



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC & MAFMC Joint Meeting Summary

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

MAFMC & ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Board, Bluefish Board & ISFMP Policy Board
August 13 & 14, 2024

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Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met August 12-15, 2024, in Philadelphia, PA. As part of the meeting the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Management Board, Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board, and Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board met jointly with the Council to take action and discuss a number of issues. The summaries of those meetings follow.

Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings from the Council's August Meeting are available at <https://www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2024>.

ASMFC SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP, AND BLACK SEA BASS MANAGEMENT BOARDS & MAFMC (AUGUST 13 & 14, 2023)

Meeting Summary

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) met jointly with the Council to set 2025 specifications for black sea bass and review previously adopted 2025 specifications for summer flounder and scup. The Board and Council considered recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Monitoring Committee, and Advisory Panel, as well as comments from members of the public.

2025 Black Sea Bass Specifications

The Board and Council reviewed the results of the [2024 Black Sea Bass Management Track Stock Assessment](#) and associated projections for 2025. The Board and Council acknowledged many improvements have been made to the stock assessment in recent years. However, they also expressed concern that the projections are predicting a sharp decline in biomass in the future, which suggest a 20% reduction in the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for 2025 is necessary, despite generally consistent increases in biomass for the past several years. They also noted projections based on the previous assessment model for several prior specifications cycles consistently predicted similarly sharp declines in biomass which were not realized according to the 2024 Management Track Assessment. Concerns were expressed about the negative socioeconomic impacts of a 20% decrease in the ABC, increases in discards, and compliance with more restrictive measures. With biomass currently more than double the target level and overfishing not occurring, it is challenging to communicate the conservation need for a 20% reduction in the ABC. The management track assessment will be updated next year, with plans already underway to thoroughly evaluate the projection methodology and make revisions as appropriate. These updates will be used to inform the 2026-2027 catch and landings limits.

The Council is bound by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requirement to set catch limits which do not exceed the recommendations of its SSC. However, the Commission is not bound by this same law. Therefore, the Board voted to suspend the typical joint management process for the 2025 black sea bass specifications, allowing it to adopt different catch and landings limits than the Council. The Board voted to maintain status quo catch and landing limits for 2025. The Council considered passing a similar motion; however, as this would violate the MSA, the Council ultimately passed a substitute motion to set the 2025 specifications based on the SSC's recommended 2025 ABC, using the same methods as prior years to calculate expected dead discards in each sector to derive the commercial quota and the recreational harvest limit. The values adopted by the Board and the Council are shown in the following table.

2025 Black Sea Bass Landings Limit	Approved by Board <i>millions of pounds</i>	Recommended by Council <i>millions of pounds</i>
Commercial Quota	6.00	4.78
Recreational Harvest Limit	6.27	4.46

The specifications adopted by the Board are final. The specifications recommended by the Council must be reviewed and, if approved, implemented by NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). If GARFO approves and implements the specifications recommended by the Council for 2025, this would create disparities between the state and federal specifications. This would require all federal permit holders to be bound by more restrictive measures than those who are only subject to state measures (e.g., individuals fishing in state waters who do not also have federal permits). The GARFO Administrator indicated the agency will use the proposed and final federal rulemaking process to consider what flexibilities are available to ensure alignment between the state and federal regulations consistent with the regulations.

The Council adopted a 5% in-season commercial closure buffer for 2025, meaning the commercial fishery would close if 105% of the quota is projected to be landed prior to the end of the year. They made no changes to any other federal commercial management measures.

2025 Summer Flounder Specifications Review

The Board and Council made no changes to the [previously adopted](#) 2025 catch and landings limits for summer flounder. The 2025 limits are the same as those implemented for 2024, including a commercial quota of 8.79 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit (RHL) of 6.35 million pounds. The Board and Council made no changes to the commercial management measures for summer flounder.

2025 Scup Specifications Review

The Board and Council recommended minor changes to the previously adopted 2025 catch and landings limits for scup. Earlier this year, a small error was discovered in the projections used to set 2024-2025 specifications. Correcting the error resulted in a small increase in the projected ABC and overfishing limit (OFL) for 2025. After reviewing the revised ABC provided by the Council’s SSC, the Board and Council adopted a revised commercial quota of 19.54 million pounds and a RHL of 12.31 million pounds for 2025. These updates represent a minor increase, about 4%, compared to the limits previously approved for 2025. The Board and Council made no changes to the commercial management measures. The Council will forward its recommendations to GARFO for final approval, while the Commission’s actions for state waters are final.

Summer Flounder Mesh Exemptions Framework/Addendum

The Board and Council reviewed, and the Board approved a Draft Addendum for public comment. They also indicated support for a regulatory language clarification related to the annual evaluation of the flynet exemption, which would clarify the regulations to be consistent with the language in the Fishery Management Plan. A minimum 30-day comment period and hearing process will be conducted by the Commission. The Commission will distribute a press release announcing the Draft Addendum’s availability, public hearing dates, and public comment process later this month. Submitted comments will be provided to both the Board and Council for consideration prior to final action, scheduled for the week of October 21 at the Commission’s Annual Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland.

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Update and Listening Session

The Board and Council received a presentation from Dr. Katherine Papacostas, MRIP Program Manager, regarding ongoing improvements to the program's Fishing Effort Survey (FES). These improvements center on re-ordering survey questions about how often people went fishing, as well as increased survey sampling, and are anticipated to result in revised catch data time series estimates in spring 2026, depending on favorable peer review in 2025 of changes being tested in 2024. Until then, NOAA Fisheries has advised that the existing MRIP data should continue to be used where they are currently to inform stock assessments and management. Council and Board members and other attendees also had an opportunity to provide input on a joint federal-state effort to re-envision the recreational fisheries data collection program. This initiative aims to transition to an improved recreational data collection partnership that better meets regional needs. [Click here to learn more or provide input.](#)

Motions

Black Sea Bass 2025 Specifications

Board Only Motion:

Move to suspend the joint management process rules for the Board to take action on the 2025 black sea bass specifications.

