



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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Department of Commerce Decision May Impact ASMFC's Ability to Conserve Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Arlington, VA – On July 11th, Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, notified the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission that he has found the State of New Jersey to be in compliance with Addendum XXVII to the Summer Flounder Fishery Management Plan. According to the letter sent to the Commission, Secretary Ross's decision was based on the assertion that "New Jersey makes a compelling argument that the measures it implemented this year, despite increasing catch above the harvest target, will likely reduce total summer flounder mortality in New Jersey waters to a level consistent with the overall conservation objective for the recreational fishery." This is the first time since passage of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) in 1993 and the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act in 1984 that the Secretary of Commerce failed to uphold a noncompliance recommendation by the Commission.

"The Commission is deeply concerned about the near-term impact on our ability to end overfishing on the summer flounder stock as well as the longer-term ability for the Commission to effectively conserve numerous other Atlantic coastal shared resources," stated Commission Chair Douglas Grout of New Hampshire. "The Commission's finding of noncompliance was not an easy one. It included hours of Board deliberation and rigorous Technical Committee review, and represented, with the exception of New Jersey, a unanimous position of the Commission's state members. Our decision was based on Technical Committee's findings that New Jersey's measures were not conservationally-equivalent to those measures in Addendum XXVIII and are projected to result in an additional 93,800 fish being harvested. Additionally, we had an obligation as a partner in the joint management of summer flounder with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to implement measures to end overfishing immediately or face the possibility of summer flounder becoming an overfished stock."

Based on the latest stock assessment information, summer flounder is currently experiencing overfishing. Spawning stock biomass has been declining since 2010 and is just 16% above the threshold. The vast majority of fishery-independent surveys show rapidly declining abundance. Any

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

increase in overall mortality puts the stock at risk for further declines and increases the probability of the stock becoming overfished. If the stock falls below the biomass threshold, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to initiate a rebuilding program, which could require more restrictive management measures.

New Jersey was not the only state to be concerned about the impact of the approved measures to its recreational fishing community. Two other states submitted alternative proposals that were rejected in favor of the states equally sharing the burden of needed reductions. Those states, as well as other coastal states, implemented the approved measures in order to end overfishing and support the long-term conservation of the resource.

“The states have a 75-year track record of working together to successfully manage their shared marine resources,” continued Chairman Grout. “We are very much concerned about the short and long-term implications of the Secretary’s decision on interstate fisheries management. Our focus moving forward will be to preserve the integrity of the Commission’s process, as established by the Atlantic Coastal Act, whereby, the states comply with the management measures we collectively agree upon. It is my fervent hope that three-quarters of a century of cooperative management will provide a solid foundation for us to collectively move forward in achieving our vision of sustainably managing Atlantic coastal fisheries.”

The Commission is currently reviewing its options in light of Secretary Ross’s action, and the member states will meet during the Commission’s Summer Meeting in early August to discuss the implications of the Secretary’s determination on the summer flounder resource and on state/federal cooperation in fisheries management under the Atlantic Coastal Act.

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