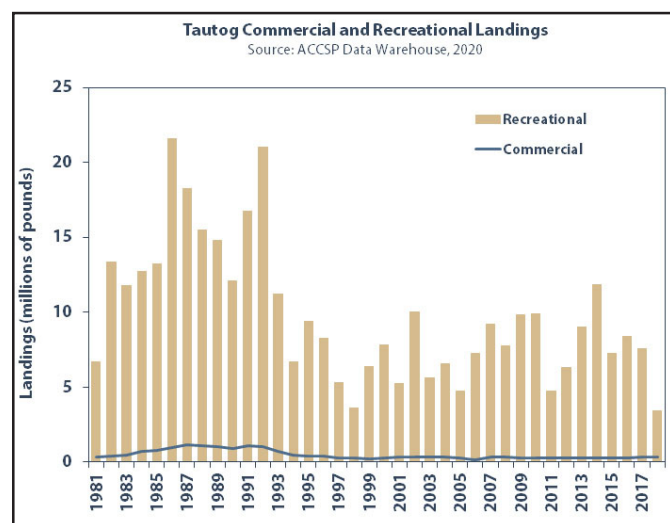


## TAUTOG (from page 6)

They are also found near the mouths of estuaries and other inlets. Adults stay close to their preferred home site and, although they may move away during the day to feed, they return to the same general location at night where they become dormant and may actually sleep. This aggregation around structure makes tautog easy to find and catch, even when biomass levels are low. The easy catchability and slow growth rate make tautog highly susceptible to overfishing and slow to rebuild.

### Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Tautog can be found in waters off of Massachusetts to Virginia, with the majority of landings occurring in state waters between Cape Cod and the Chesapeake Bay. While tautog are targeted by both commercial and recreational fishermen, approximately 90% of the harvest is recreational. Total removals have declined in all regions across the coast.



Coastwide recreational harvest peaked in 1986 at over 8.4 million fish (21.6 million pounds) but has since declined to approximately 1.1 million fish (3.4 million pounds) in 2018. The proportion of harvest from each region has fluctuated somewhat over the years, with harvest in Delaware/Maryland/Virginia declining in recent years and growing in Long Island Sound.

The proportion of tautog released alive by recreational fisheries has increased over time, from 10-20% in the 1980s to

90% in 2018. Tautog handle being released alive relatively well; the percent of fish that die as a result of being caught and released is only 2.5%, based on scientific studies. In 2018, 9.6 million tautog were released alive, of which 239,250 were estimated to have died, or 18% of total recreational removals (harvest plus dead discards).

Commercial harvest peaked in the late 1980s at 1.2 million pounds and declined to approximately 300,000 pounds in 2018. Most tautog are landed in the spring and fall, although some Mid-Atlantic fishermen pursue tautog year-round, and there is an active fishery off of the Virginia coast in the winter. Tautog are a popular fish for the live markets, due to their ability to survive handling and tank conditions.

### Stock Status

While tautog have been managed on a coastwide basis from Massachusetts through Virginia, tagging data suggest strong site fidelity across years with limited north-south movement and some seasonal inshore-offshore migrations. In the northern part of their range, adult tautog move from offshore wintering grounds in the spring to nearshore spawning and feeding areas, where they remain until late fall when the reverse migration occurs as water temperatures drop. Populations in the southern region may undergo shorter distance seasonal migrations, while in the southern-most part of the range they may not undergo seasonal migrations at all.

Based on this information, the 2015 benchmark stock assessment was conducted at a regional level, using life history information, tagging data, fishery characteristics and data availability considerations to split the coastwide population into three regions (Massachusetts/Rhode Island, Connecticut – New Jersey, Delaware/Maryland/Virginia). Each region was assessed independently using the statistical catch-at-age model. All three regions were found to be overfished, with overfishing occurring in the northern region.

In 2016, two new regional stocks were assessed and peer-reviewed. While the three-region approach of the 2014 benchmark stock assessment was still applicable, there was interest in assessing and managing Long Island Sound as a discrete area. This regional assessment analyzes two additional regions (Long Island Sound and New Jersey-New York Bight) to comprise a four-region management scenario. The two regions were found to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. (to page 28)

### Tautog Biological Reference Points and Stock Status by Region

Source: ASMFC Stock Assessment Update, 2016

Region	Fishing Mortality			Spawning Stock Biomass (mt)			MSY or SPR	Status
	Target	Threshold	3-Year Average	Target	Threshold	SSB <sub>2015</sub>		
Massachusetts – Rhode Island	0.28	0.49	0.23	2,684	2,004	2,196	SPR	Not overfished, overfishing not occurring
Long Island Sound	0.28	0.49	0.51	2,865	2,148	1,603	MSY	Overfished, overfishing
New Jersey – New York Bight	0.20	0.34	0.54	3,154	2,351	1,809	SPR	Overfished, overfishing
Delaware – Maryland – Virginia	0.16	0.24	0.16	1,919	1,447	621	SPR	Overfished, overfishing not occurring