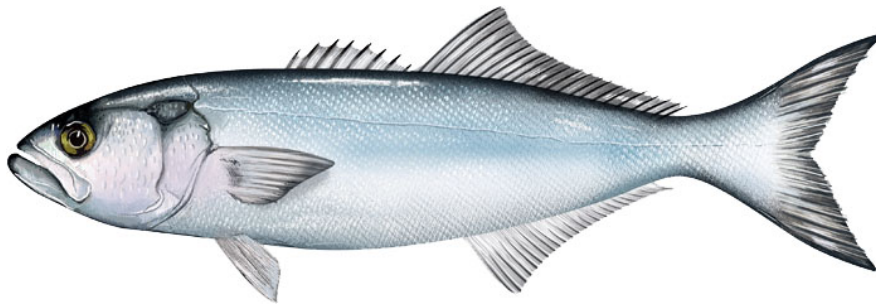


# SCOPING AND PUBLIC INFORMATION DOCUMENT

## BLUEFISH ALLOCATION AMENDMENT TO THE BLUEFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

June 2018



Prepared by the  
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC or Council)  
and the  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC or Commission)

### Public Comment Opportunities and Instructions



In December 2017, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) initiated the development of an amendment to the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). In April/May 2018, the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission)'s Bluefish Board jointly approved this public scoping document to solicit information during the public scoping process. The amendment process will involve a review and potential update of the FMP's sector based allocations, commercial allocations to the states, transfer processes, and goals & objectives. This scoping document presents background on bluefish management, the amendment process and timeline, and issues that may be addressed in the amendment.

The public is encouraged to submit comments regarding the range of potential issues to be addressed in the amendment. In addition to providing comments at any of the scheduled scoping hearings listed below, you may submit written comments by **11:59 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, on July 30, 2018** per the notice of intent and notice of public scoping, as published in the Federal Register. Hearings will be held June 20 – July 16 in nine coastal states from Massachusetts to Florida. The last four hearings will be joint hearings of the Council and Commission.

Written comments may be sent by any of the following methods:

1. **Online** at <http://www.mafmc.org/comments/bluefish-allocation-amendment>
2. **Email** to the following address: [mseeley@mafmc.org](mailto:mseeley@mafmc.org)
3. **Mail or Fax** to:  
Chris Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director  
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
North State Street, Suite 201  
Dover, DE 19901  
FAX: 302.674.5399

Please include “Bluefish Allocation Amendment Scoping Comments” in the subject line if using email or fax or on the outside of the envelope if submitting written comments.

**All comments, regardless of submission method, will be compiled in one document for review and consideration by both the Council and Commission. Please do not send separate comments or the same comments by multiple submission methods to the Council and Commission.**

The public will be notified via the Federal Register of additional opportunities to comment later in the process, however, **this is the first and best opportunity for members of the public to raise concerns related to the scope of issues that will be considered in the amendment.**

For information and updates, please visit: <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>. If you have any questions, please contact either:

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[mseeley@mafmc.org](mailto:mseeley@mafmc.org)  
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(703) 842-0717

**Public scoping hearings will be held on the following dates:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Address</b>
<b>Wednesday, June 20, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Dare County Commissioners Office, 954 Marshall Collins Drive, Room 168, Manteo, North Carolina 27954
<b>Thursday, June 21, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	NC Division of Marine Fisheries Central District Office, 5285 Highway 70 West, Morehead City, North Carolina
<b>Thursday, June 21, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Dover Public Library, 35 E. Loockerman Street, Dover, Delaware 19901
<b>Tuesday, June 26, 2018</b>	6:30 PM	NYSDEC Division of Marine Resources, 205 North Belle Mead Road, Suite 1, East Setauket, New York 11733
<b>Tuesday, June 26, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Ocean City Municipal Airport, 12724 Airport Road, Berlin, Maryland 21811
<b>Wednesday, June 27, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Ocean City Library, 1735 Simpson Avenue, Ocean City, New Jersey 08226
<b>Thursday, June 28, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Ocean County Administration Building, 101 Hooper Avenue, Toms River, New Jersey 08753
<b>Thursday, June 28, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Brevard County Government Center North, "Brevard Room", 518 South Palm Ave., Titusville, Florida 32780
<b>Tuesday, July 10, 2018</b>	7:00 PM	CT DEEP Boating Education Center, 333 Ferry Road, Old Lyme, Connecticut 06371
<b>Wednesday, July 11, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Plymouth Public Library, Otto Fehlow Room, 132 South Street, Plymouth, Massachusetts
<b>Thursday, July 12, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	URI Narragansett Bay Campus, Corless Auditorium, South Ferry Road, Narragansett, Rhode Island
<b>Monday, July 16, 2018</b>	6:00 PM	Internet webinar: Connection information to be available at <a href="http://www.mafmc.org">http://www.mafmc.org</a> or by contacting the Council

**Draft Timeline for Completion of Proposed Bluefish Allocation Amendment:**

	December 2017	Council initiates amendment
	February-May 2018	Draft action plan developed; Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) formed; Council’s Demersal Committee meets to discuss scoping process
	April-May 2018	Joint Council and Commission draft scoping document developed; Council and Commission review and approve draft document for public comment
<b>Current Step →</b>	<b>Summer 2018</b>	<b>Scoping hearings and public comment period</b>
	Summer/Fall 2018	Council and Commission identify priority issues for inclusion in the amendment; Issue-specific working groups established; FMAT and working group meetings; FMAT begins development of options
	Spring/Summer 2019	FMAT continues development of options (with working group input); meetings of the FMAT, working groups, Council and Commission, and Advisory Panel
	Fall 2019/Spring 2020	Council and Commission review FMAT and working group recommendations for options; Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) development begins
	Spring 2020	Range of options refined and approved; DEIS development continues
	Summer 2020	DEIS finalized; Council and Commission select preferred options; public hearings
	Fall/Winter 2020	Council and Commission consider public comments; final action; rulemaking and comment periods (5-7 months)

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## ***Introduction***

The bluefish fishery is managed cooperatively by the Council and NOAA Fisheries in Federal waters (3-200 miles) and the Commission in state waters (0-3 miles). The management unit for bluefish in US waters is the western Atlantic Ocean from the east coast of Florida northward to the US-Canadian border.

