



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC & MAFMC Set Specifications for Jointly Managed Species and Initiate a Joint Action on Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocations; and ASMFC Initiates Addendum on Black Sea Bass State-by-State Commercial Allocations

Durham, NC – The Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) and Bluefish Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to adopt 2020-2021 specifications for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish and review previously-implemented 2020 specifications for summer flounder. During the meeting, the Boards and Council reviewed the results of operational stock assessments for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish, which were peer-reviewed and accepted for management use in August 2019. The assessments incorporated fishery catch and fishery-independent survey data through 2018, including revised recreational catch data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The revised MRIP data are based on a new estimation methodology accounting for changes to the angler intercept survey and the recent transition to a mail-based effort survey. For these four species, the revised estimates of catch and landings are several times higher than the previous estimates for shore and private boat modes, substantially raising the overall catch and harvest estimates.

Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications

The following table summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. In setting catch and harvest limits for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, the Boards and Council also took into account recommendations from the Council’s Statistical and Science Committee (SSC), Monitoring Committee, and Advisory Panels (APs) for each species. The summer flounder limits, which were previously approved by the Board and Council in March 2019, were maintained. No changes were made to the commercial management measures for the four species. For scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, the Commission’s actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore); the Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

Table 1. 2020-2021 Commercial Quotas and Recreational Harvest Limits for Scup, Black Sea Bass, Summer Flounder and Bluefish (2019 values are provided for comparison purposes). Note: Landings limits shown in the table are initial limits prior to any deductions for past overages.

Year	Scup			Black Sea Bass			Summer Flounder			Bluefish		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)	23.98	22.23	18.06	3.52	5.58	5.58	11.53	11.53	11.53	7.71	2.77	2.77
Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)	7.37	6.51	5.34	3.66	5.81	5.81	7.69	7.69	7.69	11.62	9.48	9.48

Scup

The 2019 scup operational assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about two times the target. The assessment indicated the stock experienced very high recruitment in 2015 and below-average recruitment during 2016-2018. The Board and Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 35.77 million pounds for 2020 and 30.67 million pounds for 2021. After accounting for expected discards, this results in a commercial quota of 22.23 million pounds and an RHL of 6.51 million pounds in 2020, and a commercial quota of 18.06 million pounds and an RHL of 5.34 million pounds in 2021. Compared to 2019 landings limits, this represents a 7% decrease in the commercial quota and a 12% decrease in the RHL in 2020, and a 25% decrease in the commercial quota and a 28% decrease in the RHL in 2021.

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

Black Sea Bass

The 2019 black sea bass operational stock assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 2.4 times the biomass target in 2018. Recruitment was above average in 2015 and below-average during 2016-2018. The Board and Council adopted an ABC of 15.07 million pounds for 2020 and 2021, which results in a commercial quota of 5.58 million pounds and an RHL of 5.81 million pounds for both years after accounting for expected discards. This represents a 59% increase for both the commercial quota and the RHL compared to the 2019 measures. This could allow for a notable increase in commercial landings. However, because the recently revised recreational harvest estimates are higher than the 2020 and 2021 RHLs, managers will not be able to liberalize recreational measures in 2020, despite the increase in the RHL. Changes to recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) to constrain harvest to the RHL will be considered at the Council and Board's December 2019 joint meeting.

Summer Flounder

For summer flounder, the Board and Council received a data update, including updated catch, landings, and fishery-independent survey indices through 2018. State and federal survey indices indicate the stock

increased from 2017 to 2018 and recruitment in 2018 was above average. Considering the positive status of the summer flounder stock and recommendations from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, and AP, the Board and Council maintained the previously-implemented specifications for summer flounder. For 2020, the commercial quota is 11.53 million pounds and the RHL is 7.69 million pounds.

Bluefish

For bluefish, the 2019 operational assessment designated the stock as overfished though overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Based on the SSC's recommendation, the Bluefish Board and Council adopted an ABC of 16.28 million pounds for both 2020 and 2021. After accounting for discards, the ABC translates to a commercial quota of 2.77 million pounds and an RHL of 9.48 million pounds. Compared to 2019, this represents a 64% decrease in the commercial quota and an 18% decrease in the RHL. Because the recreational fishery is anticipated to fully harvest the RHL, the Board and Council did not authorize a quota transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector for 2020-2021.

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

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and the Council initiated the development of a joint amendment to reevaluate the FMP's commercial and recreational sector allocations. This action aims to address the allocation-related impacts of the revised recreational catch and landings data provided by MRIP. The initiation of the amendment directs Commission and Council staff to begin preparing analyses to guide development of a Public Information Document and scoping process. The Board and Council will discuss this issue during their next joint meeting in December 2019.

Black Sea Bass Commercial Addendum

After reviewing potential management strategies and engaging in a joint discussion on Council involvement, the Board initiated an addendum to consider changes to black sea bass commercial state-by-state allocations. Consistent with the Board's August 2019 discussion, this action will consider the current distribution and abundance of black sea bass as one of several adjustment factors to achieve more balanced access to the resource. Proposed strategies for adjusting the commercial state allocations include: 1) a dynamic approach, referred to as "TMGC," which gradually shifts allocations over time based on a combination of historical landings information and current stock distribution information; 2) several trigger-based allocation approaches; 3) a method to raise the Connecticut quota to 5% in addition to any other reallocation method; and 4) hybrid approaches. Although this is a Board-specific action, both the Board and Council agreed future discussions of the addendum should occur at joint meetings to allow for Council input. The Council deliberated the need for a joint action, but decided to postpone further consideration of a joint action until the December 2019 meeting.

For more information on the Commission's actions pertaining to black sea bass, please contact Caitlin Starks, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at cstark@asmfc.org and contact Dustin Colson Leaning at dleaning@asmfc.org for more information pertaining to the Commission's actions on bluefish and summer flounder.

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