Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 13, 2026

PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger
703.842.0749

Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds Northern Stock Depleted but Not Overfished and Southern Stock Not Overfished Nor Experiencing Overfishing

Newport, RI – The Commission's Sciaenids Management Board received the results of the 2026 Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, which indicate the northern stock of Atlantic croaker (New Jersey through Cape Lookout, North Carolina) is depleted but not experiencing overfishing, while the southern stock (south of Cape Lookout, North Carolina through Florida) is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

"The Benchmark Stock Assessment is a considerable advancement in our understanding of Atlantic croaker spawning stock biomass and stock status which was able to determine a clearer dividing line between the northern and southern stocks for the first time. It was also the first assessment that we have been able to successfully include shrimp trawl data, a major source of croaker removals, into the assessment model," said Board Chair Ben Dyar of South Carolina. "These data have been considered in past assessments but have never been incorporated into the stock status determination. The assessment was fully endorsed by an external panel of fishery scientists as the best scientific information available to manage the croaker resource, and I commend the members of the Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee for their outstanding work on the Benchmark Stock Assessment."

The two Atlantic croaker stocks were separately assessed using the Stock Synthesis (SS) population modeling framework. Stock status at the end of the assessment time series was determined from the three-year average (2021-2023) of fishing mortality (*F*) and spawning stock biomass (SSB) compared to their threshold levels. Two *F* thresholds were recommended for each stock to better understand sources of fishing pressure, one including *F* for all ages in the population (i.e., age-0+) and one including *F* for only ages older than age-0 (i.e., age-1+). *F* for age-0 includes mortality from shrimp trawl fleets that catch Atlantic croaker as bycatch while *F* for ages-1+ only includes mortality from recreational and commercial fisheries targeting Atlantic croaker. The assessment determined that the northern stock was depleted and not experiencing overfishing. The three-year average SSB at the end of the assessment was below the threshold and the three-year average Fs for both age ranges were below thresholds (see Figures on next page).

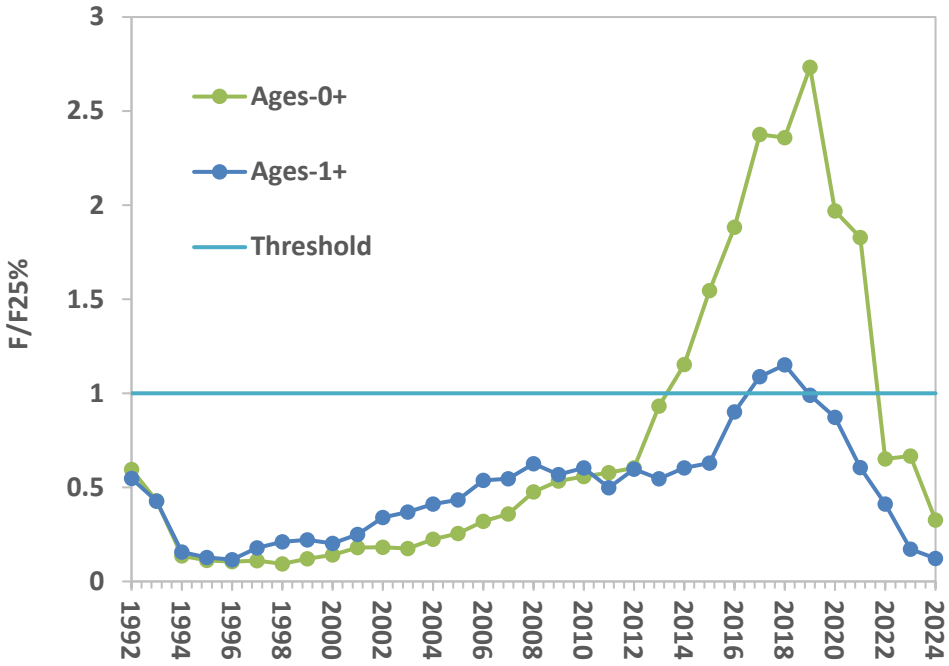
The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

Stock status is described as depleted because it was not clear what caused the initial decline in abundance observed in the 2000s, though overfishing may have limited stock recovery following the initial decline. In addition to the unfavorable SSB status, individual growth has declined and length and age structure of the stock remains truncated relative to those observed in the past.

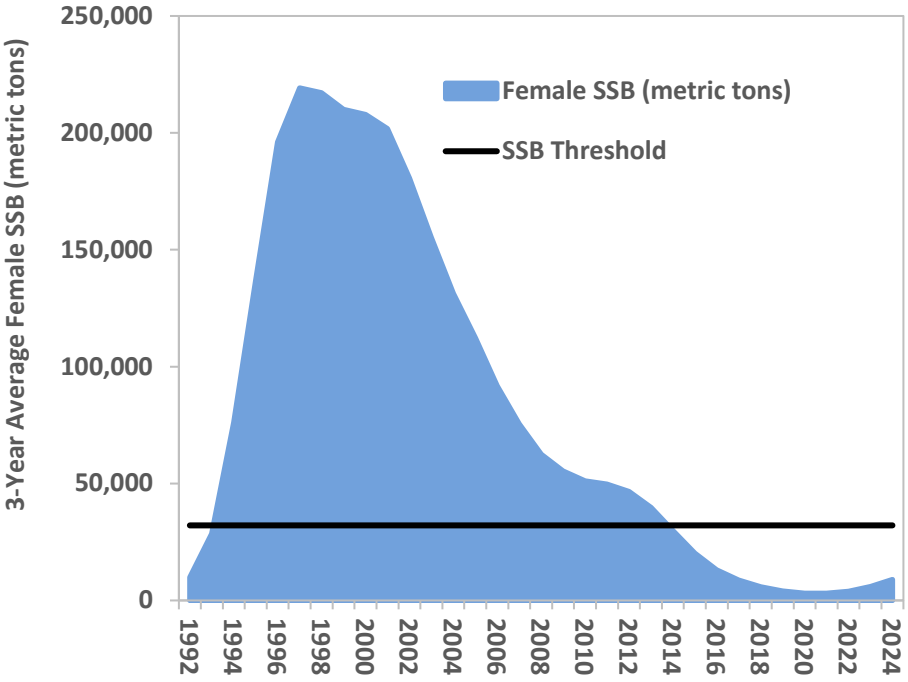
The southern stock was not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The southern stock SSB is at time series highs, well above the threshold, and *F* rates are at time series lows, well below thresholds, at the end of the assessment time series. There are no troubling signs for the condition of the southern stock as this time.

The Commission's Sciaenids Management Board accepted the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use and tasked the Technical Committee with additional analyses to evaluate possible paths forward for management of the northern stock.

3-year Average Fishing Mortality (*F*) Estimates Compared to *F* Thresholds for the Northern Stock Average F for All Ages (Ages-0+) and Ages Older Than Age-0 (Ages-1+).



3-year Average Female Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) for the Northern Stock



A more detailed description of the stock assessment results, as well as the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, will be available on the Commission website at https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-croaker under News & Resources. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, FMP Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org, or Jeff Kipp, Senior Stock Assessment Scientist, at jkipp@asmfc.org.

PR26-22