



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

## Joint ASMFC/MAFMC Meeting Summary

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*Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

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Joint ASMFC/MAFMC Meeting  
Durham, NC  
October 8 & 9, 2019

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### Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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**Press Release**

**ASMFC & MAFMC Set Specifications for Jointly Managed Species and Initiate a Joint Action on Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocations; and ASMFC Initiates Addendum on Black Sea Bass State-by-State Commercial Allocations**

Durham, NC – The Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) and Bluefish Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to adopt 2020-2021 specifications for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish and review previously-implemented 2020 specifications for summer flounder. During the meeting, the Boards and Council reviewed the results of operational stock assessments for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish, which were peer-reviewed and accepted for management use. The assessments incorporated fishery catch and fishery-independent survey data through 2018, including revised recreational catch data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The revised MRIP data are based on a new estimation methodology accounting for changes to the angler intercept survey and the recent transition to a mail-based effort survey. For these four species, the revised estimates of catch and landings for shore and private boat modes are several times higher than the previous estimates, substantially raising the overall catch and harvest estimates.

**Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications**

The following table summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. In setting catch and harvest limits for scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, the Boards and Council also took into account recommendations from the Council’s Statistical and Science Committee (SSC), Monitoring Committee, and Advisory Panels (APs) for each species. The summer flounder limits, which were previously approved by the Board and Council in March 2019, were maintained. No changes were made to the commercial management measures for the four species. For scup, black sea bass, and bluefish, 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 the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

**Table 1. 2020-2021 Commercial Quotas and Recreational Harvest Limits for Scup, Black Sea Bass, Summer Flounder and Bluefish (2019 values are provided for comparison purposes). Note: Landings limits shown in the table are initial limits prior to any deductions for past overages.**

Year	Scup			Black Sea Bass			Summer Flounder			Bluefish		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
<b>Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)</b>	23.98	22.23	18.06	3.52	5.58	5.58	11.53	11.53	11.53	7.71	2.77	2.77
<b>Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)</b>	7.37	6.51	5.34	3.66	5.81	5.81	7.69	7.69	7.69	11.62	9.48	9.48

### ***Scup***

The 2019 scup operational assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about two times the target. The assessment indicated the stock experienced very high recruitment in 2015 and below-average recruitment during 2016-2018. The Board and Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 35.77 million pounds for 2020 and 30.67 million pounds for 2021. After accounting for expected discards, this results in a commercial quota of 22.23 million pounds and an RHL of 6.51 million pounds in 2020, and a commercial quota of 18.06 million pounds and an RHL of 5.34 million pounds in 2021. Compared to 2019 landings limits, this represents a 7% decrease in the commercial quota and a 12% decrease in the RHL in 2020, and a 25% decrease in the commercial quota and a 28% decrease in the RHL in 2021.

The Board and Council also reviewed an evaluation of scup discards by mesh size, quarter, and statistical area in the commercial fishery. While discards have been well above average in recent years, the Board and Council agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation that no immediate management action was needed but discards should continue to be monitored.

### ***Black Sea Bass***

The 2019 black sea bass operational stock assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 2.4 times the biomass target in 2018. Recruitment was above average in 2015 and below-average during 2016-2018. The Board and Council adopted an ABC of 15.07 million pounds for 2020 and 2021, which results in a commercial quota of 5.58 million pounds and an RHL of 5.81 million pounds for both years after accounting for expected discards. This represents a 59% increase for both the commercial quota and the RHL compared to the 2019 measures. This could allow for a notable increase in commercial landings. However, because the recently revised recreational harvest estimates are higher than the 2020 and 2021 RHLs, managers will not be able to liberalize recreational measures in 2020, despite the increase in the RHL. Changes to recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) to constrain harvest to the RHL will be considered at the Council and Board's December 2019 joint meeting.

### ***Summer Flounder***

For summer flounder, the Board and Council received a data update, including updated catch, landings, and fishery-independent survey indices through 2018. State and federal survey indices indicate the stock increased from 2017 to 2018 and recruitment in 2018 was above average. Considering the positive status of the summer flounder stock and recommendations from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, and AP, the Board and Council maintained the previously-implemented specifications for summer flounder. For 2020, the commercial quota is 11.53 million pounds and the RHL is 7.69 million pounds.

