

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Weakfish Management Board

February 5, 2014
12:45 – 1:45 p.m.
Alexandria, Virginia

Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome/Call to order (*R. Allen*) 12:45 p.m.
2. Board Consent 12:45 p.m.
 - Approval of Agenda
 - Approval of Proceedings from October 2012
3. Public Comment 12:50 p.m.
4. 2013 Stock Status Update (*J. Cimino*) 1:00 p.m.
5. Consider Delaware's conservation equivalency **Action** 1:15 p.m.
 - Review Delaware's proposal (*J. Clark*)
 - Technical committee report (*J. Cimino*)
 - Consider Delaware's alternative management proposal
6. Elect Vice Chair **Action** 1:35 p.m.
7. Other business/Adjourn 1:45 p.m.

The meeting will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Old Town, 901 N. Fairfax St, Alexandria, VA 703-683-6000

Healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

MEETING OVERVIEW

Weakfish Management Board Meeting
Wednesday, February 5, 2014
12:45 p.m – 1:45 p.m.
Alexandria, Virginia

Chair: Russ Allen (NJ) Assumed Chairmanship: 11/12	Vice Chair: Vacant	Law Enforcement Committee Representative: Anthony
Technical Committee Chair: Joe Cimino (VA)	Advisory Panel Chair: Billy Farmer	Previous Board Meeting: October 23, 2012
Voting Members: MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS (15 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from October 23, 2012

3. Public Comment – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the Agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

4. 2013 Stock Status Update (1:00 – 1:15 p.m.)

Background

- Board requested an update of the stock status based on several indicators annually

Presentations

- Status of the Stock Report by J. Cimino (**Briefing CD**)

5. Consider DE Alternative Management Proposal (1:15-1:35 p.m.) Action

Background

- Delaware submitted an alternative management proposal for Board consideration
- The Technical Committee reviewed proposal and made recommendations to the Board (**Briefing CD**)

Presentations

- Review Delaware's proposal by J. Clark (**Briefing CD**)
- Technical Committee report by J. Cimino

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Consider approval of DE's alternative management proposal

6. Elect Vice Chair (1:35 -1:45 p.m.) Action

Background

- Russ Allen assumed chairmanship November 2012
- This fall, his chairmanship will expire and the vice chair will assume the chairmainshap
- Vice chair is now empty

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Elect Vice Chair

7. Other business/Adjourn



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Meeting Summaries for Weakfish, Atlantic Striped Bass, American Eel and South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Boards

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

71st Annual Meeting
Philadelphia, PA
October 21- 25, 2012

For more information, please contact
the identified individual,
Toni Kerns, ISFMP, or
Tina Berger, Public Affairs

703.842.0740

The transcribed proceedings for the following Boards are unavailable due to technical difficulties. The following meeting summaries and motions will serve as an overview of the Boards' discussions and actions.

Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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WEAKFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD (October 23, 2012)

Meeting Summary

The Weakfish Management Board reviewed the Technical Committee's (TC) report on the Weakfish stock status indicators for 2011 including Proportion of trips that max out the harvest limit, Relative biomass indices (recreational CPUE, Delaware Bay Trawl CPUE, New Jersey Trawl positive tows), Proportional Stock Density (a size quality index estimated from the Delaware Bay trawl survey and the NJ trawl survey), relative F (harvest and discards divided by an index of abundance or biomass), Juvenile Abundance Indices (JAI). Generally stock status indicators in 2011 suggest a stronger year class in 2011 and in terms of fishing mortality, relative F has decreased presumably a result of the management implementation of Addendum IV in 2010. The Board saw the more positive indicators in 2011 encouraging, but acknowledged this is one year in the time series and future updates will be more telling. The TC will continue to update stock status indicators in and report to the Board annually.

The Weakfish Management Board reviewed and accepted the 2012 Fishery Management Plan Review of the 2011 fishery. Landings for both the commercial and recreational fisheries declined to a time series low in 2011 totally roughly 160 thousand pounds. In terms of biological sampling, a few states fell short of their sampling requirements because of the low weakfish landings from which to sample, but the states reconfirmed their intention to fulfill future sampling requirements in 2012 and there is already anecdotal signs of improved fish availability. The Board approved the requests of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Georgia, and Florida for continued *de minimis* status for 2012.

For more information, please contact Michael Waine, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at 703.842.0740 or mwaine@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move that the Board accept the 2012 FMP review and compliance report and approve de minimis status for MA, CT, GA, and FL.

Motion made by Mr. Augustine and seconded by Mr. Cole. Motion carries without objection.

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD (October 23, 2012)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Striped Bass Board met to approve the Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Striped Bass Benchmark Stock Assessment, discuss a request from Rhode Island, and review state compliance.

The Technical Committee presented the TORs for the upcoming benchmark stock assessment, which were approved by the Board. The assessment is expected to be peer reviewed in June 2013. Rhode Island presented a request to allow the state to submit their commercial tagging report, as required under Addendum III, by January 1st rather than 60 days prior to the start of the first fishing season (originally November 1st). The Board approved this request for 2013. The Board reviewed the 2012 Striped Bass FMP Review and found all states in compliance. The stock is currently not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

For more information, please contact Kate Taylor, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at 703.842.0740 or ktaylor@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve the stock assessment terms of reference as modified today.

