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board approved an updated *De Minimis* Policy. The 2022 *De Minimis* Policy includes a specific definition for states to be considered *de minimis*, as well as a requirement that an FMP must establish a set of measures for *de minimis* states to implement that would not have to change annually. This Addendum will consider updating the *de minimis* provisions for red drum to match the 2022 *De Minimis* Policy.

2.2 Background

2.3.1 Status of the Stock

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

The southern stock was assessed using a Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment model. Stock status is based on the latest three-year (2019-2021 September through August fishing years; e.g., September 2019 through August 2022) averages of population measures. This assessment moved away from the use of calendar year (i.e., January through December) to a fishing year (September through August) definition to align the data sets and modeled population dynamics to the red drum life cycle. Terminal year spawning potential ratio (SPR) is less than the 30% SPR threshold, indicating the stock is experiencing overfishing. SPR is a measure of spawning biomass expected under current fishing mortality levels and selectivity patterns compared to spawning biomass expected if no fishing mortality were occurring. Note that $F_x\%$ is the fishing mortality level that achieves a SPR of the same percentage of x , so these quantities can be used interchangeably. For example, $F_{30\%}$ and 30% SPR are interchangeable and represent the same fishing intensity. Terminal year 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. $SSB_{30\%}$ is the level of SSB expected when the stock is fished at the $F_{30\%}$ threshold fishing mortality level.

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.

2.3.2 Status of Management

The Commission adopted [Amendment 2](#) to the Red Drum FMP in June 2002 (ASMFC 2002), which serves as the current management plan. The goal of Amendment 2 is to achieve and maintain optimum yield for the Atlantic coast red drum fishery as the amount of harvest that can be taken by US fishermen while maintaining the static spawning potential ratio (sSPR) at or above the target of 40%. There are four plan objectives:

- Achieve and maintain an escapement rate sufficient to prevent recruitment failure and achieve a sSPR at or above 40%.
- Provide a flexible management system to address incompatibility and inconsistency among state and federal regulations which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial ASMFC, Council, and public input into management decisions; and which can adapt to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information, and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by area.
- Promote cooperative collection of biological, economic, and sociological data required to effectively monitor and assess the status of the red drum resource and evaluate management efforts.
- Restore the age and size structure of the Atlantic coast red drum population.

The sSPR of 40% is considered a target; a sSPR below 30% (threshold level) results in an overfishing determination for red drum. Amendment 2 stated all states within the management unit must implement appropriate recreational bag and size limit combinations needed to attain the target sSPR, and to maintain current, or implement more restrictive, commercial fishery regulations. All states were in compliance by January 1, 2003. Red drum state-specific commercial and recreational regulations as of August 1, 2025 can be found in Table 1 (next page).

2.3.1 Status of the Fishery

Red drum fisheries are predominately recreational. In the past 10 years (2015-2024), red drum recreational and commercial harvest averaged approximately 98% and 2%, respectively, of the total coastwide red drum harvest in numbers of fish from both stocks.

The southern stock states no longer have a commercial fishery for red drum. Florida commercial harvest has been prohibited since January 1988. South Carolina and Georgia have designated red drum as a gamefish, banning commercial harvest and sale, since 1987 and 2013, respectively. In the northern stock states, red drum are harvested commercially as bycatch in fisheries targeting other species. Commercial harvest of red drum, mainly from North Carolina and Virginia, has varied through time without trend.

Table 1. Red drum regulations as of August 1, 2025. All size limits are total length. PRFC is the Potomac River Fisheries Commission.

