

Overview

The Recreational Reform Initiative (Initiative) considers improvements to management of recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The initiative is a complementary and collaborative effort between the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to address a range of recreational management issues through a completed framework/addendum and an upcoming framework/addendum and an amendment.

Goal/Vision:

- **Stability** in the recreational management measures (bag/size/season)
- **Flexibility** in the management process
- **Accessibility** aligned with availability/stock status

The goal of the Recreational Reform Initiative is to establish a process for setting recreational bag, size, and season limits for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish such that measures aim to prevent overfishing, are reflective of stock status, appropriately account for uncertainty in the recreational data, take into consideration angler preferences, and provide an appropriate level of stability and predictability in changes from year to year.

The first step of the Initiative established an interim management program through the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Addenda/Framework for all four species for setting recreational management measures for the 2023 – 2025 fishing years, with a goal of implementing a new and improved approach to managing the recreational fisheries by the beginning of 2026. Under the selected Percent Change Approach, managers consider two factors when determining whether recreational measures should be restricted, liberalized, or remain unchanged for the next two years. First, managers look at how recreational harvest limits (RHLs) for the next two years compare to recent estimates of recreational harvest. This gives an indication of whether recreational harvest is likely to exceed the RHL if management measures remain unchanged. Next, managers consider the most recent estimate of stock size relative to the target stock size. These two factors, in combination, will be used to determine the percentage change in harvest that management measures should aim to achieve.

The Recreational Harvest Control Rule Addenda/Framework addressed the Initiative goals of increasing stability in measures by setting measures every two years and by considering uncertainty around estimates of harvest and stock status when determining if measures should change. More information on the Percent Change Approach can be found [here](#). The Harvest Control Rule Addenda/Framework is currently pending federal implementation.

In 2023, work on the next addenda/framework or amendment will begin. This effort will explore options for a new recreational measure setting process as a replacement for the Percent Change Approach after the sunset period. If the recreational measures setting process is not updated through an addenda/framework or amendment to the Summer Flounder, Scup,

and Black Sea Bass and Bluefish FMPs prior to 2026, then the recreational measures setting process will revert back to the processes outlined [Addendum XXXII](#) for summer flounder and black sea bass, [Addendum XI](#) for scup, and [Amendment 1](#) for bluefish.

In addition, the Commission and Council will develop options through an amendment for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes (referred to as sector separation) and may also consider options related to recreational catch accounting such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels.

Contacts

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Timeline (Note: future dates are subject to change)

Early 2019: The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and the Council initiated the Recreational Reform Initiative during a joint meeting in March 2019. A steering committee with representation from the Council, Commission, and NOAA Fisheries was formed and met several times.

June 2020: The ISFMP Policy Board and the Council and reviewed a draft outline of topics under consideration through the initiative. They also discussed moving some topics from the [Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial and Recreational Allocation Amendment](#) to this initiative. They tasked staff with determining which items could be addressed through a joint framework/addendum and which would require an amendment.

October 2020: The ISFMP Policy Board and the Council and agreed to initiate complementary framework/addendum and amendment to address several recreational issues.

February 2021: The ISFMP Policy Board and the Council and agreed to focus on the harvest control rule proposal put forward by six recreational organizations as an immediate next step. Commission and Council staff agreed to work with NOAA Fisheries to consider how this proposal would need to be modified to comply with MSA requirements to implement annual catch limits and prevent overfishing.

June 2021: A joint Commission Plan Development Team (PDT) and Council Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) was created to further develop the harvest control rule. The joint PDT/FMAT continued to meet in the following months.

August/October 2021: The ISFMP Policy Board and the Council and reviewed a range of harvest control rule options presented by the PDT/FMAT. Both bodies approved the options for further development and inclusion in the Addenda/Framework under development.

February 2022: The ISFMP Policy Board approved Draft Addendum XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP and Draft Addendum II to the Bluefish FMP for public comment, and the Council approved the final range of options in the Harvest Control Rule Framework.

March and April 2022: The Commission conducted public hearings and accepted written comments on the Draft Addenda on Recreational Harvest Control Rule.

June 2022: Final action was taken, and the Board and Council approved [a new process](#) for setting recreational management measures and made modifications to the recreational accountability measures. The Council recommended these changes through a framework action, and the ISFMP Policy Board adopted the new process through [Addendum XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\) and Addendum II to the Bluefish FMP](#). The Policy Board and the Council considered a range of management options and ultimately selected one referred to as the “Percent Change Approach,” with an agreement to continue development of several other options for possible implementation by 2026.

December 2022: The Board and Council discussed the future of the Recreational Reform Initiative, including what actions they will prioritize for Commission and Council staff to work on in 2023 and beyond. The Board and Council agreed developing the new Recreational Harvest Control Rule, to replace the Percent Change Approach before the sunset period, through a framework/addenda was the highest priority. Development of the sector separation and catch accounting amendment was the next highest priority.

Winter 2022/2023: The Percent Change Approach will be used for the first time to determine the reduction or liberalization needed for each species, and measures for 2023 will be selected and put into place prior to the start of the 2023 fishing year.

Early 2023: Council and Commission staff will begin work on the proposed framework/addenda and amendment by drafting action plans and timelines for development of these actions.