Motion made by Mr. Augustine and seconded by Dr. Daniel. Motion carries.

Move to approve Rhode Island request on timeframe for implementation of Addendum III.

Motion made by Mr. Fote and seconded by Mr. Adler. Motion carries without objection.

Move the Board approve the Striped Bass FMP Review.

Motion made by Mr. Augustine and seconded by Mr. Gibson. Motion passes without objection.

AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD (October 23, 2012)

Meeting Summary

The American Eel Management Board met to review the potential Endangered Species Act (ESA) and CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) listings, as well as provide guidance to the Plan Development Team (PDT) in the development of Draft Addendum III.

In April 2010, American eel was petitioned to be listed as threatened under the ESA. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published a positive 90-day finding which stated that the petitioned action may be warranted. In August 2012, the organization that initially submitted the petition filed a lawsuit against USFWS to make complete a status review on American eel and publish a determination on the listing status. American eel are also under consideration for listing under CITES Appendix II. USFWS will publish its recommended species for CITES listing in November.

The Board also reviewed a preliminary draft of Addendum III. The PDT requested additional guidance from the Board on the objectives of the addendum and the extent of management options to include. The PDT will continue developing the addendum and it is anticipated that a draft will be reviewed and considered for public comment by the Board in February 2013.

For more information, please contact Kate Taylor, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at 703.842.0740 or ktaylor@asmfc.org.

Motions

No motions made.

SOUTH ATLANTIC STATE/FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT BOARD (October 23, 2012)

Press Release

ASMFC South Atlantic Board Approves Black Drum FMP for Public Comment

Philadelphia, PA – The Commission's South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board has approved the Draft Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Black Drum for public comment. The Draft FMP solicits comment on a range of issues, including management goals and objectives; recreational and commercial management measures; flexibility to react to new assessment information; *de minimis* levels and exemptions; monitoring requirements and recommendations; and recommended measures for implementation by NOAA Fisheries in federal waters.

The FMP was initiated in response to concern regarding significant increases in harvest in recent years and the fact that the fishery primarily targets juveniles. Further, the lack of consistent coastwide regulations or management goals may negatively impact the black drum population as fishing pressures shifts from other stocks.

Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the Draft FMP either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. The Draft FMP will be available on the Commission website (www.asmfc.org) under *Breaking News* or by contacting the Commission at 703.842.0740. Public comment should be forwarded to Toni Kerns, ISFMP Acting Director, 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201; 703.842.0741 (FAX) or tkerns@asmfc.org (Subject line: Black Drum FMP). It is anticipated the majority of South Atlantic states will be conducting hearings in early 2013; the details of those hearings will be released once they are finalized. The FMP is scheduled for final approval during the Commission's 2013 Spring Meeting.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Acting ISFMP Director, at 703.842.0740 or tkerns@asmfc.org.

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PR12-56

Meeting Summary

The Board reviewed the Draft Black Drum Interstate Fishery Management Plan, including options for including coastwide recreational and commercial management measures. The Board approved the document for public comment and will be working with staff to hold public hearings and prepare public comment for the Spring Meeting. The Board also reviewed a request from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to require all dealers buying Spanish mackerel to hold a federal dealer permit. The Board did not take any action on this request, which would require an addendum to the Spanish Mackerel Fishery Management Plan. Finally, the Board elected Pat Geer, from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, as Vice Chair. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Acting ISFMP Director, at 703.842.0740 or tkerns@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve the Black Drum FMP for public comment.

Motion made by Mr. Boyles and second by Mr. Cole. Motion carries unanimously.

Move to nominate Pat Geer as Vice Chair of the South Atlantic Board.

Motion made by Mr. Boyles and seconded by Mr. Cole. Motion carries unanimously.

2013 Weakfish Status Update

Summary

Non-age structured indicators of weakfish status were updated through 2012. This included exploitable biomass indices, length quality indices for DE and NJ, relative F, relative exploitation and juvenile indices. A run was made with a biomass dynamic model to estimate biomass, F, and M.

Weakfish biomass indices remain very low - slightly better than 2010-2011 but still among the lowest measured. Landings and estimated discards rose from 123 MT in 2011 to 311 MT in 2012. Fishing mortality in 2012 rose from a very low point in 2011, but is still among the lowest measured. The stock is exhibiting little response to substantial reductions in F. Length quality indices indicated that very few weakfish were reaching harvestable size; these length quality indices were similar to those observed during 1966-1969. A run of a biomass dynamic model with a predation/competition loss term indicated that M is still extremely high (1.08 in 2012) when compared to F (0.13).

Estimation of biomass indices, fishing losses, relative F, and juvenile indices.