State	Recreational	Commercial
NJ	18" - 27", 1 fish	18" - 27", 1 fish
DE	20" - 27", 5 fish	20" - 27", 5 fish
MD	18" - 27", 1 fish	18" - 25", 5 fish
PRFC	18" - 25", 5 fish	18" - 25", 5 fish
VA	18" - 26", 3 fish	18" - 25", 5 fish
NC	18" - 27", 1 fish	18" - 27"; 250,000 lbs harvest cap with overage payback (150,000 lbs Sept 1- April 30; 100,000 lbs May 1-Aug 31); harvest of red drum allowed with 7 fish daily trip limit; daily landed catch of flounder, bluefish, black drum or striped mullet must exceed daily catch of drum; small mesh (<5" stretched mesh) gill nets attendance requirement May 1 - November 30. Fishing year: September 1 – August 31.
SC	15" - 23", 2 fish per person per day bag limit and 6 fish per boat per day boat limit	Gamefish Only
GA	14" - 23", 5 fish	Gamefish Only
FL	18" - 27"; Northeast Region – 1 fish per person per day, 4 fish vessel limit; Indian River Lagoon Region – 0 fish per person per day, 0 vessel limit; Southeast Region – 1 fish per person per day, 2 fish vessel limit ¹	Sale of native fish prohibited

The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates red drum recreational catch, including both number of fish harvested and number of fish released alive by recreational anglers. It is estimated that 8% of released fish die as a result of being caught, which is used to calculate the number of dead discards. Total recreational removals (number of fish harvested + number of dead discards) in both stocks were high in the 1980s, declined in the 1990s, and have been increasing since the early 2000s (Figure 1). Total recreational removals in both stocks have increased, reaching, and in some cases exceeding, time series highs in recent years. Notably, anglers have been releasing an increasingly large percentage of the total recreational catch in both stocks (Figure 1). In the last 10 years (2015-2024), on average, anglers released 85% of the fish they caught.

¹ Florida implemented these recreational regulations on September 1, 2022, following the terminal year of the 2024 benchmark stock assessment.

