

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee
September 26, 2005
Radisson Old Towne Hotel, Alexandria, Virginia

Meeting Summary

Participants

Present: Nancy Wallace (ASMFC), Rob O'Reilly (VAMFC), Wilson Laney (USFWS-SAFCO), Russ Allen (NJDMF), John Clark (DEFW), Joseph, Munyandorero (FWRI), John Foster (GADNR), Harry Rickabaugh (MDDNR).

Absent (with foreknowledge): Mike Potthoff (NCDMF), Charlie Wenner (SCDNR), Eric Williams (NMFS-Beaufort).

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee met at the request of the South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Management Board on September 26, 2005 in Alexandria, VA. The three major agenda items for the Technical Committee to address were; 1) Develop triggers for Atlantic croaker stock assessments; 2) Finalize monitoring requirements for Amendment 1 and; 3) Discuss Atlantic croaker SPRs.

Triggers for Stock Assessment

Atlantic croaker stock assessments will be performed every 5 years. The next Stock Assessment will be conducted in 2008. On each non-assessment year the TC will meet to review Atlantic croaker data. The TC has specified "triggers" that will initiate an assessment in any non-assessment year. It should be noted that these are not management triggers, but are designed only to initiate an assessment to determine the stock status of croaker.

These triggers are a minimum requirement to update the assessment, however, if the TC reviews the data and notes a marked change, they can request that an update of the assessment be done in the absence of hitting these triggers. The first trigger is the only hard trigger. The others are to be monitored annually, and if the TC notices a substantial change, they can request a stock assessment be conducted. For example, an abrupt truncation in the size or age composition should trigger a stock assessment.

Generally, these triggers or monitoring elements are directly applicable to the mid-Atlantic (North Carolina and north) fisheries and surveys. However, the technical committee will also assess similar data from the South Atlantic (South Carolina and south) fisheries and surveys, for consideration by the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Board.

The triggers considered by the technical committee were:

- 1) Relative percent change in landings
 - A) A stock assessment will be triggered if the most recent year's commercial landings are less than 70% of the previous two year's average landings.
 - B) A stock assessment will be triggered if the most recent year's recreational landings are less than 70% of the previous two year's average landings.
- 2) Biological Data Monitoring:
 - A) The technical committee will compare the most recent year's mean length data from the recreational fishery to the average of the last two years' mean lengths.
 - B) The technical committee will compare the most recent year's mean size (length and weight) data from the commercial fishery to the average of the last two years mean size (length and weight) data.
 - C) The technical committee will monitor the overall age composition (proportion at age) and calculate the mean size at age for the age groups that are present in the state samples.
- 3) Effort vs. Landings (commercial)
 - A) CPUE considerations for the near future: as effort data increases in quality, the trigger should change from a commercial landings basis to commercial CPUE by gear type. At this time, the technical committee will monitor effort (e.g. trips or days fished) vs. landings, on a gear type basis, to track parallel trends.
- 4) The technical committee will continue to derive a MRFSS CPUE, on a directed trip basis, to examine state-by-state catch rates on an annual basis.
- 5) Surveys
 - A) The technical committee will continue to monitor the NMFS annual survey results and compare these estimates to the long-term average, until further analysis (e.g. other surveys) can be conducted.

Monitoring Requirements for Amendment 1

The Technical Committee has recommended that there be no monitoring requirements in Amendment 1. However, the TC strongly recommended that current state and federal surveys continue in order to collect croaker data that will be used in future stock assessments. In June 2005, the TC put together a list of surveys that should continue. This list was updated and finalized and will be included in Amendment 1.

Discussion on SPRs

The Technical Committee briefly discussed the spawning potential ratio (SPR) for Atlantic croaker. At current $F(2002) = 0.11$ the corresponding SPR is 69%; whereas the

threshold $F = 0.39$ corresponds to an SPR of 36%. The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Board wanted the technical committee to assess the accuracy of the SPR estimates. The technical committee did not spend an extensive amount of time discussing the SPR estimates, as discussions on triggers for an assessment were held at length. However, comments from the committee supported the current SPR and indicated that the absence of shrimp fishery croaker discard data and 1st order estimates of the scrap component of croaker landings remain unknown and it is not clear whether they could greatly affect the SPR estimates.