

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

**The Westin Crystal City  
Arlington, Virginia**

**August 6, 2024**

**Approved October 3, 2024**

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2. **Approval of Proceedings of April 30, 2024** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to approve the Red Drum FMP Review for the 2023 fishing year as amended today, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey and Delaware** (Page 9). Motion by Lynn Fegley; second by John Clark. Motion passes by consent (Page 9).

**Move to approve the Atlantic Croaker FMP Review for the 2023 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina, and Georgia commercial fisheries and New Jersey recreational fishery** (Page 9) Motion by Roy Miller; second by Jeff Kaelin. Motion passes by consent (Page 9).

4. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 11).

**ATTENDANCE**

**Board Members**

Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)	Chad Thomas, NC, proxy for Rep. Wray (LA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)	Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for Blaik Keppler (AA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)	Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
John Clark, DE (AA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Lynn Fegley, MD (AA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stain (LA)	Erike Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Shanna Madsen, VA, proxy for Jamie Green (AA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
James Minor, VA (GA)	Ron Owens (PRFC)
Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for Kathy Rawls (AA)	Jack McGovern (NMFS)

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

**Staff**

Bob Beal	Caitlin Starks	Katie Drew
Toni Kerns	Jeff Kipp	Jainita Patel
Tina Berger	Tracey Bauer	Chelsea Tuohy
Madeline Musante	James Boyle	

The Sciaenids Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, a hybrid meeting, in-person, and webinar; Wednesday, August 7, 2024, and was called to order at 11:15 a.m. by Vice Chair Shanna Madsen.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR SHANNA MADSEN: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the Sciaenids Board meeting to order. I am Shanna Madsen; I am actually your Vice-Chair. Doug Haymans is online. With all of the hurricane excitement, although Doug, I have to say, Florida made it, so I think you just wanted to leave me up here by myself.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

CHAIR MADSEN: All right, so moving into our first actions. We have our Board Consent items. We first have the Approval of our Agenda. Do any of our members have any changes that they would like to make to our agenda?

### **APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS**

CHAIR MADSEN: Okay, seeing none, next on the list is our Approval of the Proceedings from April of 2024.

Are there any changes that folks would like to make to those minutes?

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

CHAIR MADSEN: Okay, seeing none, now we have some time on the agenda for Public Comment for items that are not on the agenda. I'm seeing no one in the room who would like to make public comment, and Tracey will check and see if there is anyone online.

All right, we've got no one on line. I think we're going to have a nice efficient meeting here. Okay, rolling on.

### **2024 TRAFFIC LIGHT ANALYSES FOR SPOT AND ATLANTIC CROAKER**

VICE CHAIR MADSEN: Today we have to review our 2024 Traffic Light Analysis for both Spot and Croaker. We have Dawn Franco and Harry Rickabaugh online. I believe Harry may be starting with some introduction, and then they will tag team both spot and croaker.

MR. HARRY RICKABAUGH: Thank you, my name is Harry Rickabaugh, I'm with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. I am the current Spot TC Chair. Today I'm going to give a brief description of traffic light methodology, and a little bit about the current management measures, and the triggers.

We haven't presented those to you in a while, we didn't do a traffic light at all last year, an update. Just to refresh everyone's memory. Following that I'll give the 2024 traffic light analysis update for spot, and when I'm finished, I'll turn it over to Dawn Franco to do the traffic light analysis for Atlantic croaker.

We use a fuzzy approach for the traffic light analysis. Traffic light analysis is just an index-based analysis using color proportions to basically group your positive into green and then your cautious area into yellow, and then any unfavorable area into reds. You use in our case the mean and 95 percent confidence limits of the 2002 to 2012 reference period. If you look at the figure on the right, the middle line that says mean, that is actually mean for the index obviously that is being evaluated, and it would be 100 percent yellow at its mean. Then as you move above the mean towards the upper confidence limit, it gets to be more and more green, less and less yellow. Once you reach that upper confidence limit it is 50 percent green, 50 percent yellow, and at 2 times the upper confidence limit it becomes 100 percent green.