The Council and Commission are seeking public input for the development of an amendment to the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This amendment will review and potentially revise allocations between the commercial and recreational fisheries, the commercial allocations to the states, the goals and objectives, and the transfer processes.

This action was identified as a priority in the Council's 2017 Implementation Plan (<http://www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan/>), and the Council is now seeking public input to inform development of an amendment. The Council and Commission would like your comments on the range of issues and information that should be considered, including comments related to allocations as well as any other issues that might be of concern to you regarding management of the bluefish fishery.

## ***Why is this action being proposed?***

The Council and Commission have proposed this action in order to:

- 1) Perform a comprehensive review of the bluefish sector allocations, commercial allocations to the states, and transfer processes within the Bluefish FMP
- 2) Update the FMP goals and objectives for bluefish management

Several issues and concerns relative to bluefish management have been raised by Council and Commission members, advisors, and other interested stakeholders in recent years. Many of these concerns are related to the catch histories that current allocations are based on. Amendment 1 to the Bluefish FMP was published in 1998 to set sector and state allocations. These allocations were developed using landings data from 1981-1989 (the years prior to regulations that may have affected both recreational and commercial landings) and are still the basis for the current bluefish allocations. Stakeholders would like to see allocations reviewed using more recent catch histories.

In addition, the Council and Commission have proposed this action to evaluate the need for management response to changing conditions in the bluefish fishery. This includes addressing apparent shifts in bluefish distribution, as well as possible changes to social and economic drivers for these fisheries. This action was also proposed so the FMP goals, objectives, and management strategies can be assessed in light of possibly changing fishery conditions.

## ***Issues for consideration***

The amendment is likely to consider a variety of approaches for reviewing bluefish allocations. These could include (a combination of), *but would not be limited to*:

- Analyses of recent catch histories

- Analyses of overages/underages in recent history
- Recent trends in sector-based or state transfers
- Shifts in temporal and spatial distributions

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be developed for public comment and used by the Council to evaluate any proposed measures. The Council will consider the biological and socio-economic impacts of any management measure before making a final decision.

### ***Amendment Process and Timeline***

The Council and Commission will first gather information during the scoping period. The scoping process is the first and best opportunity for members of the public to raise concerns related to the scope of issues that will be considered in the bluefish allocation amendment. The Council and Commission need your input both to identify management issues and to develop effective alternatives. Your comments early in the amendment development process will help us address issues of public concern in a thorough and appropriate manner.

Following the initial phase of information gathering and public comment, the Council and Commission will evaluate potential management alternatives and the impacts of those alternatives. The Council and Commission will then develop a draft amendment, incorporating the identified management alternatives, for public review.

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council will develop an environmental analysis document to evaluate the impacts of the management measures considered. This can be either an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), depending on the results of the scoping process. The public will have several opportunities to review and comment on any environmental analysis document that is prepared as part of the bluefish allocation amendment process.

This is the public's opportunity to inform the Council and Commission about changes observed in the fishery, actions the public feels should or should not be taken in terms of management, regulation, enforcement, research, development, enhancement, and any other concerns the public has about the resource or the fishery. The measures outlined in this document are not a list of "preferred alternatives" or measures that the Council and Commission will necessarily include in the amendment. No management measures have yet been analyzed for their effectiveness or impacts. **Please comment on any bluefish management measures or strategies you think may or may not be useful or practical and explain your rationale. Please also comment on any other issues that should be addressed in the amendment.** The list of relevant issues may be expanded as suggestions are offered during the scoping process.

A tentative schedule for the completion of the amendment is included at the beginning of this document. Please note that this timeline is subject to change.

### ***Background on Bluefish Management***

The Council and Commission implemented the first Bluefish FMP in 1990. Since then, six amendments and one framework have been developed and approved for the Bluefish FMP, all of which made changes to bluefish management measures. These documents can be found here: <http://www.mafmc.org/bluefish/>.

Amendment 1 (1999) introduced the updated allocations to the recreational and commercial fisheries as 83% and 17%, respectively. This amendment also implemented the state-by-state commercial allocations from Maine to Florida (FL east coast) using landings data from 1981-1989. States manage their own commercial quotas and are subject to accountability measures if they exceed their individual quota. Additionally, Amendment 1 allows for a transfer of up to 10.5 million pounds of quota from the recreational to the commercial fishery, as long as the recreational sector is not projected to take their share of the quota.

To further allow for the successful utilization of state quotas, Amendment 1 allows for quota to be transferred between two or more states under mutual agreement and with the approval of the NMFS Regional Administrator. The ability to transfer or combine quota allows states the flexibility to respond to variations in the resource, short term emergency situations, or other factors affecting the distribution of catch. The transferring of quota does not affect the share of quota each state receives annually.

Approved quota transfers are published in the Federal Register. To allow for these in-season adjustments, state commercial landings for bluefish are monitored by the states and NOAA via the Dealer Electronic Reporting to the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS), as well as state agencies.

## ***Description of the Bluefish Resource***

### Status of the Stock

The bluefish benchmark stock assessment was peer reviewed in June 2015 and approved for use by management at the 60<sup>th</sup> Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee.

Results from the most recent benchmark stock assessment indicate that the bluefish stock is not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2014 relative to the biological reference points from the 2015 SAW/SARC 60. Modeling results indicated that the estimated spawning stock biomass (SSB) was 190.77 million pounds (86,534 mt) in 2014 (85 percent of the accepted reference point  $SSB_{MSY\ proxy} = SSB_{35\%SPR} = 223.42$  million pounds or 101,343 mt, which was updated by the SSC from  $F_{40\%SPR} = 0.17$  in 2015). Since the beginning of the time series, SSB declined from a high of 340.90 million pounds (154,633 mt) in 1985 to a low of 116.34 million pounds (52,774 mt) in 1997, before increasing again (Figure 1). The average SSB for the 1985-2014 time series is 175.15 million pounds (79,449 mt). Fully-selected fishing mortality (F) in 2014 was estimated to be 0.157, below the F threshold ( $F_{MSY\ proxy} = F_{35\%SPR} = 0.19$ ). Fully selected F peaked in 1987 at 0.477 and then declined gradually since then, with a time series average of 0.284 (Figure 2).