### ***Bluefish***

For bluefish, the 2019 operational assessment designated the stock as overfished though overfishing was not occurring in 2018. Based on the SSC's recommendation, the Bluefish Board and Council adopted an ABC of 16.28 million pounds for both 2020 and 2021. After accounting for discards, the ABC translates to a commercial quota of 2.77 million pounds and an RHL of 9.48 million pounds. Compared to 2019, this represents a 64% decrease in the commercial quota and an 18% decrease in the RHL. Because the recreational fishery is anticipated to fully harvest the RHL, the Board and Council did not authorize a quota transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector for 2020-2021.

## **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocations Amendment**

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and the Council initiated the development of a joint amendment to reevaluate the FMP's commercial and recreational sector allocations. This action aims to address the allocation-related impacts of the revised recreational catch and landings data provided by MRIP. The initiation of the amendment directs Commission and Council staff to begin preparing analyses to guide development of a Public Information Document and scoping process. The Board and Council will discuss this issue during their next joint meeting in December 2019.

### **Black Sea Bass Commercial Addendum**

After reviewing potential management strategies and engaging in a joint discussion on Council involvement, the Board initiated an addendum to consider changes to black sea bass commercial state-by-state allocations. Consistent with the Board's August 2019 discussion, this action will consider the current distribution and abundance of black sea bass as one of several adjustment factors to achieve more balanced access to the resource. Proposed strategies for adjusting the commercial state allocations include: 1) a dynamic approach, referred to as "TMGC," which gradually shifts allocations over time based on a combination of historical landings information and current stock distribution information; 2) several trigger-based allocation approaches; 3) a method to raise the Connecticut quota to 5% in addition to any other reallocation method; and 4) hybrid approaches. Although this is a Board-specific action, both the Board and Council agreed future discussions of the addendum should occur at joint meetings to allow for Council input. The Council deliberated the need for a joint action, but decided to postpone further consideration of a joint action until the December 2019 meeting.

For more information on the Commission's actions pertaining to black sea bass, please contact Caitlin Starks, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [cstark@asmfc.org](mailto:cstark@asmfc.org) and contact Dustin Colson Leaning, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [dleaning@asmfc.org](mailto:dleaning@asmfc.org) for more information pertaining to the Commission's actions on bluefish and summer flounder.

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### ***Meeting Summary***

#### **Bluefish**

The Commission's Bluefish Board and Council received an update on the Bluefish Allocation Amendment and revisited the list of issues previously identified for consideration in the Draft Amendment. As background, the Board and Council initiated the amendment in December 2017 with the goal of reviewing and possibly revising the allocation between the commercial and recreational fisheries and the commercial allocations to the states. In August 2018, the Board and Council agreed to postpone finalization of the public hearing document until after the results of the bluefish operational assessment were available. These results, which were released in August 2019, indicate the stock is overfished with overfishing not occurring in 2018. Once the Council receives official notification from NOAA Fisheries regarding the overfished status of the bluefish stock, the Council will be required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to initiate a bluefish rebuilding plan, to be implemented within two years, to rebuild the stock to the biomass target within ten years.

During their joint meeting, the Board and Council affirmed the list of five issues previously identified for consideration in the amendment. These include: (1) FMP goals and objectives, (2) commercial and recreational allocation, (3) commercial allocation to the states, (4) quota transfers, and (5) other issues. The Board and Council also provided specific recommendations for further analysis by FMAT. These included (1) considering the dynamics between seasonality and region when analyzing state allocations; (2) addressing management uncertainty by sector; and (3) incorporating rebuilding into the amendment in order to streamline the development and implementation of a rebuilding plan. Additional information and updates will be posted on the [Commission](#) and [Council](#) websites.

### **Recreational Reform Initiative (All 4 species)**

The Council and Board also reviewed progress made by a joint steering committee on recreational management reform for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The steering committee has discussed a new process for setting recreational management measures for multiple years at a time, as well as the development of guidelines for maintaining status quo recreational management measures. The Council and Board agreed the steering committee should continue to develop these concepts.

For more information on the Commission's actions pertaining to black sea bass, please contact Caitlin Starks, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [cstark@asmfc.org](mailto:cstark@asmfc.org) and contact Dustin Colson Leaning, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [dleaning@asmfc.org](mailto:dleaning@asmfc.org) for more information pertaining to the Commission's actions on bluefish and summer flounder.

### ***Motions***

#### **Bluefish 2020 & 2021 Specifications**

**Move that the average ABC approach, no reduction for management uncertainty, terminal year estimate be used for expected recreational landings, and NEFSC estimated discards be used for 2020 and 2021 specifications. This results in an ABC of 16.28 M lbs., a recreational harvest limit of 3.62 M lbs., and a commercial quota of 2.77 M lbs.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Ballou and seconded by Ms. Hart.

