

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE
ATLANTIC MENHADEN
AUGUST 2026**

STATUS OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fishery Management Plan History

Original FMP Adoption:	August 1981	
Amendments:	Amendment 1	July 2001
	Addendum I	August 2004
	Addendum II	October 2005
	Technical Addendum I	February 2006
	Addendum III	October 2006
	Addendum IV	November 2009
	Addendum V	November 2011
	Amendment 2	December 2012
	Technical Addendum I	May 2013
	Addendum I	August 2016
	Amendment 3	November 2017
	Addendum I	November 2022
	Technical Addendum I	January 2023
Revisions:	September 1992	
Supplements:	October 1986	
Information Updates:	None	
Comprehensive Review:	None	

The first fishery management plan (FMP) for Atlantic Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) was approved by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) in August 1981. The objective of the original plan was to achieve a coastwide age composition of landings in the purse seine fishery by spawners and achieve the greatest continuing yield for each area by determining age at harvest and eliminating other restrictions not contributing to management goals. A Revision to the FMP was approved in 1992 and was the result of an updated stock assessment. The 1992 FMP also included a suite of objectives intended to improve data collection and increase awareness of the fishery and its research needs. In 2001, Amendment 1 to the FMP was approved. This Amendment adopted a new stock assessment and new overfishing definition, as well as required mandatory reporting for all Menhaden purse seine fisheries. Addendum I to Amendment 1 was approved in August 2004 to modify the biological reference points, address the stock assessment schedule, and update the habitat section. The 2003 stock assessment used a new model with a fecundity-based biological reference point to determine stock status. Addendum II was approved by the ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Management Board in 2005 and established a harvest cap on reduction fishery landings in Chesapeake Bay to be implemented from 2006–2010. Addendum II also established a research program to determine the Menhaden population abundance in Chesapeake Bay and to address localized depletion. Technical Addendum I, passed in February 2006, implemented an official 5-year annual cap starting in 2006, with the cap calculated based on annual landings from a 5-year period ending in 2004. It also introduced the process of yearly overages being subtracted from the subsequent year, but underage's not being added. Passed in

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November of 2006, Addendum III mirrored the intent and provisions of Addendum II, but incorporated 2005 landings data and included language for the transfer of under-harvest to the following year's harvest. The Board then approved Addendum IV in November of 2009 which extended the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery harvest cap, established through Addendum III, for an additional 3 years (2011–2013). In 2010, the Board tasked the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee (TC) to develop alternative reference points. In addition, the ASMFC Policy Board directed the Multispecies TC to work with the Menhaden TC to explore reference points that would account for predation. Addendum V was approved in November 2011 and established a new interim *F* threshold and target (based on maximum spawning potential or MSP) with the goal of increasing abundance, spawning stock biomass, and Menhaden availability as a forage species. The new threshold and target equated to an MSP of 15% and 30%, respectively.

The development of Amendment 2 established a 170,800 metric ton (MT) (376,549,543 lb) total allowable catch (TAC) beginning in 2013 that continued until completion of, and Board action on, the 2015 benchmark stock assessment. The TAC was based on a 20% reduction from the 2009–2011 3-year average of total coastwide catch. Additionally, a bycatch allowance of 6,000 lb per vessel per day after states met their TAC was established. The Board adopted new biological reference points for biomass based on MSP, with the goal of increasing abundance, spawning stock biomass, and Menhaden availability as a forage species. In 2013, Technical Addendum I to Amendment 2 established a set aside program for episodic events. The 2015 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment update indicated Menhaden were not overfished and overfishing was not occurring, which resulted in Board action to increase the TAC for both 2015 and 2016 to 187,880 MT (414,204,497 lb), a 10% increase. Technical Addendum I, approved May 2013, enabled the Management Board to set aside 1% of the overall TAC for episodic events in New England states (New York to Maine), characterized as times or areas where Menhaden are more abundant than usual. Under the Episodic Event Set Aside (EESA) Program, increased harvest can only occur after a state meets with the Board to ensure they meet the qualifications of an episodic event, after this, effort controls are enforced to make sure the set aside amount is not exceeded by the state fishery. Addendum I, approved in August 2016, modified the bycatch allowance to authorize two commercial fishermen, fishing stationary multi-species gear from the same vessel to land 12,000 lb of Atlantic Menhaden per day. This Addendum supported a history, especially in the pound net industry, of cooperative fishing which enables fishermen to pool resources. In October 2016, the Atlantic Menhaden Board increased the TAC by 6.45% setting the 2017 TAC at 200,000 MT (440,924,523 lb).

