



NEWS RELEASE



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MAFMC and ASMFC Postpone Final Action on Potential Changes to Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Allocations

During a joint webinar meeting on Tuesday, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) voted to postpone a final decision on potential changes to the commercial and recreational allocations of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. This delay is intended to allow for further development of the Recreational Reform Initiative before any allocation decisions are made. The Council and Board are now scheduled to take final action on the commercial/recreational allocation amendment at a joint meeting in December 2021.

Summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass are highly sought by both commercial and recreational fishermen throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Southern New England. The commercial/recreational allocations for all three species are currently based on historical proportions of catch or landings. Recent changes in how recreational catch is estimated have resulted in a discrepancy between the current levels of estimated recreational harvest and the allocations to the recreational sector. In response to the revised data, the Council and Board initiated the amendment in 2019 to consider possible changes to the commercial and recreational allocations. This action also aligns with the Council's policy of reviewing fishery allocations at least every 10 years.

The Council and Commission received 334 public comments from both commercial and recreational fishery participants and organizations during five virtual public hearings and a written comment period earlier this year. In general, comments from the commercial sector favored maintaining status quo allocations, and comments from the recreational sector tended to support the alternatives that would increase allocations to the recreational sector. A more detailed summary of the public comments is available [here](#).

Much of the discussion during this week's meeting focused on the possibility of postponing an allocation decision to allow for further development of the Recreational Reform Initiative—an approach that has been recommended by stakeholders from both sectors, as well as representatives from the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). The [Recreational Reform Initiative](#) focuses on management changes to more appropriately account for uncertainty and variability in the Marine Recreational Information Program data and provide stability in the recreational bag, size, and season limits. Proponents of delaying final action have argued that a better sense of potential management changes through the Recreational Reform Initiative may inform the allocation decisions that the Council and Board are considering through this action.

After several hours of discussion, the Council and Board voted to postpone final action until December. This delay is not expected to affect the timing of any allocation changes, as GARFO has advised that implementation of the amendment would be very unlikely to occur until January 1, 2023, regardless of whether approval occurred at this meeting or in December. In the months ahead, staff may incorporate a small number of new alternatives proposed by Council and Board members that fall within the range of alternatives already analyzed

Given summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass'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 jointly manage these species.

within the amendment. The Council and Board are expected to discuss the need for any additional alternatives at their joint meeting in August.

Additional information and updates on this amendment are available at:
<http://www.mafmc.org/actions/sfsbsb-allocation-amendment>.