Then conversely, you simply would do the same thing for red as you move under the mean, it becomes more and more red and less and less

yellow. Then in order to calculate those percentages we use a linear regression of the index values plus those proportions of yellow, green and red on the left side, to come up with an equation we can use to assign the exact color proportions for each index relative to the reference period.

Then we can combine the indices. With both species we used two metrics, the harvest metric, and the adult abundance metric, which are divided by region. We can combine the individual indices. We use a 50/50 weighting, because we have two indices in each metric, in this instance. You can't have some cases where in a given year you'll see green, yellow and red.

That just means one of the two indices was above its mean and one of the two indices was below its mean, relative to that reference period of 2002 to 2012. As I mentioned, we have two metrics for each species, and each species is divided by region. Those regions are the Mid-Atlantic Region, which is New Jersey through Virginia, and the South Atlantic Region, which is North Carolina through Florida.

The harvest metric for both species utilizes the recreational landings from MRIP, and the commercial landings from ACCSP. The adult abundance metric for spot uses only Age 1 plus fish. The Mid-Atlantic Region survey, the Chesapeake Bay Multispecies Monitoring and Assessment Program, and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Multispecies Bottom Trawl Survey.

In the South Atlantic we use the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program Survey, and the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Pamlico Sound Survey, often referred to as Program 195. For croaker, the adult abundance metrics for Age 2 plus fish, and in the Mid-Atlantic it is the same two surveys as for spot, ChesMMAP, and the Northeast Fisheries Science Trawl Survey.

For the South Atlantic we once again used the SEAMAP Survey, the second survey is the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Trammel Net Survey. If you look at the table on the top, the percent in red are the levels at which we would trigger management action. Both species use a 30 percent for moderate action and a 60 percent for an elevated management response.

The responses are below the table for each commercial/recreational by species. For both species initially we would have needed to have both that harvest metric and the adult abundance metric exceed one of those thresholds. For croaker 3 of the 4 terminal years, and for spot 2 of the 3 terminal years. Spot is a little shorter timeframe, due to being a shorter-lived species. Both of those TLA did trigger at the 30 percent level in 2020, with management measures going in place in 2021. For croaker, those measurements need to stay in place for at least three years, for spot they were required to stay in place for at least two years. There was also any state with more restrictive measure had to keep those in place for that same timeframe, or until the abundance metric is no longer triggered at that point or past those three year and two-year limits. The abundance metric is no longer triggered, but could then remove the regulations if the Board wished.

Now we don't use the commercial recreational harvest, which is the harvest metric after it's triggered, since the management action could reduce the amount of landings, which would increase the amount of red, which is of course what we're monitoring to determine whether to go in or out of management action.

Now I'm going to move into the spot traffic light analysis, just using the methods I just mentioned. The first thing is the harvest confidence indices. For this metric, it's again Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic, and actually for all the years too for spot and croaker. We're going to use the same figures you see on the right. If you look at just the upper panel on the Y axis there is the proportion of color.

On the X axis is obviously year. The red is coming off of the primary axis, so the proportion on the left where it says 0.3, that would be your 30 percent level that black line, horizontal line. The upper horizontal line, the 0.6 is your 60 percent level, and again it will be that way for all of them.

In this case being the harvest composite, for spot you can see that the terminal two years are above that 30 percent red threshold, which would mean if we were using this it would be triggered. But since we've already triggered management action, we're not currently using this to evaluate that.

We're just showing you what it would look like if we were. You can also see that in 2023 we would have the highest proportion of red at 74 percent. In the South Atlantic we again have the highest proportion of red in 2023 at 81 percent, and that it the eighth year in a row that it was above the 30 percent threshold.

For the abundance composite indices. I apologize, I just noticed I mislabeled this slide. I had these separated into two slides and made it into one. This isn't just for the Mid-Atlantic. As you'll notice, we have the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic on this slide. The top panel is the Mid-Atlantic adult indices.

