

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE
SPINY DOGFISH
AUGUST 2024**

STATUS OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fishery Management Plan History

FMP Documentation:	MAFMC/NEFMC FMP	January 2000
	Framework 1	2006
	Amendment 1	2007
	Framework 2	2009
	Amendment 2	2011
	Amendment 3	2014
	Amendment 4	2015
	Amendment 5	2017
	Framework 3	2018
	Framework 4	2020
	Framework 5	2020
	ASMFC FMP	November 2002
	Addendum I	November 2005
	Addendum II	October 2008
	Addendum III	April 2011
	Addendum IV	August 2012
	Addendum V	October 2014
	Addendum VI	October 2019

Comprehensive Review: 2023

Spiny dogfish sharks are interjurisdictionally managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils (MAFMC/NEFMC) in federal waters and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) in state waters. A fishery management plan (FMP) was created for the stock in 2000 (MAFMC and NEFMC 2000). The FMP includes an annual commercial quota allocated for each fishing year (May 1–April 30).

The MAFMC/NEFMC spiny dogfish FMP has had five amendments since initiated in 2000. Amendment 1 required a standardized method to report by-catch, Amendment 2 established annual catch limits (ACLs) and Accountability Measures (AMs), Amendment 3 allowed for updates to essential habitat definitions, established provisions to maintain existing management measures (including quotas) in the event of delayed rulemaking, and eliminated the seasonal allocation of the coast-wide commercial quota, Amendment 4 implemented a standardized bycatch reporting methodology, and Amendment 5 implemented management measures to prevent the development of new, and the expansion of existing, commercial fisheries of certain forage species in the Mid-Atlantic. All amendments were approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). The MAFMC/NEFMC spiny dogfish FMP, associated amendment documents, and framework information can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/dogfish>.

In state waters, the ASMFC 2002 Interstate FMP for spiny dogfish establishes the annual quota and possession limits (ASMFC 2002). The Spiny Dogfish Coast Wide Management Board, Advisory Panel, Technical Committee, and Plan Review Team oversee the management of spiny dogfish in state waters. The management unit includes the U.S. Atlantic coast (Maine-Florida) distribution

of spiny dogfish from the estuaries eastward to the inshore boundary of the exclusive economic zone.

There are no amendments to the ASMFC interstate FMP but there are six addenda. Addendum I allows the Spiny Dogfish Management Board to set multi-year specifications and Addendum II establishes regional allocation of the annual quota (58%) to states from Maine to Connecticut. Addendum III was added to create flexibility in quota shares for southern Atlantic States (New York to North Carolina). Addendum III allows for quota transfer between states, rollovers of up to 5%, state-specified possession limits, and includes a three-year reevaluation of the measures. North Carolina is allocated 14.04% of the quota. Addendum IV standardizes the definitions of overfishing between the three management agencies and adopts a fishing mortality threshold consistent with the federal FMP. Addendum V ensures consistency in spiny dogfish management with the Shark Conservation Act of 2010 by prohibiting processing at-sea, including the removal of fins. Addendum VI allows quota to be transferred between all regions and states to enable full utilization of the coast-wide commercial quota and avoid quota overages. The ASMFC spiny dogfish FMP and associated addendum documents can be found at <http://www.asmfc.org/species/spiny-dogfish>.

To ensure compliance with interstate requirements, North Carolina (N.C.) also manages spiny dogfish under the North Carolina Fishery Management Plan for Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJ FMP). The goal of the IJ FMP is to adopt fishery management plans, consistent with N.C. law, approved by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, or the ASMFC by reference and implement corresponding fishery regulations in North Carolina to provide compliance or compatibility with approved fishery management plans and amendments, now and in the future. The goal of these plans, established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (federal council plans) and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ASMFC plans) are like the goals of the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 to “ensure long-term viability” of these fisheries (NCDMF 2022).

Management Unit

For spiny dogfish, the entire U.S. Atlantic Coast from the estuaries eastward to the inshore boundary of the exclusive economic zone is considered a single stock which is managed by the ASMFC, NEFMC, and MAFMC. North Carolina is allotted a state-specific share of the coast-wide quota and allowed to specify possession limits in state waters.

Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of the joint MAFMC/NEFMC FMP is to conserve spiny dogfish to achieve optimum yield from the resource. In support of this goal, the following objectives were adopted:

- Reduce fishing mortality to ensure that overfishing does not occur.
- Promote compatible management regulations between state and council jurisdictions and the US and Canada.
- Promote uniform and effective enforcement of regulations.
- Minimize regulations while achieving the management objectives stated above.
- Manage the spiny dogfish fishery to minimize the influences of the regulations on the prosecution of other fisheries, to the extent practicable.
- Contribute to the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem structure and function.

The goal of the ASMFC FMP for spiny dogfish is to promote stock rebuilding and management of the spiny dogfish fishery in a manner that is biologically, economically, socially, and ecologically sound. In support of this goal, the following objectives are recommended:

- Reduce fishing mortality and rebuild the female portion of the spawning stock biomass (SSB) to prevent recruitment failure and support a more sustainable fishery.
- Coordinate management activities between state, federal, and Canadian agencies to ensure complementary regulations throughout the species range.
- Minimize the regulatory discards and bycatch of spiny dogfish within state waters.
- Allocate the available resource in biologically sustainable manner that is equitable to all the fishers.
- Obtain biological and fishery related data from state waters to improve the spiny dogfish stock assessment that currently depends upon data from the federal bottom trawl survey.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOCK

Biological Profile

Spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*) are found across the Atlantic Ocean in temperate and subarctic waters. In the northwest Atlantic, they range from Labrador, Canada to Florida but are most abundant from Nova Scotia, Canada to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina (Nammack et al. 1985). Spiny dogfish migrate to coastal waters of North Carolina in the winter and move north along the Atlantic coast in the spring (Sulikowski et al. 2010). Spiny dogfish are a relatively long-lived and slow growing species, reaching a maximum length of approximately 4 feet. Males are mature at approximately 23.6 inches (6 years old), while females mature at between 29.5 and 31.5 inches (12 years old; Nammack et al. 1985). The maximum recorded age is 35 years for males and 40 years for females (Campana et al. 2006). Spiny dogfish give birth to live young called pups. Spiny dogfish gestation is approximately 22 months with two to 15 pups produced (average of six) in each litter and offspring production (fecundity) increases with fish length (Ketchen 2011). Mating occurs during the fall and winter offshore in the mid-Atlantic and pups are born during the winter in the offshore wintering grounds (Campana et al. 2009).

Stock Status

The 2023 Management Track Stock Assessment indicates that spiny dogfish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (NOAA 2023).

Stock Assessment

The 2023 Management Track Stock Assessment indicated that spiny dogfish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The spawning stock biomass estimate of 191 million pups is slightly above the SSB threshold of 188 million pounds. The fishing mortality estimate (0.02) is just below the fishing mortality threshold (0.0246). However, the assessment also found a lower productivity of the stock, requiring reduced quotas to prevent overfishing in the future.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERY

Current Regulations

The fishery is typically opened via proclamation from November through April, as the quota allows; this time period corresponds to the time when spiny dogfish are available in North Carolina waters [see most recent [North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries \(DMF\) proclamation](#)].

Commercial harvest of spiny dogfish is quota managed with harvest periods and trip limits in federal waters and regional and state quota allocations in state waters. There are no recreational harvest restrictions for spiny dogfish.

Commercial Fishery

In North Carolina, spiny dogfish commercial landings peaked in 1996 and declined sharply through 2001. Landings remained low through 2008 and then steadily increased from 2009 through 2014. Landings have declined since 2014 (Table 1; Figure 1A). In 2023, 266,752 pounds of spiny dogfish were harvested which is well below the last decade’s average of 2,639,282 pounds. In 2023, most of the spiny dogfish were landed from the ocean gill net fishery with others landed from estuarine gill nets. Historically, spiny dogfish have also been landed with beach seines, ocean trawls, and hook-and-line gears. In 2022, 74% of spiny dogfish were caught in ocean gill nets.

Table 1. Spiny dogfish recreational harvest and number released (NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program) and commercial harvest (North Carolina Trip Ticket Program), 1994–2023.