Amendment 3 maintained the single-species biological reference points management program until the review and adoption of Ecological Reference Points (ERPs). The intent of Menhaden-specific ERPs is to provide a method to assess the status of Menhaden not only in regard to their own sustainability, but also regarding their interactions with predators and the status of other prey species. This approach allows fishery managers to consider the harvest of Menhaden within a broad ecosystem context, which includes other fish, birds, mammals, and humans who utilize and depend on marine resources. The TAC for the 2018 and 2019 fishing seasons was set at 216,000 MT (476,198,485 lb) and maintained into 2020, with the expectation that it would be set in future years using ERPs. Amendment 3 allocated a baseline quota of 0.5% to each jurisdiction, and then additional TAC was allocated based on historic 2009–2011 landings. Additionally, the quota transfer program was maintained, quota rollover was prohibited, the 6,000-lb trip limit for non-directed and small-scale gears following the closure of the directed fishery was maintained, and 1% of the TAC was set aside for episodic events from New York through Maine. Finally, the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery cap was reduced from 87,216 MT (192,278,366 lb) to 51,000 MT (112,435,753 lb).

Atlantic Menhaden are currently managed under Addendum I to Amendment 3. Addendum I addresses commercial allocations, the EESA Program, and the Incidental Catch/Small-Scale Fishery (IC/SSF) Provision. Regarding allocations, the Addendum creates a three-tiered system for minimum allocations to the states, with Pennsylvania receiving 0.01%; South Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Delaware, North Carolina, and Florida receiving 0.25%; and the remaining states continuing to receive a minimum of 0.5%. Furthermore, the Addendum allocates the remainder of the TAC, excluding the 1% for episodic events

under the EESA Program, on a state-by-state basis, based on landings history of the fishery from 2018, 2019, and 2021. This was ensured by Technical Addendum I to Addendum I, which corrected a paragraph to reflect the correct reference years and became effective for the 2023 fishing year. Under the IC/SSF provision, the Addendum codifies the ability for states to divide their quotas into sectors, enabling individual sectors to enter the provision at different times. Additionally, the Addendum removes purse seines as a permitted small-scale directed gear, prohibiting them from harvesting under the IC/SSF provision. The Addendum counts IC/SSF landings against the TAC and if IC/SSF landings cause the TAC to be exceeded, then the Board must take action to modify one or both of permitted gear types and trip limits under the provision. The Addendum also continues to prohibit the rollover of unused quota, maintains the 6,000-lb trip limit for applicable gear types following the closure of a directed fishery, and keeps the current Chesapeake Bay Cap, which was first implemented in 2006 to limit the amount of reduction harvest within the Bay, at 51,000 MT (112,435,753 lb). This recognizes the importance of Chesapeake Bay as nursery grounds for many species by capping reduction landings from the Bay to current harvest levels. The 2021–2022 TAC was set at 192,456 MT (424,292,851 lb) an approximate 11% decrease from the previous 2018–2020 TAC. The 2023–2025 TAC was set at 233,550 MT (514,889,001 lb) which was an approximate 20% increase from the previous TAC, based on positive stock status under ERP based management.

In October 2025 an Addendum to Amendment 3 was initiated by the Board with the purpose of investigating options to reduce the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap by up to 50% and distribute it throughout the fishing season. Options for the reduction will focus on alleviating ecological impacts from the concentration of fishing effort as well as reducing the fleets effects on other fisheries in Chesapeake Bay. In February 2026 the Board established a workgroup dedicated to the continued development of a document outlining these options. The Board will consider approving a Draft Addendum for public comment at the 2026 ASMFC summer meeting. The 2026 TAC was set at 184,972 MT (407,792,570 lb), an approximate 20% decrease from the 2023–2025 allocation based on the status of the stock resource using ERP based management, specifically because of higher natural mortality estimates. The TC analysis found a 0% chance of the 2026 TAC causing overfishing in 2026 but a 100% chance of *F* falling between the ERP *F* threshold and target.

To ensure compliance with the ASMFC Interstate FMP for Atlantic Menhaden, North Carolina manages this species under the North Carolina FMP for Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJ FMP). The goal of the IJ FMP is to adopt FMPs, 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), is similar to the goal of the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 to “ensure long-term viability” of these fisheries (NCDMF 2015).

Management Unit

The management unit is defined as the Atlantic Menhaden resource throughout the range of the species within U.S. waters of the northwest Atlantic Ocean from the estuaries eastward to the offshore boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Atlantic states from Maine to Florida, including Pennsylvania, are included in the management unit (ASMFC 2017b).

Goal and Objectives

The goal of Amendment 3 is to manage the Atlantic Menhaden fishery in a manner which equitably allocates the resource’s ecological and economic benefits between all user groups. The primary user groups include those who extract and utilize Menhaden for human use, those who extract and utilize predators which rely on Menhaden as a source of prey, and those whose livelihood depends on the health of the marine ecosystem (ASMFC 2017b).