Council: Motion fails for lack of like motion by the Council.

**Move that the average ABC approach, no reduction for management uncertainty, terminal year estimate for expected recreational landings, and MRIP terminal year estimated discards be used for 2020 and 2021 specifications. This results in an ABC of 16.28 M lbs., a recreational harvest limit of 9.48 M lbs., and a commercial quota of 2.77 M lbs.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 null). Roll Call: In favor – MA, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, NC, FL, NMFS; Opposed – RI; Null – VA.

Council: DiLernia/Heins (20/0/0) Motion carries.

#### **Bluefish FMP Review (Board Only)**

**Move to approve the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan Review of the 2018 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* requests for Maine, South Carolina and Georgia's commercial fisheries.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Ballou and seconded by Dr. Gary. Motion carries by consent.

### **Scup 2020 & 2021 Specifications**

#### **Main Motion**

**Move that, based on the averaged ABCs recommended by the SSC, in 2020 and 2021 the recreational ACL = ACT = 7.31 mil lb and the commercial ACL = ACT = 25.91 mil lb.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Borden and seconded by Ms. Meserve.

Council: DiLernia/Davidson

#### **Motion to Substitute**

**Move to substitute that, based on the varying ABCs recommended by the SSC, the 2020 recreational ACL = ACT = 7.87 mil lb and commercial ACL = ACT = 27.90 mil lb. For 2021, the recreational ACL = ACT = 6.75 mil lb and commercial ACL = ACT = 23.92 mil lb.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion carries (7/3/1/0).

Council: Nowalsky/Cimino (14/4/1)

Motion carries

#### **Main Motion as Substituted**

**Move that, based on the varying ABCs recommended by the SSC, the 2020 recreational ACL = ACT = 7.87 mil lb and commercial ACL = ACT = 27.90 mil lb. For 2021, the recreational ACL = ACT = 6.75 mil lb and commercial ACL = ACT = 23.92 mil lb.**

Board: Motion carries (8 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstentions. Roll call: In favor – MA, CT, NJ, DE, MD, VA, NC, NMFS; Opposed – RI; Abstentions – NY, PRFC.

Council: (15/1/3)

Motion carries

**Move that for 2020, using the 3-year average method for sector discards, recreational harvest limit is 6.51 mil lb and commercial quota of 22.23 mil lb. For 2021, the recreational harvest limit is 5.34 mil lb and commercial quota of 18.06 mil lb.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion carries (9 in favor, 2 abstentions). Roll call: In favor – MA, RI, CT, NJ, DE, MD, VA, NC, NMFS; Abstentions – NY, PRFC.

Council: Nowalsky/Cimino (17/0/2)

Motion carries

### **Black Sea Bass 2020 & 2021 Specifications**

**Move that, based on the averaged ABCs recommended by the SSC and the previous MC methodology for discards, in each year 2020-2021, the recreational ACL=ACT=8.09 mil lb and the commercial ACL=ACT=6.98 mil lb. This results in an RHL of 5.81 mil lb and a commercial quota of 5.58 mil lb in each year.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion carries (9 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 abstention). Roll call: In favor – MA, RI, CT, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NMFS; Opposed – NC; Abstentions – NY.

Council: Nowalsky/Cimino (16/1/1)

Motion carries

**Motion to Substitute**

**Move to substitute that based on the averaged ABCs recommended by the SSC and the new MC methodology for discards, in each year 2020-2021, the recreational ACL=ACT=6.85 mil lb and the commercial ACL=ACT= 8.22 mil lb. This results in an RHL of 5.48 mil lb and a commercial quota of 5.26 mil lb in each year.**

Board: Motion made by Mr. Batsavage

Council: Batsavage/deFur

Motion fails for lack of a second by the Board

**Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Sector Allocation**

**Move to initiate an amendment to consider modifications to the commercial/recreational sector allocations for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.**

Board: Motion made by Dr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed).

Council: deFur/Heins (13/4/0)

Motion carries

**Black Sea Bass Commercial Issues (Board only)**

**Move to initiate an addendum to consider adjustments to the commercial black sea bass allocations consistent with the goal statement and options developed by the Board.**

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion carries (10 in favor/1 abstention).

**Move to nominate Justin Davis for vice chair of the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board.**

Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion carries by consent.