Year	Recreational			Commercial	
	Number Landed	Number Released	Weight Landed (lb)	Weight Landed (lb)	Total Weight Landed (lb)
2014	1,992	598,268	11,978	5,650,285	5,662,263
2015	7,302	657,373	36,376	4,247,213	4,283,589
2016	22,611	52,562	173,584	2,271,201	2,472,840
2017	683	44,038	5,616	393,085	398,701
2018	7,514	157,394	43,732	1,168,247	1,211,979
2019	6,106	261,322	43,551	1,124,291	1,167,842
2020	1,785	31,195	13,638	1,501,331	1,514,969
2021	21,587	400,905	117,447	131,501	248,948
2022	3,903	70,502	12,295	70,392	82,687
2023	52,623	456,305	260,605	6,147	266,752
Mean	12,611	188,925	30,873	1,603,940	2,639,282

Recreational Fishery

Recreational estimates across all years have been updated and are now based on the NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) new Fishing Effort Survey-based calibrated estimates. For more information on MRIP, please see [MRIP \(NOAA\)](#). Total annual North Carolina recreational landings, obtained from the NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program, were minimal in the 90s and early 2000s and have been highly variable since (Table 1; Figure 1B). 2023 was the highest recreational landings estimate in the time series at 52,623 pounds. Mean lengths measured in MRIP have varied in the last decade, likely due to the extremely small sample sizes. The smallest average length was 24 inches in 2022 with 10 fish measured and the highest average length was 35 inches in 2014, 2016, and 2019 with one, two, and 3 fish measured, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2. Spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program recreational samples, 1994–2023.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
2014	35	12	40	1
2015	27	16	40	2
2016	35	31	38	2
2017	33	31	34	5
2018	30	25	38	11
2019	35	32	38	3
2020	32	27	38	11
2021	29	24	35	10
2022	24	18	27	10
2023	27	23	31	7