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOCK

Biological Profile

Atlantic Menhaden are an estuarine-dependent species with a single stock along the Atlantic coast that ranges from northern Florida to Nova Scotia (ASMFC 2026). Menhaden form large nearshore schools from early spring through early winter. By summer, schools divide by size and age, with older and larger Menhaden distributed farther north (ASMFC 2025b). During fall and early winter, Menhaden migrate south to the North Carolina capes to spawn 20–30 mi offshore (ASMFC 2026). Sexual maturity is reached between ages 1 and 3 (ASMFC 2026). The buoyant eggs hatch within 2 to 3 days of spawning and ocean currents carry larvae into estuarine nursery areas where they develop into juveniles and remain during their first year (ASMFC 2026). Research indicates that the number of new fish that enter the fishery annually (year-class strength) is likely determined by environmental factors (currents, temperature, predation, etc.) acting on larvae as they approach and enter inlets and nursery areas (Buchheister et al. 2016). Atlantic Menhaden can live up to 10 years but fish older than 6 years have been uncommon in fishery dependent data since the 1960s (ASMFC 2025b). Atlantic Menhaden strain microscopic organisms drifting or floating in the water column (plankton) while swimming in schools near the surface. Atlantic Menhaden are important prey to many species including Striped Bass, Bluefish, Weakfish, Spiny Dogfish, birds, dolphins, and whales (ASMFC 2022; 2025b; 2026).

Stock Status

In February 2025, the ASMFC accepted the results of the Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species Assessment update, Ecological Reference Point (ERP) Benchmark Stock Assessment, and Peer Review Reports for management use. Using the definitions of ecological reference points from the SEDAR 69 Assessment (SEDAR 2020) accepted in 2020, and re-estimating values following the 2025 acceptance of the SEDAR 102 Assessment (SEDAR 2025), it was found that Atlantic Menhaden are not currently overfished or experiencing overfishing (ASMFC 2026). The F for Atlantic Menhaden in 2023 was estimated at 0.26; below the ERP threshold and above the ERP target. Atlantic Menhaden fecundity for 2023 was estimated at 1.2×10^{15} eggs; above the ERP threshold and below the ERP target.

Adopted in August of 2020, the ERPs are based on fishing mortality (F) and biomass targets established in Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Striped Bass Interstate FMP. The use of Striped Bass as a reference point was found to maintain other species at their current F rates. Higher or lower F rates for Striped Bass and other predatory species result in changes to reference point values for Atlantic Menhaden, recognizing its contribution as an important forage fish. The use of these ecological reference points with the Northwest Atlantic Coastal Shelf Model of Intermediate Complexity for Ecosystems (NWACS-MICE), and Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM) allows the evaluation of tradeoffs between Menhaden harvest, predator harvest, and resulting biomass for the included species, allowing reference points to be defined and limits like TAC to be set. The ERPs referenced in the stock assessments have both target and threshold values defined below:

ERP target: The maximum F on Atlantic Menhaden that sustains Atlantic Striped Bass at their biomass target when Striped Bass are fished at their F target (ASMFC 2026).

ERP threshold: The maximum F on Atlantic Menhaden that keeps Atlantic Striped Bass at their biomass threshold when Striped Bass are fished at their F target (ASMFC 2026).

ERP Fecundity target and threshold: The long-term equilibrium fecundity that results when the population is fished at the ERP F target and threshold, respectively (ASMFC 2026).

Stock Assessment

Since the stock assessment peer review process was adopted by the ASMFC in 1998, Atlantic Menhaden have been assessed several times. Prior to the 2025 Atlantic Menhaden Single Species Update Assessment and the ERP Benchmark Stock Assessments, the most recent peer reviewed benchmark stock assessment

was SEDAR 69–Benchmark Stock Assessment (SEDAR 2020), which was updated in 2022 (ASMFC 2025a). The results of the 2022 stock assessment update and ERPs were used to set the TAC for fishing years 2023–2025. In October 2025 the board adopted management strategies following the 2025 Atlantic Menhaden Single Species Assessment Update and the 2025 Ecological Reference Point Peer Review and Benchmark Stock Assessment Report (ASMFC 2026).

The Single Species Assessment Update used the BAM to estimate population size-at-age and recruitment starting in 1955. This statistical catch-at-age model is used to estimate abundance at age, recruitment, spawning stock biomass, fecundity, and *F*. Stock assessment scientists accounted for spatial differences in Menhaden fisheries by modeling the fishery as four separate fleets, first dividing the fleets by bait and reduction fishing, and then by northern and southern sectors. The model was also used in the 2020 Benchmark Stock assessment and 2022 update (ASMFC 2025b).

