



Picture by Nolen Vinay

Scoping Document

Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan

What is Scoping?

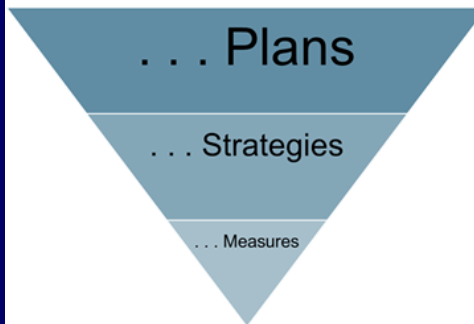
Scoping is the first stage of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) process. Scoping serves to:

- (1) Provide notice to the public that a formal review of the FMP is underway.
- (2) Inform the public of the stock status, when available.
- (3) Solicit stakeholder input on relevant management strategies and issues that may need addressed.
- (4) Recruit potential FMP advisory committee (AC) members to assist the DMF in drafting the plan.

Scoping is the best opportunity to provide input for consideration during FMP development.

This document provides an overview of the initial management strategies and issues identified by the DMF, as well as background information on the fisheries and stock. Management strategies developed in Amendment 2 will be dependent on statutory requirements, available data, research needs, and the consequences of management.

Fishery Management



Management **PLANS** set specific management goals for a fishery. Management **STRATEGIES** are techniques to achieve the set management goals. Management **MEASURES** are the actions to achieve the management strategies.



September 2022

**The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
seeks your input on management
strategies for the Striped Mullet
Fishery Management Plan**

Striped Mullet Scoping Period September 26 - October 7, 2022

Meetings

DMF staff will provide information about the N.C. Striped Mullet FMP Amendment 2. Following the presentation, the public will have an opportunity to give comment and speak directly with DMF staff.

Three in-person meetings will be held across the state with one meeting being available virtually. Links to scoping information, including webinar information and reference documents, can be found through the [Striped Mullet Amendment 2 Information Page](#).

Tuesday, September 27

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Dare County Administration Building
Commissioners Meeting Room
954 Marshall C. Collins Drive
Manteo

Tuesday, October 4

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

DMF Central District Office
5285 Highway 70 West
Morehead City

OR

Virtually through [WebEx](#)

Event number 2436 717 6123

Event password 1234

Thursday, October 6

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Department of Environmental Quality
Wilmington Regional Office
127 Cardinal Drive
Wilmington



Can't attend but want to submit comments?

Written comments can be submitted by online form or U.S. mail. Comments must be received by October 7, 2022.

To comment by online form:



To comment by U.S. mail, mail to:

N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
N.C. Striped Mullet Scoping
P.O. Box 769
Morehead City, NC 28557

*FMP Process Questions?
Contact the FMP Coordinator*
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252-808-8014

2022 STOCK ASSESSMENT

Status of the Stock

The 2022 stock assessment indicates overfishing is occurring in the striped mullet fisheries and the North Carolina striped mullet stock is overfished.

