



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC & MAFMFC Joint Meeting Webinar

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

ASMFC Bluefish Board and Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board & MAFMFC Webinar
August 11 & 12, 2020

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Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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ASMFC BLUEFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD & MAFMC (August 11, 2020)

Meeting Summary

The Commission’s Bluefish Management Board (Board) met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to review previously implemented 2021 specifications for bluefish. While the Council approved a new risk policy last year that could have impacted the 2021 specifications, the fact that bluefish is under a rebuilding plan led the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to recommend no change to the previously implemented specifications. Based on these recommendations and other considerations, the Council and Board voted for a status quo bluefish acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 16.28 million pounds for 2021.

For landings limits, the Board and Council used the 2019 estimate for recreational discards as opposed to the Monitoring Committee’s recommendation of an average discard estimate from 2017-2019, which results in an RHL of 8.34 million pounds. Commercial discards were considered negligible, resulting in a commercial quota of 2.77 million pounds. For 2021, no transfer was recommended from the recreational to commercial sector as the recreational sector is anticipated to harvest the entire RHL.

The table below summarizes 2021 commercial quotas and RHL for bluefish approved by the Board and recommended by the Council (2020 values are provided for comparison purposes).

	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>		Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>	
	2020	2021	2020	2021
Bluefish	2.77	2.77	9.48	8.34

For more information on bluefish management contact Dustin Colson Leaning, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at dleaning@asmfc.org,

Motions

Move that the bluefish 2021 ABC=ACL=16.28 M lbs. Using MRIP discards from 2019 (5.17 M lbs.) and including no transfer to the commercial fishery, the RHL=8.34 M lbs. With commercial discards set to 0, the commercial quota=2.77 M lbs.

Board: Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Fote. Motion carries (Roll Call: In favor – ME, MA, RI, NY, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, GA, FL, NMFS; Null – CT).

Council: Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. DiLernia. Motion passes without objection.

ASMFC SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP AND BLACK SEA BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD & MAFMC (August 11-12, 2020)

Meeting Summary

The Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) met jointly with the Council to review previously implemented 2021 specifications for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. In December 2019, the Council approved a revised risk policy with the intent that 2021 specifications would be revised to reflect the new policy. As such, the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommended new 2021 acceptable biological catch (ABC) limits for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Board approved and the Council recommended the revised 2021 specifications.

The following table summarizes the 2021 commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass approved by the Board and recommended by the Council (2020 values are provided for comparison purposes).

	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>		Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>	
	2020	2021	2020	2021
Summer Flounder	11.53	12.49	7.69	8.32
Scup	22.23	20.50	6.51	6.07
Black Sea Bass	5.58	6.09	5.81	6.34

Summer Flounder Specifications

The Board and Council received a data update, including fishery landings and federal trawl survey indices through 2019, and reviewed recommendations from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, Advisory Panel, and Council staff. Based on the SSC's recommendation to update measures based on the new risk policy, the Board and Council approved a revised ABC of 27.11 million pounds, which results in a commercial quota of 12.49 million pounds and an RHL of 8.32 million pounds for both years after accounting for expected discards. These revisions represent an approximately 8% increase from those currently implemented for 2020-2021.

Scup Specifications

The Board and Council received a data update, including fishery landings and federal trawl survey indices through 2019, and reviewed recommendations from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, Advisory Panel, and Council staff. Based on the SSC and Monitoring Committee recommendations to update measures based on the new risk policy, the Board and Council approved a revised ABC of 34.81 million pounds for 2021. This revised ABC represents a 13% increase from the currently implemented 2021 measures and results in a commercial quota of 20.50 million pounds and an RHL of 6.07 million pounds in 2021.

The Board and Council also reviewed an evaluation of scup discards by mesh size, calendar quarter, and statistical area in the commercial fishery. Discards decreased in 2019, but they remain well above average in recent years. The Board and Council agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation that no immediate management action was needed but that discards should continue to be monitored.