The Ecological Reference Point Benchmark Assessment focused on refining the NWACS-MICE, previously used to develop ERPs in 2020. The NWACS-MICE is defined as an Ecopath with Ecoism (EwE) model which uses the top four predators of Atlantic Menhaden (Striped Bass, Bluefish, Weakfish, and Spiny Dogfish), Atlantic Menhaden, and two related prey species (Atlantic Herring and Bay Anchovy). These outputs coupled with BAM results can be used to evaluate Menhaden population status with ERPs and set annual TAC (ASMFC 2025b).

DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERY

Current Regulations

In 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly banned purse seines from nearshore state waters (15A N.C. Admin. Code 3J.0105). Effective January 1, 2013, a law was passed making it unlawful to harvest Menhaden with a purse seine net deployed by a mother ship and one or more runner boats within North Carolina’s 3-mi jurisdiction.

In 2026, under Addendum 1 to Amendment 3, North Carolina’s annual quota dropped from 858 MT (1,892,142 lb) of the coastwide allocation of 233,550 MT (514,884,330 lb), to 686.5 MT (1,513,460 lb) of the coastwide allocation of 184,972 MT (407,792,570 lb). North Carolina’s allocation remained at 0.25% of the available coastwide quota.

Commercial Fishery

North Carolina’s Atlantic Menhaden landings have been on a decline, especially since the last Menhaden processing factory in North Carolina closed in 2005. Landings have remained relatively constant since 2012 (Table 1; Figure 1). The average landings over the last 10 years fall at 574,717 lb. In 2025, North Carolina transferred 500,000 lb of its 1,892,142 lb Atlantic Menhaden quota to Maine and landed 458,488 lb or roughly 24% of its allocated quota. The majority of landings are used for bait in the blue crab and recreational fisheries. The decline in commercial landings is largely due to the loss of North Carolina’s last processing facility in 2005, which in turn led to the North Carolina General Assembly banning purse seines from near shore state waters in 2007 (15A N.C. Admin. Code 3J.0105). Gill nets are now the most common gear used to harvest Menhaden throughout the state.

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Table 1. Recreational harvest and releases and commercial harvest of Atlantic Menhaden from North Carolina, 1991–2025. Recreational weight landed for 2012–2025 are based on North Carolina’s recreational cast net and seine mail survey and an estimated individual fish weight of 0.35 lbs derived from fishery-independent sampling. Commercial landings based on North Carolina Trip Ticket Program, 1991–2025. *2023–2024 Recreational data not available.

Year	Recreational			Commercial	Total Weight Landed (lbs)
	Number Landed	Number Released	Weight Landed (lbs)	Weight Landed (lbs)	
1991				110,528,754	110,528,754
1992				57,515,712	57,515,712
1993				64,711,384	64,711,384
1994				73,853,901	73,853,901
1995				58,374,081	58,374,081
1996				53,850,943	53,850,943
1997				97,727,057	97,727,057
1998				57,976,455	57,976,455
1999				42,799,080	42,799,080
2000				56,280,112	56,280,112
2001				56,012,396	56,012,396
2002				69,190,596	69,190,596
2003				48,936,502	48,936,502
2004				50,577,983	50,577,983
2005				13,387,423	13,387,423
2006				962,651	962,651
2007				1,134,208	1,134,208
2008				645,231	645,231
2009				2,124,734	2,124,734
2010				1,299,150	1,299,150
2011				3,530,003	3,530,003
2012	169,926	68,303	59,474	538,792	598,266
2013	221,014	96,004	77,355	454,206	531,561
2014	131,419	64,493	45,997	917,905	963,902
2015	271,824	162,539	95,138	898,322	993,460
2016	278,213	100,998	97,375	398,044	495,418
2017	261,203	96,573	91,421	752,799	844,220
2018	130,441	52,000	45,654	713,978	759,632
2019	152,247	83,285	53,286	551,849	605,136
2020	126,126	60,988	44,144	599,742	643,886
2021	152,722	37,343	53,453	430,623	484,076
2022	119,393	59,721	41,788	539,499	581,286
2023	*	*	*	619,374	619,374
2024	*	*	*	359,167	359,167
2025	82,764	31,994	28,967	458,488	487,455
Mean	174,774	76,187	61,171	26,561,461	26,582,434