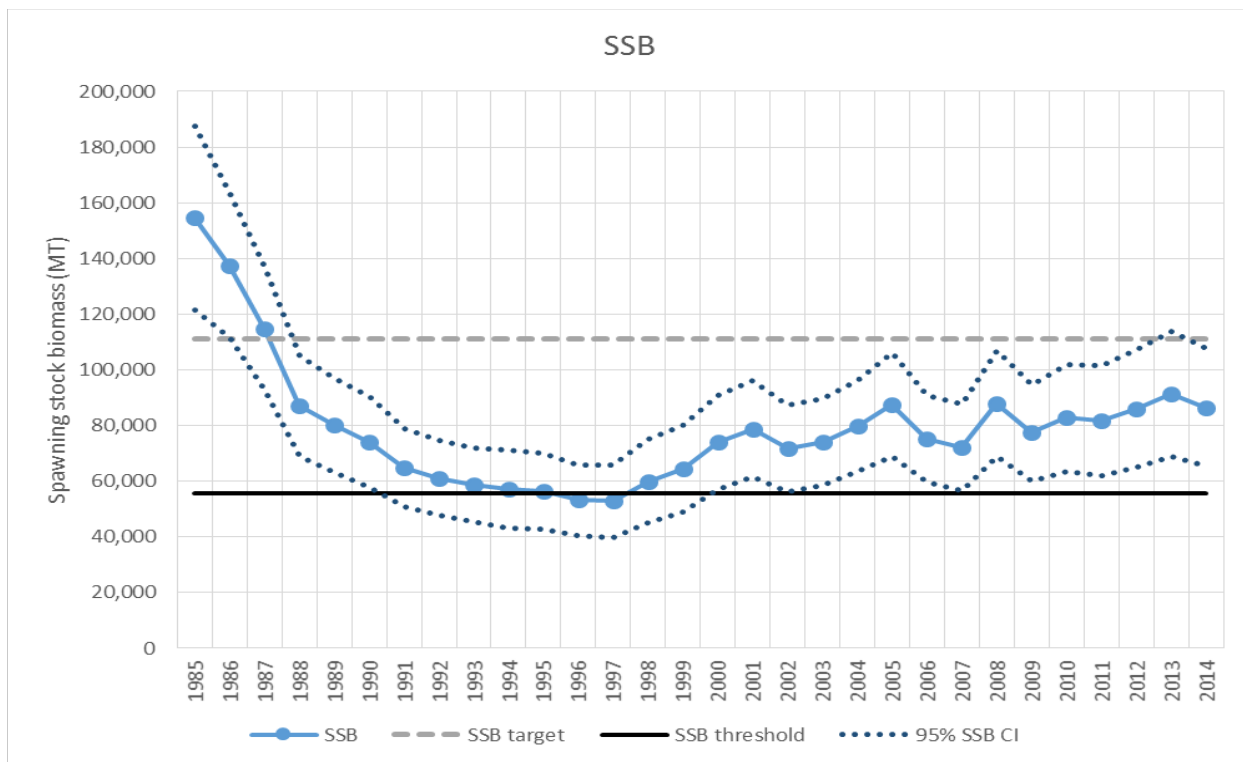


Figure 1. Fully selected spawning stock biomass of bluefish plotted with thresholds and 95% confidence intervals identified in SAW 60.

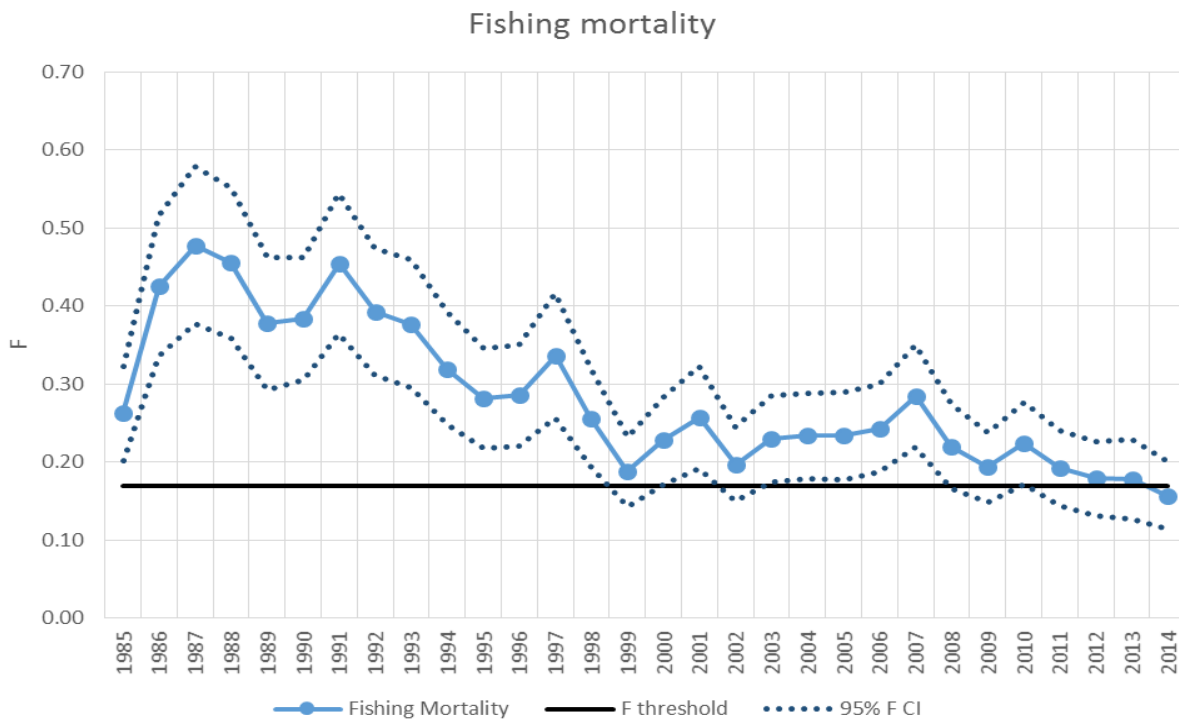


Figure 2. Fully selected fishing mortality of bluefish plotted with thresholds and 95% confidence intervals identified in SAW 60. The F threshold ( $F_{MSY\ PROXY} = F_{35\%SPR} = 0.19$ ) was changed in 2015 by the MAFMC SSC from  $F_{40\%SPR} = 0.17$ .

