



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission NEWS RELEASE

*Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

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## **ASMFC & MAFMC Set Black Sea Bass Specifications for 2017 and 2018** *Benchmark Assessment Finds Resource Not Overfished & Overfishing Not Occurring*

Kitty Hawk, NC – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) approved revised specifications for the 2017 black sea bass fishing year as well as specifications for the 2018 fishing year for the northern black sea bass stock (Cape Hatteras, North Carolina to the US-Canadian border). The revised specifications are based on the results of the 2016 benchmark stock assessment, which found the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The approved limits are consistent with the recommendations of the Council’s Science and Statistical Committee. 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 NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for black sea bass in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Please note specifications for 2018 may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

Species	Year	Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)	Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL)	Commercial Mesh Size	Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)
Black Sea Bass	2016	2.70	11"	4.5"	2.82
	2017	4.12	11"	4.5"	4.29
	2018	3.52	11"	4.5"	3.66

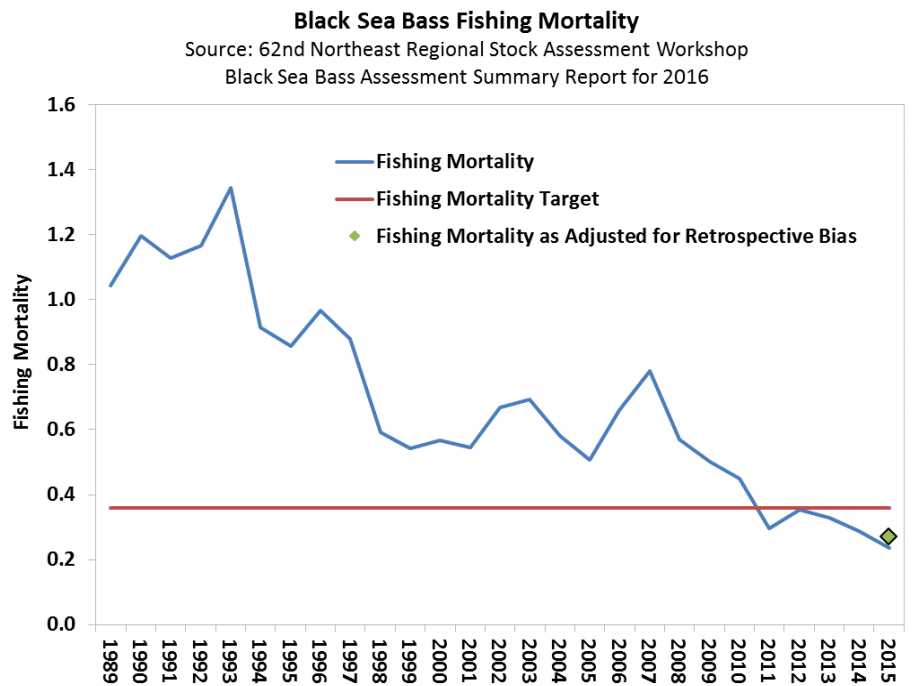
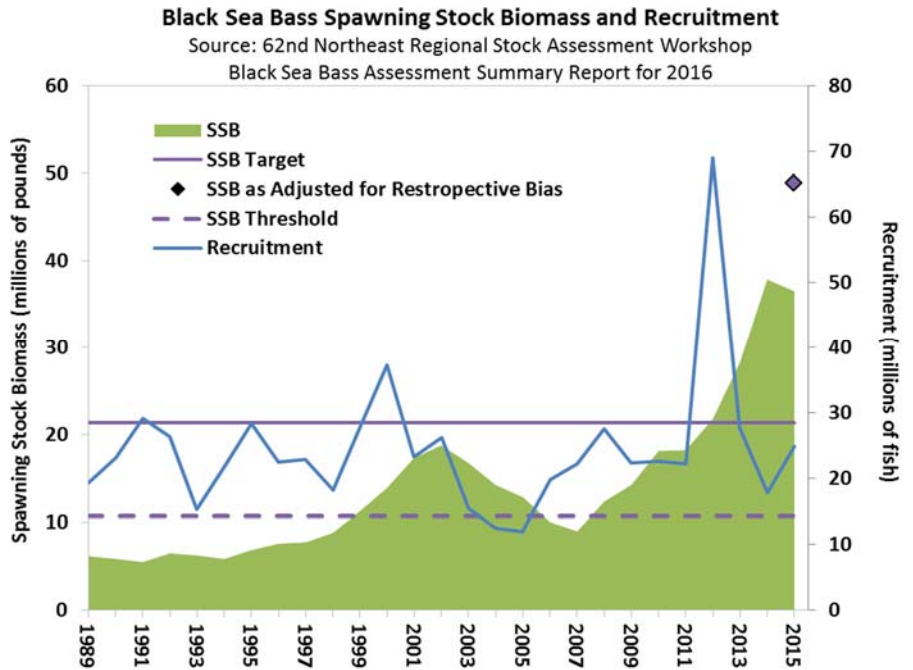
In considering 2017 recreational management measures, the Commission and Council maintained status quo measures in federal waters and in state waters from Delaware to North Carolina. These include a 12.5 inch TL minimum size, 15 fish possession limit, and open seasons from May 15 – September 21 and October 22 – December 31 (note: measures for federal waters are not final until approved by NOAA). Northern region states (Massachusetts through New Jersey) have the flexibility to continue 2016 management measures or develop new measures that will collectively constrain harvest to the 2017 RHL. Recognizing the favorable stock condition and the difficulty of precisely projecting the impacts of recreational management measures on overall harvest, the Commission and Council maintained status quo measures for 2017. Preliminary 2016 recreational harvest is estimated at 4.67 million pounds, roughly 380,000 pounds above

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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 anadromous species.

the 2017 RHL. As additional 2016 harvest estimates become available, the Commission may review these data and consider the potential impacts to achieving the 2017 RHL.