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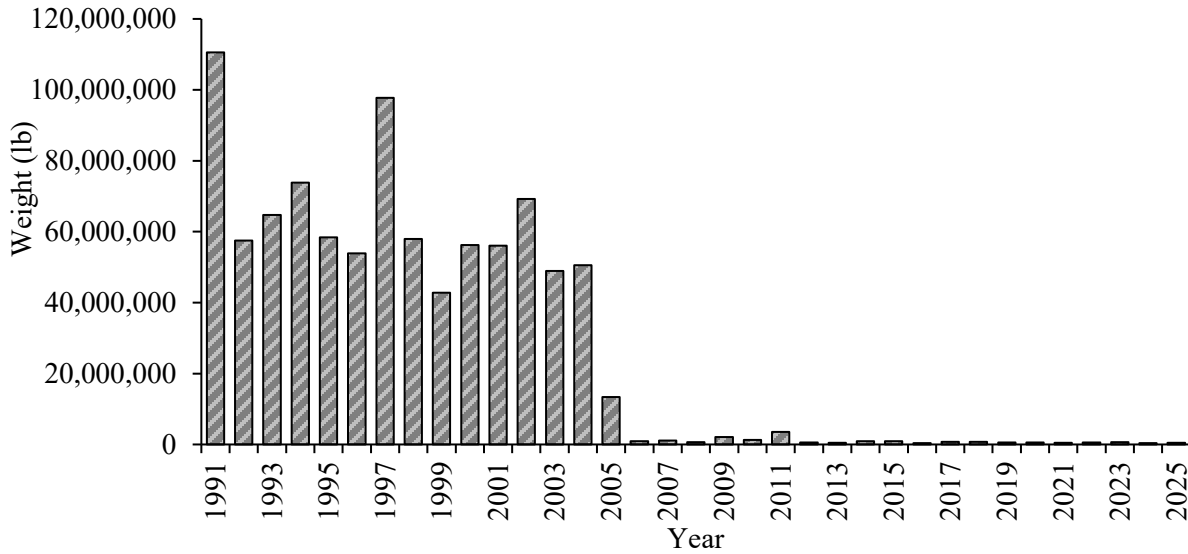


Figure 1. Atlantic Menhaden commercial landings reported through the North Carolina Trip Ticket Program, 1991–2025.

Recreational Fishery

In October 2011, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) implemented a recreational cast net and seine mail survey to develop catch and effort estimates for various species, including Menhaden. From 2012–2025, recreational annual harvest averaged 174,774 fish harvested and 76,187 fish released (Table 1; Figure 2). In 2023, a new licensing system was implemented, and the license database was restructured. This restructuring disrupted our ability to query the full license dataset to establish a sampling frame of eligible anglers for the mail surveys. As a result, data from 2023–2024 is unavailable. The annual harvest for 2025 is the lowest in the time series (28,967 lb), but this could be caused by a large number of outliers in the data that needed to be removed. Without the removal of outliers, the harvest is estimated at 92,041 lb in 2025, which is much closer to other harvest values in the time series.

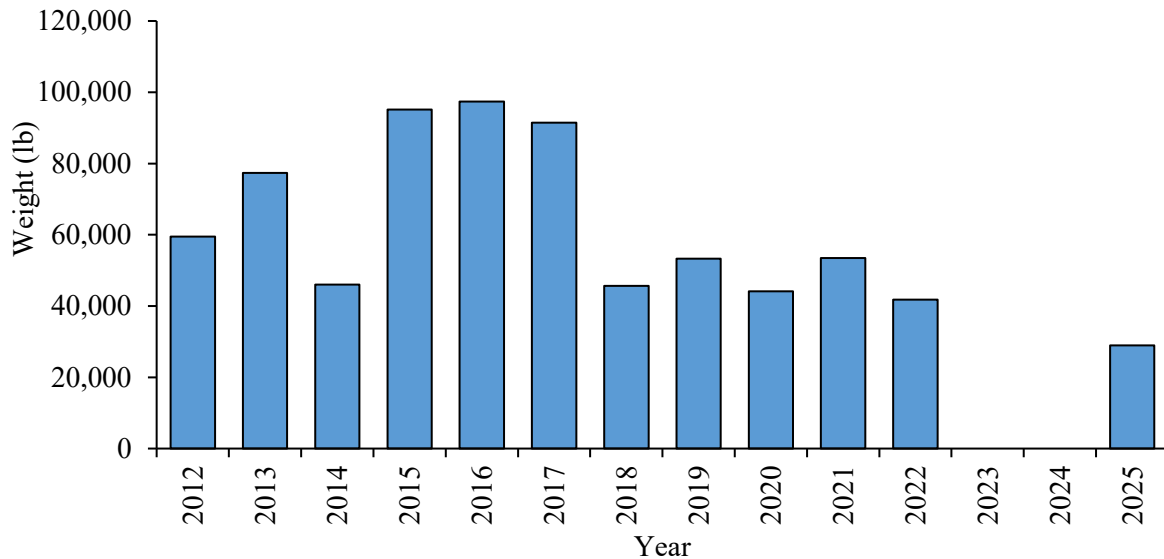


Figure 2. Atlantic Menhaden recreational landings estimated from the North Carolina recreational cast net and seine mail survey, 2012–2025. Recreational data from 2023–2024 not available.