Indices again for this would be ChesMAPP and the Northeast Science Center survey. If you recall for ChesMAPP, they had some survey changes, some significant ones following the 2018 sampling season. For the past couple of traffic light updates, we have not had any ChesMAPP information, and therefore no composite index following 2018.

They have since done those conversions, so all of the data, bringing this data to 2018 has been converted to be on the same scale as the current survey methodology. This is the first time you are seeing anything for 2019 on for the traffic light for the Mid-Atlantic. You can see we do not have two of the three terminal years above 30 percent, although the terminal year,

2023 is above the 30 percent red in the Mid-Atlantic. In the South Atlantic there are no red at all in 2022 or '23, and has not been above 30 percent red since 2018. Neither of these would be tripped at this point. Again, just to reiterate, we can't use the harvest metric to either evaluate whether we should come out of the management options or to trigger up to the next level.

But we are showing you if they would or would not have triggered. In the Mid-Atlantic it would have triggered at the 30 percent red, and it would have also the South Atlantic, and again, both of those regions had the highest percent of red in the terminal year, but we're considering that unknown, since it could be affected by the management options that went into place in 2021.

For the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic indices, again we are not triggered any longer. But the Mid-Atlantic index does remain above the 30 percent red, but the previous two years are not. Since the TC is not recommending relaxing those regulations, even though we could do that at this point.

Primarily, because a few reasons, but the adult abundance metric, even though it did not trip, the terminal year for the Mid-Atlantic is above the 30 percent red, and if you recall, two of the three terminal years being above 30 percent would trigger management action. If we were to have that situation next year, we would basically be removing management measures in 2025, and then putting the same measures back in place in 2026.

Also, harvest levels have remained at a relatively high red level. We aren't seeing the same improvement as we are with the adult indices. They did decline to their highest values within the time period being monitored in 2023. Moving forward we can use that harvest metric to consider the traffic light status in the future. That is because we are now officially not really triggered, since we have the abundance index moving into the favorable zone.

We also have the benchmark stock assessment that is going to begin right after the croaker assessment

is finished, hopefully that is in 2025. TC would prefer to wait to see if we are able to get a more traditional stock assessment results out of that, that are useable for a management action, to evaluate whether or not we should be changing our management, rather than changing it now and potentially changing again following that stock assessment. With that I can take any questions on either the way the traffic light is calculated or the spot traffic light.

CHAIR MADSEN: I'm going to turn towards the Board to see if we have any questions regarding Harry's presentation. All right, we've got nothing in the room and nothing online. Verified with Tracey, if the Board decides to go along with the recommendations of the TC, we do not have to take any actions today. Just something to consider as we're moving forward and we go into croaker. All right, we've got a quiet and small group today. Let's move forward, and we'll go ahead and we'll have Dawn present for croaker next.

MS. DAWN FRANCO: Thank you so much, Shanna and thank you, Harry. Thank you, Harry for the introduction and doing the lion's share of the presentation. I will just be taking everyone through the croaker part, as everything he just explained earlier is applicable to croaker as well. I didn't introduce myself, I'm so sorry. I'm Dawn Franco, I'm with Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and I am newly the Chair of the Atlantic Croaker TC in the interim, since we just lost our Chair. Here we go. Very similar to what Harry just said, I'll start with the harvest composite, which is recreational and commercial landing combined, and we have the Mid-Atlantic at the top and the South Atlantic at the bottom. For the Mid-Atlantic you can see that we are continuing above the 60 percent threshold for several years now, and we're about 10 years above the 30 percent threshold.

Then in the South Atlantic we are not quite reaching the 60 percent threshold, but we have been either at or exceeding the 30 percent

threshold for the past 10 years. Like Harry said, we currently cannot use these for assessing another trigger mechanism or putting in further management restrictions, but it is still good to show you how things are going and to refer back to it.

Also, Harry said that once triggered, if we remove the management measures, we could go back and use this data once again for determining if anything is triggered for either region. Moving on to the data that we can actually use. Today we'll look at the Atlantic croaker adult abundance slides. As Harry mentioned, this is the first year that we have a full dataset for the Mid-Atlantic, very exciting.