For the first time, the black sea bass stock was modeled as two separate sub-units divided at approximately the Hudson Canyon. For modeling purposes, the data was divided into sub-units but the assessment and peer review noted that the sub-units are not separate stocks but comprise one single stock. As a result, the assessment combined the information from both sub-units to estimate stock-wide abundance and fishing mortality (F) as well as help minimize the effect of retrospective bias in the assessment (which can either overestimate spawning stock biomass and underestimate F, as seen in the southern sub-unit, or underestimate spawning stock biomass and overestimate F, as seen in the northern sub-unit). Spawning stock biomass (SSB) and F estimates for 2015 were adjusted for the retrospective bias (see accompanying graphs). The assessment used both fishery-dependent data (recreational catch and commercial landings/discards) and fishery-independent data from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Winter and Spring Surveys, the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program Surveys and state surveys from MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD and VA.

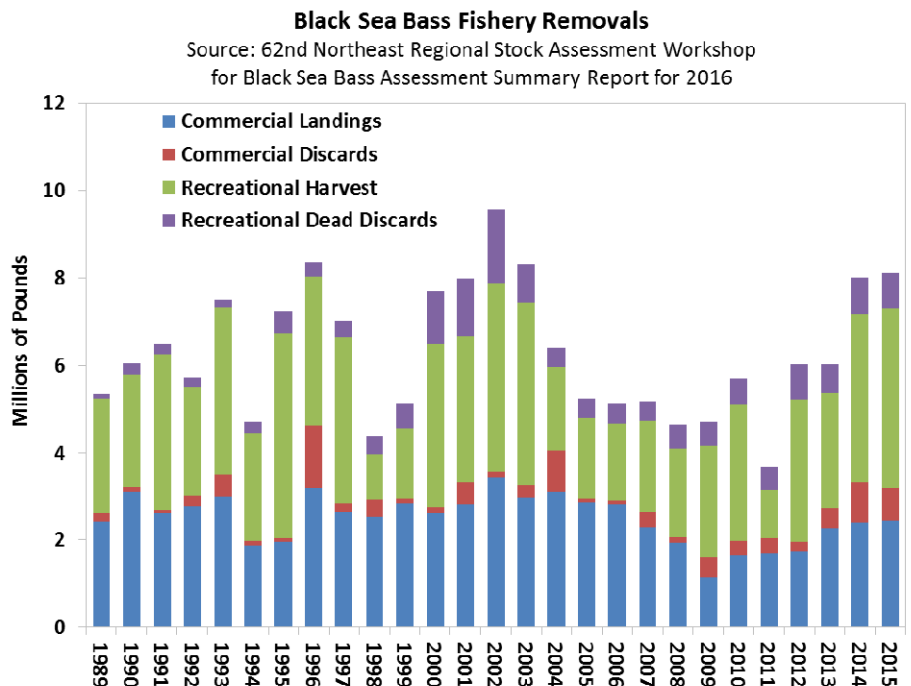


With improved recruitment and declining fishing mortality rates since 2007, SSB has steadily increased. SSB in 2015 was estimated at 48.9 million pounds, 2.3 times the SSB target of 21.3 million pounds, and fishing mortality (F) was estimated at 0.27, well below the F target of 0.36. To account for the fact that black sea bass are a protogynous hermaphrodite, which change sex from female to male, the assessment defined SSB as the total of male and female mature biomass which accounts for changes in sex ratio. Recruitment at age

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1 averaged 24.3 million fish from 1989 to 2015, with peaks in 2000 (1999 cohort) at 37.3 million and at 68.9 million in 2012 (2011 cohort). The large 2011 cohort, which is currently moving through the fishery, was dominant in the northern area and less so in the south. Since 2012, recruitment has been average with a 2014 cohort estimated at 24.9 million fish. The distribution of black sea bass continues to expand northward into the Gulf of Maine.

Commercial landings averaged 2.9 million pounds from the late 1980s through the 1990s. Since implementation of quotas in 1998, commercial landings have ranged between 2.9 and 3.5 million pounds until 2007. Commercial landings declined to 1.2 million pounds in 2009, then increased to 2.3 million pounds in 2013 and have since remained above 2.5 million pounds. Commercial fishery discards represent a relatively small fraction of the total fishery removals from the stock. Commercial discards were generally less than 0.4 million pounds per year, but increased to 0.9 and 0.7 million pounds in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The recreational fishery harvests a significant proportion of the total catch. Recreational landings averaged 3.7 million pounds annually until 1997. Recreational harvest limits were implemented in 1998 and landings have since ranged between 1.1 and 4.4 million pounds. Recreational landings in 2015 were 4.1 million pounds. Recreational discard losses, assuming 15% hook and release mortality, are similar, generally less than 0.4 million pounds per year. Estimated mortality from recreational discards was 0.8 million pounds in 2015.



For more information about summer flounder, scup, or black sea bass please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior FMP Coordinator, at [krootes-murdy@asmfc.org](mailto:krootes-murdy@asmfc.org).

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