## Biology and Stock Definition

Bluefish are found worldwide in tropical and subtropical waters, but in the western North Atlantic they range from Nova Scotia to Argentina. The Council and Commission FMP for bluefish defines the management unit as all bluefish from the east coast of Florida northeast to the US-Canada border. Bluefish travel in schools of like-sized individuals and undertake seasonal migrations, moving into the Middle Atlantic Bight (MAB) during spring and then south or farther offshore during fall. Within the MAB they occur in large bays and estuaries as well as across the entire continental shelf. Juvenile stages have been recorded in all estuaries within the MAB, but eggs and larvae occur in oceanic waters (Able and Fahay 1998). Growth rates are fast, and they may reach a length of 3.5 ft and a weight of 27 pounds (Bigelow and Schroeder 1953). Bluefish live to age 12 and greater (Salerno et al. 2001).

Bluefish eat a wide variety of prey items. The species has been described by Bigelow and Schroeder (1953) as “perhaps the most ferocious and bloodthirsty fish in the sea, leaving in its wake a trail of dead and mangled mackerel, menhaden, herring, alewives, and other species on which it preys.”

Bluefish born in a given year (young of the year) typically fall into two distinct size classes suggesting that there are two spawning events along the east coast. Literature also supports the existence of a small third spawn in the fall (Juanes et al. 2013). As a result of the bimodal size distribution, young are referred to as spring-spawned or summer-spawned. In the MAB, spring-spawned bluefish appear to be the dominant component of the stock.

## Description of the Fishery

### *Recreational Fishery*

All recreational data presented in this document for 2017 are listed as preliminary. Recreational data is now collected and reported through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Prior to MRIP was the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), which ran for two decades until 2006. Data collection and reporting transitioned from MRFSS to MRIP due to increasing demand for better precision, accuracy, timeliness, and coverage. The majority of data collection occurred through a telephone survey that used a random-digit dialing method to target households in coastal counties. Over time, this method has become less effective as more people are abandoning landlines for cell phones. Now, MRIP is transitioning to a mail survey design that utilizes the National Saltwater Angler Registry. New survey designs may produce very different results than those from older surveys. Preliminary MRIP calibration work suggests all effort estimations will increase by ~3-5 times. This increase has the potential to drastically alter bluefish catch, landings, and effort data for the shore and private angler modes. No change will occur for the party/charter mode as vessel operators either submit vessel trip reports (VTRs) or report through a separate telephone survey.

The current recreational bluefish allocation is 83% of the overall annual catch limit (ACL), resulting in a 2018 post-sector transfer recreational harvest limit of 11.58 million pounds. Bluefish are targeted as a recreational fishery from Maine to Florida. The Council has management jurisdiction in federal waters and the Commission within state waters.

A coastwide time series of recreational harvest and catch (harvest plus discards) in numbers of fish is provided in Figure 3. To calculate landings in pounds, the average weight of a harvested

bluefish (2.22 pounds in 2016) can be multiplied by the number of fish harvested. Additionally, a recent time series (2013-2017) of landings by state is provided in Table 1.

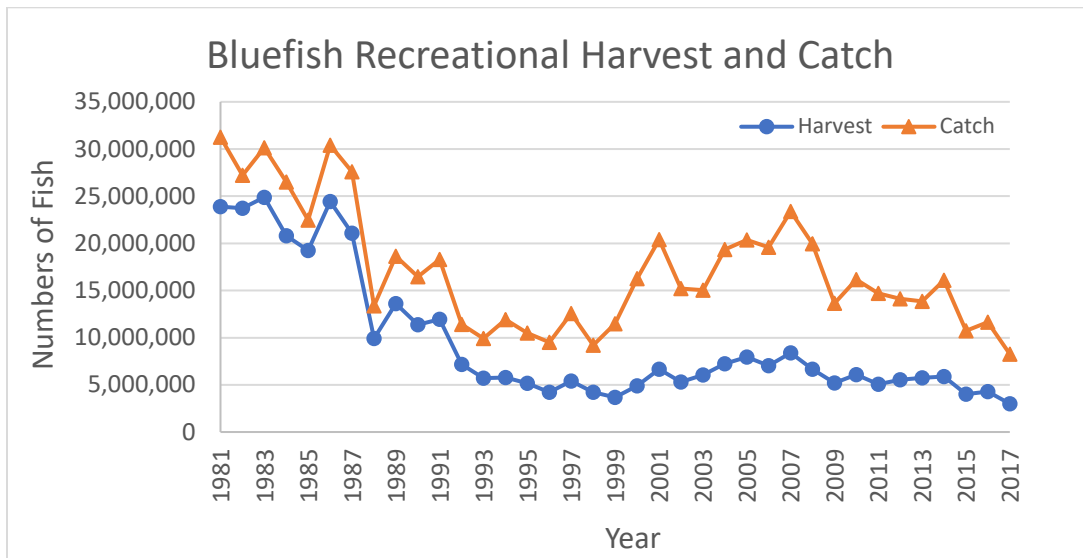


Figure 3. Bluefish recreational harvest and catch spanning ME to FL (east coast) from 1981-2017.

In 2017, the greatest harvest (retained catch) of bluefish by weight occurred in New Jersey with 3.33 million pounds, followed by Florida (1.38 million pounds), New York (1.06 million pounds), and Delaware (831,000 pounds). MRIP numbers indicated only 27 and 0 bluefish were caught in Maine and New Hampshire, respectively. Average weights, based on dividing MRIP landings in weight by landings in number for each state, suggest that bluefish size tends to increase toward the north along the Atlantic coast. Discards in the recreational fishery remain relatively high throughout the time series (Figure 4).

