

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
SCIAENIDS MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**Beaufort Hotel
Beaufort, North Carolina
Hybrid Meeting**

October 18, 2023

Approved April 30, 2024

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1. **Approval of Agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings** of May 1, 2023 by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to approve the Red Drum FMP Review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance reports, and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware** (Page 10). Motion by Lynn Fegley; second by Erika Burgess. Motion passes by unanimous consent (Page 10).
4. **Move to approve the Atlantic Croaker FMP Review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance reports, and de minimis status for New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina, and Georgia commercial fisheries and New Jersey and Delaware recreational fisheries** (Page 10). Motion by Shanna Madsen; second by Roy Miller. Motion passes by unanimous consent (Page 10).
5. **Move to approve the Spotted Seatrout FMP Review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance reports, and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware** (Page 11). Motion by Ingrid Braun; second by John Clark. Motion passes by unanimous consent (Page 11).
6. **Move to approve the nomination of Trey Mace to the Spot and Atlantic Croaker Stock Assessment Subcommittee** (Page 13). Motion by Lynn Fegley; second by Malcolm Rhodes. Motion passes by unanimous consent (Page 13).
7. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 13).

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)	Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)	Chad Thomas, NC, proxy for Rep. Wray (LA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ (LA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
John Clark, DE (AA)	Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Lynn Fegley, MD (AA Acting)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Dave Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)	Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Pat Geer, VA, proxy for J. Green (AA)	Ingrid Braun, PRFC
Shanna Madsen, VA, proxy for Sen. Mason (LA)	Jack McGovern, NMFS

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Ex-Officio Members

Somers Smott, Chair, Atl. Croaker Technical Committee	Ethan Simpson, Chair, Red Drum Technical Committee
Harry Rickabaugh, Chair, Black Drum & Spot Technical Committees	

Staff

Robert Beal	Tracey Bauer	Chelsea Tuohy
Toni Kerns	Caitlin Starks	Katie Drew
Tina Berger	James Boyle	Jeff Kipp
Madeline Musante	Emile Franke	Kurt Blanchard

Guests

Max Appelman, NOAA	Blaik Keppler, SC DNR	Jason Rock, NC DMF
Pat Augustine	Thomas Lilly	Cody Rubner, ASGA
Linda Barry, NJ DEP	Brooke Lowman, VMRC	McLean Seward, NC DEQ
Jeffrey Brust, NJ DEP	John Maniscalco, NYS DEC	Ethan Simpson, VMRC
Haley Clinton, NC DEQ	Chris McDonough, SC DNR	Somers Smott, VMRC
Margaret Conroy, DE DNREC	Jack McGovern, NOAA	Scott Travers, RI Saltwater Anglers Assn.
Scott Davis, ASGA	Kyle Miller, FL FWC	Shelby White, NC DMF
Jacob Espittia, FL FWC	Patrick Moran, MA Environmental Police	Chris Wright, NOAA
Julie Evans	Thomas Newman	Daniel Zapf, NC DEQ
Tony Friedrich, ASGA	Lucas Pensinger, NC DMF	Erik Zlokovitz, MD DNR
Lewis Gillingham, VMRC	Jeff Renchen, FL FWC	
Joseph Grist, VMRC	Harry Rickabaugh, MD DNR	
Steve Heins		

The Sciaenids Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Rachel Carson Ballroom via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Thursday, October 19, 2023, and was called to order at 12:05 p.m. by Chair Chris Batsavage.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR CHRIS BATSAVAGE: Good afternoon, everyone. I'll go ahead and call the Sciaenids Management Board meeting to order. My name is Chris Batsavage; I'm the Administrative Proxy for North Carolina, serving as Chair of the last meeting of the week. I'll try to move through as quickly as possible.

Helping me do that up at the front of the table is Tracey Bauer and Jeff Kipp. Make sure I'm getting through the agenda quickly, but not too quickly.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Right now, I am looking for Board consent on Approval of the Agenda. Is there any modifications or other changes needed for the agenda? Seeing none; I'll consider the agenda approved.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Next is approval of the proceedings from the May, 2023 meeting. Are there any changes, edits or modifications to those proceedings? Seeing none in the room and none online; we'll also consider those approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Next up is Public Comment. This is an opportunity for the public to provide any comments related to the Sciaenids Management Board for items that are not on the agenda.

Do we have anyone in the room or online that would like to provide public comment? Seeing none.

REVIEW ANNUAL UPDATE TO BLACK DRUM INDICATORS

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: We're going to move on to the next item, which is a Review of the Annual Update to Black Drum Indicators. We'll have Harry Rickabaugh, the TC Chair, providing that update. Harry, whenever you're ready.