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA

Fishery-Dependent Monitoring

Commercial fishing activity is monitored in a variety of DMF fishery-dependent sampling programs for compliance with the ASMFC. Monitoring includes the ocean sink net fishery, winter trawl fishery, estuarine gill net fishery, long haul seine fishery, and sciaenid pound net fishery. Commercial landings of Atlantic Menhaden are monitored through the DMF Trip Ticket Program. Mean lengths in the Menhaden commercial fishery have remained fairly consistent, apart from 2020–2022 where mean lengths increased slightly (Table 2; Figure 3).

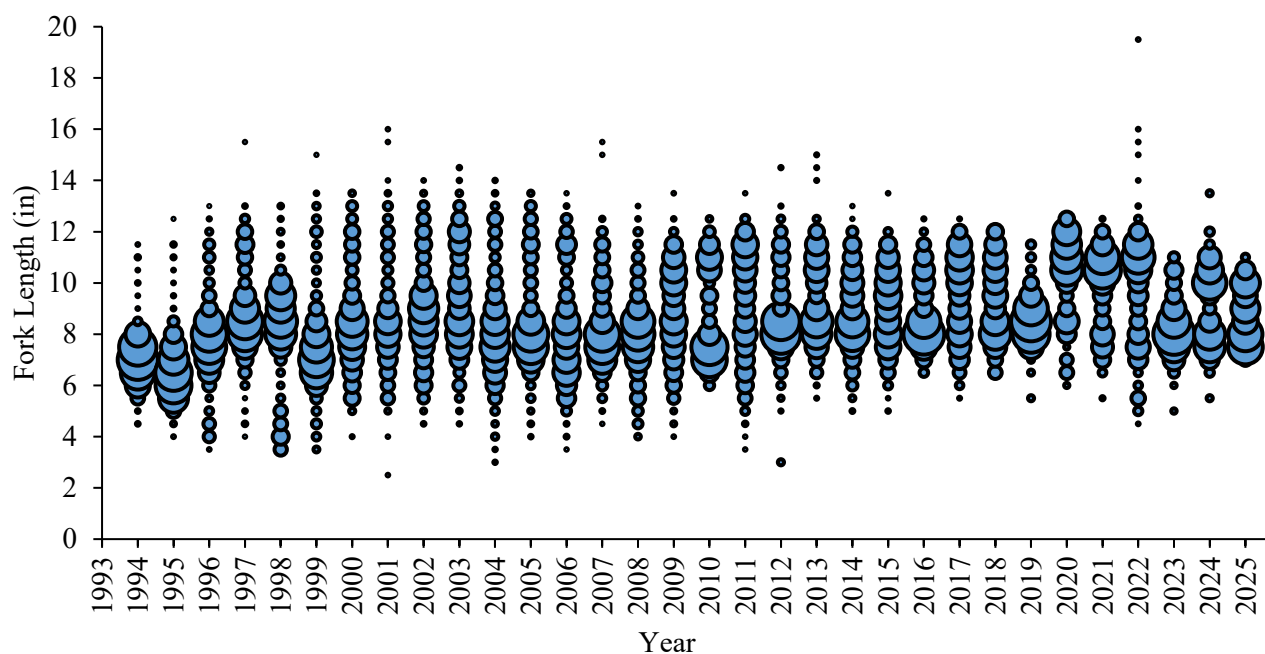


Figure 3. Commercial length frequency of Atlantic Menhaden harvested, 1994–2025. Bubbles represent fish at length, and the bubble size is proportional to the number of fish at that length.

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Table 2. Mean, minimum, and maximum lengths (fork length, in) of Atlantic Menhaden measured from the commercial fisheries, 1991–2025.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1991	6.2	1.9	11.0	3,588
1992	7.0	4.1	17.3	1,831
1993	6.9	3.0	13.8	3,163
1994	7.0	4.3	11.4	1,077
1995	6.5	4.1	12.5	2,045
1996	7.7	3.6	12.9	2201
1997	8.8	3.7	15.6	1,623
1998	8.1	3.4	12.9	1,570
1999	7.4	3.3	14.9	1,702
2000	8.5	4.1	13.5	868
2001	9.6	2.6	15.9	1,266
2002	8.8	4.6	14.0	1075
2003	9.3	4.4	14.4	621
2004	8.2	3.1	14.2	644
2005	8.5	4.0	13.4	1197
2006	8.1	3.7	13.7	1445
2007	8.3	4.3	15.7	1424
2008	8.0	3.9	12.8	1063
2009	8.9	3.9	13.5	1124
2010	8.6	5.8	12.6	210
2011	9.2	3.7	13.7	1346
2012	8.7	2.8	14.3	705
2013	9.3	5.6	15.2	845
2014	8.8	4.8	12.8	1477
2015	9.1	4.8	13.7	1165
2016	8.7	6.3	12.3	760
2017	9.4	5.6	12.4	891
2018	9.3	6.5	12.2	441
2019	8.5	5.6	11.3	179
2020	10.3	6.2	12.7	250
2021	9.9	5.4	12.5	416
2022	9.7	4.7	19.6	1091
2023	8.7	5.0	11.1	236
2024	9.1	5.7	13.7	175
2025	8.7	6.9	10.9	121