Motion made by Mr. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 null).

Council and Board Motion:

Move to adopt the following status quo specifications for black sea bass for 2025:

- **The recreational ACL = ACT = 9.16 million pounds, with an RHL of 6.27 million pounds. The commercial ACL = ACT = 7.50 mil lbs., with a commercial quota of 6.00 million pounds. The commercial in-season closure buffer is 5%.**
- **No changes to the other commercial measures which can be modified through specifications.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. Clark Motion carries (CT, DE, MA, NY, MD, VA, NJ, PRFC, NH in favor, NC, NOAA, RI opposed).

Motion carries

Council: Luisi/Lennox. Motion carries for the Board only (Council proceeds with substitute motion)

Council Only Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute to adopt the following specifications for black sea bass for 2025:

- **The recreational ACL = ACT = 7.31 mil lbs., with an RHL of 4.46 mil lbs. The commercial ACL = ACT = 5.98 mil lbs., with a commercial quota of 4.78 mil lbs.**
- **The commercial in-season closure buffer is 5%.**
- **No changes to the other commercial measures which can be modified through specifications.**

Pentony/Duval (10/5/4). Motion to substitute carries.

Council Only Motion as Substituted:

Move to adopt the following specifications for black sea bass for 2025:

- **The recreational ACL = ACT = 7.31 mil lbs., with an RHL of 4.46 mil lbs. The commercial ACL = ACT = 5.98 mil lbs., with a commercial quota of 4.78 mil lbs.**
- **The commercial in-season closure buffer is 5%.**

- **No changes to the other commercial measures which can be modified through specifications.**

Motion carries (16/3/1)

Scup Specifications Review

Move to revise the 2025 specification for scup, such that the commercial ACL=ACT= 26.85 million pounds (12,181 mt) and the commercial quota=19.54 million pounds (8,863 mt). The Recreational ACL=ACT=14.46 million pounds (6,559 mt) and the RHL=12.31 million pounds (5,585 mt).

Council: Beckwith/Farnham (Motion carries by consent)

Board: Motion made by Mr. and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion carries by consent. Roll Call: In Favor - MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, NOAA.

Summer Flounder Mesh Exemptions Framework/Addendum

Board Only Motion:

Move to approve the draft summer flounder mesh exemptions addendum as presented today for public comment.

Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Mr. Gilmore. Motion carries by consent.

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM POLICY BOARD & MAFMC (AUGUST 14, 2024)

Meeting Summary

The Interstate Fishery Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) and Council reviewed progress on development of the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda, which considers changes to the process for setting recreational bag, size, and season limits for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. They reviewed modifications to the draft range of alternatives recommended by the Fishery Management Action Team/Plan Development Team (FMAT/PDT) as well as a summary of a review by the SSC. The Policy Board and Council endorsed the FMAT/PDT recommendation to remove an alternative referred to as the “Biological Reference Point Approach” from further consideration due to its complexity. They also agreed that approaches based on recreational fishing mortality rate targets and options for revising the starting point for measures cannot be fully developed in the time remaining for completion of this action. However, these topics could be further developed through separate management actions if they remain priorities. They also agreed the work group of Commissioners and Council members will work with the FMAT/PDT to develop language to clarify the role of the RHL in this management action. Prior to the next meeting of the Policy Board and Council and in late October, the FMAT/PDT will complete development of the range of alternatives and will develop a draft addenda document for public hearings.

Motions

Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda

Council Only Motion:

Move to approve the draft range of alternatives as presented today.

Pentony/Neill. Motion carries by consent

ASMFC BLUEFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD & MAFMC (August 14, 2024)

Meeting Summary

The Bluefish Management Board and Council reviewed [previously adopted](#) 2025 specifications for bluefish. Bluefish are in the third year of a seven-year rebuilding program. After considering available information on recent catches and fishery performance, the both bodies agreed that no changes are needed to the previously implemented specifications, which include a commercial quota of 3.03 million pounds and a RHL of 15.7 million pounds. Additionally, no changes were made to recreational bag limits (3 fish per day for private anglers and 5 fish per day for for-hire vessels).

ASMFC BLUEFISH, AND SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP, AND BLACK SEA BASS MANAGEMENT BOARDS (AUGUST 14, 2024)

Meeting Summary

Under Board action only, the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and Bluefish Board reviewed and approved the respective Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Reviews for the 2023 fishing year and state compliance reports. *De minimis* requests were approved for Delaware for summer flounder and scup, and for Maine, South Carolina, and Georgia for bluefish. The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board elected John Maniscalco from New York as Vice-Chair and the Bluefish Board elected Eric Reid from Rhode Island as Vice-Chair.

For more information on summer flounder, scup, and bluefish, please contact Chelsea Tuohy, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at ctuohy@asmfc.org, and contact Tracey Bauer Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at tbauer@asmfc.org for more information on black sea bass.

Motions

Move to approve the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP Reviews for the 2023 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* requests from Delaware for summer flounder and scup.

Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Mr. Cimino. Motion passes without objection.

Move to nominate Mr. John Maniscalco from New York as Vice Chair of the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Kaelin. Motion passes without objection.

Move to approve the Bluefish FMP Review for the 2023 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* requests from Maine, South Carolina and Georgia.

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Gilmore. Motion passes without objection.

Move to nominate Mr. Eric Reid from Rhode Island as Vice Chair of the Bluefish Management Board.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Ms. Ferrara. Motion passes without objection.