MR. HARRY RICKABAUGH: First, I would like to thank all the people who submitted data for this. It comes from many locations, several states and also the ASMFC staff, for putting this together. Jeff, I know put together most of the slides., and updated some of the indices for us, so thanks. Following the last assessment, it was found that the black drum stock was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring.

Data for that assessment ran through 2020. During that assessment, empirical indicators were identified that could be used to monitor the stock condition between assessments. Lack of contrast in the black drum datasets, coupled with some high uncertainty in the model, led the TC to recommend they are monitoring these empirical stock indicators annually. The Board agreed to annual monitoring of these empirical indicators, and tasked the TC to do so on an annual basis. This is to assess a new assessment only; it does not trigger management action. The next assessment is preliminarily schedule for 2027. The different indicators that we're looking at are in three different categories. The first one is the abundance indicators. These are made up of four indices from the Mid-Atlantic, which are all YOY.

The Mid-Atlantic region is from Virginia, north. There are three indices in the South Atlantic, which is North Carolina, south. Those include a YOY indices at Age 0-1 indices and a subadult indices. We also look at exploitable biomass, that is through an MRIP CPUE. We do not have a fishery independent index to track adult abundance.

The range expansion indicator is only for interpreting any potential changes of just that. Range expansion is not an indicator of overall stock abundance. Then we also look at some fishery catch metrics, just your

recreational live releases, recreational harvest in pounds, and commercial landings in pounds. Those are also structured regionally with the Mid-Atlantic region from Virginia, north and the South Atlantic from North Carolina, south.

The years to be updated in this go round are going to be 2021 and 2022, since again, the assessment only ran data through 2020. In all the figures we're about to see, there is going to be a time series mean that's the dotted dash line. On these slides, all of the abundance slides, the index is scaled to its mean, so that we can put multiple figures up at one time and compare them side by side. We're really looking at the trend here, so the absolute value isn't as important, so they're scaled to a mean.

For the Mid-Atlantic again, that is what is up there now, we have four indices, and once again they are all YOY. The upper left panel is the public service enterprise group seine survey, which is conducted in Delaware Bay in the upper Delaware River. The upper right panel and the lower left panel are the Delaware trawl surveys, which are conducted in the Delaware Bay, and the lower right is the Maryland seine.

For all the figures I'm going to show today, the black dots connected by the black line are the data that was used in the assessment through 2020. The red dots connected with the red line will be the updated years, so they just help you jump out, see what was used in the assessment and what is the new data.

Again, these Mid-Atlantic indicators all kind of vary around the timeseries means. The Delaware Bay indices being below their mean in 2021, and above in 2022, and the Maryland Coastal Bay Seine Survey being above the timeseries mean in 2021 and below in 2022. But they all varied within, sort of the range of their most recent values. There are a few more larger peaks in the early part of the timeseries that don't seem to be as apparent in recent years.

For the South Atlantic, the abundance indicators were mixed, as far as trend, with declines measured in the South Carolina Trawl Survey, which is an Age 0-1, and is in the left panel, and in the Georgia

Trammel Survey, which is a YOY only survey, which is in the far-right panel. It varied around the time series in the North Carolina gillnet survey, the middle panel, which is a subadult survey, so primarily Ages 1 through 3. I had heard about the Georgia Trammel Survey, as there were some questions during the assessment about possible changes in catchability, due to a survey gear change in 2007, that will be explored further in the next assessment, to see whether that was really impacting those really large values you see prior to 2007. The exploitable abundance indicator is based off an MRIP CPUE. It declined below its time series mean for both of the update years. This is the only index we actually use within the model to track abundance, so this is the tuning index for the model.

As you can see through the model time period, the black dots that increased steadily, and then kind of leveled off in a high value. Now these last two years are below the mean, or dropped from where we were in the previous ten years or so. Similar to where we were in the mid-2000s, you can see two values back there, slightly lower than these two.

Not in an area we haven't been in the no-so-distant past, but it is a decline from the trajectory we had in the assessment. The range expansion indicator is from the New Jersey Trawl. Again, this is only to look at range expansion, not actually an indicator of stock status. It was not available in 2021, due to survey restrictions.

The 2022 value is below the time series mean. You can see there was a lot of variability in this early in the timeseries, near zero values and some higher values in more recent years, and pretty much some sort of catch. Certainly, they do seem to be more available, but it's not like a trend of increasing availability seen in this range expansion.

For these next few slides, we're moving to the catch indicators, and these are not scaled to their mean, these ones will be actual the mean, and in this case, this is the recreational live releases, so in millions of fish, and these releases have varied around their time series mean in the Mid-Atlantic with 2021 being above, and 2022 being just below., and above the

timeseries mean in the South Atlantic during the update years.

Live releases in the South Atlantic have continued to follow a declining trend that was observed at the end of the stock assessment. It is still above, as I mentioned its timeseries mean and the rate of decline seems to have slowed, but it is still on that trajectory. The recreational harvest is in millions of pounds, and again, as you can see from this scale, the South Atlantic does account for a higher proportion of the landings than the North Atlantic.

