

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE  
SPINY DOGFISH  
AUGUST 2022**

**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:	2022	

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/NEMFC 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/NEMFC 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 2018 stock assessment update indicates that spiny dogfish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Sosebee et al. 2018).

### **Stock Assessment**

The 2018 stock assessment update determined that the spiny dogfish SSB of 235 million pounds was slightly above the SSB threshold of 175 million pounds as of 2017. The 2018 stock assessment update used a fishing mortality (F) target of  $F_{40\%}$  spawning potential ratio (SPR) of 0.202 and determined that the observed F was below this target ( $F=0.2439$ ). However, results from the assessment indicated a decreasing trend in female spawning stock biomass from 2013 to 2018, the terminal year of the assessment. To address this trend, the federal quota for 2019 was set at 20.5 million pounds, a 46% reduction from the 2018 quota (38.2 million pounds). The quota was set at 23.2 million pounds in 2020 and 29.9 million pounds in 2021. A research track stock assessment was completed in late 2022, and future management advice will be provided through the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's management track assessment that is scheduled for June of 2023.

## **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). Most of the spiny dogfish were landed from the ocean gill net fishery, but they also have been landed from estuarine gill nets, beach seines, ocean trawls, and hook-and-line gears. In 2022, 91% of spiny dogfish were caught in ocean gill nets.

### **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 <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data>. Total annual North Carolina

recreational landings, obtained from the NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program, have been minimal since 1994 (Table 1; Table 2; Figure 1).

## **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. Therefore, length data presented in this report includes the years 1999 through 2022. 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 (Table 3). The total number of spiny dogfish measured in 2022 was 114. 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.

### **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 936 spiny dogfish were measured in the Pamlico Sound Independent Gill Net Survey from 2001 to 2021. 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 STRATEGY

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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## TABLES

Table 1: Spiny dogfish recreational harvest and number released (NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program) and commercial harvest (North Carolina Trip Ticket Program), 1994–2022.

Year	Recreational			Commercial	Total Weight (lb)
	Number Landed	Number Released	Weight Landed (lb)	Weight Landed (lb)	
1994	0	1,842	0	1,234,931	1,234,931
1995	107	1,911	1,071	7,174,803	7,175,874
1996	0	2,453	0	13,210,735	13,210,735
1997	0	0	0	7,608,426	7,608,426
1998	1,645	3,229	11,308	4,961,379	4,972,687
1999	0	51,303	0	3,718,622	3,718,622
2000	0	0	0	3,549,939	3,549,939
2001	0	7,866	0	*	*
2002	0	12,167	0	*	*
2003	2,701	1,429	0	*	*
2004	0	40,336	0	522,576	522,576
2005	0	3,928	0	18,865	18,865
2006	1,402	72,255	5,718	11,574	17,292
2007	0	78,188	0	149,543	149,543
2008	0	40,842	0	158,727	158,727
2009	0	94,509	0	1,416,362	1,416,362
2010	3,613	167,231	16,556	1,708,437	1,724,993
2011	11,422	175,993	83,637	2,557,923	2,641,560
2012	1,365	176,126	9,538	2,728,882	2,738,420
2013	48,603	2,006,275	79,537	3,010,958	3,090,495
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
Average**	4,977	179,705	22,951	2,703,855	2,730,533

\* Confidential data

\*\* Average does not include confidential data



Table 2. Spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program recreational samples, 1994–2022.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1994	0	0	0	0
1995	33	33	33	1
1996	0	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0	0
1998	31	21	32	4
1999	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	0
2001	0	0	0	0
2002	0	0	0	0
2003	0	0	0	0
2004	0	0	0	0
2005	0	0	0	0
2006	33	30	35	4
2007	0	0	0	0
2008	0	0	0	0
2009	0	0	0	0
2010	28	25	31	2
2011	31	30	33	3
2012	33	31	33	1
2013	22	21	31	1
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

Table 3. Spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from commercial fish house samples, 1999–2022.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1999	33	22	41	255
2000	33	25	41	2,636
2001	32	29	35	12
2002	30	26	32	10
2003	0	0	0	0
2004	34	27	41	1,323
2005	30	27	32	7
2006	35	30	41	92
2007	34	27	40	1,201
2008	34	29	39	545
2009	34	28	43	1,048
2010	34	28	40	843
2011	33	28	40	686
2012	34	26	42	2,461
2013	35	27	41	2,373
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

Table 4. Female spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from commercial fish house samples, 1999–2022.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1999	33	22	41	235
2000	33	25	41	2,464
2001	33	31	35	7
2002	31	28	32	8
2003	0	0	0	0
2004	34	27	41	1,295
2005	30	27	32	4
2006	35	30	41	91
2007	34	29	40	1,017
2008	34	29	39	527
2009	34	28	43	994
2010	34	28	40	794
2011	34	26	39	647
2012	35	27	42	2,373
2013	35	26	41	2,285
2014	35	19	42	2,094
2015	35	25	40	1,281
2016	35	24	40	727
2017	34	29	39	53
2018	35	27	40	343
2019	34	25	39	523
2020	32	23	41	362
2021	31	31	31	1
2022	33	27	38	98

