



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

January 28, 2019

To: Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board
From: Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Technical Committee
RE: Technical Committee Recommendations for 2019 Recreational Black Sea Bass Measures

Technical Committee Members: Greg Wojcik (Chair, CT), Robert Glenn* (MA), Jason McNamee (RI), John Maniscalco (NY), Peter Clarke** (NJ), Steve Doctor (MD), Alex Aspinwall (VA), Richard Wong (DE), T.D. VanMiddlesworth (NC)

*Attended the call in place of Tiffany Vidal

**Unable to attend call but submitted written comments

Staff: Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC), Julia Beaty (MAFMC)

Additional Attendees: Nichola Meserve (MA)

The Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Technical Committee (TC) met via conference call on Monday, January 14, 2019 to review the available 2018 recreational black sea bass harvest estimates through wave 5, determine the methodology for projecting wave 6 harvest, and discuss recommendations for 2019 recreational measures. Additionally, the TC evaluated proposals from Virginia and North Carolina to account for their expected harvest during the February 2019 federal waters black sea bass recreational fishery.

Review of Recreational Harvest Estimates

In 2018 the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) released a new time series of harvest estimates calibrated to account for changes in intercept survey sampling design and the new Fishing Effort Survey (FES). However, this information has not yet been incorporated into a stock assessment for black sea bass, and the recreational harvest limit (RHL) for 2019 is still based on a stock assessment that used pre-calibrated MRIP data. Therefore, the TC reviewed MRIP harvest estimates for 2018 (Waves 1-5) that are back-calibrated in order to be consistent with the MRIP data derived using methodology prior to 2018 (i.e. effort information from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey instead of the new Fishing Effort Survey). This is necessary in order to allow the establishment of potential recreational measures for 2019.

Projection of 2018 Wave 6 Harvest

The TC discussed methodologies for projecting 2018 black sea bass harvest in wave 6 (November-December). First, the TC agreed the projection should be based on average harvest estimates for the most recent three years (2015-2017) to account for variability in MRIP estimates. Then, the TC agreed to calculate the projected 2018 wave 6 harvest using the ratio of the sum of coastwide landings in Waves 1-5 to the sum of coastwide landings in Wave 6 across the most recent three years. The TC noted that using coastwide landings rather than state-by-state landings to calculate the harvest ratio for Waves 1-5

to Wave 6 was preferable because MRIP data should be used at as large a scale as possible to utilize estimates with the smallest level of uncertainty.

The TC also agreed that for the purposes of this projection, smoothing should be applied to New York's harvest estimate in 2016 Wave 6, and New Jersey's harvest estimate in 2017 Wave 3. When developing recreational measures for 2018 the TC evaluated these estimates and found them to be outliers using a modified Thompson's Tau analysis. The TC then applied the previously approved smoothed values to develop 2018 recreational measures. The TC recommends continuing to use these values for the development of recreational measures as the MRIP estimates are not representative of the actual harvest.

Using the above methodology, the TC developed a Wave 6 harvest projection of 192,304 pounds, and a projected 2018 harvest of 3.92 million pounds.

Recommendations for 2019 Recreational Measures

Although the projected 2018 harvest point estimate exceeds the 2019 RHL of 3.66 million pounds by 7%, the TC recommends maintaining status quo recreational management measures in 2019. Justification to recommend maintaining status quo recreational measures include:

1. The percent standard error (PSE) of harvest estimates should be considered when compared with the RHL instead of using the point estimate. The PSE for the final coastwide recreational harvest (MA-VA) in 2017 was 8.4. This is typical of MRIP harvest estimates for black sea bass produced using the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to estimate effort. NC is not included in this estimate due to the need for post-stratification of the harvest estimate at Cape Hatteras.
2. The TC expressed concern about using back-calibrated MRIP estimates to develop recreational measures. Effort estimates from CHTS using random digit dialing has been reported to produce much lower harvest estimates than the new FES. The use of this data was not well accepted by the full TC.
3. The contribution of different state and wave combinations to the total harvest under back-calibrated and the newer FES based MRIP estimates are not equal ($\pm \sim 20\%$). Therefore, regulatory changes based upon back calibrated estimates that impact angler access may not actually be appropriate or result in the intended effect, especially when compared to FES based estimates in the near future.
4. TC also expressed concern with using the current RHL of 3.66 million pounds. The RHL was developed based on the past stock assessment and doesn't incorporate important changes to the stock including a strong 2015 cohort and the integration of new MRIP catch and harvest estimates.

The 2018 projected harvest estimate is within a single PSE of the 2019 RHL. The black sea bass stock is robust, was last assessed using data from 2015, and is expected to be above the biomass target. The continued use of CHTS based estimates, which have been found to be incorrect, to manage and potentially further restrict fisheries is concerning to the technical committee. The Technical Committee recommends that status quo recreational management be continued in 2019 and that those measures are not likely to exceed the 2019 RHL.

Virginia Proposal for February 2019 Recreational Fishery

Alex Aspinwall presented the Virginia (VA) proposal for participation in the February 2019 black sea bass recreational fishery in federal waters. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) will open the recreational black sea bass fishery on February 1- 28, 2019 with a 12.5" minimum size limit and a 15 fish bag limit in response to the National Marine Fisheries Service opening Federal waters in February 2019. VMRC will make season adjustments to account for landings during Wave 1 using either of the following options: 1) close 14 days in Wave 3, or 2) close 14 days in Wave 5.

Based on average daily landings rates from the most recent two years (2017-2018) of MRIP landings, a closure of 14 days in Wave 3 would result in savings of 6,802 pounds and a closure of 14 days in Wave 5 would result in savings of 6,755 pounds. Both options would account for landings that occurred in February 2018 (6,459 pounds). Mandatory reporting of landings and biological data collection will continue in 2019 to ensure the characterization of the February fishery.

The TC evaluated VA's proposal and found the methods to be technically sound. The TC recommends approval of VA's proposal for adjusting 2019 measures to account for February harvest.

North Carolina for February 2019 Recreational Fishery

T.D. VanMiddlesworth presented the North Carolina (NC) proposal for participation in the February 2019 black sea bass recreational fishery in federal waters. NC's expected harvest in Wave 1 is estimated at 62 pounds, based on Wave 1 landings data from 1996-2009 and 2013. To account for this harvest by adjusting measures in the rest of the season, NC proposed two options: 1) Close 1 day in Wave 3 (May 15), or 2) close 2 days in Wave 3 (May 15-16).

Based on daily harvest rates in Wave 3 in 2017 and 2018, these two options would provide savings of either 84 pounds or 168 pounds, respectively. The NC Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) recommends Option 2 to mitigate against harvest in February that is higher than expected.

The NCDMF will rely on MRIP intercepts for length and weight data on black sea bass harvested in February, as well as information on reported releases, catch/harvest per angler, and fishing locations. In addition, NCDMF staff will work with charter boat captains to collect black sea bass carcasses for age and growth samples.

The TC evaluated NC's proposal and found the methods to be technically sound. The TC recommends approval of NC's proposal for adjusting 2019 measures to account for February harvest, but recommended requiring Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) for all charter boats targeting black sea bass in February. VTRs are already required for party and charter boats fishing in federal waters, and should therefore capture most of NC's black sea bass harvest in February. VTR data could be used to validate MRIP for-hire harvest and effort estimates.

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