Now we can see all the data that we were missing for the previous years, and what we see here for the top and Mid-Atlantic is we have continuation above the 30 percent threshold in majority of the recent years, but for croaker we're only focusing on the past four years. We would need three out of the last four years to exceed any percent threshold to make a decision, or for the further management action to occur.

We actually saw some improvement in the Mid-Atlantic for a few short years. In 2021 and 2022 that level decreased a little bit from 2020. The red was over 60 percent in 2020, and declined for a couple of years. But then in the terminal year it shot up to a very high level in 2023 at 90 percent for that last terminal year.

In a nutshell, we have exceeded 30 percent threshold once again in the past three out of the four years, and we got very close to exceeding 60 percent in 2020, slightly under at 56 percent in 2021, just barely over 30 percent for 2022, but then again over 60 percent in 2023. In the South Atlantic, we are seeing continued green.

We're seeing continued improvement, and we haven't exceeded a 30 percent threshold in the South Atlantic since 2004. The past 20 years we have not exceeded any thresholds. Then so if we were to have exceeded 60 percent red in three out of the four terminal years, that would actually



trigger, or be a sign that we should take further management action.

A nice sum up of the past four years, looking at just the adult abundance. We are continuing the trigger at the 30 percent level, and again we have unknown, just like spot for the 2023 TLA status, because we're not using that at the moment. Unlike spot, we are still triggering at, at least the 30 percent level.

There wasn't anything to say for sure we needed to change management action, but also included in Addendum III is language that states if triggered measures have remained in place for a minimum of four years. We're considering Year 4 to be 2024, but we should reevaluate and look at all the abundance trends to determine if triggered measures should remain in place, or have the option to put more restricted measures in place, should we think it is necessary. We reviewed all of the abundance metrics on their own in separate graphs.

I do actually have those here in the presentation today, should we want to see them and review them, but it's a very similar picture to what we're seeing in the traffic light analysis, where you're seeing a downturn in the terminal year, a little bit of up and down in the most recent years. But most importantly, our recommendation is just to hold steady and maintain current management measures, because as with spot, we do have a pending stock assessment.

We are in the middle of a stock assessment, and hopefully we will get more information on that before the end of the year, and it really doesn't make a whole lot of sense to change any of the management measures now, if we might have to change something after the stock assessment is complete. I believe that is all I have for you today, and I don't think I added the questions, my apologies about that. I'm happy to take any questions that there might be in the room or online.

CHAIR MADSEN: Thank you very much, Dawn. I'll turn to the room first, are there any questions for Dawn on the croaker TLA? All right, we also have nothing online. Turning to the Board to see if any action is warranted today. We have two recommendations from the TCs, both spot and croaker, to maintain our management measures.

Even though spot is currently not triggered, and croaker is continuing to be triggered, both the TCs have recommended maintaining our current management measures, since we are in the middle of hopefully a benchmark stock assessment for croaker, and hopefully we'll get some outcomes there, instead of having to depend our TLAs. Any comments from the Board on that? Go ahead, Chris.

MR. CHRIS BATSAVAGE: I agree with the TCs recommendations to hold things in place while the assessments are underway. I think moving forward would be after the assessments, assuming they pass peer review and we get a better handle of what the spawning stock biomass and F rates look like for these species, because we may want to take a look at the traffic light analyses. Yes, thinking about the adult abundance metric that is used.

If it's just say two and three year old fish for croaker, and not seeing fish much older than that, then you may get a situation where it will show in the traffic light analysis that things are fine, but compared to historically, it is probably not, and the same with spot if it's just a bunch of one year old fish that are in the adult abundance metric, but we're not seeing those twos and threes or older.

It may not be telling us what we really need to know. However, you know the assessments should shed more light on that. But anyways, just want to make that comment, as far as things to think about in the future. We've done a couple different iterations of the traffic light analysis, and may want to take a fresh look at how we do things in the coming years. Thanks.

