

Croaker and Spot Addendum (Addendum I for spot and Addendum II to Amendment I for croaker).

Purpose: The purpose of the draft addenda is to consider alternative management programs for Atlantic croaker and spot with the application of the Traffic Light Approach as a precautionary management framework. The Board initiated the addenda at its February 2014 meeting following the development of the Traffic Light Approach (TLA) report and management memo by the Atlantic Croaker Technical Committee (TC) and Spot Plan Review Team (PRT). The TC and PRT recommend both species for a benchmark stock assessment with the proposed Traffic Light Approach providing guidance in the interim period.

Current Triggers

Croaker: Annual changes in recreational and commercial landings are compared with the average of the previous two years' index value. If the index value drops below 70% of the previous two year average, at a minimum, examination of the data is required by the TC, and the TC may recommend the board imitate a stock assessment (no management action is required).

Issues with current trigger: If landings decline steadily, but not abruptly (current condition) then the trigger does not trip, since both the two year average and landings decline. Landings may reach a very low level without ever tripping. It does not consider the time series of landings only the previous two years. It also requires no management action be taken even if steep declines occur for multiple years.

Spot: Landings and fishery independent index values are compared to the 10th percentile of the indices time series. If two of these indices (one of which must be fishery-independent) are below the 10th percentile the PRT is to recommend to the Board that it consider management action.

Issues with current trigger: The tenth percentile is a very low threshold, and it declines if index values stay near, but not below, the 10th percentile value for several years (a moving target). This is what is currently happening with landings values. The trigger does not require mangment action only the consideration of action.

Traffic light Approach (TLA): Uses a reference period within the time series to derive proportions of red, yellow and green for each year's index value. Green indicates favorable conditions yellow is a transition phase from favorable to unfavorable and red indicates an unfavorable condition. There are two sets of composite indices for each species, one is fishery dependant and one is fishery independent (adult indices only). The way the TLA would initiate management action if adopted is as follows: If the percentage of red in one or both (whether one or both would be selected below) of the composite indices exceeds 30% for 2 consecutive years for spot or 3 consecutive years

for croaker moderate management action would be enacted and remain in place until the percentage of red remained below 30% for the same number of years (2 spot, 3 croaker). If the TLA exceeds 60% over the same time frames more significant management action would occur. The management action would be coast wide and implanted by the board with recommendations by the croaker TC or the spot PRT, or a percent reduction would be required that each state would have to meet using whatever management strategy they desire with board approval, depending on which option is selected below. Season, bag limit, gear restriction or size limit changes could be used in either case. The difference is whether the change is made coast wide at the board level, or state by state at the state level with board approval. At this time the exact action, or percent reduction, that would be taken has not been determined.

Amendment Options: The options below are for each species independently.

1. Status Quo = no change in the current triggers.
2. TLA with coast wide management = The 30% and 60% trigger points would initiate coast wide management measure(s) that would be determined by the board with recommendations from the TC or PRT.
3. TLA = The 30% and 60% trigger points would initiate a percent reduction that is determined by the board and implemented by each state using management measures developed by each state.

Sub option for both 2 and 3 above =

A = single composite index (each composite consist of two or more indices combined) exceeding a proportion of red threshold will initiate management

B = both composite indices (each composite consist of two or more indices combined) must exceed a proportion of red threshold to initiate management.

Public comment

A public hearing was held at the Tawes building on June 12, 2014, with one recreational angler attending. The one attendee favored option 3 B for both species.

Public herrings in VA, NC and GA and form letters from NJ favored status quo with a few people preferring option 3 B for both species. A disliked of size limits was also mentioned.