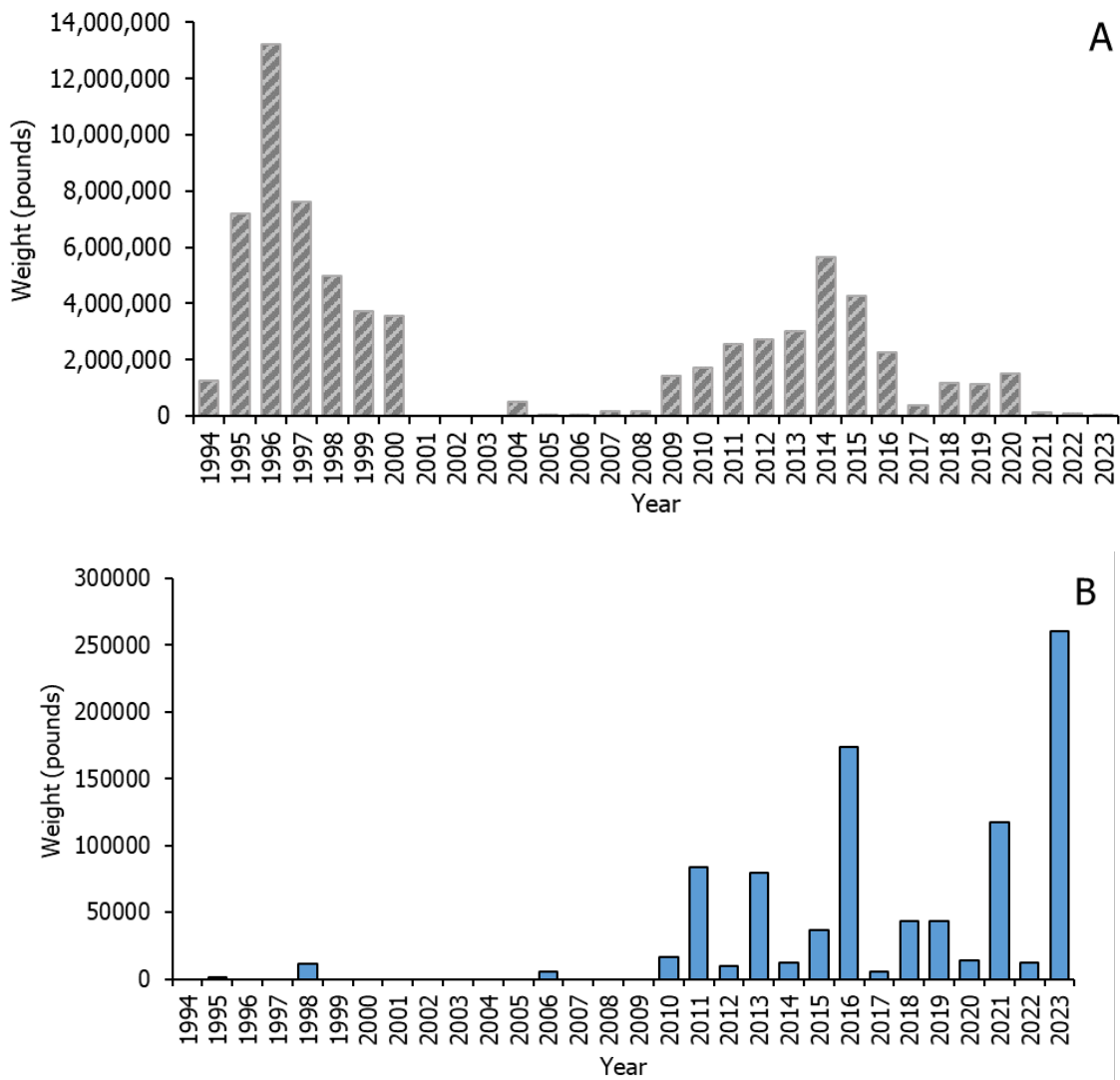


Figure 1. Annual commercial (A) and recreational (B) landings in pounds for spiny dogfish in North Carolina, 1994–2023.

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA

Fishery-Dependent Monitoring

Fishery-dependent monitoring programs for beach seine, estuarine gill net, ocean gill net, and ocean trawl sampled spiny dogfish from 1994 to 2023. Prior to 1999, sampling was minimal, and sex was not recorded. Samples were collected at fish packing houses while the catches were offloaded. Fishing captain or crew members were interviewed to obtain information including area fished, gear specifications, and water depth. For each sample collected, total length (TL) and fork length (FL), aggregate weight (nearest kg), and sex were recorded. From 1999 through 2022, sampled spiny dogfish TL has averaged 33 inches and ranged from 19 to 43 inches. In the last decade, there has been much less variability (Table 3). Female spiny dogfish are typically encountered more often during sampling events due to their relatively higher abundance in nearshore areas where fishing occurs (Table 4). Like many elasmobranch species, spiny dogfish exhibit sexual dimorphism; males are generally smaller than females. There were no commercially harvested spiny dogfish measured in 2023. Low landings and a very limited number of trips reporting any spiny dogfish harvest contributed to the inability to obtain fishery dependent biological samples.

Table 3. Spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from commercial fish house samples, 2014–2023.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
2014	35	26	42	2,168
2015	34	19	40	1,365
2016	34	25	40	795
2017	33	24	39	67
2018	34	27	40	380
2019	34	24	39	580
2020	31	23	41	454
2021	34	28	38	76
2022	33	26	38	114
2023				0

Table 4. Spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data by sex from commercial fish house samples, 2014–2023.

Year	Female				Male			
	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
2014	35	19	42	2,094	31	25	33	74
2015	35	25	40	1,281	31	25	38	84
2016	35	24	40	727	30	26	35	68
2017	34	29	39	53	30	27	32	14
2018	35	27	40	343	30	27	35	37
2019	34	25	39	523	30	24	35	57
2020	32	23	41	362	29	25	37	88
2021	31	31	31	1	34	28	38	75
2022	33	27	38	98	30	26	32	16
2023				0				0