CHAIR MADSEN: Great, thank you very much for those comments, Chris. Turning to the Board in the room. Are there any other comments that you

would like to make on these two traffic light approaches? Turning to Tracey for anyone online. Okay, great. I think that we have all agreed that we are going to move forward with the TC recommendations for both species.

Hopefully, next year we'll be getting some actual news on croaker, and we'll be able to reevaluate at that point.

**CONSIDER RED DRUM AND ATLANTIC CROAKER FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEWS AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2023 FISHING YEAR**

CHAIR MADSEN: All right, we are moving through our agenda. We are going to go through some FMP reviews. Tracey is going to cover both red drum and croaker FMP reviews, and talk about the compliance from last year. Go ahead, Tracey.

MS. TRACEY BAUER: Good morning, everyone. I'm going to start with the FMP Review Presentation for Red Drum, where I'll be reviewing current red drum management, status of the fishery, and then recommendations by the PRT. I'll keep that pretty short, because you guys are going to be hearing a lot more from red drum at next meeting.

Then we'll move to Atlantic croaker, where I'll just briefly review current croaker management, status of the fishery, some specifics on de minimis requests for this year, and then PRT recommendations. Starting off with red drum. Red drum is currently managed under Amendment 2 to the Interstate FMP, and Addendum I.

The goal of Amendment 2 was to achieve and maintain the optimum yield for the Atlantic Coast red drum fishery, and to maintain that spawning potential ratio at or above 40 percent. It requires states to implement creel and size limits to achieve an F target, including a

maximum size of 26 inches total length, and maintaining existing commercial regulations.

Then Addendum I that followed in 2013 was mainly focused on updating Amendment 2's habitat section with the most up-to-date information. Moving into status of the fishery. This figure breaks down the northern, which is New Jersey through North Carolina, and southern, which is South Carolina through Florida regions commercial and recreational landings, at the proportion of total coastwide landings.

In this figure, starting at the bottom, the bottom blue and green represent the proportion of total coastwide landings that are from the northern region, and then the dark blue at the top is the proportion of total landings from the southern region, which are obviously at least, except for right at the beginning, all recreational.

Red drum landings from New Jersey through the east coast of Florida in 2023 were estimated at about 5.0 million pounds, 61 percent of those total landings came from the southern region, and 39 percent came from the northern region. In the northern region landings totaled 1.9 million pounds in 2023, which was a decline about 24 percent from the previous year, and this was mainly due to a decline in recreational landings in the northern region.

Then commercial landings in the northern region increased slightly by 6 percent in 2023, to approximately 200,000 pounds. I will now review red drum recreational landings specifically. In this figure the orange bars are the recreational landings and then the pounds for the northern region, and the blue portion is recreational landings from the southern region. Recreational landings in the northern region in 2023 were estimated to be 1.8 million pounds or about 387,000 million fish, which as previously mentioned was declined from the previous year's estimates of recreational harvest, which was about 2.6 million pounds. Recreational landings in the southern region were estimated at 3.0 million pounds, or about 1 million fish, which was a slight decline from 2022.

This figure shows total recreational removals compared to the number of fish in both the northern and southern regions. The lines on this figure are number of fish in the northern region, which is the red line, and the southern region, which is the orange line, and the bars are total recreational removals in numbers of fish for the two regions.

Purple bars are for the northern region, and maroon are for the southern region. As a reminder, total removals are dead discards plus number of fish caught. The number of fish released in the northern region in 2023 was 2.7 million fish, which was a decline from 2022 by 9 percent. Since this estimated that 8 percent of the released fish dies while being caught, recreational removals from the northern region were estimated in 2023 to be about 600,000 fish.

The number of fish released in the southern region, 8.5 million fish, increased by 17 percent from 2022, and again because of the 8 percent discard mortality rate recreational removals from the southern region in 2023 were estimated to be 1.7 million fish. Moving into the PRT recommendations.

The PRT found no inconsistencies among states with regard to the FMP requirements. Both New Jersey and Delaware requested de minimis status through the reporting process, and as a reminder, Amendment 2 does not include a specific method to determine whether a state qualifies for de minimis for red drum.