Biomass indices were formulated as outlined in the 2009 peer-reviewed assessment (see section C10, TOR 6 in the assessment; (available <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd0915/weakfish.pdf>), with some exceptions. Biomass indices (MRIP mid-Atlantic catch per trip and, DE and NJ trawl indices) were standardized to their respective 1990-2012 means (years in common for all three time-series; Table 1). This approach was recommended by the peer-review panel in 2009. The MRFSS-based estimates of Mid-Atlantic private/rental recreational CPUE (includes releases and harvest) were replaced with MRIP-based estimates. Indices outside this time-period (1981-1989 for MRIP and 1989 for NJ) were also standardized to these means (Table 1).

With the addition of 2012 biomass indices, it does not look like recovery has started. Biomass appears to have stabilized at a low level. DE and MRIP indices rose slightly in

2012 (Table 1; Figure 1). There was a substantial rise in the NJ index during 2011, but it returned back to a low level in 2012 (Table 1; Figure 1).

Recreational and commercial harvest and discard losses were estimated using conventions of the assessment with one exception. Commercial discard losses were estimated by extending a time trend in discard estimates as a percent of commercial harvest during 2002-2007 through 2010 (Table 2). Using this trend, discard estimates increased steadily from 18% of commercial harvest in 2002 to 40% in 2010 (i.e., commercial discards more than doubled as a proportion of catch; Table 2). Commercial discard losses in 2011-2012 were arbitrarily frozen at the 2010 level (40% of harvest) so that they would not go up indefinitely. Ratio-based estimates of commercial discards that used all years combined rather than annual estimates (latter were variable and imprecise) were used in the 2009 assessment; however, continuing with this approach would not reflect putative changes in bycatch due to recent restrictions.

Fishing losses rose from 123 MT in 2011 to 311 MT in 2012, the first rise in estimated losses since 1998 (Figure 2). During the recovery of the stock in response to Amendments 2 and 3, losses rose to 6,500 MT (1998) and declined afterwards. An abrupt decline occurred between 2002 and 2003, from 3,700 MT to 1,600 MT (Figure 2).

Relative F indicated that F had fallen to a very low level in 2011 – the lowest of the time-series (Figure 3). Relative exploitation in 2012 suggests that F may rise, but would still be among the lowest levels estimated (Figure 3).

Juvenile indices were updated through 2012. A series of poor year-classes during 2008-2012 were indicated by the grand means of annual standardized juvenile indices (Figure 5). An index for NY was not available for 2012.

Table 1. Observed (Obs) biomass indices, biomass indices standardized (Standard) to 1990-2011 mean, estimated fishing losses, relative fishing mortality (F), and relative exploitation (U).

Year	Obs NJ	Obs DE	Obs MRIP index	Standard Mean NJ	Standard Mean DE	Standard Mean MRIP	Standard Mean Indices	Mt Fishing Killed	Relative F	Relative U
1981			0.92			10.56	10.56	20,193	2,558	1913
1982			0.45			5.24	5.24	13,408	2,483	2561
1983			0.48			5.56	5.56	13,849	3,107	2489
1984			0.29			3.35	3.35	13,010	4,215	3882
1985			0.25			2.82	2.82	10,720	3,123	3799
1986			0.35			4.04	4.04	14,863	3,953	3676
1987			0.30			3.48	3.48	11,311	3,404	3253
1988			0.28			3.17	3.17	12,690	5,581	4006
1989	0.12		0.12	1.41		1.35	1.38	7,865	7,815	5701
1990	0.08	1.15	0.07	1.00	0.12	0.78	0.63	5,165	7,525	8158
1991	0.08	2.63	0.09	0.95	0.27	1.00	0.74	5,206	6,140	7039
1992	0.12	3.80	0.09	1.47	0.39	1.01	0.96	4,320	4,715	4518
1993	0.07	11.31	0.05	0.86	1.15	0.62	0.88	4,011	3,546	4578
1994	0.12	14.84	0.10	1.48	1.51	1.17	1.39	4,659	2,876	3361
1995	0.14	23.93	0.13	1.63	2.43	1.50	1.85	4,839	2,115	2610
1996	0.14	42.56	0.19	1.70	4.32	2.15	2.72	5,536	2,284	2034
1997	0.19	20.04	0.18	2.25	2.04	2.09	2.13	5,910	2,879	2780
1998	0.10	21.44	0.23	1.14	2.18	2.62	1.98	6,468	3,815	3268
1999	0.08	12.66	0.18	0.93	1.29	2.02	1.41	5,347	3,239	3787
2000	0.13	20.68	0.18	1.54	2.10	2.03	1.89	4,956	3,112	2622
2001	0.10	13.58	0.11	1.26	1.38	1.25	1.30	4,698	3,779	3627
2002	0.07	14.43	0.11	0.84	1.47	1.27	1.19	3,662	4,702	3074
2003	0.02	4.65	0.04	0.19	0.47	0.44	0.37	1,563	3,528	4263
2004	0.06	4.30	0.03	0.73	0.44	0.39	0.52	1,348	2,452	2595
2005	0.06	2.91	0.07	0.69	0.30	0.75	0.58	1,401	2,589	2414
2006	0.03	5.20	0.06	0.34	0.53	0.64	0.50	1,257	2,737	2504
2007	0.06	1.86	0.03	0.74	0.19	0.32	0.42	945	2,531	2268
2008	0.04	1.04	0.04	0.45	0.11	0.43	0.33	615	2,612	1862
2009	0.03	0.33	0.00	0.34	0.03	0.05	0.14	336	1,743	2392
2010	0.05	0.76	0.01	0.58	0.08	0.08	0.25	177	451	724
2011	0.12	0.91	0.01	1.45	0.09	0.08	0.54	123	293	227
2012	0.04	1.38	0.03	0.46	0.14	0.29	0.30	311		1050
Mean 1990- 2012	0.08	9.84	0.09							

Figure 1. Weakfish biomass indices, 1981-2012. Indices have been standardized to their respective means during a common time period.

