

**Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel
Baltimore, MD
October 18, 2005**

Meeting Summary

Participants

AP Members

1. Gene Doebley, NJ
2. Tom Powers, VA
3. Andy Dehel, DE
4. Bob Kelley, GA

TC Representative

Rob O'Reilly

Staff

Nancy Wallace

Summary

The Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel (AP) met on October 18, 2005 in Baltimore, MD. Gene Doebley, vice-chair of the AP ran the meeting in the absence of the Chair, Bill Windley.

Nancy Wallace gave a presentation on Draft Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Croaker FMP for public comment. The AP members asked questions and then went through the Draft Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Croaker Fishery Management Plan. The following is a list of consensus statements from the AP members who attended the meeting. It should be noted that those in attendance were all recreational fishermen. There were no commercial fishermen in attendance.

Options included in the plan

Section 2.4.1

• Issue 1: Regional or Costwide Management

The AP supports regional management until it can be shown that there is mixing in the stock. There was concern that management restrictions would be put in place in the mid-Atlantic because it is unknown how healthy the stocks in the South Atlantic are.

Section 2.5

• Issue 1: Choosing a fishing mortality rate target and threshold

The AP supports the fishing mortality target and threshold that the TC has recommended for the mid-Atlantic region. They would like to see an assessment of the south- Atlantic

region and have a more conservative fishing mortality target and threshold to improve stock conditions.

- **Issue 2: Choosing a spawning stock biomass target and threshold**

The AP supports the SSB target and threshold that the TC has recommended for the mid-Atlantic region. They would like to see an assessment of the south- Atlantic region and have a more conservative SSB target and threshold to improve stock conditions.

While there was consensus on supporting the F and SSB targets and thresholds that the TC has recommended for the mid-Atlantic region, some AP members were concerned that these were not conservative enough. They would like to see management put in place before abundance falls to the target levels. The SSB is very high right now and they would not want to see such a decrease before any management action is taken.

Section 4.1 Recreational Fisheries Management

- The AP supports the status quo option (no coastwide ASMFC management measures restricting harvest of Atlantic croaker) in the mid-Atlantic region. In the South Atlantic they support implementing appropriate management measures to rebuild the stock.
- There was a recommendation to change the wording for the options from “bag and size limits” to “bag or size limits”
- In the mid-Atlantic a size limit would not be supported because many people use croaker for bait.
- The AP would not support any management measures on the recreational fishery without a cap on the commercial fishery. Members of the AP were concerned about a foreign market developing for Atlantic croaker for the commercial fishery.
- If management restrictions are implemented on the recreational fishery, the AP members would like to see the states have the ability to use conservation equivalency.

Section 4.2 Commercial Fisheries Management

- The AP supports the status quo option (no coastwide ASMFC management measures restricting harvest of Atlantic croaker) in the mid-Atlantic region. In the South Atlantic they support implementing appropriate management measures to rebuild the stock.
- The AP recommended that any management measures for the commercial fishery should be a harvest cap or quota, not bag or size limits.

Other Comments on Amendment 1

- There was a recommendation to change the wording of section 1.3.1 of Draft Amendment 1 from “The species currently has significant commercial landings of over a million pounds in Virginia, North Carolina, New Jersey and Maryland” to “The species currently has significant commercial landings of over 10 million pounds in Virginia and North Carolina and over 1 million pounds in Maryland and New Jersey”.

- There was a recommendation to change the wording of Section 1.5.2.1 to reflect the directed recreational fishery for Atlantic croaker in Virginia waters.
- There was a recommendation to implement the use of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) for pound nets and haul seines to allow croaker less than 3 or 4 inches to survive.
- The following research initiatives should be emphasized in the southern region:
 - Improve catch and effort statistics from the commercial and recreational fisheries.
 - Evaluate bycatch and discard estimates from the commercial and recreational fisheries (i.e. shrimp fishery). Produce a general fishery independent index using state survey information. Develop a coast wide and or regional CPUE index.
- There was a concern over bycatch of Atlantic croaker by the shrimp fishery in the south and by nets in the mid-Atlantic region
- The AP wanted to stress the importance of recognizing that there is a problem in the south Atlantic with croaker and research needs to be conducted.
- There was a recommendation to look at the raw MRFSS data to get valid data for the southern states where landings are low.

The next order of business was Rob O'Reilly, Atlantic croaker Technical Committee (TC) Chair, briefed the AP on the TC meeting that was held in September 2005. He described the TC's evaluation of the Spawning potential ratio (SPR) for Atlantic croaker with relation to the reference points in the draft amendment. He also went through the list of triggers that the TC had developed to determine if a stock assessment was needed before the next planned review in 2008.

The AP had a discussion on research recommendations. It was thought that the most important research recommendation was:

- Examine otolith microchemistry data available and expand the research to cover the species throughout the Atlantic range with the hope of understanding the relationship between age 0 and age 2-plus migratory patterns. The desire was to have the studies completed in advance of the requirement for future management measures so that they can be regionalized if appropriate.

Tom Powers, from VA, suggested that he would investigate the possibility of funding otolith studies with funds from Virginia's dedicated funds, which are generated by recreational, and commercial license fees. It was suggested that other members of the AP investigate the potential of in kind funding from their respective states.

Rob O'Reilly commended the AP and suggested they should maintain a sustained and far-sighted interest in the status of the croaker stock and long term and short-term study objectives, as the technical committee is mostly occupied with data review and analysis.

Finally, Nancy Wallace described the timeline for upcoming Atlantic croaker activities. The Management Board will review public comment at their next meeting in November 2005. After this meeting the Amendment will be approved and implemented. The TC will meet in 2006 to review the triggers. The AP will be briefed on these results at a subsequent meeting in 2006.