The PRT has chosen to evaluate each state's contribution to the fishery by comparing the two-year average of total landings of that state to the management unit. New Jersey and Delaware each harvested 0 percent of the two-year average of total landings. As a reminder, de minimis status does not exempt either state from any requirement, but it may exempt them from future management measures implemented through addenda to Amendment 2, as determined by the Board.

All the research and monitoring recommendations at this time can be found in the FMP document and the previously completed Red Drum Simulation Assessment Peer Review Report with more soon to follow. I will be moving right into Atlantic croaker, and I think handle all the questions at the end. This again is kept purposefully short; these are just the review of the traffic light analyses. Amendment 1 did not require any specific measures restricting harvest, but encouraged states with conservation measures to maintain them.

It also implemented a set of management triggers that were further refined to a traffic light analysis in Addendum II and III, and Addendum I revised the management program's biological reference points as recommended by the 2010 stock assessment. Moving into status of the fishery. We'll first look at Atlantic croaker landings trends. 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 landings in 2023 were estimated at 2.3 million pounds, which was a 16 percent decrease in harvest from 2022, and commercial landings in 2023 were a little over 500,000 pounds, which is the lowest value of the time series going back to 1950, and 2023 recreational landings were estimated at 1.8 million pounds or 5.5 million fish.

Moving into more specifics of the recreational fishery. In this figure the blue bars are landings of Atlantic croaker in millions of fish, and the red bars are fish released alive, and the black line is percent of fish that were released out of total catch. Although Atlantic croaker landings have remained low, the number of fish released has generally been increasing since about 2019.

In 2023, recreational anglers released 34.9 million fish, which was an increase from 2022. In addition, the percent of Atlantic croaker caught by recreational anglers and released has overall been increasing since about the beginning of the 1990s. An estimated 86 percent of the total recreational croaker catch was released in 2023, which is the

highest percentage on record for a third year in a row.

Before I get into this year's *de minimis* requests, I wanted to remind the Board of how *de minimis* status is determined for Atlantic croaker. For Atlantic croaker, the three-year average of commercial, recreational landings by weight must constitute less than 1 percent of the coastwide commercial or recreational landing for the same three-year period.

Commercial and recreational *de minimis* are separated for this species, and a state can qualify for *de minimis* in either the recreational or the commercial sector or both. A state will only qualify for exemptions in that sector that it qualifies for *de minimis* for. For this year's, *de minimis* requests, New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina, and Georgia all requested *de minimis* for the commercial fisheries, and they all met the *de minimis* requirements.

New Jersey requested *de minimis* for the recreational fishery. The PRT noted in their review that New Jersey's recreational fishery exceeded the 1 percent *de minimis* threshold this year at 1.2 percent, so just over it, and this is the first year they've exceeded the threshold since 2017. PRT recommendations, the PRT found no inconsistencies among states, with regards to the FMP requirements.

The PRT recommended approval of the compliance reports and *de minimis* requests for New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina and Georgia commercial fisheries, and in addition the PRT agreed to recommend *de minimis* status for New Jersey's recreational fishery for additional year, to confirm if there is a consistent trend of higher recreational landings of Atlantic croaker in New Jersey. The PRT agreed to continue to monitor the situation.

If New Jersey's Atlantic croaker recreational fishery exceeds the 1 percent threshold again next year, they would no longer recommend *de minimis* status. Also of note, since Delaware

had not requested *de minimis* status for the recreational fishery this year, which they have in the past, they will be required to implement a 50-fish bag limit in order to stay in compliance with the FMP. It is also noted in the FMP review that additional research and recommendations can be found there, and in the most recent stock assessment. With that I can take any questions. CHAIR MADSEN: Great, thank you, Tracey. I will turn to the Board to see if there are any questions about either of these FMP reviews. John Clark.