Just as a reminder, the South Atlantic fishery is primarily subadults, and the North Atlantic is primarily mature adult fish within the recreational harvest. In this case you have higher weight in the smaller fish in the South Atlantic, so by number it will be the greater, but we're showing this by weight, so we can compare it to commercial later.

Recreational harvest is also varied by region, with both update years below the time series mean in the Mid-Atlantic, and both update years above the timeseries in the South Atlantic. The commercial landings have showed a similar pattern to the recreational harvest, with both of the update years below the timeseries mean in the Mid-Atlantic, and both of the update years above the timeseries mean in the South Atlantic.

You can see here, this is in thousands of fish, so that commercial harvest is considerably lower than the recreational harvest, and in this case, even though it's larger fish in the north and smaller fish in the south, we're still kind of that split, even in the commercial fishery. The catches on average, the annual catches are very similar by weight. There was some discussion from the TC about the Mid-Atlantic reduction in harvest, particularly a commercial, is likely due to some reductions in effort. A lot of the Virginia fishery is bycatch within their commercial striped bass gillnet fishery that happens in the spring.

There has been decreased effort in that fishery, and in Delaware they've had a reduction in effort, mainly due to a decline in market demand, so it's become less profitable, so there is less commercial fishing in

the North Atlantic, most likely than in previous years. The Black Drum TC met on September 26, to discuss the data that I just showed you, and to come up with recommendations for this Board at this meeting.

Overall, the indicators showed mixed signs of stability and declines since the assessment. The TC did discuss that it's only two years of additional data, and the black drum is a long-lived species. Also, many of our indicators, are their juvenile indices or a lot of the indicators in the South Atlantic, the harvest and releases are on subadult and juvenile fish, so we're kind of looking more at that part of the population.

We do not have an adult index. There are not a lot of surveys up and down the coast that target adult black drum, so that is one piece of information we are missing. Recruitment for black drum is highly variable, and our indices have been relatively low, particularly in the South Atlantic, so it's not real surprising that some of the other indicators are also a little low, since that is part of the population and bulk of the fishery is targeting in the South Atlantic.

The level of hours we are seeing are within the historical range of values we've seen, so we're not into an area we haven't been before that the stock hasn't recovered from. But we do have some declining trends, the TC does feel that's something we need to monitor in the future. It does not feel that initiating an updated stock assessment is necessary at this time. With that I can take any questions.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Thank you, Harry, any questions for Harry on the black drum stock indicators? Okay, seeing no questions, just an FYI for the Board, and it's in our compliance report, which you'll see in the FMP review later. But looking at recreational harvest in North Carolina, it did increase by quite a bit in 2022 compared to 2021. It was, I think three and a half higher than it was the previous year, and it was highest since the FMP required bag and size limits were implemented back in like 2014, I think.

We've heard some anglers voice concerns over increased black drum fishing effort in recent years in

North Carolina, so we're just kind of monitoring the trends in the fishery. I think these indicators also help kind of guide us and the rest of the states, as far as any impacts, you know changes in harvest or fishing effort might have on the stock.

Just wanted to share that with everyone. The TC isn't recommending any changes to the stock assessment schedule, based on the indicators being mixed, and also this is the first time we've used these indicators. I'll just look to see if there is anyone on the Board who feels like anything other than what the TC recommended should be done. If not, then I think we'll just, yes, Shanna.

MS. SHANNA MADSEN: I don't think anything else should be done, but I did have a question. How often does the TC expect to be bringing back these indicators, because it looks like, you know we've got the two-years that we're looking at right now, they have a time series of them. But I do note the TC's point that this is an extremely long-lived species, so I'm just wondering how often a reevaluation of the indicators will be brought to the Board.

MS. TRACEY BAUER: Currently, as far as I'm aware, the plan was annually.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, thanks. I guess, would that be something, Tracey, that as the TC goes through this exercise and the Board reviews, that if we felt it was appropriate to look at it maybe not annually, but maybe every two years, or based on life history of the fish, that would be a change that we could just make through Board action or consensus.

MS. BAUER: Yes, yes, absolutely. This is all new for all of us, these black drum indicators. If we find something that works better for the Board, then we can do that.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Any follow up on that, Shanna, or is that good.

MS. MADSEN: I think I'm good for now, but I kind of agree that maybe at another time, once the TC brings this back. I feel like yearly is a little bit excessive again, for such a long-lived species. Not that it takes

up a ton of our time, but I feel like it could take up some time for the TC, so maybe a biannual situation might be better in the future. But let's see how this goes, since it's new for all of us.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Erika.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: On the same topic, I would be interested in the TC's thoughts on potentially doing this every three years.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: I guess, Tracey, that would be something that the next time the TC meets to review these indicators, that could be something that we ask the TC to discuss at that time, and then report back to the Board, probably this time next year.