Black Sea Bass Specifications

The Board and Council reviewed recent trends in commercial and recreational catch and federal trawl survey indices, as well as recommendations from the SSC, the Monitoring Committee, the Advisory Panel, and Council staff. They had an in-depth discussion of discard projections and the increased risk of overfishing under the revised 2021 ABC due to the reduced buffer between the OFL and the ABC. Based on the SSC's recommended ABC and the Monitoring Committee's recommendation for revised discard projections, the Board and Council approved a revised 2021 ABC of 17.45 million pounds, a commercial quota of 6.09 million pounds, and an RHL of 6.34 million pounds. The revised ABC is 16% higher than the previously implemented 2020-2021 ABC. The commercial quota and RHL are 9% higher than those previously implemented for 2020-2021. These represent the highest landings limits ever implemented by the Board and Council for black sea bass.

The Board and Council also reviewed the black sea bass recreational opening during February 2018-2020 and considered if changes are needed for February 2021. Based on Monitoring Committee's advice, they approved revised values for expected February recreational harvest by state. These values are used by the states that participate in this optional season to adjust their recreational management measures for the rest of the year as needed to account for expected February harvest. States also have the option of adjusting their measures after February to account for estimated February harvest based on monitoring, rather than the initial expected harvest. However, all states that participate in the February opening must first adopt measures to account for the initial expected February harvest estimate. The revised expected February harvest estimates reflect recent changes in the MRIP methodology.

North Carolina Proposal to Account for Black Sea Bass Harvest in the February 2020 Recreational Fishery

The Board considered a proposal from North Carolina to adjust their recreational season to account for harvest in the February 2020 black sea bass recreational fishery. The North Carolina season was closed for two additional days in May 2020 to account for a projected February recreational harvest of 62 pounds, as per the state proposal approved by the Board in January. However, the preliminary MRIP harvest estimate north of Cape Hatteras for February 2020 was much higher than expected at 50,692 pounds. The Technical Committee (TC) reviewed all available harvest, catch, and effort data for North Carolina for Wave 1 (January-February), and agreed that the February 2020 MRIP estimate is an outlier. Per the TC's recommendation, North Carolina proposed two season closures in Wave 6 (November-December) that would provide an approximate exchange of open fishing days and effort, rather than a pound-for-pound payback of the estimated harvest. The proposed closures include 1) December 1-31, 2020 (31 additional closed days) or 2) November 16-December 31, 2020 (46 additional closed days). Moving forward, the TC recommends that North Carolina and other states participating in this program should be required to use more tailored methods to estimate February harvest, such as mandatory logbook reporting and a call-in program. Consistent with the TC recommendation, the Board approved both options in the North Carolina proposal. North Carolina will choose and implement one of the proposed season closures later this year.

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment

The Board and Council reviewed alternatives recommended by the Plan Development Team (PDT)/Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) for inclusion in a draft amendment for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment. This amendment considers potential modifications to the allocations of total allowable catch or landings between the commercial and recreational sectors for these three species. Based on guidance provided by the Board and Council in June, the [PDT/FMAT developed draft alternatives](#) for 1) revised commercial/recreational allocations, 2) recreational for-hire sector separation, 3) provisions for quota transfers between the commercial and recreational fisheries, and 4) provisions to allow future modifications to these measures via framework action instead of an amendment.

The Board and Council approved the PDT/FMAT-recommended range of alternatives for commercial/recreational allocation options. The groups considered a motion to add options to increase the commercial allocations by 5%; however, they did not approve this motion as they could not identify a supportable justification for this increase, and it is not consistent with the goal of the amendment. They also considered but did not approve a motion to postpone development of this action indefinitely in response to concerns over data uncertainty and potential industry impacts.

The Board and Council voted to remove the alternatives related to recreational for-hire sector separation from further consideration in this action, consistent with the Bluefish Board and Council's decision to remove this issue from the Bluefish Allocation Amendment at their August 6 joint meeting. The intent of removing this issue from these actions is to allow exploration of sector separation through a broader process involving all four species, such as through the ongoing Recreational Reform Initiative. The Council and Board intend to discuss the Recreational Reform Initiative, including sector separation, at their next joint meeting. While the next joint meeting is presently scheduled for December, both bodies expressed the desire to formally initiate a Recreational Reform Initiative management document sooner. Consideration is being given to bringing together the Council, the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board, and the Bluefish Board for that discussion in October.