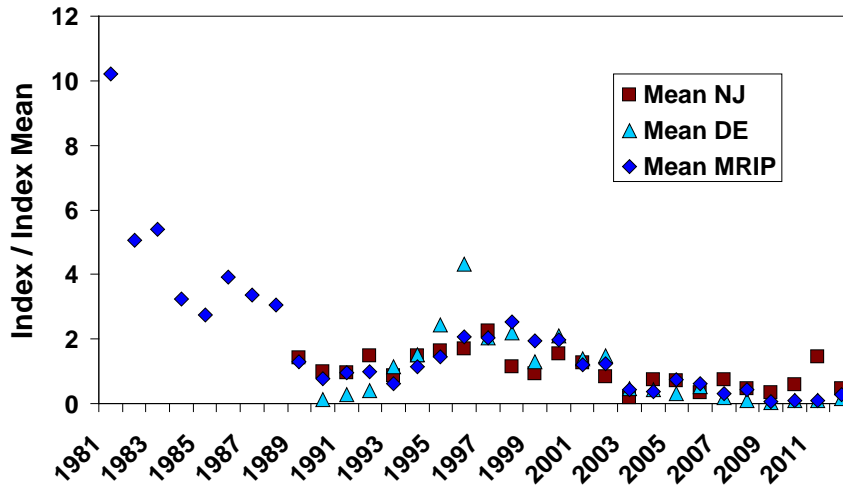


Figure 2. Total fishing losses (harvest and discards). Commercial discards for 2007-2012 estimated from 2001-2007 trend and were a constant 40% after 2010.

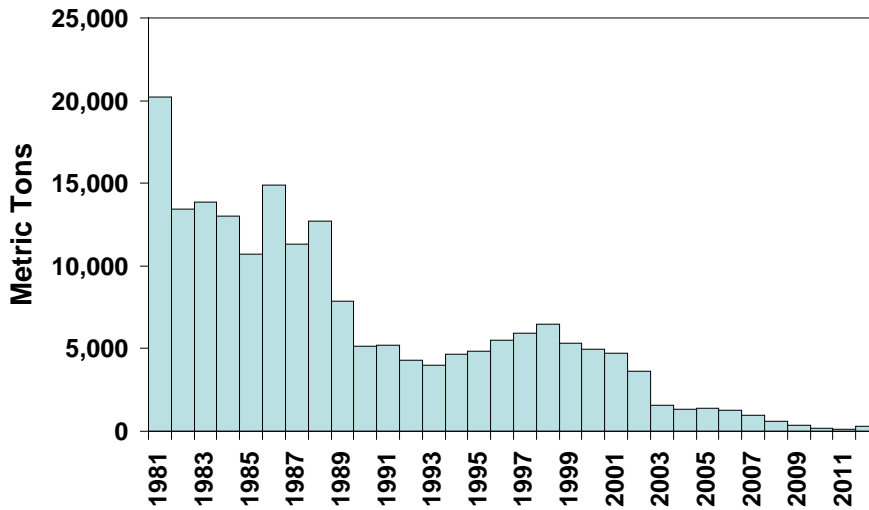


Figure 3. Relative F (fishing losses / 2 yr mean of indices) and relative exploitation (U; fishing losses / mean of indices).

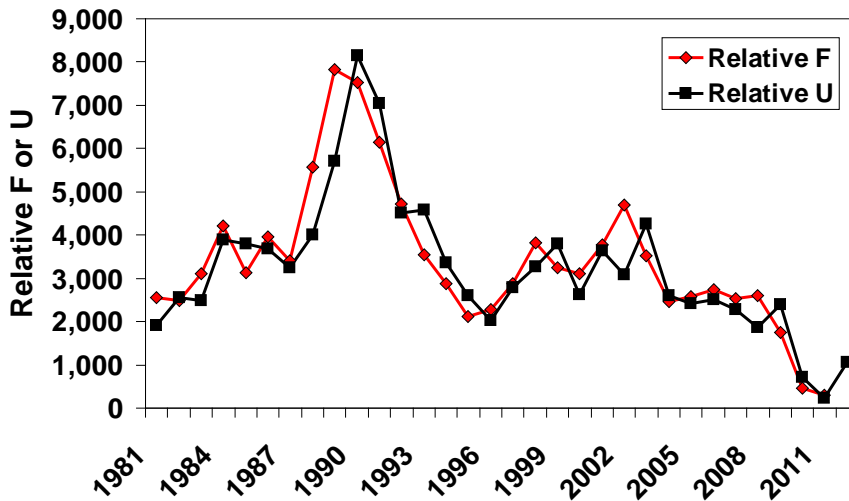


Figure 4. Response of biomass (mean of indices) to F (relative F) over major management periods