MS. BAUER: Yes, absolutely, we can have them discuss that next year if that works for everyone on the Board.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, does that seem like a reasonable ask? Yes, I'm seeing heads nodding, so yes, we can do that. Yes, thanks, Erika, I think just to kind of provide something a little more concrete from the Board to get input from the TC would be good.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF ATLANTIC CROAKER, RED DRUM, AND SPOTTED SEATROUT FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEWS AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2022 FISHING YEAR

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: If nothing else on this, we'll move on to the next agenda item, which is to Consider Approval of the Atlantic Croaker, Red Drum and Spotted Seatrout FMP Reviews and State Compliance Reports for the 2022 Fishing Year. Tracey is going to go through each one individually, she is going to pause for questions after each, but then we'll take up motions after she's done presenting all three FMP reviews. Tracey, whenever you're ready.

MS. BAUER: Good afternoon, everyone. Like he said, I'm going to be going through the Red Drum, Atlantic Croaker and Spotted Sea Trout FMP Reviews. The Black Drum one is actually finished as well, but you'll

get that one through an e-mail vote, so we're not going through so many at this meeting.

I'm going to start off the presentation today by going through the red drum FMP Review. Red Drum are managed by the Commission through Amendment 2 to the Interstate FMP in Addendum I. The Addendum required states to implement recreational creel and size limits to achieve at least a 40 percent static spawning potential ratio, and included a maximum size limit of 27 inches, and maintained existing commercial regulations.

Then Addendum I, which went into effect in 2013 updated Amendment 2's habitat section to include current information on red drum spawning habitat and habitat by life. It also describes key habitats and habitats of concern, including threats and ecosystem considerations. On this slide I'm just going to touch on a couple of the more recent red drum assessments.

As you guys are all probably aware, the 2017 red drum stock assessment and peer review report indicated that overfishing was not occurring for either the northern or southern stocks of red drum. But that assessment was not able to determine an overfished or not overfished status, because of the population abundance could not be reliably estimated, due to limited data for the older ages. That assessment had a terminal year of 2013.

Fairly recently, I just wanted to touch on more local or state-specific stock assessment in Florida. They had completed that in 2020, with a terminal year of 2019, and on the Atlantic coast estimates of current escapement rates, in the formerly defined northeast region, had exceeded their target of 40 percent, where the formerly defined southeast region of Florida exceeded the escapement rate in the terminal year, but the three-year-average did not meet the current escapement rate management target. Now moving on to reviewing the status of the fishery.

I wanted to start off with a high-level overview of the red drum fishery in 2022, so 5.8 million pounds of red drum were harvested in 2022, which is slightly lower

than the previous year at 6.2 million pounds. In 2022, 56 percent of the total landings were from the southern region and 44 percent were from the northern region. This close to equal split of the total landings between the north and the south regions is a somewhat recent trend, whereas in the past the majority of the landings were always from the south.

This is something we've been seeing maybe since 2019 or so. There is no commercial harvest in the southern region, obviously, so the commercial landings given on the slide are all from the northern region, and were about 192,000 pounds in 2022, which was a slight decrease from 2021, when it was about 220,000 pounds.

This harvest, the 192,000 pounds is about 7 percent of the total landings in the northern region. Now I'm going to focus specifically on the recreational landings as the majority of the harvest. In this figure, the orange bars are recreational landings in millions of pounds from the northern region, and the blue bars are recreational landings from the southern region. Just as a reminder, I've been talking about the northern region and southern region a lot. The northern region is New Jersey to North Carolina, and the southern region is South Carolina to Florida. In the northern region recreational landings were estimated to be 2.4 million pounds in 2022, which was just a very slight decrease from the previous year at 2.6.

North Carolina was estimated to have the most recreational landings, followed by Virginia. In the southern region, recreational landings were estimated to be 3.3 million pounds in 2022, which was very similar to 2021, when it was 3.4 million pounds. Florida was estimated to have the most pounds of recreational landings in this region, followed by Georgia.

Just a note that recreational landings declined in Florida by 35 percent, but increased in Georgia by 113 percent, and increased in South Carolina by 32 percent. This figure shows the total removals compared to the number of fish released in both the southern and northern region. The purple bars are total removals, and the red line is releases, both from

the northern region, and then in the southern region the maroon bars are the total removals, and the orange line is releases. That is all in millions of fish.

About 500,000 fish were harvested in the recreational fishery in the northern region in 2022, which was a decline about 13 percent from 2021, and 2.9 million fish were released in the northern region, which was a decline of 23 percent from 2021. Since it is estimated to, at least the current estimate that we're using in the stocks assessments and such of 8 percent of released fish size at the result of being caught.