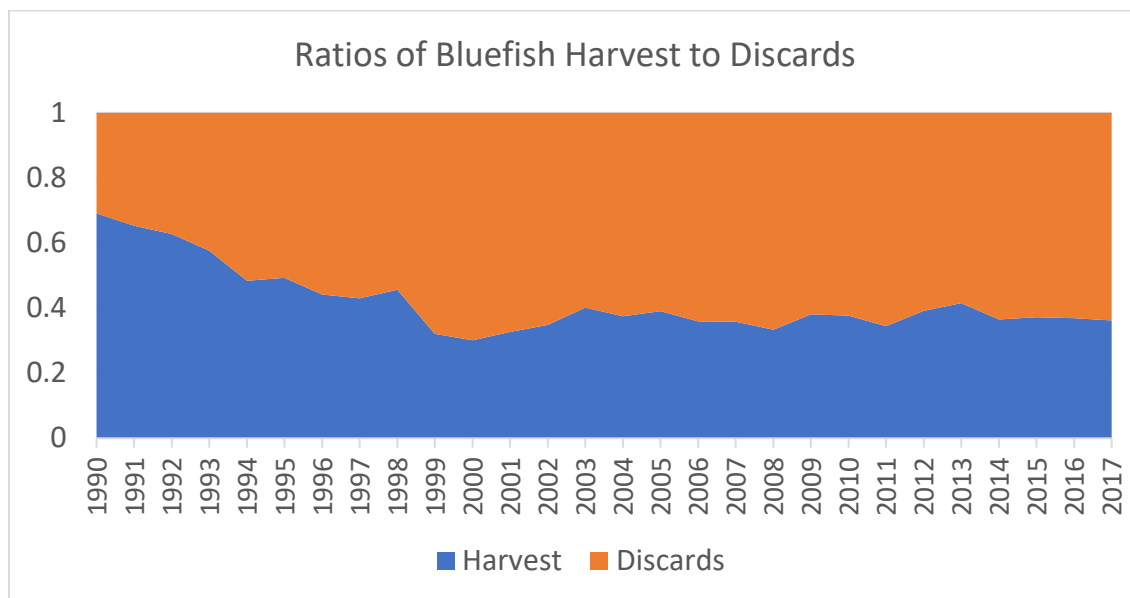


Figure 4. Ratio of bluefish harvest (A+B1) to discards (based on numbers of fish); 2017 estimate is preliminary.

Table 1. Bluefish recreational landings (pounds) by state from 2013-2017. Source: MRIP, March 2018.

State	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Maine	62,654	636	3,780	57	27
New Hampshire	0	5,310	24,942	16	0
Massachusetts	2,562,308	1,968,114	1,837,308	697,834	537,297
Rhode Island	1,431,880	347,030	338,087	421,797	362,589
Connecticut	4,281,939	1,018,115	2,650,562	966,241	594,817
New York	4,266,712	1,877,864	2,095,307	2,025,744	1,055,014
New Jersey	1,877,196	3,002,699	2,566,738	3,493,997	3,333,175
Delaware	26,760	121,972	84,781	93,402	830,999
Maryland	63,249	227,618	147,595	157,161	223,604
Virginia	273,735	83,104	147,363	156,836	31,207
North Carolina	988,664	966,004	868,868	855,631	700,724
South Carolina	109,218	104,495	140,155	145,961	83,816
Georgia	3,646	12,261	3,717	2,880	1,227
Florida	516,404	720,464	764,037	520,365	1,377,636
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16,464,365</b>	<b>10,455,686</b>	<b>11,673,240</b>	<b>9,537,922</b>	<b>9,132,132</b>

Figure 5 reflects MRFSS/MRIP-based estimates of landings by mode (1991 through 2017) and indicates that the primary landing modes for bluefish are private boats followed by the for-hire mode. About 53 percent of the landings of bluefish on a coastwide basis came from private/rental boats, followed by for-hire boats (25 percent) for the 1991 to 2016 period. Shore mode contributes about 22 percent of the total landings. For the last six years (2012-2017), 40 percent of the total bluefish landings came from private/rental boats, 37 percent from shore mode, and 23 percent from for-hire boats.

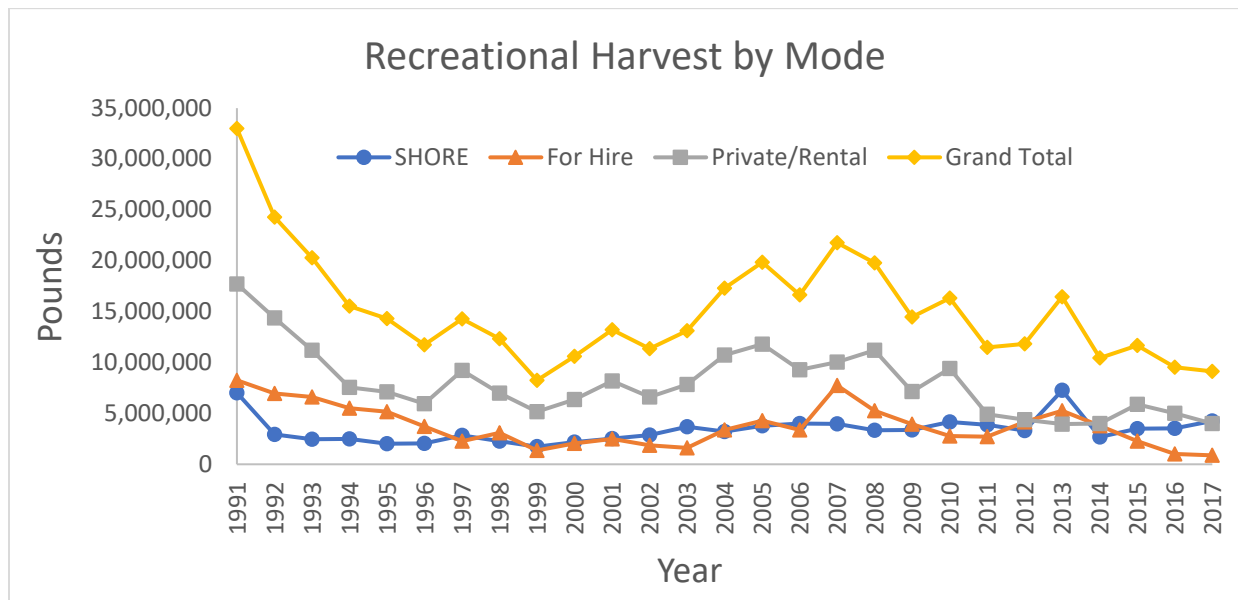


Figure 5. Bluefish landings (pounds) by recreational fishermen by mode, Atlantic Coast, 1991-2017.