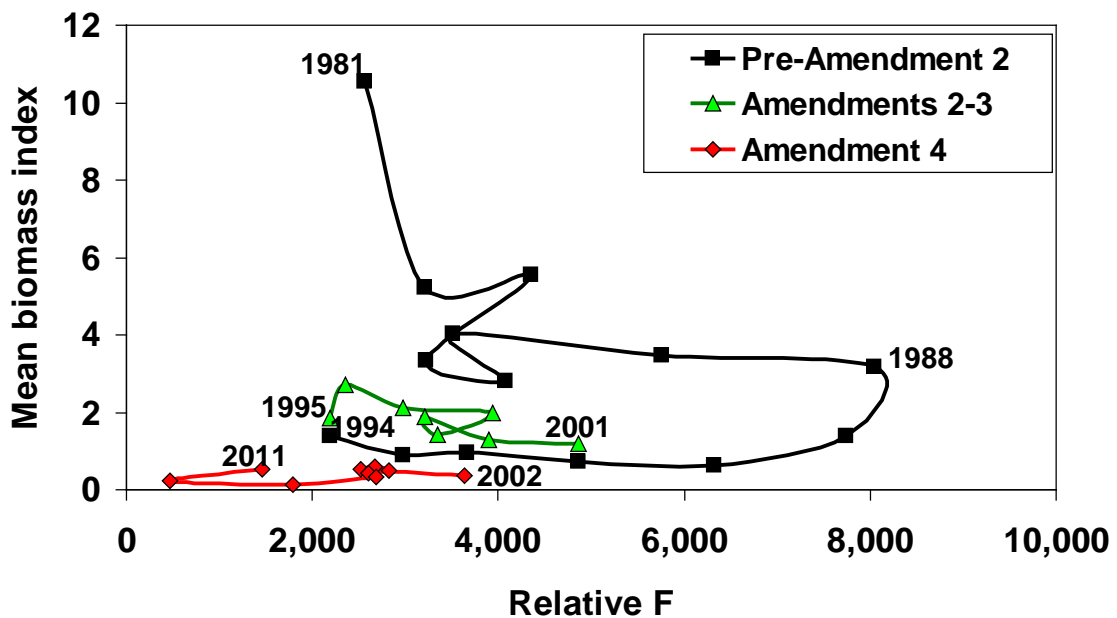


Figure 5. Juvenile indices standardized to their 1991-2012 means. Trend indicated by unweighted grand mean.

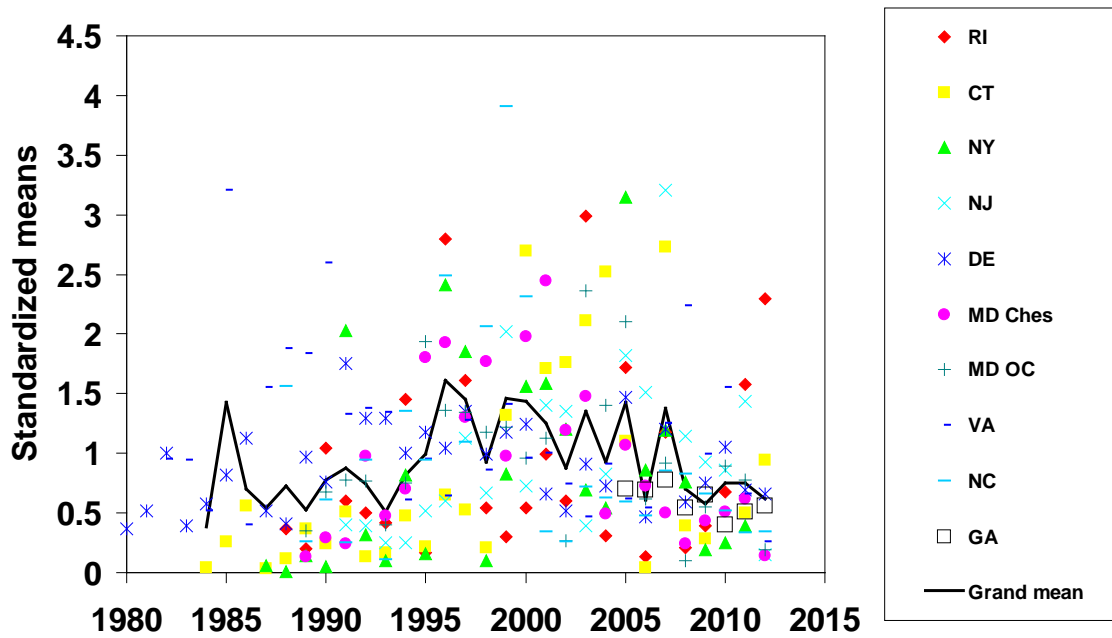


Figure 6. Delaware and New Jersey trawl survey length quality indices (Quality+ PSD)