This results in an estimate of dead discards of about 236,000 red drum in 2022 in the northern region. Recreational removals from the fishery are best estimated to be about 736,000 fish in 2022 in the northern region. Moving on to the southern region, about 1.23 million fish were harvested in the recreational fishery in the southern region, which was a slight increase in recreational harvest in 2021, and 7.3 million fish were released in the southern region, which is a slight decrease from 2021.

With that 8 percent discard mortality rate, this results in an estimated about 583,000 dead discarded fish in 2022 in the southern region, and so recreational removals in the southern region are estimated to be about 1.8 million fish in 2022. I next just wanted to briefly touch on and give a high-level overview of one change in Florida's management measures that occurred last year.

In 2022, Florida adopted a more holistic approach to red drum management, to really focus on better capturing regional differences and improved angler satisfaction. Each year, they will be evaluating the red drum stock in each of their management regions using set metrics. Results will be summarized in annual reviews.

Regulations before then may be changed based on the results of these reviews. When I did this for the first time, last year, 2022, reviewing the metrics and getting subsequent stakeholder feedback, regulation changes were approved for red drum in state waters, and went into effect on September 1, 2022. Those

regulations changes for the areas on the Atlantic coast are on the slide, but they are mainly reduced bag limits and vessel limits, though in one region the Indian River Lagoon region, is now currently catch and release only. Finally, PRT recommendations. The PRT, when reviewing the compliance reports found no inconsistencies among states, with regards to the FMP requirements. Both New Jersey and Delaware requested de minimis status through the annual reporting process, and as a reminder, Amendment 2 currently does not include a specific method to determine whether a state qualifies for de minimis.

The PRT has chosen in the past and now to evaluate an individual state's contribution to the fishery, by comparing the two-year average of total landings of the state to that of the management unit. New Jersey and Delaware each harvested zero landings, zero percent of the two-year average of total landings, so they both met those requirements.

Additional research and monitoring recommendations can be found in the FMP review document, and in a simulation assessment and peer review report. I won't spend time going through those today, but you can touch base with me if you have any questions. But that's where I will end for red drum, if anyone has any questions.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Thanks, Tracey, any questions on the red drum FMP review? Seeing none; move on to the next one, which is croaker.

MS. BAUER: We're going to be going pretty quickly through the Atlantic croaker FMP review. Atlantic croaker, as a reminder, is currently managed under Amendment 1 to the Atlantic croaker FMP, and then Addenda I through III, which was 2011, 2014, and 2020. Amendment 1 did not require any specific measures restricting harvest, but encouraged states with conservative measures to maintain them.

It also established a set of management triggers. However, Addenda II and III established and revised that traffic light analysis, and the resulting management responses to replace that original set of management triggers. Then Addendum I had

revised the management programs biological reference points to assess stock condition on a coastwise basis, as recommended by the 2010 stock assessment.

Really briefly, review current stock status information for Atlantic croaker. The most recent peer reviewed stock assessment is that 2010 stock assessment, with a terminal year of 2008, and found that croaker was not experiencing overfishing. Overfished status could not be determined. As a reminder, the assessment completed in 2017, was not recommended for peer review, so current stock status is unknown.

But as you guys all know, in the absence of a recent peer reviewed assessment we're using the traffic light analysis at this time. Moving on to the status of the fishery. We'll start to look at Atlantic croaker landings. In this figure the black line is commercial landings, and the red dashed line is recreational landings, both in millions of pounds.

Total Atlantic croaker harvest from New Jersey through the east coast of Florida in 2022, was estimated to be 2.8 million pounds, and the commercial and recreational fishery harvested 25 percent and 75 percent of the 2022 total respectively. About 684,000 pounds of Atlantic croaker were harvested commercially in 2022, which is the lowest of the time series, dating back to 1950. Within the management unit, the majority of the 2022 commercial landings came from North Carolina, followed by Virginia and Florida. I will now review the Atlantic croaker recreational landings and releases. In this figure, the blue bars represent landings of Atlantic croaker in millions of fish, and the red bars are fish released alive.

Then the black line is percent of fish that were released out of the total catch. In 2022, anglers released 30.5 million fish, which is an increase from the 27.4 million fish released in 2021. Anglers also released a slightly greater percentage of the total recreational catch in 2022, compared to 2021.

An estimated 85.5 percent of the total recreational croaker catch was released in 2022, which is the

highest percentage on record for a second year in a row. Last year was just slightly lower, 84 percent. The 2022 recreational landings were estimated at 5.1 million fish, and 2.1 million pounds, which was pretty similar to the previous year. The PRT recommendations are pretty straightforward.

They found no inconsistencies among states, in regard to the FMP requirements, and again as a reminder, states are permitted to request de minimis status if for the three previous years which data are available, their average commercial landings or recreational landings by weight constitute less than 1 percent of the coastwide commercial or recreational landings for the same three-year period.