Fishery-Independent Monitoring

Atlantic Menhaden are sampled in a variety of DMF independent surveys for compliance with ASMFC requirements. Atlantic Menhaden are sampled in the North Carolina Estuarine Trawl Survey (Program 120), Pamlico Sound Survey (Program 195), the Juvenile Anadromous Survey (Program 100), the Albemarle Sound Independent Gill Net Survey (Program 135), and the Fishery Independent Gill Net Survey (Program 915). The Estuarine Trawl Survey (Figure 4) and Fishery Independent Gill Net Survey (Pamlico Sound only; Figure 5) were used as data sources in the 2020 Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species Benchmark Stock Assessment, the 2025 Single-Species Update, and the 2025 Ecological Reference Point Benchmark Stock

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Assessment. P915 is especially key in Atlantic Menhaden monitoring as it provides one of our longest series of relative abundance for Atlantic Menhaden.

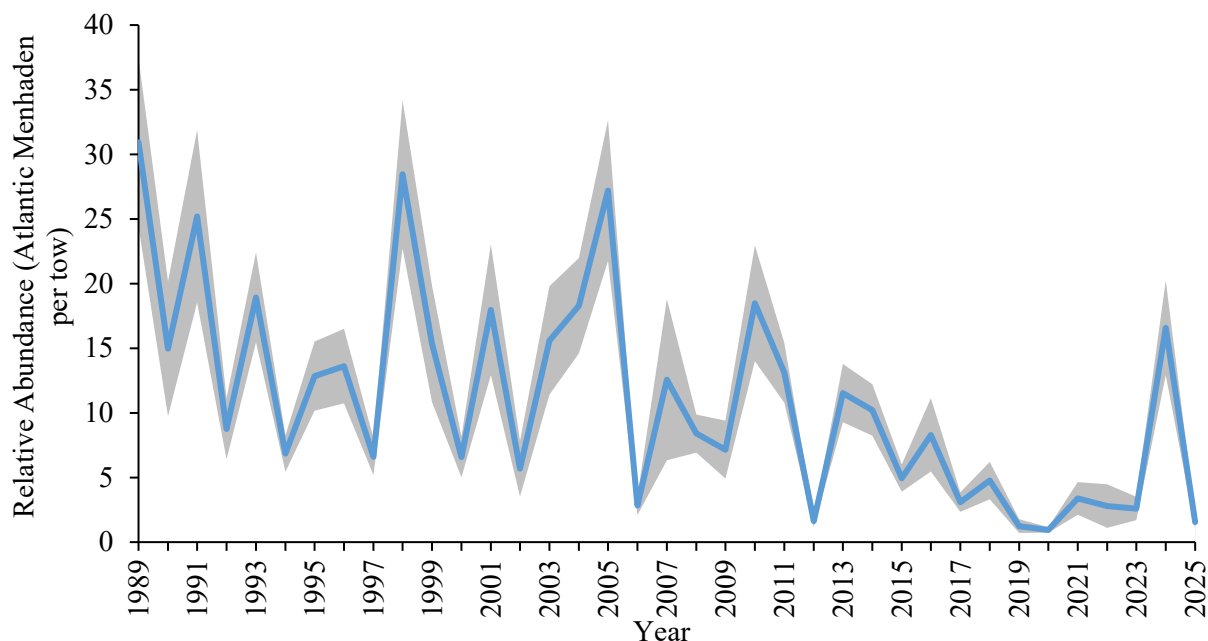


Figure 4. Relative abundance index of Atlantic Menhaden collected from the North Carolina Estuarine Trawl Survey (Program 120) during May and June 1989–2025.