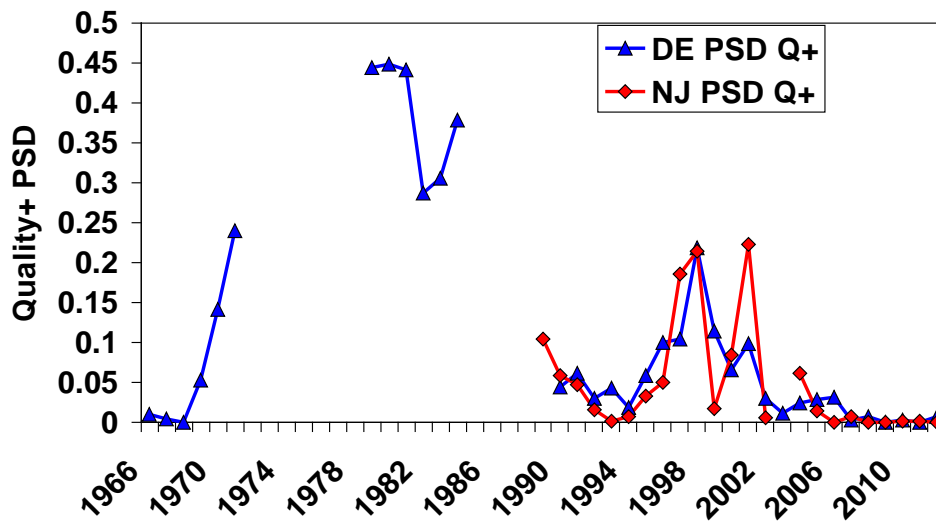
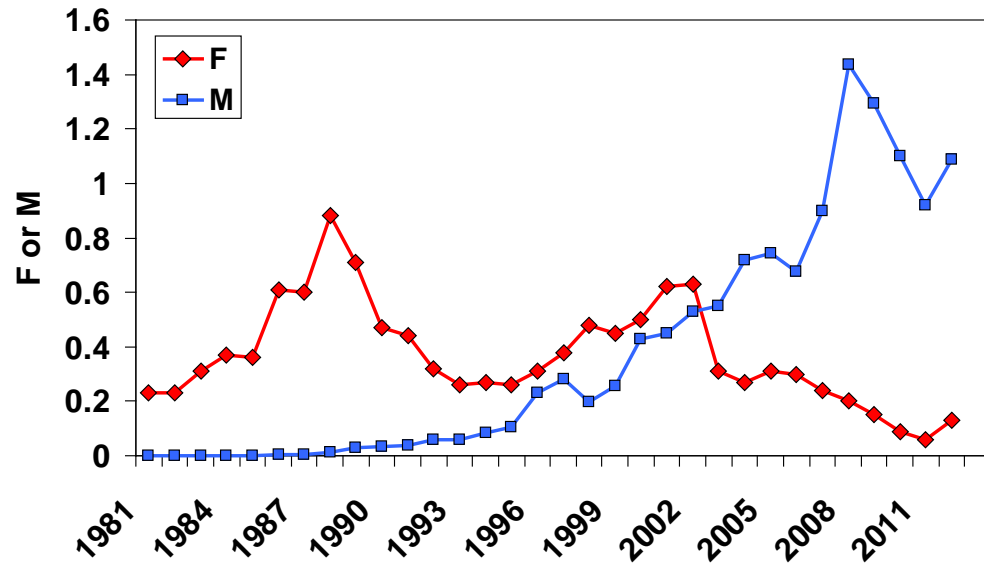


Figure 7. Estimated F and M on weakfish during 1981-2012 .



Weakfish Alternative Management Proposal for Delaware
Weakfish Management Board
November 2013

Introduction

Delaware proposes an alternative management regime for consideration by the Weakfish Management Board under the alternative management regime procedures of Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Weakfish (ASMFC 1996). Weakfish are cooperatively managed by the states through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The management unit for weakfish consists of all estuarine waters to the inshore boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from Massachusetts through the east coast of Florida.

The current management regime for the Delaware commercial weakfish fishery requires 34 net closure days during May and June, the months with the highest historic landings, to comply with the 32% reduction in the weakfish exploitation rate required by Amendment 3. All nets must be removed from the water during the closure days. The net closure days were the first week of May, the last week of June and all other Fridays in May and June.

Weakfish was the target of most Delaware gill net effort in May and June during the years after passage of Amendment 3 and the current management regime was effective in reducing the weakfish exploitation rate. However, the collapse of the commercial weakfish fishery during the past decade led Delaware gill netters to fish for other species. Addendum 4 to Amendment 4 of the Weakfish FMP reduced the daily allowable landings to 100 lbs., which further reduced the gill net effort targeting weakfish.