A state seemed to qualify for de minimis in either its recreational or commercial sector, or both, but will only qualify for exemptions in the sector which qualify for de minimis. This year, New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina and Georgia requested de minimis status for their commercial fisheries, and New Jersey and Delaware requested de minimis for the recreational fishery.

The PRT found that these states met all the requirements of de minimis for the sectors they requested it for. Again, additional research and monitoring recommendations can be found in the FMP Review Document. I'll stop there for any questions.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Any questions on the Atlantic croaker FMP review? Okay, seeing none; we'll move on to spotted sea trout.

MS. BAUER: All right, thanks, Mr. Chair. Lastly, Spotted Sea Trout FMP Review. Spotted sea trout is currently managed under the Omnibus Amendment to the Spanish mackerel, spot and spotted sea trout FMPs. This amendment established a 12-inch total length minimum size limit, or a comparable mesh size requirement. It also established de minimis and applies guidelines, keeping the FMP in line with ASMFC guidelines and established adaptive management.

I'll briefly review what is known about the spotted sea trout stock status through these state-specific stock assessments. There has been no coastwide assessment of spotted sea trout, as the PRT has not recommended one due to the life history of the species and availability of data. In 2019, the Florida stock assessment update on Florida's Atlantic coast used the regional base assessed model to estimate current transitional spawning potential ratios. It estimated 31 percent in the northeast management region, which was below their 35 percent management target, and then 34 percent in the southeast management region, which was just below or at the management target. Work on a new benchmark stock assessment is underway in Florida, and is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2024.

Then there was a recently completed, just last year, a benchmark stock assessment for spotted sea trout in North Carolina and Virginia waters. It was completed and approved for management use in North Carolina in late 2022. The assessment indicated the spotted sea trout stock in North Carolina and Virginia waters was not overfished, but overfishing was occurring.

A review of the North Carolina FMP is currently underway, and Amendment 1 to the North Carolina spotted sea trout FMP will focus on management to end overfishing, and ensure sustainable harvest. Again, I'll move into a brief summary of the status of the fishery, starting with an overview of the commercial and recreational harvest.

This figure shows coastwide recreational and commercial harvest for spotted sea trout by year in millions of pounds. In 2022, the commercial landings totaled about 681,000 pounds, which is an 11 percent decrease from 2021, and North Carolina accounted for a majority of the commercial landings with 88 percent, followed by Virginia at 10 percent.

Total recreational landings with the past total commercial landings every year since recreational landings were first recorded in 1981. Recreational harvest has in general remained stable throughout the time series, with an average of 4 billion fish in the last four years, the last five years, and recreational

harvest in 2022 was 6.5 million pounds or 3.8 million fish, with North Carolina, Georgia and Florida responsible for the largest shares in numbers of fish.

I will now focus on the recreational catch and releases. In this figure it shows coastwide recreational catch in millions of fish, with harvest shown on the gray line and releases shown on the black dash line. In 2022, recreational catch totaled 25.9 million fish, which was a 17 percent increase from 2021.

The percent of fish released in 2022, 83 percent was about equal to the percent of fish released in 2021. The number of fish released has averaged 18.9 million fish in the last ten years, and in 2022, 22.1 million fish were released, which is the third highest number released in the time series, and the highest since 2018. Finally, a slide sea trout PRT recommendations. The PRT found no inconsistencies among states with regard to the FMP requirements, and recommended approval of the state compliance reports and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware.

For spotted sea trout, a state qualifies for de minimis status if it's previous three-year average of combined commercial and recreational harvest is less than 1 percent of the previous three-year average coastwide. The PRT found that both New Jersey and Delaware met these requirements, so again additional research monitoring recommendations are found in the FMP review document, and I can take any questions.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Any questions on the Spotted Sea Trout FMP Review? Joe Cimino.

MR. JOE CIMINO: I was just curious. I know groups tend to look at tagging data for red and black drum. But has there ever been kind of like a review of tagging data for speckled trout, just to get some idea of movement and interstate activity?

MS. BAUER: I know I could speak towards North Carolina's effort. Spotted sea trout tagged in North Carolina have been found up the Chesapeake Bay, up into Virginia and Maryland waters. I'm not sure

they've gone any farther than that though. My information is about a year or so out of date. I don't know if Virginia has any information about theirs.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Shanna.

MS. MADSEN: We have, I mean we obviously still continue tagging. We have our tagging program. I don't know who has necessarily been reviewing it, in order see if trends have been changing, or anything like that. But if it's something that you would be interested in, we can definitely look into it.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Erika.

MS. BURGESS: Joe, are you interested in it for a stock unit understanding, or are you interested in movement?

