



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 3, 2023

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ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Board Acts to Support Stock Rebuilding through Emergency Action and Addendum II Initiation *Addendum I Approved to Allow Ocean Commercial Quota Transfers Contingent on Stock Status*

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved an emergency action to implement a 31-inch maximum size limit for striped bass recreational fisheries, effective immediately for 180 days (through October 28, 2023). This action responds to the unprecedented magnitude of 2022 recreational harvest, which is nearly double that of 2021, and new stock rebuilding projections, which estimate the probability of the spawning stock rebuilding to its biomass target by 2029 drops from 97% under the lower 2021 fishing mortality rate to less than 15% if the higher 2022 fishing mortality rate continues each year.

“Based on concern for the stock and the long-term interests of its stakeholders, the Board acted decisively to protect one of the few remaining strong year classes,” said Board Chair Marty Gary with the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. “The public is concerned about stock rebuilding and has urged the Board to expeditiously respond to the new stock projections. Striped bass is one of the flagship species of the Commission, and this action sends a strong signal that the Board is firmly committed to rebuilding the stock for current and future generations. At the same time, the Board recognizes that this action will have a profound impact on the for-hire industry and recreational anglers, however, it feels it is a necessary step to ensure rebuilding.”

As outlined in the Commission’s Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter, a management board can take emergency action to address circumstances under which public health or the conservation of coastal fishery resources or attainment of fishery management objectives has been placed substantially at risk by unanticipated changes in the ecosystem, the stock, or the fishery.

The Board implemented the emergency 31-inch maximum size limit for 2023 to reduce harvest of the strong 2015-year class. The 31-inch maximum size limit applies to all existing recreational fishery

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.

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regulations where a higher (or no) maximum size applies, excluding the May Chesapeake Bay trophy fisheries which already prohibit harvest of fish less than 35 inches. All bag limits, seasons, and gear restrictions will remain the same. Jurisdictions are required to implement the required measure as soon as possible but no later than July 2, 2023. If it deems necessary, the Board may extend the emergency action for two additional periods of up to one year each at a future Board meeting.

The Commission will hold at least four virtual public hearings in mid- to late May to inform the public about the emergency action and identify next steps for management. A subsequent press release will provide the details of the public hearing schedule and webinar information.

Draft Addendum II Initiated

To address the concerns about increased removals and stock rebuilding beyond 2023, the Board initiated Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. The Draft Addendum will consider 2024 management measures designed to reduce fishing mortality to the target. Specifically, the Draft Addendum will propose options for the ocean recreational fishery, including modifications to the slot limit with harvest season closures as a secondary non-preferred option. It will also propose options for the Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries, as well all commercial fisheries, including maximum size limits. Board members emphasized the importance of soliciting public input through the addendum process for 2024 measures following the 2023 emergency action.

For measures beyond 2024, the Board intends to consider the results of the upcoming 2024 stock assessment update to inform subsequent management action. To enable an expedited management response to the 2024 stock assessment update, the Draft Addendum will propose a provision that would enable the Board to respond to the results of the stock assessment updates via Board action if the stock is projected to not rebuild by 2029. The Board will consider the Draft Addendum at the Summer Meeting, when it will either approve the document for public comment, or provide feedback for further development of the document.

Addendum I Approved

The Board also approved Addendum I to Amendment 7. When the stock is not overfished, the Addendum enables the Board to decide every one to two years whether it will allow voluntary transfers of ocean commercial quota. The Board can also set criteria for allowable transfers, including a limit on how much and when quota can be transferred in a given year, and the eligibility of state to request a transfer based on its landings. When the stock is overfished, no quota transfers will be allowed.

To inform final action on this Addendum, the Board considered public comments, Advisory Panel input, and a Technical Committee report addressing the impact of additional quota utilization on stock rebuilding.

“The Board’s decision on Addendum I balances the commercial industry’s desire for a quota transfer mechanism with the need for caution when the stock is overfished,” said Board Chair Gary. “This was the most restrictive option for allowing transfers, giving the Board the ability to establish boundaries around quota transfers, as needed.”

Addendum I will be available by the end of May on the Commission website at <http://www.asmfc.org/species/atlantic-stripped-bass> under Management Plans and FMP Reviews. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.