Trends in recreational trips associated with targeting or harvesting bluefish from 1991 to 2017 have been slowly declining since 2007. The lowest annual estimate of bluefish trips was 1.61 million trips in 2017, a decrease from 2.17 million trips in 2016. The highest annual estimate of bluefish trips in this timeframe was 5.95 million trips in 1991. For the last five years (2013-2017), bluefish trips have ranged from 1.61 million trips in 2017 to 2.40 million trips in 2014. Number of trips is further broken down by state (last five years) in Table 2. Relative to total angler effort in 2017, bluefish were either the primary target and/or harvested in 5.7 percent of all recreational angler trips.

Table 2. Number of recreational trips by state from 2013-2017 where bluefish were the primary target and/or where bluefish were harvested regardless of target.

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Maine	10,493	4,157	2,846	4,058	212
New Hampshire	6,761	1,026	3,777	3,004	98
Massachusetts	288,852	493,501	185,421	167,855	106,786
Rhode Island	105,070	121,231	57,285	44,275	42,855
Connecticut	193,270	238,880	191,390	209,317	191,189
New York	468,625	541,966	406,297	651,045	291,135
New Jersey	248,338	429,928	336,354	442,673	497,680
Delaware	21,197	51,989	25,783	53,948	68,176
Maryland	6,053	44,392	26,596	33,938	24,014
Virginia	59,201	36,136	44,952	69,583	10,191
North Carolina	275,868	272,732	226,333	356,635	245,656
South Carolina	35,758	34,879	89,359	46,614	35,019
Georgia	98	4,670	1,813	1,390	2,970
Florida	91,505	126,334	121,220	82,640	96,983
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,811,089</b>	<b>2,401,821</b>	<b>1,719,426</b>	<b>2,166,975</b>	<b>1,612,964</b>

MRIP classifies catch into three fishing areas, inland, nearshore ocean (< 3 mi), and offshore ocean (> 3 mi). About 51 percent of the harvest of bluefish on a coastwide basis came from inland waters, followed by nearshore ocean (33 percent) for the 1991 to 2017 period. Therefore, 84% of harvest is within state waters. Only about 16% of the total harvest occur offshore. For the last six years (2012-2017), 58% of the total bluefish harvest came from inland waters, 9% from offshore ocean, and nearshore ocean was 33 % of the total. These results are grouped by state or federal waters to present where the majority of the harvest is taking place.

### Commercial Fishery

The presented data is representative of recent fishery performance (2012-2016, 2013-2017, or 2017) depending on data availability.

The current commercial bluefish allocation is 17% of the overall ACL, resulting in a 2018 commercial quota of 7.24 million pounds (Figure 6). Current state allocations were partitioned using landings data from 1981 to 1989, as that period represents the years prior to the regulations that may have affected both recreational and commercial landings. Quotas were distributed to the states based on their percentage share of commercial landings during that period. The current commercial allocations to the states are presented in Table 3. State quota allocations have generally kept the proportion of total landings stable over time, though state-specific landings vary (e.g., Table 3).

Dealer data for 2017 indicate that the bulk of the bluefish landings were taken by gillnet (47%), followed by unknown gear (29%), handline (7%), bottom trawl (10%), and pound net (3%).

VTR data were used to identify all NMFS statistical areas that accounted for 5 percent or more of the Atlantic bluefish catch. Seven statistical areas accounted for approximately 78 percent of the VTR-reported catch from 2013-2017. Statistical area 612 was responsible for the highest percentage of the catch. These seven statistical areas have accounted for the majority of bluefish commercial landings since the mid-1990s. A map of the statistical areas that accounted for 5 percent or more of the Atlantic bluefish catch is shown in Figure 7.



Figure 6. Total coastwide commercial quotas from 2000-2018 (after any transfer from the recreational sector).

Table 3. Commercial state allocations (percent share), 2013-2017 initial quotas (pre-transfer), and landings (pounds).

State	Percent Share	2013 Initial Quota	2013 Landings	2014 Initial Quota	2014 Landings	2015 Initial Quota	2015 Landings	2016 Initial Quota	2016 Landings	2017 Initial Quota	2017 Landings
Maine	0.67	60,673	28	49,861	0	35,037	0	32,655	20	57,105	0
New Hampshire	0.41	37,620	161	30,916	3,048	21,725	1,192	20,247	10	35,408	0
Massachusetts	6.72	609,606	591,743	500,970	471,443	352,036	601,400	328,096	500,562	573,755	364,810
Rhode Island	6.81	617,902	457,382	507,786	504,863	356,826	514,278	332,561	463,513	581,563	647,112
Connecticut	1.27	114,929	31,755	94,448	31,513	66,369	40,310	61,856	68,673	108,170	33,088
New York	10.38	942,548	1,261,364	774,579	943,191	544,304	958,734	507,289	913,996	887,118	690,675
New Jersey	14.82	1,344,713	346,251	1,105,075	509,103	776,547	710,612	723,739	669,113	1,265,633	304,710
Delaware	1.88	170,465	10,074	140,087	8,592	98,440	77,223	91,746	16,690	160,440	5,679
Maryland	3.00	272,443	45,726	223,891	83,507	157,330	94,667	146,631	68,000	256,420	25,147
Virginia	11.88	1,078,179	315,954	886,040	239,295	622,629	196,125	580,287	205,564	1,014,773	36,251
North Carolina	32.06	2,909,829	952,307	2,391,274	1,864,168	1,680,371	645,952	1,566,100	981,454	2,738,704	1,319,384
South Carolina	0.04	3,195	0	2,625	0	1845	0	1,719	0	3,007	0
Georgia	0.01	862	0	709	0	498	0	464	0	812	0
Florida	10.06	913,016	110,489	750,309	113,045	527,249	183,460	491,394	186,598	859,322	209,864
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.01</b>	<b>9,075,976</b>	<b>4,123,234</b>	<b>7,458,570</b>	<b>4,771,768</b>	<b>5,241,202</b>	<b>4,023,953</b>	<b>4,884,784</b>	<b>4,074,193</b>	<b>8,542,230</b>	<b>3,636,720</b>