For transfer provisions, the Board and Council approved most of the PDT/FMAT-recommended alternatives. They removed an alternative that would have allowed for annual quota transfers with limited pre-defined guidelines. They also approved the PDT/FMAT-recommended alternatives for framework provisions.

The Board and Council are expected to review and approve a draft amendment for public comment in December. For more information on summer flounder and scup management contact Dustin Colson Leaning, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at dleaning@asmfc.org, and contact Caitlin Starks, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org for more information on black sea bass management.

Motions

Move that, based on the SSC and MC recommendations, the summer flounder 2021 recreational ACL=ACT=12.48 mil lb and the commercial ACL = ACT =14.63 mil lb. The RHL = 8.32 mil lb and the commercial quota = 12.49 mil lb.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes without objection (Roll Call: In favor – MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, NMFS).

Council: Motion made by Mr. DiLernia and seconded by Mr. Cimino. Motion passes without objection.

Move that, based on the SSC, staff, and MC recommendations, the scup 2021 recreational ACL=ACT=7.66 mil lbs and the commercial ACL = ACT =27.15 mil lbs. The RHL = 6.07 mil lbs and the commercial quota = 20.50 mil lbs.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion passes (Roll Call: In favor –MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, VA, NC, NMFS; Abstentions – PRFC).

Council: Motion made by Ms. Davidson and seconded by Ms. Wilke. Motion passes without objection.

Move that, based on the SSC, staff, and MC recommendations, the black sea bass 2021 recreational ACL=ACT=7.93 mil lb and the commercial ACL = ACT = 9.52 mil lb. The RHL = 6.34 mil lb and the commercial quota = 6.09 mil lb.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes (Roll Call: In favor –MA, RI, CT, NY, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, NMFS; Opposed – NJ).

Council: Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (17 in favor, 3 opposed).

Move to update the values for initial expected February recreational harvest by state based on the Monitoring Committee recommendation presented today.

Board: Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Miller. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed)

Council: Motion made by Ms. Davidson and seconded by Mr. deFur. Motion carries (14 in favor, 4 opposed).

Move to approve the North Carolina proposal to account for black sea bass harvest in the NC February 2020 recreational fishery by closing either 31 or 46 additional days in Wave 6, 2020.

Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Ms. Meserve. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 abstention).

Move to remove recreational for-hire sector separation from further development in the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass commercial/recreational allocation amendment. Further development of for-hire sector separations should be considered under comprehensive recreational reform initiatives.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (9 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 null).

Council: Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (18 in favor, 2 opposed).

Move to postpone indefinitely further development of this amendment.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Dr. Davis.

Council: Motion made by Mr. Townsend and seconded by Mr. Gwin. (4 in favor, 15 opposed)

Motion fails for lack of Council majority.

Move to task the FMAT to analyze an option for increasing the commercial allocation by 5% in all six categories for commercial/recreational allocation.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Mr. Hasbrouck.

Council: Motion made by Mr. Farnham and seconded by Mr. Hughes. (1 in favor, 19 opposed)

Motion fails for lack of Council majority.

Move to remove option 3b-2 from the range of alternatives.

Board: Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Pentony. Motion passes without objection.

Council: Motion made by Ms. Bolen and seconded by Mr. DiLernia. Motion carries (20 in favor, 0 opposed).

Move to amend to add "and limit the alternative set to the scup fishery."

Board: Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Maniscalco. (5 in favor, 4 opposed, 1 null, 1 abstention)

Council: Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Mr. DiLernia. (8 in favor, 12 opposed)

Motion fails for lack of Council majority.

Move to approve the range of alternatives for inclusion in a public hearing document, as modified today, with the exception of the trigger approach as recommended by the FMAT.

Board: Motion made by Dr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 null).

Council: Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. deFur. Motion passes without objection.