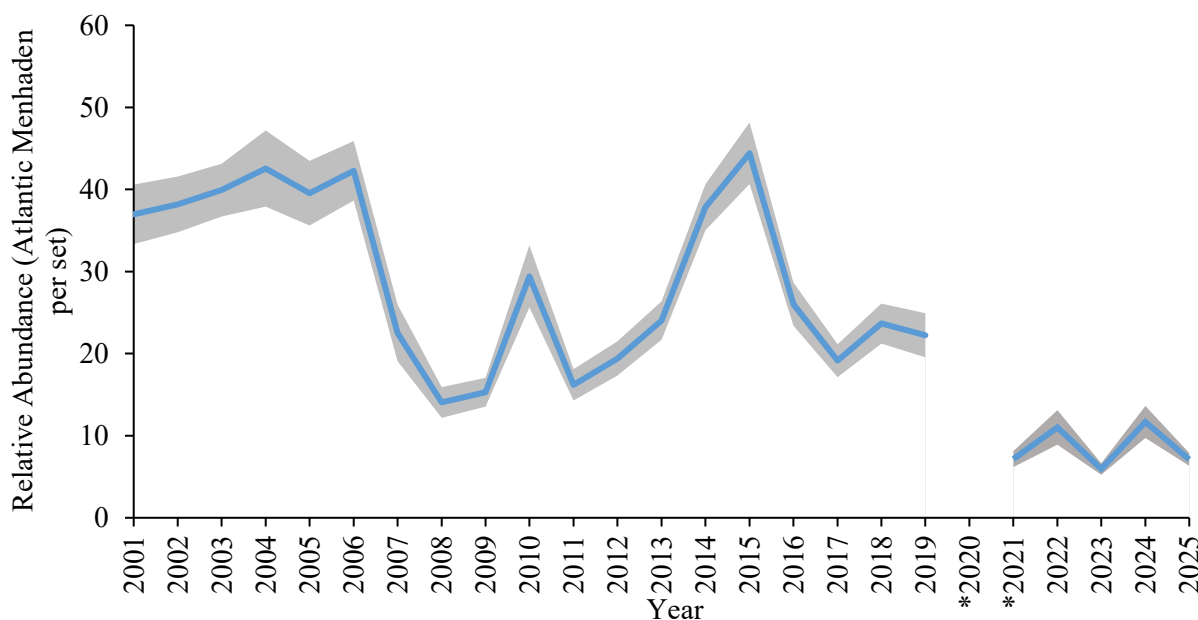


Figure 5. Relative abundance index of Atlantic Menhaden collected from the Fishery-Independent Gill Net Survey (Program 915, Pamlico Sound only), 2001–2025. *Survey suspended February 20, 2020, through June 30, 2021.

The Program 120 relative abundance index for Atlantic Menhaden in 2025 was 1.5, which was a severe decrease from 2024 (16.6 Atlantic Menhaden per tow). While the decrease looks drastic, the 2024 relative

abundance index was much higher than other values, even exceeding the 10-year average from 2014 to 2024 (5.3 fish per tow), and the 2025 value is much closer to other values in the last 6 years.

The Program 915 relative abundance index for Atlantic Menhaden in 2025 was 7.1, which is a decrease from 2024 (11.67 Atlantic Menhaden per tow). Values from 2022–2025 (full sampling years since survey suspension) are lower than relative abundance indices before survey suspension in 2020.

RESEARCH NEEDS

- Expand collection of diet and condition data along the Atlantic coast to provide seasonally and regionally stratified annual, year-round monitoring of key predator diets to provide information on prey abundance and predator consumption.
- Improve monitoring of population trends and diet data in non-fish predators and data-poor prey species to better characterize the importance of Atlantic Menhaden and other forage species to the ecosystem dynamics.
- Further develop the multi-species statistical catch-at-age and NWACS models to improve spatial and seasonal dynamics and incorporate additional predator feedback and environmental recruitment drivers.
- Continued development of a spatial NWACS-MICE model using Ecospace to more effectively address manager and stakeholder priorities, after holding a spatial ecosystem objectives workshop to identify priorities.
- Develop and implement a multi-year coastwide fishery independent survey focused on Atlantic Menhaden.

MANAGEMENT

The TAC for the 2026 fishing season was originally set at 186,840 MT (411,907,464 lb) which is 20% decrease from the previous 2023–2025 TAC. This reduction was based on the stock status of the resource under ecological reference point-based management. The TC committee analysis put this TAC as having a 0% chance of causing overfishing status in 2026 but would result in a 100% probability of the F falling between the ERP F target and threshold. A 50% or more reduction in the TAC would be needed to meet the ERP F target but with concerns about economic impacts associated with drastic cuts, the 20% decrease was agreed on for the 2026 season. In December of 2025, the 2026 quota changed due to relinquished quota from Delaware. Following the addition of Delaware's quota, and the 1% set aside for episodic events, the final coastwide TAC for the 2026 fishing season is 184,972 MT (407,792,570 lb) with North Carolina's allocation being 686.5 MT (1,513,460 lb). A TAC for 2027–2029 will be considered at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

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