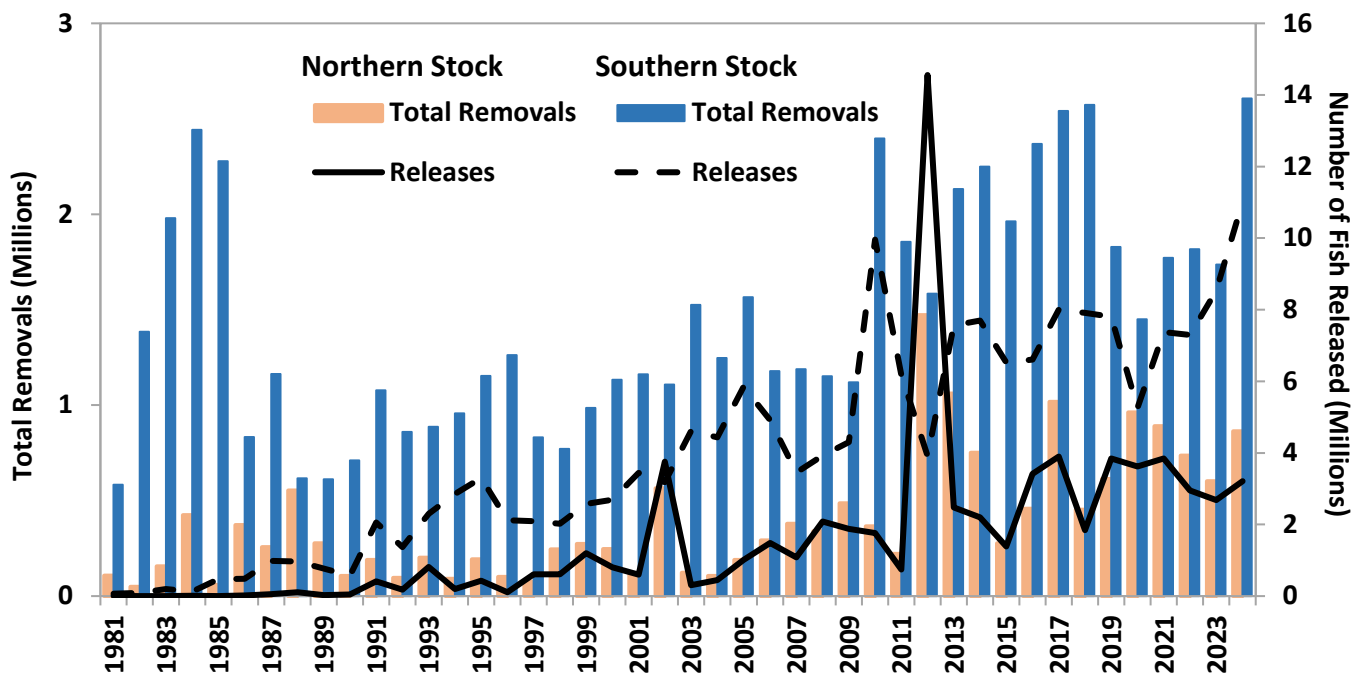


Figure 1. Total recreational removals (harvest + dead discards; numbers) compared to recreational releases of red drum (numbers) by stock for 1981-2024.

Of the northern stock states, a majority of recreational removals are from North Carolina and Virginia, followed by Maryland, comprising approximately 60%, 35%, and 5%, respectively, of the most recent 3-year average of removals (2022-2024). In the southern stock states, a majority of recreational removals are from Florida, followed by Georgia and South Carolina, comprising approximately 43%, 33%, and 24%, respectively, of the most recent 3-year average of removals (2022-2024).

Between 2022 and 2023, recreational removals declined, particularly in Florida, which had implemented more conservative red drum regulations in September 2022 (Table 1). These regulations were implemented after the terminal year of the 2024 benchmark stock assessment, so this observed decline in removals could not be incorporated into the model. Following this decline, recreational removals in both the northern and southern stock states increased in 2024.

3.0 Management Program

3.1 Alternative State Management Measures

States in either stock may propose changes to their management measures using any Board-approved methodology. This process typically occurs following the acceptance of a stock assessment for management use by the Board, which provides new information on the status of the stock, in order to end and prevent overfishing. This can include liberalizing measures if there are positive trends in the stock condition.

The process for states to make changes to measures is as follows:

1. States develop proposals which include all the regulation options (i.e., sets of bag/slot/vessel limits) under consideration, using a Board-approved methodology ². States have the option to either work collaboratively (i.e., states work together to set regulations in each of their states that have the combined effect of achieving the required coastwide reduction) or on their own (e.g., each state must achieve the same X% catch reduction) to achieve the change in catch necessary to not exceed the required fishing mortality level, but this is agreed upon by the states of a respective stock prior to the development of the proposals. States are to provide the following information in proposals: a description of the methodology used to estimate the catch reduction achieved by changes in regulations; sets of measures under consideration; percent change in catch achieved by the individual state and stock, if applicable; estimated implementation timeline by the state. In instances where a state has already implemented regulations to reduce catch following the terminal year of the assessment, data from the MRIP will be used to estimate actual reductions in recreational removals. Regulations need to be in place for at least three years to be used to estimate the actual reduction achieved.
2. These proposals are reviewed by the Red Drum Technical Committee (TC) to ensure the data and analysis are technically sound. The TC evaluates a state's proposed action based on whether it will contribute to overfishing of the resource. Public input on proposed measures are gathered at the state level through state processes.
3. The proposals are presented to and approved by the Board. Proposals should follow a Board-approved methodology and the stock as a whole should achieve the Board-approved percent change in catch.
4. Once approved, states select one of the options from their proposals to implement.

3.2 Allow Alternative Methods to Estimate Fishing Mortality for Use in Management

States are able to propose methods outside of the most recently Board-approved benchmark stock assessment to estimate changes to fishing mortality.

The methods and analyses used to estimate changes to fishing mortality are submitted by the state(s) proposing the action and reviewed by the TC to ensure the data and analysis are technically sound. The TC evaluates a state's methodology and analyses based on whether it will contribute to overfishing of the resource as defined by the Red Drum FMP. The Board can recommend additional review by the Commission's Assessment Science Committee (ASC), if additional technical expertise or independent review is needed.