MR. CIMINO: A little of both. I'm just wondering if New Jersey has interest in having new regulations, and I'm just trying to kind of understand where our fish are coming from.

MS. BURGESS: I doubt they are coming from Florida, but we have a genetic analysis of the stock units in our state, if you're interested.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Good, thanks, yes, I guess this is something, oh we don't have a TC, this is a Plan Review Team, right for speckled trout.

MS. BAUER: Yes, correct, spotted sea trout only has a PRT.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, so I guess if it was an interest to the Board and at a future meeting to have some analysis or information on tagging movements. Is that something that could possibly be done, Tracey? It kind of falls out of the typical realm where you have a TC that provides this information. In this case, it could be the individual states providing information, or it could be just kind of done more informally, to where maybe the states can provide, Joe can reach out offline to those states. I'll look to Joe.

MR. CIMINO: That's fine. I'll reach out to the states, I appreciate that.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Yes, it might be the easiest solution. Any other questions on spotted sea trout? Okay, then we are at a point for motions. Tracey, I don't know if it's a one large motion, or do we have individual motions for each FMP review?

MS. BAUER: I think we've settled on individual motions for each FMP review.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, that makes perfect sense. Starting off, I guess in order with Red Drum. Get a motion up on the board, see who would like to make it. Lynn Fegley.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: I would **move to approve the Red Drum FMP Review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance reports and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware.**

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, Erika Burgess seconds the motion. **Any discussion on the motion? Any opposition to the motion? Motion passes unanimously.** Next up will be Croaker. Get it up on the board. Okay, see who would like to make a motion for this. Shanna, want to read that into the record, please?

MS. MADSEN: **Move to approve the Atlantic Croaker FMP Review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance report and de minimis status for New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina and Georgia commercial fisheries, and New Jersey and Delaware recreational fisheries.**

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, Roy, I saw your hand go up too at the same time, you second that? Okay. Any discussion on the motion? **Any opposition to the motion? That motion also carries unanimously.** Last but not least Spotted Sea Trout. All hands go up. Ingrid, read that in the record, please?

MS. INGRID BRAUN: **Move to approve the Spotted Seatrout FMP review for the 2022 fishing year, state compliance reports, and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware.**

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: I'll allocate the second, I saw John Clark's hand go up, so second by John Clark. **Is there any opposition to the motion? That motion also passes unanimously.**

PROGRESS UPDATE ON 2024 RED DRUM, ATLANTIC CROAKER, AND SPOT BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENTS

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Next item to cover is the Progress Update on the 2024 Red Drum, Atlantic Croaker, and Spot Benchmark Stock Assessment. I'll turn to Jeff Kipp to give us an update.

MR. JEFF J. KIPP: There are three items I'll be covering for this agenda item. The first two will be progress updates on the ongoing Red Drum, Spot and Atlantic Croaker assessments. It will require no Board action. The third item will be to consider an update to the Atlantic Croaker and Spot Stock Assessment Subcommittee, which is an action item.

The Red Drum Assessment kicked off earlier this year with data gathering. The TC and SAS met for a virtual data workshop in June, to review the available datasets and identify data development tasks to support the assessment. A particular development from the Data Workshop of interest to the Board was the decision to switch from a calendar year to a fishing year from September through August, for tracking the stocks in the assessment models.

All population estimates and stock status will be based on this fishing year definition. This decision will provide some benefits like matching the model's age structure to the biological age structure, but did require recalculating datasets, so I did want to acknowledge the TC for taking on the additional workload.

The next milestones will be an assessment workshop in a few weeks in Charleston, South Carolina. The SAS will meet to review follow ups from the Data Workshop and model development. For the remainder of the process, we'll have a second assessment workshop in March, to finalize the model results and stock status determinations. A peer review workshop in August, which will be

coordinated by SEDAR, and the assessment and peer review will be presented to the Board at the annual meeting next year.

REVIEW AND CONSIDER RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE TIMELINE FOR THE SPOT AND ATLANTIC CROAKER BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENTS

MR. KIPP: Now moving to the Spot and Croaker Assessments, which are going through the assessment process together, with a joint Stock Assessment Subcommittee.

The original timeline was similar to the Red Drum Assessment. We started off earlier this year with data gathering. The TCs and SAS met in May for a virtual data workshop, to review datasets and identify data development tasks. Following the Data Workshop and before our first Assessment Workshop, we did have an unscheduled item come up, which was the lead analyst for the Croaker Assessment model, Laura Lee from NCDMF taking a new position, and she will no longer be able to serve as the lead analyst role.

This development created a personnel and experience bottleneck that required the SAS to revise the assessment timeline and request additional support on the SAS during the Policy Board meeting at the Commission's August meeting. We did not find a new lead analyst, but we did receive a nomination for our SAS member, with stock synthesis expertise that could support our remaining lead analyst for the assessment.

