



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 8, 2014

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ASMFC South Atlantic Board Approves Traffic Light Approach to Assess Stock Trends and Initiate Management Response for Spot & Atlantic Croaker

Alexandria, VA – The Commission’s South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board approved two Addenda, one to the Omnibus Amendment for Spot and one to Amendment I to the Atlantic Croaker Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Addenda establish a new management framework (i.e., Traffic Light Approach or TLA) to evaluate fisheries trends and develop state-specified management actions (i.e., bag limits, size restrictions, time & area closures, and gear restrictions) when harvest and abundance thresholds are exceeded.

The TLA is a statistically-robust way to incorporate multiple data sources (both fishery-independent and -dependent) into a single, easily understood metric for management advice. It is often used for data-poor species, or species which are not assessed on a frequent basis, such as blue crabs in North Carolina and snow crabs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. As such, it serves as an excellent management tool for spot, which has not been assessed on a coastwide basis and Atlantic croaker, which was last assessed in 2010.

The name comes from assigning a color (red, yellow, or green) to categorize relative levels of indicators on the condition of the fish population (abundance metric) or fishery (harvest metric). For example, as harvest or abundance increase relative to their long-term mean, the proportion of green in a given year will increase and as harvest or abundance decrease, the amount of red in that year becomes more predominant. Under the Addenda, state-specific management action would be initiated when the proportion of red exceeds the specified thresholds (for both harvest and abundance) over three consecutive years for Atlantic croaker and two consecutive years for spot. Management measures would remain in place for three years for Atlantic croaker and two years for spot.

The current management triggers for Atlantic croaker and spot compare annual changes in various indices (e.g. recent landings and survey information) to review trends in the fisheries. The Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee and Spot Plan Review Team had expressed concern that this annual review did not illustrate long-term trends in the stock nor did it include specific management measures to implement in response to declines in the stock or fishery. The adopted TLA management framework replaces the current management triggers for both species.

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.

The approved management frameworks for both species will be in place until the next benchmark stock assessment, currently scheduled for both species in 2016. Both Addenda will be available on the Commission website, www.asafc.org, under Breaking News. For more information, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at krootes-murdy@asafc.org or 703.842.0740.

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