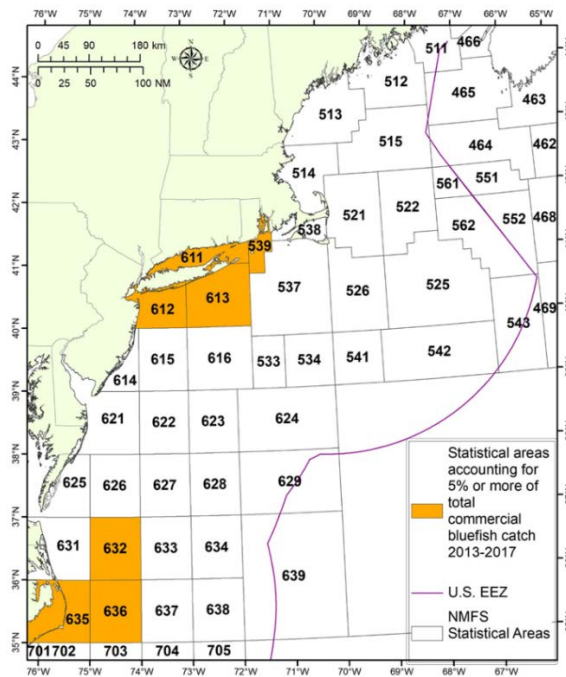


Figure 7. Statistical areas that accounted for 5 percent or more of the Atlantic bluefish catch from 2013-2017.

According to dealer data, commercial vessels landed about 4.13 million pounds of bluefish valued at approximately \$2.88 million ex-vessel value from 2013-2017. Average coastwide ex-vessel price of bluefish was \$0.71 per pound from 2013-2017. The relative value of bluefish is very low among commercially landed species, less than 1% of the total value of all finfish and shellfish landed along the U.S. Atlantic coast in 2017. A time series of bluefish landings, revenue, and price is provided in Figure 8.

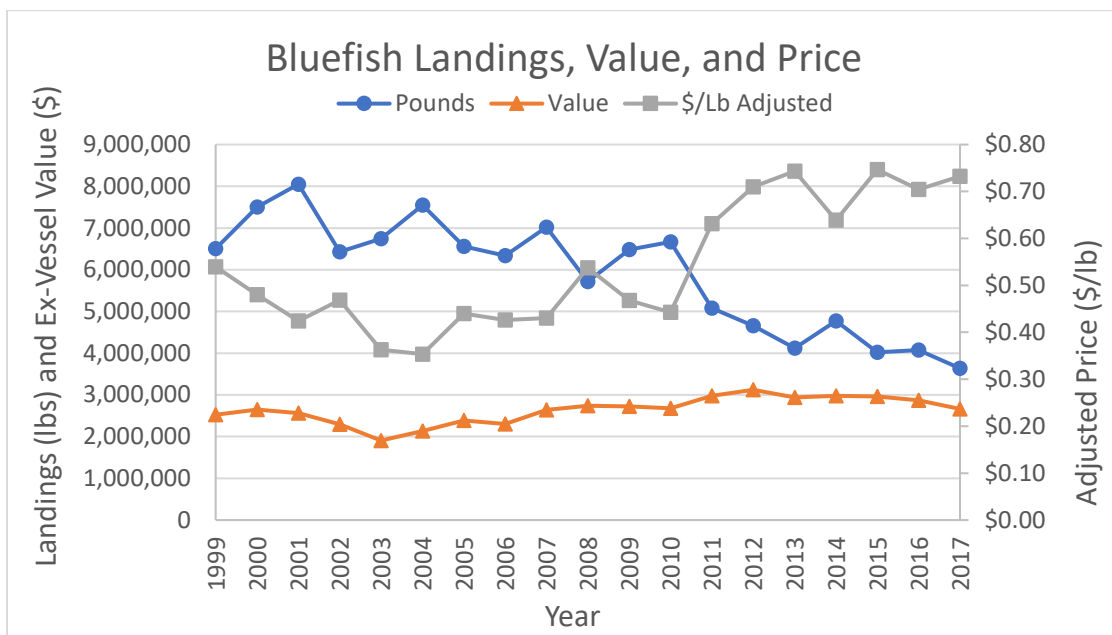


Figure 8. Landings, ex-vessel value, and price (adjusted to 2016 real dollars; 2017-unadjusted) for bluefish, 1999-2017.



According to dealer data where a state or federal permit could be associated with an individual trip (which is ~90%, except for SC, GA, FL ~0%), Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and North Carolina all accounted for greater than 5% of bluefish trips, which represents 94% of all bluefish trips from 2013-2017.

### *Transfers*

Transfers of quota from the recreational to the commercial fishery occur almost on a yearly basis (Table 4). Typically, this transfer of quota is written into the specifications, and then adjusted as needed when recreational landings from the previous year become available. However, these in-season adjustments have only begun in recent years. This represents quota that would otherwise go unused if not transferred to the commercial sector. These transfers occur once confirmation has been made by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office that the recreational sector will not meet their bluefish quota.

Transfers of bluefish quota also occur within the commercial fishery between states. State quota transfers occur on a year to year basis, as needed. As a state nears its commercial quota, that state can request a poundage quota transfer from another state that is not on track to land their quota. See Table 3 for the pounds of commercial quota landed by each state (before and after any state transfers). In recent years (2013-2017), only MA, RI, and NY have received quota transfers. Of the eleven states that did not receive any transfer, nine of them transferred quota to other states in one or more years (Table 5). Transfers during this time frame (2013-2017) occurred largely during a period of declining coastwide commercial quota (Figure 6). Past reduced quota periods (2006-2008) resulted in different patterns of transfers than those seen in recent years. From 2005-2016, New York has received quota from other states in 10 of 12 years.