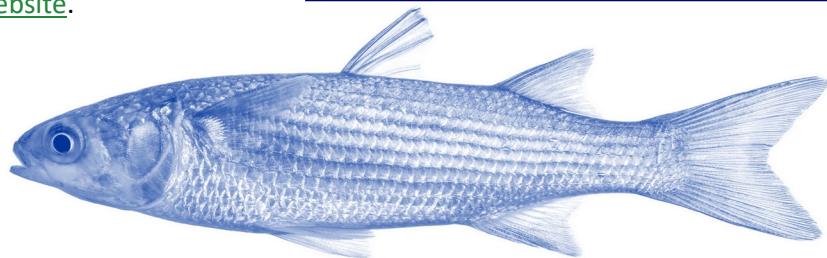
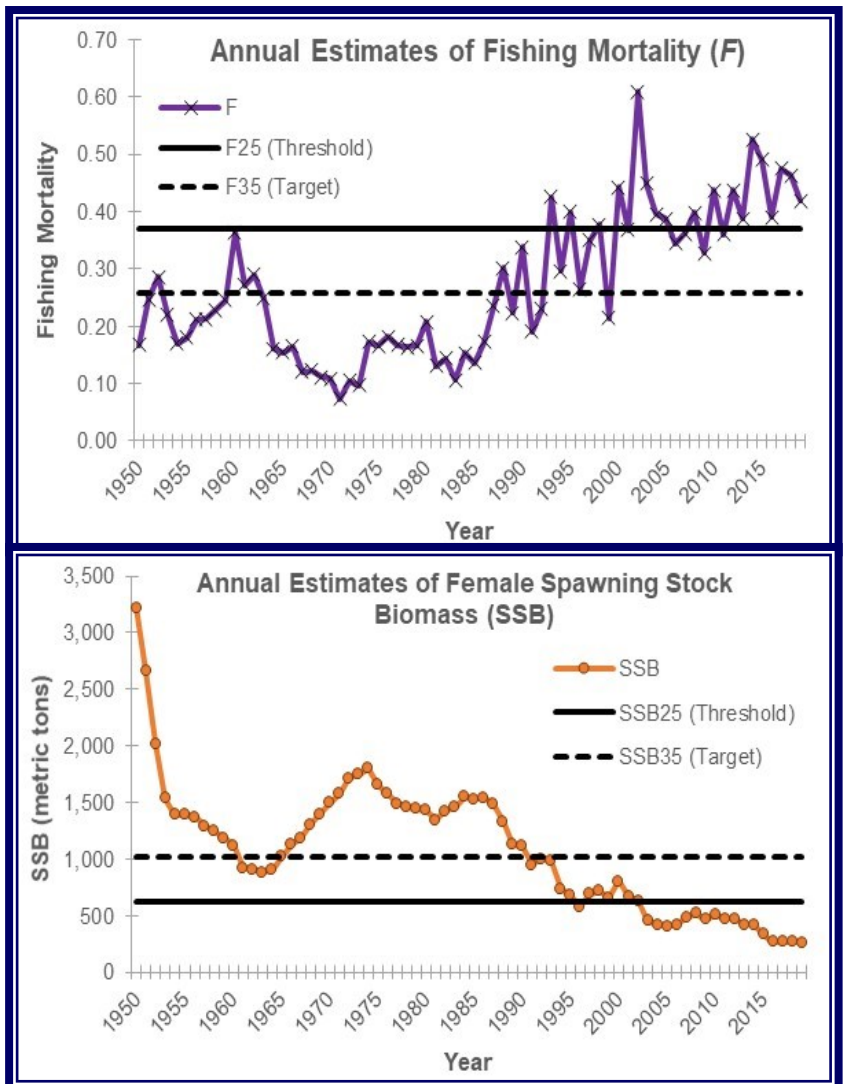
Stock status is based on the 2019 fishing mortality (F) and spawning stock biomass (SSB). Both exceeded the reference points established in the Striped Mullet FMP Amendment 1.

The North Carolina Fishery Reform Act of 1997 requires management end overfishing and achieve a sustainable harvest. To reach these goals within the 10-year time period, conservative management measures require a 20–33% reduction in total removals from 2019 landings.

Stock Assessment Report and Fishery Management Plan



The complete 2022 Stock Assessment of Striped Mullet is available on the [DMF website](#).



Striped Mullet Questions? Contact lead biologists

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252-948-6481

Jeffrey Dobbs
Jeffrey.Dobbs@ncdenr.gov
252-808-8193

AMENDMENT 2

Statutorily Required Management Strategy: Sustainable Harvest

Background

The Fisheries Reform Act requires implementing management to end overfishing in two years and rebuild the spawning stock biomass to a level of sustainable harvest in 10 years upon adoption of the plan. Projections based on the stock assessment indicate a conservative 20-33% reduction in total removals is needed to end overfishing and rebuild the spawning stock of striped mullet to a sustainable level. If reductions only come from the commercial sector a 35.4% reduction is needed. The division asks for public input about how the striped mullet resource is used by stakeholders and considerations to account for in the fishery when making management decisions. Possible management measures to achieve sustainable harvest include:

- Quota management
- Fishing seasons
- Trip limits
- Size limits (minimum, maximum, or slot limits)
- Specific fishing days (weekday vs. weekend)
- Gear modifications
- Area closures



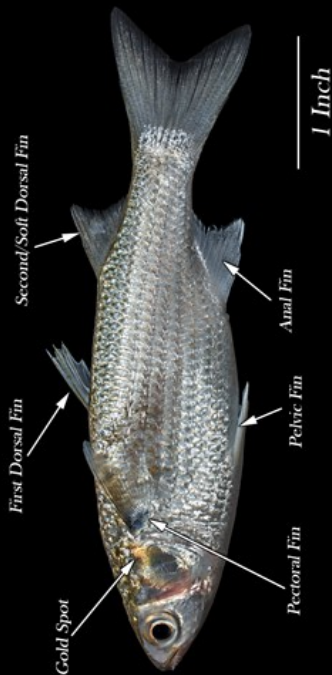
STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Answers to these questions are an important part of plan development and a valuable part of our process.