Delaware gill netters began landing Atlantic menhaden and black drum instead of weakfish during May and June. The net closure days required by the current management regime presented a problem for these two fisheries. May is usually the peak of the spring recreational striped bass fishery and the demand for fresh Atlantic menhaden bait is very high at this time. Atlantic menhaden decay rapidly and can only be sold as fresh bait for two days, so Delaware gill netters cannot provide fresh bait for any of the Sundays during May nor can they provide fresh bait during the entire first week of May. Black drum are usually only in Delaware Bay during May and June. The closure days required by Amendment 3 leave netters only 45% of the days in May and June to net black drum. This situation led Delaware, at the behest of its Tidal Finfish Advisory Council, to investigate whether the weakfish management regime could be modified to allow netters to fish on the net closure days while still maintaining Delaware's compliance with the Weakfish FMP.

Delaware proposes to change its management regime for weakfish from the current net closure days to a closed season. The proposed closed season will result in an equivalent exploitation rate reduction to the net closure days based on an analysis conducted by Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife using the methodology found in Amendment 3 to the Weakfish FMP. Delaware's neighboring states of New Jersey and Maryland meet their mandated weakfish exploitation rate reductions through closed seasons.

Methods

Alternative reductions in fishing mortality were calculated based on the ASMFC Reduction Equation outlined in Attachment III of Appendix 2: Components of an Evaluation Manual – Assessing States' Compliance with Amendment 3 of the Weakfish Fishery Management Plan (Figure 1).

Attachment III
Reduction in the Fishing Mortality Rate

• Reduction in F = $\left\{ 1 - \frac{FQ * FS}{CP} \right\} * Pct_{LCP}$

- FQ = fishing quotient = 0.15, as it was initially assumed that no fishery (except the pound net) operates at a rate > 0.85.
- FS = fishing season = the time span (in days) when 90% of average (1990-1992) annual weakfish landings (number of fish) occurred.
- CP = closed period = number of days of the fishing season that is closed to landings
- Pct_{LCP} = percentage of fishing season landings represented by the closed period.

Illustrative example for a gill net fishery (1996/98)

- 1) Fishing season (FS) = 273 days, 12-inch size limit.
- 2) Closed period (CP) = 143 days = a Pct_{LCP} of 33%, and 52% of the fishing season, in days.
- 3) Fishing quotient (FQ) = 0.15.
- 4) Reduction in F = 23.5% = 73.4 of required 32%.
- 5) Now, you must add days or Pct_{LCP} incrementally, to raise the reduction in F to 32% (Table 4).
- 6) The 32% reduction in "5)" may be lessened, if other gear types or the EEZ account for landings.

Figure 1. Attachment III of Appendix 2: Components of an Evaluation Manual – Assessing States' Compliance with Amendment 3 of the Weakfish Fishery Management Plan.

Fishing mortality reductions were based relative to the reference period of landings from 1989 to 1991, as outlined in Amendment 3 to the Weakfish Fishery Management Plan (ASMFC 1996). Reference period landings (pounds) were converted to numbers using monthly average weights

observed in our commercial fishery sampling (n=3,511; Figure 2) (Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife 1994). Fishing Season (FS), defined as the period when 90% of the average annual landings (numbers) occurred, spanned 89 days from 6-Apr to 4-Jul. Reductions based on various closed periods (CP) were examined (see Results).

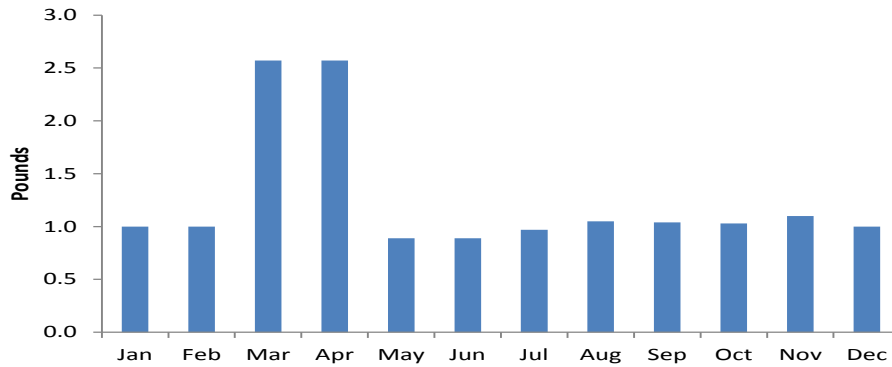


Figure 2. Average weight (lbs.) of commercial fishery weakfish samples observed in Delaware Bay (Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife 1994).

Results

Delaware’s peak landings period during 1989 through 1991 extended from 6-Apr through 4-Jul (Figure 3), with over 52% of landings occurring solely in May.