Table 5. Male spiny dogfish length (total length, inches) data from commercial fish house samples, 1999–2022.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Total Number Measured
1999	30	23	32	20
2000	30	27	38	172
2001	31	29	33	5
2002	27	26	28	2
2003	0	0	0	0
2004	31	28	36	28
2005	30	29	31	3
2006	30	30	30	1
2007	30	27	37	184
2008	31	29	37	18
2009	31	28	37	54
2010	31	28	35	49
2011	30	28	33	34
2012	30	28	35	87
2013	31	26	35	88
2014	31	25	33	74
2015	31	25	38	84
2016	30	26	35	68
2017	30	27	32	14
2018	30	27	35	37
2019	30	24	35	57
2020	29	25	37	88
2021	34	28	38	75
2022	30	26	32	16

**FIGURES**

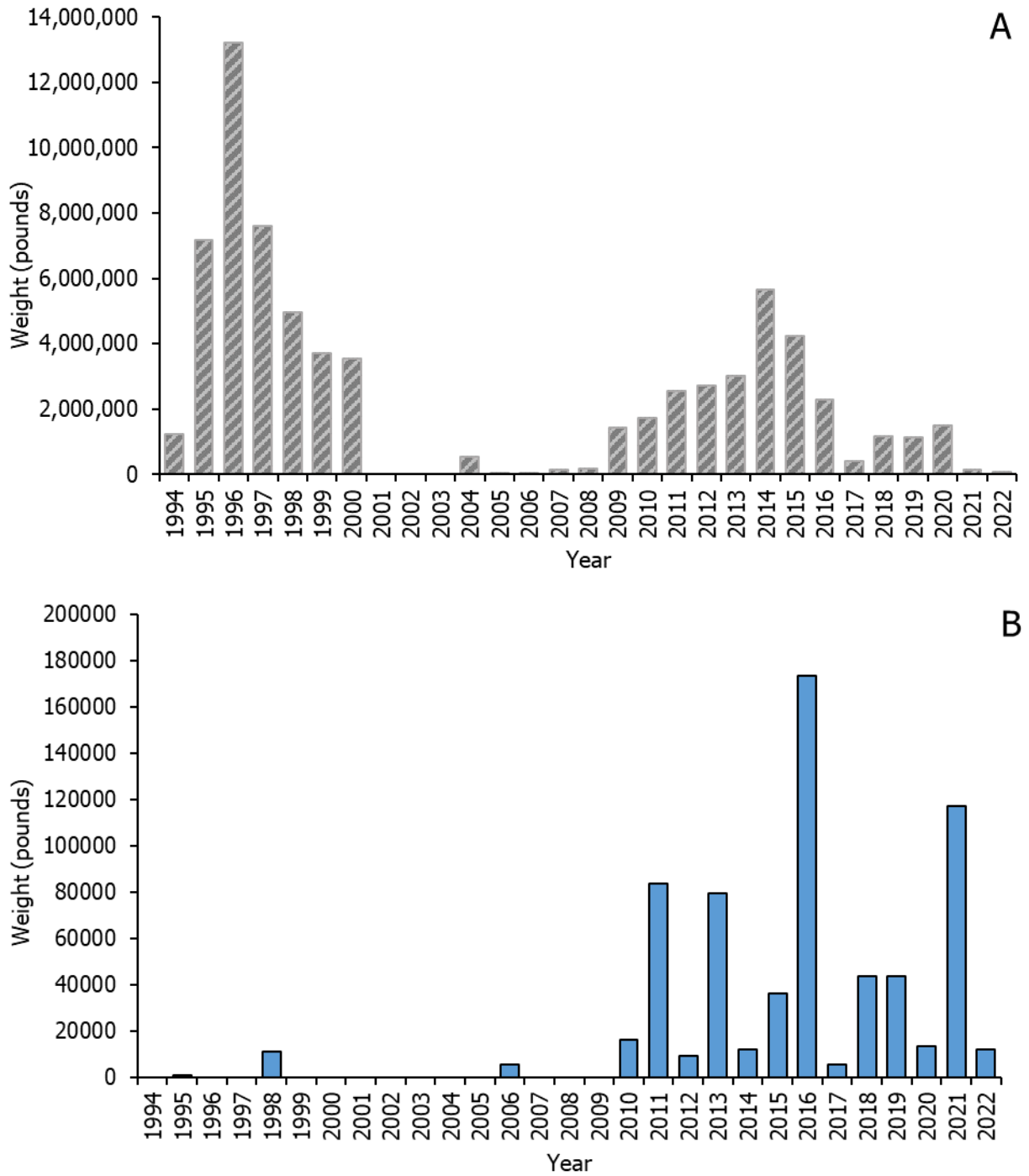


Figure 1. Annual commercial (A) and recreational (B) landings in pounds for spiny dogfish in North Carolina, 1994–2022.