Table 4. Final bluefish quota transfers from the recreational to commercial sector.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Final Sector Transfer Amount</b>	<b>FR Citation</b>
2000	0	<a href="#">65 FR 45844</a>
2001	3.15 million lbs	<a href="#">66 FR 23625</a>
2002	5.933 million lbs	<a href="#">67 FR 38909</a>
2003	4.161 million lbs	<a href="#">68 FR 25305</a>
2004	5.085 million lbs	<a href="#">69 FR 47798</a>
2005	5.254 million lbs	<a href="#">70 FR 13402</a>
2006	5.367 million lbs	<a href="#">71 FR 9471</a>
2007	4.780 million lbs	<a href="#">72 FR 4458</a>
2008	4.088 million lbs	<a href="#">73 FR 9957</a>
2009	4.838 million lbs	<a href="#">74 FR 20423</a>
2010	5.387 million lbs	<a href="#">75 FR 27221</a>
2011	4.772 million lbs	<a href="#">76 FR 17789</a>
2012	5.052 million lbs	<a href="#">77 FR 25100</a>
2013	4.686 million lbs	<a href="#">78 FR 26523</a>
2014	3.340 million lbs	<a href="#">79 FR 35293</a>
2015	1.579 million lbs	<a href="#">80 FR 46848</a>
2016	1.577 million lbs	<a href="#">81 FR 51370</a>
2017	5.033 million lbs	<a href="#">82 FR 13402</a>

Table 5. Commercial state-to-state transfers from 2005-2017 (light grey indicates quota received and dark grey indicates quota transferred).

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Average
ME	0	-52,000	-25,000	-45,000	0	0	0	0	0	-45,000	-30,000	-32,000	0	-17,615
NH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	0	0	0	-20,000	0	6,154
MA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000	45,000	250,000	225,000	0	55,385
RI	0	60,000	155,000	-50,000	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	180,000	132,000	150,338	55,949
CT	0	0	0	-20,000	-75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-7,308
NY	0	250,000	450,000	455,000	425,000	0	200,000	50,000	300,000	250,000	550,000	420,000	0	257,692
NJ	0	0	309,125	0	0	0	0	0	-300,000	-50,000	0	-40,000	-50,000	-10,067
DE	0	-15,000	-80,000	-90,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-50,000	0	-18,077
MD	0	-45,000	-50,000	-50,000	0	0	0	0	0	-50,000	0	-50,000	0	-18,846
VA	0	-525,000	-350,000	0	-150,000	0	0	0	0	0	-250,000	-210,000	-338	-114,257
NC	0	652,000	0	-100,000	0	0	0	-100,000	-200,000	0	-550,000	-225,000	-100,000	-47,923
SC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-150,000	0	-11,538
GA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FL	0	-325,000	-409,125	-100,000	-200,000	0	-200,000	-50,000	0	-250,000	-150,000	0	0	-129,548

## ***Issues for Public Comment***

Public comment is sought on a range of issues that may be considered in the amendment. The issues listed below are not necessarily exhaustive, but are intended to focus the public comment and provide the Council and Commission with input necessary to develop the amendment. **The public is encouraged to submit comments on the issues listed below as well as any other issues that should be addressed in the amendment.**

### ***ISSUE 1: FMP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES***

#### Background

The original FMP (1990) contains the first set of goals and objectives. The five goals of the FMP are the following:

1. Increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery
2. Provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish (defined as the commercial fishery not exceeding 20% of the total catch).
3. Provide for cooperation among the coastal states, the various regional marine fishery management councils, and federal agencies involved along the coast to enhance the management of bluefish throughout its range.
4. Promote compatible management regulations between State and Federal jurisdictions.
5. Prevent recruitment overfishing.
6. Reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

#### Description of the Issue

As the management of bluefish over the last 20 years has changed through amendments, framework adjustments, and addendums, the management objectives in the FMP have remained the same. During this period, the status of the stock has changed, as well as potential changes in availability, effort, and fishery productivity. Given these changes, do the management objectives still capture the needs and goals of the FMP?

#### Management Questions

- Are the existing objectives appropriate for managing the bluefish fishery?
- If these are not appropriate, what should the goals and objectives be?
- What else should the Council and Commission consider with regard to goals and objectives in the bluefish fishery management plan?

**ISSUE 2:  
COMMERCIAL AND  
RECREATIONAL  
ALLOCATIONS**

Background

The original FMP (1990) contains the first set of sector allocations of the ACL at 80% recreational and 20% commercial. This was adjusted to 83% recreational and 17% commercial in Amendment 1 (1999).

Description of the Issue

While the designation of the 83/17% split in 1999 was determined based on the historical significance (1981-1989) of the bluefish fishery, the characteristics and participation in both the commercial and recreational fisheries may have changed over the last 20 years.

Management Questions

- Is the existing allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors based on the annual ACL appropriate for managing the bluefish fishery?
- If not, how should the current allocations be revised?
- What else should the Council and Commission consider with regard to quota allocation between the commercial and recreational bluefish fisheries?

**ISSUE 3:  
COMMERCIAL  
ALLOCATIONS TO  
THE STATES**

Background

Amendment 1 (1999) set the commercial allocations to the states using landings data from 1981-1989.

Description of the Issue

Trends in state harvest have shifted, especially with yearly state-to-state transfers in recent years. See Tables 3 and 5.

Management Questions

- Are the existing commercial state allocations appropriate for managing the bluefish fishery?
- If not, how should current measures and requirements be revised?
- What else should the Council and Commission consider with regard to commercial state allocations for bluefish?

## ***ISSUE 4: QUOTA TRANSFERS***

### Background

The original FMP (1990) contained alternatives regarding quota transfers. Quota transfers can occur from state-to-state within the commercial fishery and from the recreational to commercial fishery once deemed the recreational fishery will not meet the quota.

### Description of the Issue

Commercial state-to-state quota transfers occur on a yearly basis and become repetitive between a few states, especially in recent years. Transfers from the recreational to commercial sector have occurred in every year since 2001, inclusive (Table 4).

### Management Questions

- Are the existing transfer processes appropriate for managing the bluefish fishery?
- If not, what are appropriate requirements for managing the transfers within the commercial fishery?
- When and why do state transfers occur?
- What else should the Council and Commission consider with regard to quota transfers in the bluefish fishery?

## ***ISSUE 5: OTHER ISSUES***

### Background

As stated earlier in this document, the goal of the Public Information Document is to solicit comments on a broad range of issues for consideration in this amendment. This “Issue” is in place to allow the public to identify any other issues associated with the fishery. Comments do not need to be limited to issues included in this document.

### Management Considerations

- Fishery productivity
- Ecosystem considerations
- Changes in the fishery
- Changes in distribution of bait fish
- Average fish size
- Changes in availability, effort, and marketability
- Impacts of changes observed over time
- Economic and intrinsic value of recreationally released fish
- Value of unharvested quota

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