MR. JOHN CLARK: Tracey, with the commercial landings of croaker, I mean it really seems to have bottomed out. Is it all based on, I mean they've always been cyclical, I know in their abundance. Is it a combination this time of effort and the population? I mean is there still the same market for croaker because it really seems like it has just bottomed out.

MS. BAUER: That's a really good question. I haven't heard much about the market for croaker, and that's where I might turn to some of the states to see if they've heard anything. But it's something really, we're going to have to dive in further, in terms of effort and stuff like that in the stock assessment itself.

CHAIR MADSEN: Go ahead, Chris.

MR. BATSAVAGE: I'm not sure about any market changes, marketability could be an issue. I know with the gillnet fishery in the ocean for croaker off of North Carolina. As the fish got smaller, they were using a smaller mesh size to catch those fish. At least in the past for the bigger commercial fishery there was a better market for those larger fish.

It might just be not as many large fish available. But I can't really speak on how this affects the overall market. But this kind of puts the landings in perspective, coastwide landings of half a million pounds during the last peak of the commercial fishery for croaker in North Carolina. You had a few trawlers come in and the gillnet fleet go, that would be about a week's worth of catch landings just in

North Carolina during the wintertime. It's a big, big change over 20 years we've seen.

CHAIR MADSEN: Just a comment from Virginia. We're seeing the same thing. We've got a lot of small croakers right now, but not a lot of large ones. I think the market might still be there, but we're just not getting the correct size fish for that market. Eric Reid.

MR. ERIC REID: I am not on this Committee, but I know something about the market. When it comes to things like pan fish, which is what a croaker is, it is akin to our scup or porgy in New England. I can tell you that the big ones are worth money, but when you get into a relatively small fish, which is what we catch as well, as far as our scup goes.

The shipping costs aren't covered by the return out of the market anymore. I don't like doing it for free, but I will do it for free. But the boats don't want to do it for free. That is probably where your price, the price is so low that nobody can make any money doing it. It is not profitable, so nobody wants to spend the time dealing with it.

CHAIR MADSEN: Thank you for that insight, Eric. Do we have any other questions around the table about either the red drum FMP review or croaker FMP review? Lynn Fegley.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: I was just going to say if you are ready for a motion I would be happy to provide.

CHAIR MADSEN: Please, go right ahead, unless we have someone online that wants to make comment or have questions. Okay, seeing none. Go ahead, Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: Okay, I was going to start with red drum. **Move to approve the red drum FMP review for the 2023 fishing year as amended today, state compliance reports and de minimis status for New Jersey and Delaware.**

CHAIR MADSEN: Motion by Lynn Fegley, second by John Clark. Any discussion around the table on this motion? Okay, seeing none, are we maybe ready for a second motion? All right, **the motion passing by consent, no one on line has any hands raised.** Let's move on to croaker FMP review. Any comments that either of the states who are kind of flip flopping in and out of de minimis would like to make, please feel free. Go ahead, John.

MR. CLARK: Yes, I think this was like our fourth year in a row of exceeding the de minimis status for Atlantic croaker recreational, so we already had the 8-inch size limit in place, but we don't have the 50 fish possession limit, so we will go ahead and implement that. Because it will be mandated for us to do that, we can do that relatively quickly, probably in a month or so.

CHAIR MADSEN: Thank you, John, appreciate that. Any other comments around the table? All right, I think we'll need a motion for the croaker FMP review as well. Roy Miller.

MR. ROY W. MILLER: So, moved.

CHAIR MADSEN: You've got to read that one in, Roy.

MR. MILLER: **Move to approve the Atlantic Croaker FMP Review for the 2023 fishing year, state compliance reports and de minimis status for New Jersey, Delaware, South Carolina, Georgia commercial fisheries and New Jersey recreational fishery.**

CHAIR MADSEN: All right, I see Jeff Kaelin second. **All right, do we have any objections around the table, any online? All right, none online. Motion passes.**

#### **PROGRESS UPDATES ON RED DRUM, ATLANTIC CROAKER, AND SPOT BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENTS**

CHAIR MADSEN: Last item on our agenda. It looks like we have Progress Updates on some of our Benchmark Stock Assessments. Jeff Kipp is going to

go over our red drum, croaker, and spot benchmark stock assessments. Jeff.

