



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Red Drum Benchmark Assessment Finds Resource Relatively Stable with Overfishing Not Occurring

Washington, DC – The 2009 peer reviewed stock assessment for red drum indicates that abundance of young fish for both the northern (NJ – NC) and southern (SC – FL) stock complexes have remained relatively stable since 2000. The stock assessment concluded that sufficient numbers of young fish are surviving to move offshore and join the adult spawning population, indicating that overfishing is likely not occurring.

Data limitations resulting from red drum's life history characteristics and management regime present unique challenges to scientists as they try to assess the status of the stock. Relatively little is known about the adult (spawning) population of red drum (ages 4 and older) as these fish are primarily found in offshore waters where fishing for red drum is prohibited under federal law. As such, there is little fishery-dependent information on the larger, reproductive fish and limited fishery-independent data. Existing data are largely for the juvenile component of the resource (ages 1 – 3) found in inshore waters. Fishery-dependent data are constrained by the fisheries slot limit, which ranges anywhere from 15 to 27 inches (again limiting the amount of information about larger fish) and fishery-independent data are supplied by multiple state inshore surveys.

The end result of these limitations is a stock assessment that adequately describes abundance and exploitation rates for the pre-adult component of the population (ages 1 – 3), particularly for the northern region, but provides no reliable information on the adult component. Additionally, the stock assessment model was considered to be informative only about the relative, not absolute, trends in age 1 – 3 abundance and exploitation for the southern region. Therefore, only general conclusions about trends in stock status could be provided for the southern region.

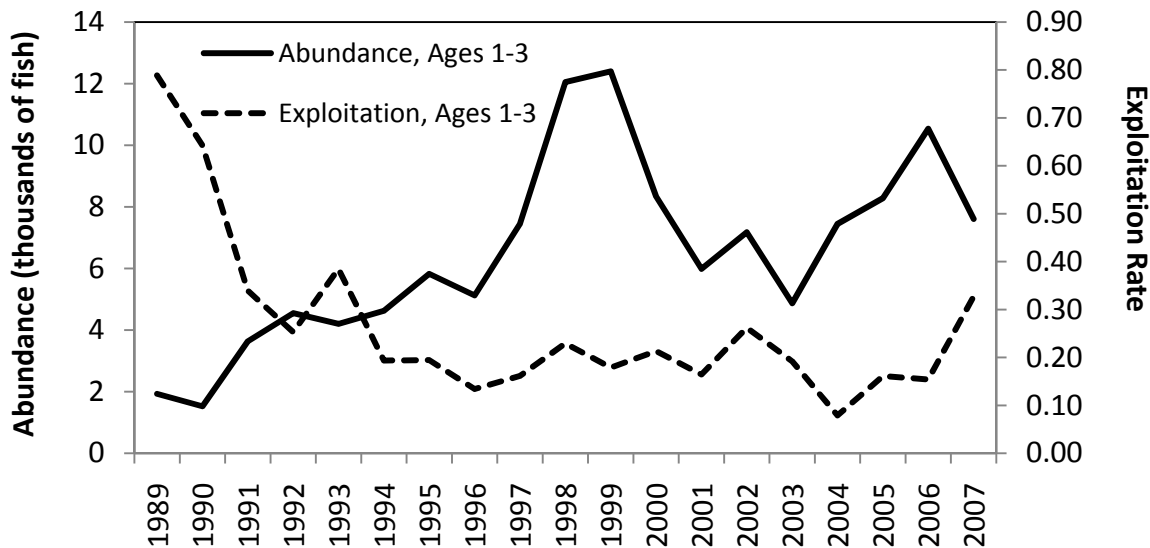
In the northern region, abundance of age 1 – 3 red drum increased during 1990 – 2000 after which it widely fluctuated. The initial increase in abundance of these age groups can be explained by the reduction in exploitation rates in the early part of the time series with relative stability since then. Fishing pressure appears to be stable, and there is a high probability that the stock is not subject to overfishing. It is likely that the fishing mortality rate is at or above its target (Figure 1).

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 anadromous species.

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Figure 1. Estimates of Abundance and Exploitation for the Northern Stock Component of Red Drum, Ages 1 - 3

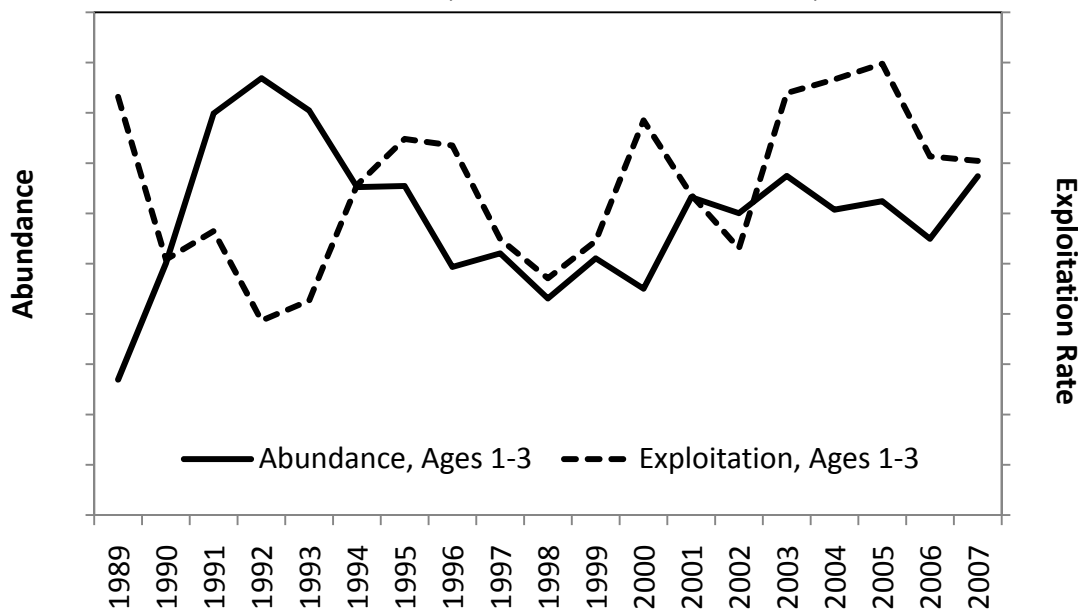
Source: SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review 18, 2009



In the southern region, the relative trend in abundance of age 1 - 3 red drum increased during 1989 – 1992, declined during 1992 – 1998 and has fluctuated thereafter. As with the northern stock, the initial increase in abundance of these age groups can be explained by the reduction in exploitation rates in the early part of the time series. There appears to have been a slight increase in exploitation rates since 1990 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trends in Abundance and Exploitation for the Southern Stock Component of Red Drum, Ages 1 - 3

Source: SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review 18, 2009



Given these findings, the Commission’s South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Management Board did not initiate any changes to the management program at this time. A more detailed description of the stock assessment results will be available by mid-December and can be obtained via the Commission website at www.asmf.org under Breaking News. For more information, please contact Nichola Meserve, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400.