

Guide to ASMFC's Draft Addendum II for Red Drum: Empowering Anglers and Advocates to Protect Redfish

This guide is meant to educate anglers, conservationists, and the public about the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) [Draft Addendum II to Amendment 2 of the Red Drum Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\)](#). This document breaks down the issues, explains the science, and highlights how **you** can get involved to influence decisions. Your voice matters: Attend public hearings, submit comments, and rally others to ensure redfish populations thrive for generations.

This guide draws from the [2024 Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment](#), the draft addendum (released August 2025), and key management principles. We'll cover the problems, proposed options, recommended positions, and action steps.

Why Red Drum Management Matters

The ASMFC coordinates management in state waters (0-3 miles offshore), while federal waters ban harvest since 1990. The stock is divided into:

- **Northern Region:** New Jersey to North Carolina (border with South Carolina).
- **Southern Region:** South Carolina to Florida's east coast.

The goal of the FMP is to maintain a static spawning potential ratio (sSPR) of at least 40% for optimum yield, with 30% as the overfishing threshold. Fisheries are mostly recreational (98% of harvest), with minor commercial bycatch in the north.

The Current Problems

The 2024 Benchmark Stock Assessment (approved October 2024) paints a concerning picture:

- **Southern Stock:** Overfished and experiencing overfishing. Spawning potential ratio (SPR) is below 30%, and female spawning stock biomass (SSB) is 8,737 metric tons—under the 9,917 metric ton threshold. Recreational removals have surged since the 2000s, hitting highs, with 85% of catches released (but 8% of releases die).
- **Northern Stock:** Not overfished or experiencing overfishing, but fishing mortality (F) is rising. Assessed via Traffic Light Analysis (TLA) due to data gaps, it shows "yellow" signals for increasing F. Red drum abundance is expanding northward (e.g., into Chesapeake Bay), potentially due to climate change, while other species like striped bass decline, shifting angler pressure.

Current regulations vary by state (see Table 1), causing confusion and enforcement issues, especially in shared waters like Chesapeake Bay. Amendment 2 (2002) uses outdated methods for updating rules, limiting flexibility to address new science.

Table 1: Current Red Drum Regulations (as of August 1, 2025)

State/Jurisdiction		Recreational Limits	Commercial Limits
NJ		18"-27", 1 fish	18"-27", 1 fish

State/Jurisdiction Recreational Limits		Commercial Limits
DE	20"-27", 5 fish	20"-27", 5 fish
MD	18"-27", 1 fish	18"-25", 5 fish
PRFC	18"-25", 5 fish	18"-25", 5 fish
VA	18"-26", 3 fish	18"-25", 5 fish
NC	18"-27", 1 fish	18"-27"; 250,000 lbs cap with conditions
SC	15"-23", 2 fish/person/day, 6 fish/boat	Gamefish Only
GA	14"-23", 5 fish	Gamefish Only
FL	Varies by region: 18"-27"; 0-1 fish/person/day, vessel limits	Sale prohibited

Removals peaked in recent years, with a brief dip in 2022-2023 due to Florida's tighter rules, but rose again in 2024.

Complexities in Managing the Northern Stock

The northern stock poses unique challenges:

- **Data Limitations:** Unlike the south's Stock Synthesis model, the north uses TLA (color-coded metrics) because data is insufficient for advanced modeling. Low sample sizes in Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data make precise estimates hard, especially north of Virginia.
- **Range Expansion and Shifting Effort:** Historically rare north of North Carolina, red drum are increasing in areas like Chesapeake Bay amid warming waters. Declines in other sportfish (e.g., striped bass) could intensify targeting.
- **Varying Regulations:** Bag limits range from 1-5 fish, and slots differ, complicating enforcement in shared bays.
- **Biological Factors:** Red drum grow quickly, so raising minimum sizes offers limited protection—lowering maximum sizes better safeguards maturing fish.

Without proactive steps, rising F could tip the stock toward overfishing.

Complexities of Southern Stock Management:

Managing the southern stock of red drum, spanning from South Carolina to Florida's east coast, presents a multifaceted challenge due to its overfished status and ongoing overfishing, as revealed by the 2024 Benchmark Stock Assessment. This region faces intense recreational pressure—accounting for 98% of the fishery—with removals reaching historic highs in recent years, driven by increasing angler effort and

high release rates (around 85%), where dead discards contribute significantly to mortality. Coordinating management across three states with varying regulations, such as Georgia's liberal 5-fish bag limit and 14" minimum size, South Carolina's 2-fish per person with a 15" minimum, and Florida's region-specific rules including zero-harvest zones, complicates enforcement and equitable conservation. Additionally, the stock's life history adds layers of difficulty: juveniles congregate in estuaries during winter, making them vulnerable to targeted fishing at low sizes, while sub-adults and adults migrate offshore, where federal prohibitions apply but state waters bear the brunt of harvest. The need for substantial fishing mortality reductions (up to 28% to achieve the 40% SPR target) requires innovative, flexible regulatory processes, but outdated methodologies from Amendment 2 hinder timely responses, forcing reliance on new assessment tools like Stock Synthesis amid data uncertainties and potential delays in future evaluations.