Fishery-Independent Monitoring

The DMF initiated a fishery-independent gill net survey of Pamlico Sound in 2001 (P915). DMF has conducted a fishery-independent gill net survey (P915) which has been conducted in Pamlico Sound since 2001. Sampling was expanded to the Pamlico, Pungo, and Neuse Rivers in 2003 and to the Cape Fear and New Rivers in 2008. Coverage was further expanded to Bogue, Back, and Core Sounds in 2018. The objective of this project is to provide annual indices of relative abundance for key estuarine species in North Carolina estuaries that can be incorporated into stock assessments. Data from this survey are used to improve bycatch estimates, evaluate management measures, and evaluate habitat usage. Results from this project are used by the DMF and other Atlantic coast fishery management agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of current management measures and to identify additional measures that may be necessary to conserve marine and estuarine stocks. Developing fishery independent indices of abundance for target species allows the DMF to assess the status of these stocks without relying solely on commercial and recreational fishery dependent data. The survey employs a stratified random sampling design and utilizes multiple mesh gill nets (3.0 inch to 6.5 inch stretched mesh, by 0.5-inch increments). A total of 1,352 spiny dogfish have been measured in the Pamlico Sound Independent Gill Net Survey from 2001 to 2023. Total length ranged from 20 to 40 inches and averaged 32 inches during the survey period.

RESEARCH NEEDS

Research needs from the ASMFC's 2021 FMP review are provided below:

Fishery-Dependent Priorities

- Determine area, season, and gear specific discard mortality estimates coast-wide in the recreational, commercial, and non-directed (bycatch) fisheries.
- Characterize and quantify bycatch of spiny dogfish in other fisheries.
- Increase the biological sampling of dogfish in the commercial fishery and on research trawl surveys.
- Further analyses of the commercial fishery are also warranted, especially with respect to the effects of gear types, mesh sizes, and market acceptability on the mean size of landed spiny dogfish.

Fishery-Independent Priorities

- Conduct experimental work on NEFSC trawl survey gear performance, with focus on video work to study the fish herding properties of the gear for species like dogfish and other demersal groundfish.
- Investigate the distribution of spiny dogfish beyond the depth range of current NEFSC trawl surveys, possibly using experimental research or supplemental surveys.
- Continue to analyze the effects of environmental conditions on survey catch rates.

Modeling / Quantitative Priorities

- Continue work on the change-in-ratio estimators for mortality rates and suggest several options for analyses.
- Examine observer data to calculate a weighted average discard mortality rate based on an assumption that the rate increased with catch size.

Life History, Biological, and Habitat Priorities

- Conduct a coast-wide tagging study to explore stock structure, migration, and mixing rates.
- Standardize age determination along the entire east coast. Conduct an ageing workshop for spiny dogfish, encouraging participation by NEFSC, DMF, Canada DFO, other interested agencies, academia, and other international investigators with an interest in dogfish ageing.
- Identify how spiny dogfish abundance and movement affect other organisms.

Management, Law Enforcement, and Socioeconomic Priorities

- Monitor the changes to the foreign export markets for spiny dogfish and evaluate the potential to recover lost markets or expand existing ones.
- Update on a regular basis the characterization of fishing communities involved in the spiny dogfish fishery, including the processing and harvesting sectors, based upon Hall-Arber et al. (2001) and McCay and Cieri (2000).
- Characterize the value and demand for spiny dogfish in the biomedical industry on a state-by-state basis.
- Characterize the spiny dogfish processing sector.

MANAGEMENT

To set the annual spiny dogfish quotas, an annual joint meeting between the ASMFC Technical Committee and MAFMC Monitoring Committee is held. The Technical and Monitoring committees make quota recommendations after considering discards, Canadian landings, and management uncertainty. To ensure effective management, quota recommendations are formed using fisheries data collected from the previous fishing season. These quota recommendations are then communicated to the Spiny Dogfish Management Board and MAFMC for approval. The 2023/2024 quota (12 million pounds) was reduced 59.4% from the 2022/2023 quota (29,559,580 pounds). Current management targets and thresholds are below:

- $F_{msy} = 0.2439$
- $SSB_{target} = 351.2$ million pounds (159,288 metric tons); level of biomass that would maximize recruitment to the population (100% SSB_{max}).
- $SSB_{threshold} = 175.6$ million pounds (79,644 metric tons); 50% of SSB_{target}

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