MR. JEFF J. KIPP: I'm going to go ahead and start with an update on the red drum assessment. Since the last update to this Board at the spring meeting, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee has finalized the Assessment Report, that was in June. The assessment was presented to the Technical Committee, and the Technical Committee approved that assessment for release to the Peer Review in June.

The Assessment Report was forwarded to SEDAR 4 Peer Review in early July. We are actually meeting next week for the SEDAR Peer Review Workshop down in Charleston, so that will be from Tuesday through Friday of next week. Then we will be presenting the assessment and the Peer Review Reports to the Board at the annual meeting. Moving on to the Atlantic croaker and spot assessment. We have had two of our milestones for these assessments. We had a data workshop and a methods workshop; both were last year. Since that time, we've mostly been meeting, a subgroup of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee on biweekly modeler calls to develop the Atlantic croaker stock synthesis model. Going back to the annual meeting of last year the Board decided to decouple the assessments and move forward with the croaker assessment and hold the spot assessment for now.

We did want to bring some Stock Assessment Subcommittee changes to the Board's awareness. We've had two members leave the Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Lindy Barry, New Jersey has retired and Somers Smott from Virginia has changed positions, so we thank Lindy and Somers for their contributions.

But that SAS has gotten a little thinner since. The South Carolina DNR has hired a new hire, C.J. Schlick for support of ASMFC South Atlantic assessments. C.J. has been joining us informally on these biweekly modeler calls. But we did

want to request the Board make the addition of C.J. to the SAS formal here today.

The timeline for the remaining croaker assessment milestones, we do have an Assessment Workshop and then finally a Peer Review Workshop still scheduled for that assessment. But those remain to be determined at this time, given the model development. We're kind of holding until we see enough progress on that model development to have a productive final assessment workshop, to finalize stock status determinations of that model.

Once that is scheduled, we will then schedule the peer review to follow that, and when this assessment will be presented to the Board. Once the Atlantic croaker assessment is completed, we will then begin the spot assessment, and we are anticipating approximately a year for the completion of that spot stock assessment once it starts. That's it for my update, so again looking for any opposition to adding C.J. Schlick to the Spot and Atlantic Croaker Stock Assessment Subcommittee, and any questions on these ongoing assessments.

CHAIR MADSEN: Thank you, Jeff, any questions for Jeff on these stock assessments? John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Hey, Jeff, thanks for the update. With the croaker, is the idea to develop more biological reference points rather than just keep relying on the traffic light, or does it look like, based on the data we'll still be doing the traffic light analysis?

MR. KIPP: Yes, that is the goal is to develop biological reference points with this stock synthesis model and have a stock status determination from that, as opposed to the TLA.

CHAIR MADSEN: Any other questions around the table? All right, and we're seeing none online. Do we have any opposition to adding C.J. to our staff? I certainly hope not, because I know that Croaker SAS has been working really, really hard, so it's great to have another person assisting. All right, we've got one comment.

MS. BAUER: I did want to let the Board know that the Red Drum Assessment Peer Review Workshop next week will be streamed online, so I can send out a webinar link to everyone if you wanted to register and listen to that if you are interested. I don't know how aware the Board was that you could listen to that, but I just wanted to give everyone a heads up.

CHAIR MADSEN: I think that's a good idea, Tracey. Worth sending out in case folks want to listen in. Okay, do we have any other questions, comments, et cetera around the table? All right, moving on. Do we have any other business to come before the Board today? Doug Haymans.

MR. DOUG HAYMANS: It was simply a thank you for Chairing today in my absence. I appreciate it, and look forward to seeing everyone at the annual.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

CHAIR MADSEN: Appreciate that, Doug, and you better be here at the annual, because I think that red drum stock assessment is going to get spicy. All right, looking around the room and seeing no other business, I will take a motion to adjourn. So, moved.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m. on Wednesday, August 7, 2024.)