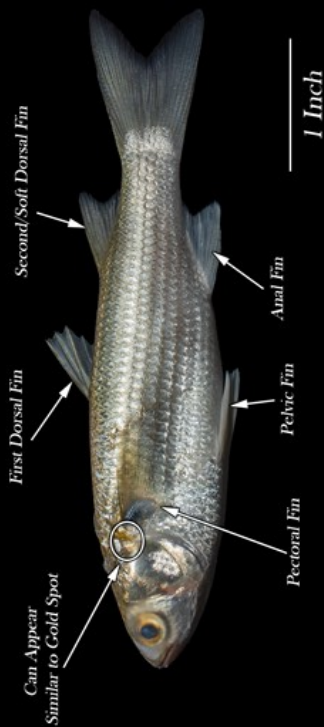
- Why do you fish for striped mullet (roe, bait, meat, or other)?
- What size striped mullet do you target?
- How often do you fish for striped mullet?
- What time of year is most important to have access to striped mullet?
- What area do you fish for striped mullet?
- What ideas do you have to end overfishing and rebuild the striped mullet stock?
- Should management measures be considered statewide or regionally?
- Should management be considered to protect migrating striped mullet?
- Should roe, bait, and food fish be managed separately?



White Mullet



Striped Mullet



Additional Management Strategies: Recreational Fishery

Background

Under Amendment 1, recreational harvest of striped mullet is limited to 200 mullet (white and striped combined) per person per day. Since July 2006, striped mullet has been exempt from the mutilated finfish rule, allowing it to be used as cut bait.

Striped mullet recreational harvest estimates in North Carolina are highly uncertain with proportional standard error (PSE) exceeding 50% in most years. This means the fishers sampled may or may not represent the fishery and harvest may be much more or less than estimated. Uncertainty may be due to limited bait samples since most recreational harvest of striped mullet is for live or cut bait in other fisheries. Recent limitations on fishing seasons of target species, like southern flounder, have likely decreased demand for striped mullet as live bait. However, there are many other fisheries which use striped mullet as bait.

Further characterization of the recreational mullet fishery is needed to understand stakeholder use.

Even though recreational estimates are uncertain, non-quantifiable management measures restricting recreational harvest of striped mullet may be necessary. The division is interested in public input about how the striped mullet resource is used by recreational stakeholders and what the most important aspects of the fishery are when making management decisions.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Answers to these questions are an important part of plan development and a valuable part of our process.

- What gear do you use to catch mullet?
- How many mullet do you typically catch and keep in a trip?
- What size mullet do you prefer?
- Do you purchase mullet for bait?
- Could other species be used for bait instead of mullet?
- What species do you target when using mullet as bait?
- What seasons do you use mullet as bait?

Additional Management Strategies: Small Mesh Gill Net

Background

Gill nets are one of the most controversial fishing gears used in North Carolina waters. Although gill net fishing effort has decreased significantly over the last two decades, this gear continues to be the subject of debate and opinion concerning the impact on our fisheries. At the direction of the MFC, in 2021 the DMF drafted an [issue paper](#) reviewing rules and available data for the small mesh gill net fishery and developed potential options for rulemaking. The issue paper characterized the estuarine small mesh gill net fisheries in North Carolina and included options aimed at simplifying small mesh gill net regulations, reducing bycatch, and reducing conflict between stakeholders.