We did move forward with an assessment workshop in September, to review follow ups on data workshop items, and to begin development of a model for croaker, anticipating the delay for the Spot Assessment. I won't go into the top of the slide here, given that this was just presented and approved at the Policy Board. We did modify the assessment timeline, but for a few additional details on the remaining croaker timeline. We do have an assessment workshop in February, and a peer review in the summer of next year.

The assessment and peer review will be presented to the Board at the annual meeting next year, along with Red Drum. Then the new Spot timeline will delay the assessment until November of 2024, when we will revisit updated data. There will be an assessment workshop in February of 2025, and the assessment will be peer reviewed in the summer of 2025.

The assessment and peer review will be presented to the Board at the 2025 annual meeting. I do want to note that this is a fairly aggressive timeline to get both of these assessments completed, following the loss of expertise and support that we experienced, and it will be dependent on having the TCs and SAS fully engaged throughout both assessments over the next several years.

REVIEW AND POPULATE ATLANTIC CROAKER AND SPOT STOCK ASSESSMENT SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

MR. KIPP: As I noted a few slides back, we did receive a nomination for a new SAS member to help support the assessment. That nomination for your consideration is Trey Mace from Maryland DNR. If approved, Trey would be joining the existing SAS membership listed on the screen, and would fill the spot vacated by Laura Lee. That concludes my presentation, I can take any questions on the assessment.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Thanks, Jeff, any questions? Yes, Spud.

MR A. G. "SPUD" WOODWARD: Thank you, Jeff. Obviously, the Data Workshops were conducted before this FES issue was revealed to us. Do you anticipate during the assessment workshops that there are going to be some discussions about the possible bias in some of that data, and how to address it? I think all of us are going to be a little concerned that we may have some distorted results in these assessments, because of that unknown, but probably existing bias.

MR. KIPP: Yes, thanks for that question. We do anticipate having discussions about that. We did

proactively meet with MRIP staff, and did discuss some potential sensitivity runs that we could explore during our Assessment Workshops to help understand what the potential implications would be, noted that some of these assessments will be completed before those adjusted data are available.

We don't anticipate major complications, because what was covered at that MRIP presentation was that MRIP expects these effort changes to be consistent across years. What we think we're going to see is a scaling effect, where we have a lower magnitude in catch, but a similar trend through time.

In terms of the assessment stock and stock status, we would expect certainly the population biomass and abundance estimates to decrease, with effort changes that decrease. But the overall trends in those population estimates should be similar. But we will certainly include those sensitivity runs, to better understand that, and that will be part of that assessment package.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Yes, follow up, Spud.

MR. WOODWARD: I'm just looking ahead into the future. We did the sensitivity runs; we make an evaluation of where there is a risk. I guess I'm making erroneous management decisions. I guess the other question is going to be, when we get the results of this expanded FES study, should that affect the timing of when we do the next assessments? I mean if we find something that is of great concern to us, are we going to need to maybe make some adjustments, and update those stock status determinations, maybe earlier than we would have done otherwise?

MR. KIPP: Yes, definitely. I think the SAS can consider that we do have a Term of Reference for the assessment that makes it the responsibility of the SAS and TC to make recommendations on future assessment updates and benchmarks. I think certainly, with some of those preliminary sensitivity runs.

Having an understanding there that will help play into those recommendations, and we could start and

make a recommendation to update those assessment models a year or two after, once those updated MRIP data become available, if it does look like there is going to be some implications.

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Yes, I guess that could probably also have potential implications for future management too. Where if there was a management response that was being considered from the assessment. I guess we would have to look at the results and see how that is impacted by the new FES estimates, to determine whether, do the assessment update before considering management, but I guess we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. But I think those are good questions and things to consider over the next few years. Any additional questions for Jeff? Seeing none; then what we have before us then is to Consider Approval of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee nomination for spot and croaker for Trey Mace. I'll be looking for a motion for that. Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: I am thrilled to **nominate Trey Mace to the Spot and Atlantic Croaker Stock Assessment Subcommittee.**

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: Okay, and second by Malcolm Rhodes. Any discussion on the motion? **Any objection or opposition? Seeing none; the motion carries.** Greatly appreciate Trey joining the SAS, definitely could use as much stock assessment help as we can, to get both these assessments done, in addition to the other assessments going on too. That leaves us with Other Business. Is there any other business to come before the Sciaenids Board? Okay, seeing none.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR BATSAVAGE: This should be my last meeting as Board Chair for the Sciaenids Board.

I appreciate the opportunity to do this over the last couple years. Next time we meet we'll be under the capable leadership of Doug Haymans. Doug, you've got your work cut out for you with a few assessments coming up. I think we'll be fine. Look for a motion

to adjourn. Plenty of hands, we are adjourned, thanks everyone and safe travels home.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m. on October 19, 2023)