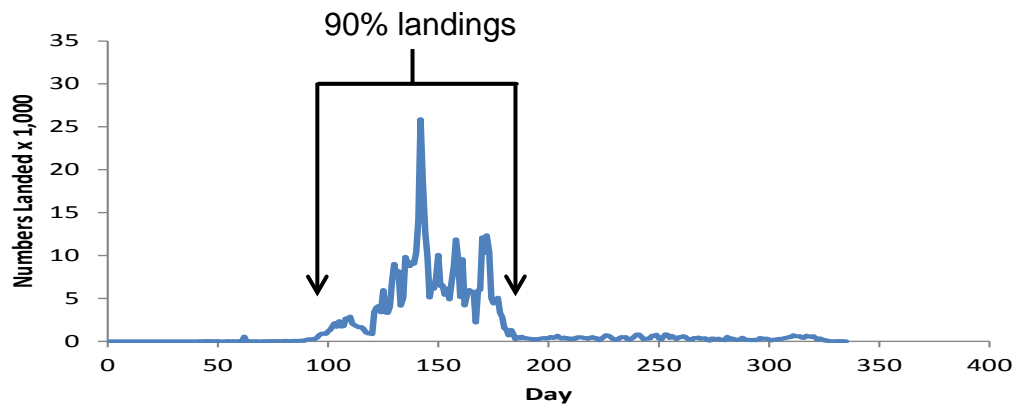


Figure 3. Weakfish landings (numbers) in Delaware, 1989-1991.

Season Closure

A closed season from 1-May through 2-Jun, 33 consecutive days, would result in a 54.5% reduction in landings and a 32.5% reduction in fishing mortality rate (Table 1) and thus meet the requirements of Amendment 3.

Table 1. Calculated percent reductions in fishing mortality rate (F) from various season closures. Pct(LCP) = percentage of fishing season landings represented by the closed season (*sic* Attachment III of Appendix 2: Components of an evaluation manual).

Closure Start	Closure End	Days	Pct(LCP)	% F Reduction
1-May	30-Jun	60	91.2%	70.9%
1-May	31-May	31	52.1%	29.6%
1-May	1-Jun	32	53.4%	31.1%
1-May	2-Jun	33	54.5%	32.5%
1-May	3-Jun	34	55.8%	33.9%
1-May	4-Jun	35	56.8%	35.1%

Proposed Alternative Management Regime

Delaware proposes to change its management regime from the current net closure days to a 33 day closed season extending from May 1 through June 2. This closed season will result in an equivalent reduction to Delaware’s weakfish exploitation rate as the closure days while allowing gill netters to land other species of fish during the closed season. Delaware laws (7 Delaware Code § 923) prohibits commercial gill netting from 12:01 AM Saturday to 4 PM Sunday and all holidays during May 10 through September 30, thus there will still be nine net closure days during the proposed closed season.

Literature Cited:

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. 1996. Amendment #3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Weakfish. Fishery Management Report No. 27 of the ASMFC. Prepared by: Lockhart, F.; Laney, W.; and R. O’Reilly.

Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife. 1994. Delaware’s Weakfish Catch Reduction Plan. Report submitted to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, May 24, 1994.



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

January 2, 2014

To: Weakfish Management Board

From: Joe Cimino, TC Chair

RE: Recommendations on Delaware's Alternative Management Plan for Weakfish

The Weakfish Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) held a conference call on December 9, 2013 to review an alternative management proposal submitted by Delaware to meet the requirements of Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Weakfish. Amendment 3 required that states implement management measures, which theoretically reduced the exploitation rate by 17% per fishing season. Delaware has presented an alternative management option, based on the 1989-91 reference period established in the Amendment (all other states except NJ used 1990-1992 as a reference period). The reduction was intended to achieve a target exploitation rate of 34% as well as the reference point, $F = 0.5$. At the time Amendment 3 was established the most recent fishing mortality rate in 1994 was estimated at $F = 1.88$ (Current estimates of relative exploitation and relative F are at time series lows, however the same is true for estimates of biomass). The TC and SAS agree that the proposal does achieve conservation equivalency as a management option compared to what was originally put in place for Amendment 3. This alternative option changes from a net closure to a closed season for weakfish, as noted in the proposal Delaware's neighboring states also used a closed season to achieve the reduction in exploitation.

Members of the TC and SAS pointed out that the proposal is for a closed season for weakfish, but would allow gill nets to be set in the water, something that has not been allowed under the current management regime. Delaware's TC and SAS representatives spoke to these concerns on the conference call. First they explained that there would still be a net ban on weekend days, second the two species being targeted employ fishing practices that should minimize interactions with weakfish. Gill nets set for black drum employ large mesh (8 inches or greater). The proposal states that the other target species is menhaden and although the mesh size used would also catch weakfish, harvesters are fishing drift gill nets and particularly targeting schools of menhaden. Further, the Delaware Code currently requires the use of drift nets effective May 11 through September 30 and if this proposal was accepted staff would move forward to adopt regulations that would make it unlawful to use any gill net having a stretched-mesh less than 6 inches during the period May 1 through and including May 10 unless the net is drifted.

It was further noted by members of the TC and SAS that stock conditions are markedly different than when Amendment 3 was put in place and to some extent the relevance of this proposal can be questioned. However, Addendum IV to Amendment 4 to the FMP requires that all states maintain past commercial regulations put in place, in addition a 100 pound trip limit. Aside from the concern that allowing gill nets to be set in May and June, which may

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increase incidental catch of weakfish, the TC and SAS do accept the proposal as a management option that achieves conservation equivalency with the requirements of Amendment 3 and the current management regime.

If you have any questions, please contact myself (joe.cimino@mrc.virginia.gov) or Marin Hawk (mhawk@asmfc.org or 703-842-0740).