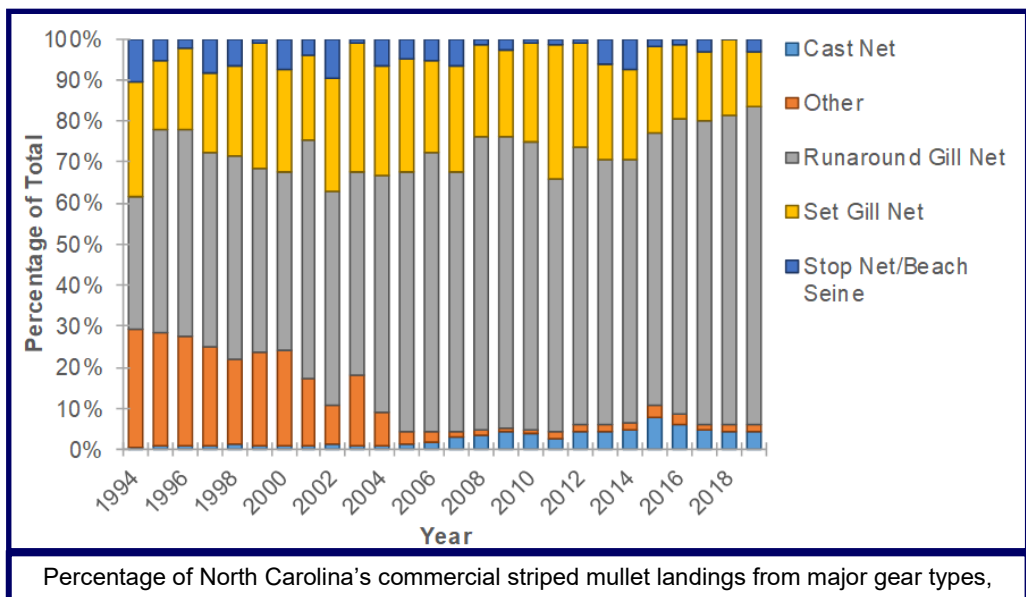
At its August 2021 business meeting, the MFC passed a motion to not initiate rulemaking on small mesh gill nets but refer the issue through the FMP process for each species, and any issues or rules coming out of the species-specific FMP to be addressed at that time.

Small mesh gill nets are the predominant gear used to harvest striped mullet in North Carolina. Most striped mullet are harvested commercially using runaround or other actively fished gill nets. Because there are no direct regulations limiting the commercial harvest of striped mullet, commercial discards are currently not an issue. Typically all striped mullet caught in commercial operations are landed and sold. However, if regulations are implemented to recover the stock, it may be necessary to address discards. The division is interested in public input about modifications that could be made to small mesh gill net regulations to address regulatory complexity, bycatch reduction, and reduction of conflict between stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Answers to these questions are an important part of plan development and a valuable part of our process.

- What modifications would you make to your fishing operation to catch less striped mullet in your gill net?
- Do you actively fish your nets more frequently when attendance requirements are in place?
- Do you set nets when attendance is mandatory? How do attendance requirements affect your fishing operation?
- What are the major causes of conflict between small mesh gill netters and other stakeholders?
- How would a minimum mesh size affect you? Why do you use your preferred mesh size?
- How would a yardage limit effect you? Why do you use your preferred yardage?
- How does fishing area effect the choices in gill net mesh size and yardage?



Additional Management Strategies: Stop Net Fishery

Background

Stop nets and seines were the dominant gears in the early years of the fishery up to 1978, accounting for upwards of 70% of the commercial landings. Due to the schooling nature of striped mullet, the beach seine fishery has the potential to be and historically has been a high volume fishery, landing thousands of pounds in a single trip.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Answers to these questions are an important part of plan development and a valuable part of our process.

- Has management reduced conflict between users of different gear types (e.g. gill net and stop net users)?

Additional Management Strategies: Migration Corridor

Background

Striped mullet undergo annual spawning migrations in the fall from estuarine waters to the ocean. Large schools of striped mullet form, making them easy to target and harvest in large quantities. Designation of seasonal or permanent migration corridors limiting harvest or fishing gears could be used to provide additional protection to the spawning stock.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Answers to these questions are an important part of plan development and a valuable part of our process.

- Would designation of migration corridors alter the way you fish?
- Is it important to have access to striped mullet in all areas at all times of year?
- Are there areas or times when fishing for striped mullet should not be allowed?



Other Management

Are there other relevant strategies that should be considered for Amendment 2? The division wants to hear from stakeholders on their ideas.

Management strategies considered in Amendment 2 are dependent on statutory requirements, available data, research needs, and the effectiveness of the solution.