² If not already available, the TC develops and/or evaluates a methodology to estimate the change in catch that results from adjusting regulations, such as bag, vessel, and slot limits. All methodologies are approved by the Board for management use prior to the development of state proposals.

The Board reviews comments from the TC and ASC, if applicable, and decides whether to approve proposed alternative analyses for management use if the Board determines that the alternative analysis is consistent with the goals and objectives of the fishery management plan.

If the alternative methods are approved for management use, the process to change management measures involve the following steps:

1. State(s) develop proposals which include all regulation options (i.e., sets of bag/slot/vessel limits) under consideration, using the Board-approved methodology³. If there is more than one state proposing changes, states have the option to either work collaboratively or on their own (i.e., each state must show how their changes impact fishing mortality). State(s) proposals include the following information: a detailed description of the methodology used; sets of measures under consideration; percent change in catch achieved by the individual state and stock as a whole, if applicable; estimated implementation timeline by the state.
2. These proposals are reviewed by the TC to ensure the data and analysis are technically sound. The TC also evaluates a state's proposed action based on whether it will contribute to overfishing of the resource as defined by the Red Drum FMP. Public input on proposed measures are gathered at the state level through state processes.
3. The proposals are presented to and approved by the Board. Proposals follow a Board-approved methodology and the stock as a whole achieve the Board-approved percent change in harvest.
4. Once approved, states select one of the options from their proposals to implement.

3.3 Fishing Mortality Level

Southern stock state measures are to achieve the threshold and end overfishing (i.e., $F < F_{30\%}$ or 30% SPR under terminal year fishery selectivity patterns), with a target of decreasing fishing mortality such that it is less than the fishing mortality associated with 40% SPR under terminal year fishery selectivity patterns. The reduction in fishing mortality will be calculated using methodologies developed by the TC that do not incorporate noncompliance and are approved by the Board.

3.4 Chesapeake Bay Jurisdictions Modifications

Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions are defined as Maryland, the PRFC, and Virginia.

³ If not already available, the TC develops and/or evaluate a methodology to estimate the change in catch that results from adjusting regulations, such as bag, vessel, and slot limits. The methods and analyses used to estimate changes to fishing mortality from the proposed action are provided by the state proposing the action and reviewed by the TC. All methodologies need to be approved by the Board for management use prior to the development of proposals.

Recreational Measures: The bag limit for Maryland, the PRFC, and Virginia is 3 fish per person per day and the slot limit is 18 to 26 inches total length.

3.5 *De Minimis* Provisions

This section updates section 4.5.3 in Amendment 2 to align with the guidelines in the Commission's 2022 *De Minimis* Policy.

De Minimis Program

A state is considered *de minimis* if the average total landings for the last three years is less than 1% of total landings from its respective stock.

By definition, states that meet *de minimis* standards have a negligible effect on the conservation of a species, therefore, those states should not have to change regulations year-to-year to meet FMP requirements. If deemed necessary, a set of measures can be established for *de minimis* states within a stock which should provide a minimum level of protection and prevent regulatory loopholes. The PRT and/or the TC recommend commercial (if applicable) and recreational measures for *de minimis* states by stock. The Board reviews the recommendation(s) and approves the *de minimis* measures. *de minimis* states implement the *de minimis* measures, unless more restrictive regulations are already in place. The Board reviews the *de minimis* standard measures after each benchmark stock assessment to determine if the measures are still providing a minimal level of species conservation.

Other guidelines in Amendment 2 section 4.5.3, including that states must include *de minimis* requests as part of their annual compliance reports, still apply.

4.0 Compliance

Addendum II is effective immediately.

The implementation schedule for Section 3.3 and 3.4 is as follows:

- States to submit proposals by April 1, 2026.
- The Board reviews and considers approval of proposals at the Spring 2026 Commission meeting.
- States implement regulations by September 1, 2026

5.0 Literature Cited

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