



NEWS RELEASE



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MAFMC and ASMFC Approve Bluefish Rebuilding Plan and Revised Allocations

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Management Board (Board) jointly recommended approval of the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. The Amendment updates the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) goals and objectives, initiates a rebuilding plan, establishes new allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors, implements new commercial allocations to the states, revises the process for quota transfers between sectors, and revises how the management plan accounts for management uncertainty.

The Council and Board initiated the Amendment in December 2017 to consider revisions to the commercial and recreational fisheries allocations and the state-specific commercial allocations. In 2019, an operational stock assessment for bluefish indicated the stock was overfished, and the Council and Board subsequently decided to incorporate the rebuilding plan in the Amendment.

During their joint meeting last week, the Council and Board reviewed a summary of the five virtual hearings and written comments submitted by 378 individuals and organizations, in addition to the recommendations of their joint Advisory Panel.

After weighing the pros and cons of shorter and longer rebuilding plan timeframes, the Council and Board ultimately selected the rebuilding plan which utilizes a constant fishing mortality approach and is projected to rebuild the stock in 7 years. Rebuilding progress will be analyzed through management track stock assessments every two years. The management track assessment [scheduled for later this month](#) will be the first step in informing specifications for the 2022-2023 fishing years.

The revised sector allocations increase the recreational allocation from 83% to 86% of the acceptable biological catch and decrease the commercial allocation from 17% to 14%. The Council and Board used catch data from 1981-2018 as the basis for sector allocations since it more accurately captures the cyclical nature of the fishery, while providing each sector with sufficient access to the resource considering historical usage.

The Council and Board based state commercial allocations on more recent data to improve efficiency within the commercial fishery and better reflect the current distribution of the stock. As such, the Amendment allocates a baseline quota of 0.1% to each state, and then allocates the rest of the commercial quota based on landings data from 2009 to 2018 (see Table 1 below). Recognizing that several states will be losing quota during a time when the coastwide commercial quota is already at an historic low, the Council and Board decided to phase-in the allocation changes over 7 years in order to reduce short-term economic impacts to the affected commercial fishing industry. The Council and Board also committed to reviewing the approved state allocations within 5 years.

Given bluefish's presence in, and movement between, state waters (0-3 miles from shore) and federal waters (3-200 miles from shore), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council manage this species cooperatively.

Table 1. Revised state allocation percentages of the bluefish commercial quota based on 2009-2018 landings data with a minimum default allocation of 0.1%. Previous allocations are provided for comparison purposes.

State	Previous Allocations Under Amendment 1	Revised Allocations to be Phased in Over 7 Years
Maine	0.67%	0.11%
New Hampshire	0.41%	0.22%
Massachusetts	6.72%	10.12%
Rhode Island	6.81%	9.61%
Connecticut	1.27%	1.09%
New York	10.39%	19.76%
New Jersey	14.82%	13.85%
Delaware	1.88%	0.49%
Maryland	3.00%	1.92%
Virginia	11.88%	5.87%
North Carolina	32.06%	32.03%
South Carolina	0.04%	0.10%
Georgia	0.01%	0.10%
Florida	10.06%	4.78%

The Amendment also updates the sector transfer process to allow for quota transfers in either direction between the commercial and recreational sectors. Previously, quota could only be transferred from the recreational sector to the commercial fishery. The transfers will now be capped at 10% of the acceptable biological catch for a given year.

Finally, the Amendment modified the management uncertainty tool within the FMP to a sector-specific approach. It allows the Council and Board to apply a buffer to either sector, in the form of a quota reduction, to account for management uncertainty during specifications. While this tool has not been used often, the modified approach allows managers to better target areas of uncertainty within one sector without reducing the quota or harvest limit in the other sector.

As next steps, the Council will forward its recommended approval of the Amendment to NOAA Fisheries for final consideration and implementation. The Commission will consider final approval of the Amendment at its August meeting.

Additional information about this amendment is available at:
<https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>

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