Further complexities arise from environmental and socioeconomic factors influencing the southern stock. The absence of commercial harvest (red drum is designated as a gamefish in SC and GA, with sales prohibited in FL) shifts all management focus to recreational measures, but varying state priorities can lead to inconsistent policies. The Draft Addendum II proposes pathways for states to submit alternative mortality estimation methods outside formal assessments to address these issues proactively, yet ensuring scientific rigor and interstate consensus remains a hurdle. Without unified, adaptive strategies, the southern stock's recovery could be prolonged, underscoring the immediate need to focus on sustaining ecological health

Proposed Management Options in Draft Addendum II

The addendum aims to update management for flexibility and conservation. Key issues:

- **3.1 Alternative State Management Regimes:** Process for states to propose rule changes.
- **3.2 Allow Alternative Methods to Estimate F:** Pathways for new methodologies outside assessments.
- **3.3 Management Requirements:** F levels to achieve (target 40% SPR vs. threshold 30% SPR).
- **3.4 Northern Region Options:** Align bag/slot limits, especially in Chesapeake Bay.
- **3.5 De Minimis Provisions:** Update for low-harvest states.

Recommended Positions for Sustainability

Based on science and precaution, support these to protect redfish while allowing access:

- **3.1: Option B** – Establish Process to Adjust Management Measures
- **3.2: Option A (Status Quo)** – Ensure new methods undergo rigorous review.
- **3.3: Option A (Status Quo)** – Target F40% for conservatism (~28% southern catch reduction).

- **3.4: Option B with 2 fish/person/day, 18"-26" slot in Chesapeake Bay (MD, PRFC, VA); Option C elements for NC (1 fish/person/day, 19"-25" slot)** – Reduces F by ~14% in VA, ~11% in NC; aligns rules.
- **3.5: Option B** – Modernize for efficiency.

Additional Concerns to Raise:

- **PRFC and GA Bag Limits:** 5-fish limits are too high for a vulnerable species—advocate reducing to 2-3 for consistency and conservation.
- **GA and SC Minimum Sizes:** 14" (GA) and 15" (SC) are too low. Small redfish congregate in winter, making them easy targets. Push for 18" minima to protect juveniles.

How You Can Make an Impact: Public Participation

Your input can shape outcomes! The public comment period ends October 1, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. EST.

Public Hearings Schedule

Public hearings are scheduled throughout September 2025 to gather input. As of September 1, 2025, specific details may vary by state—many are hybrid (in-person with virtual options) for broader access. Check your state's marine fisheries agency or ASMFC's action page for updates. No centralized calendar lists exact events yet, but expect hearings in states like NJ, DE, MD, VA, NC, SC, GA, and FL. Register if required; virtual links often via Zoom.

- **Why Attend?** Share experiences, support positions, and network with advocates. Prepare talking points on stock health and preferred options.
- **Tips for Impact:** Be factual, reference the assessment, and emphasize sustainability. Bring data on local fishing trends.

Submit Comments

- Mail: Tracey Bauer, ASMFC, 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200A-N, Arlington, VA 22201.
- Email: comments@asmfc.org (Subject: Red Drum Draft Addendum II).
- Online: <https://asmfc.org/actions/red-drum-draft-addendum-ii/>.

Next Steps in the Process

- The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has scheduled a public hearing to gather input on the draft addendum. These hearings are hybrid, so you can attend in person or virtually.
- [FL Public Hearing on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Monday, Sep. 15, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- [NC Public Hearing on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Tuesday, Sep. 16, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- [VA Public Hearing on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)

- Wednesday, Sep. 17, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- [MD/PRFC Public Hearing Webinar on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Thursday, Sep. 18, 2025 – 5:00 pm
- [Public Hearing Webinar on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Monday, Sep. 22, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- [SC Public Hearing on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Tuesday, Sep. 23, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- [GA Public Hearing on Red Drum Draft Addendum II](#)
- Wednesday, Sep. 24, 2025 – 6:00 pm
- October 2025: Board reviews and finalizes.
- TBD: States implement.

Join ASGA, spread this guide, and attend hearings—your actions ensure redfish remain abundant. For questions, contact me at [your email]. Let's protect this resource together!