

*Summer Flounder, Scup, and
Black Sea Bass Technical
Committee's Discussion of the
Distribution of 20% Liberalization*

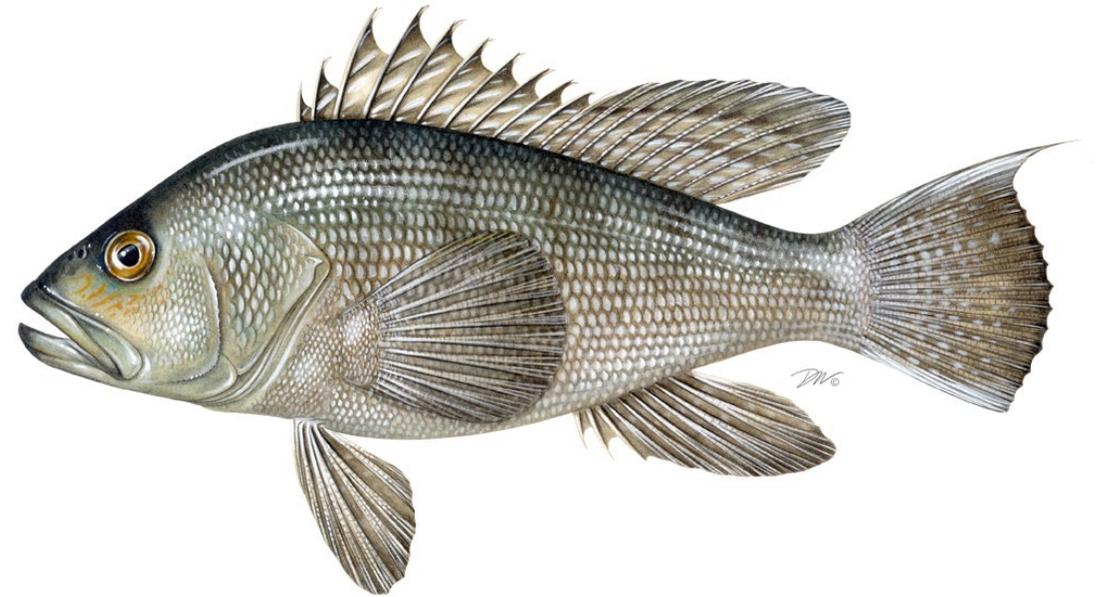
Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board

February 4, 2026

Background

- The Board approved a 20% liberalization for BSB in 2026 – 2027 at the December 2025 Joint Council/Board meeting.
- The TC met 3 times to discuss considerations and recommendations to the Board.

Purpose of today's meeting is to determine the regional distribution of this liberalization.



Three Region Framework

- Northern Region: MA–NY
- New Jersey
- Southern Region: DE–NC (north of Cape Hatteras)

Direction from Addendum:

Develop measures to meet coastwide target in a manner that aims to reduce intraregional and interregional disparities where possible

| STATE | Size Limit | Possession Limit | Open Season |
|--|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| MASSACHUSETTS | 16.5" | 4 fish | May 17-September 1 |
| RHODE ISLAND | 16.5" | 2 fish | May 22-August 26 |
| Private & Shore | | 3 fish | August 27-December 31 |
| RI For-Hire | 16" | 2 fish | June 18-August 31 |
| | | 6 fish | September 1-December 31 |
| CONNECTICUT | 16" | 5 fish | May 17-June 23; |
| Private & Shore | | | July 8-November 25 |
| CT (Authorized For-Hire Monitoring Program vessels) | | 5 fish | May 17-August 31 |
| NEW YORK | 16.5" | 7 fish | September 1-December 31 |
| | | 3 fish | June 23-August 31 |
| NEW JERSEY | 12.5" | 6 fish | September 1-December 31 |
| | | 10 fish | May 17-June 19 |
| | | 1 fish | July 1-August 31 |
| | | 10 fish | October 1-October 31 |
| DELAWARE | 13" | 15 fish | November 1-December 31 |
| MARYLAND | | | May 15-September 30; |
| VIRGINIA | | | October 10-December 31 |
| | | | May 15-July 15; |
| NORTH CAROLINA - North of Cape Hatteras (N of 35° 15'N) | | | August 5-December 31 |
| | May 15-September 30; | | |
| | October 10-December 31 | | |

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Technical Committee Report

TC Recommendations

TC did not reach consensus and instead recommended the following approaches to distribute the 20% liberalization.

- a) The liberalization is distributed equally between regions, i.e., each region will work separately to achieve but not exceed a 20% liberalization.
- b) The Board assigns a percent liberalization to a region or regions, and the other regions' percent liberalizations are adjusted accordingly to achieve the 20% coastwide liberalization.
- c) The Board assigns one or more management measures to a region or regions, resulting in de-facto percent liberalization(s), and the other regions' percent liberalizations are adjusted accordingly to achieve the 20% coastwide liberalization.

Important Considerations

Percent liberalizations are not directly comparable among regions because regional harvest scales differ.

This means a given percent change in one region does not translate to the same percent change elsewhere.

For Options B or C, the Board should evaluate how assigning changes to a focal region affects the other regions and the coastwide outcome before deciding.

Status Quo and Harvest Targets

The median coastwide 2026 harvest estimated by the Recreation Demand Model (RDM) if management measures are held status quo is **5,860,833** pounds.

Coastwide harvest liberalized by 20%, calculated using the median coastwide value, is **7,033,000** pounds, an increase of 1,172,167 pounds.

Table 1. RDM-estimated harvest in pounds by state in 2026 under status quo management measures. The individual median harvest estimates calculated by state do not add up to the total coastwide median harvest because coastwide median harvest is calculated by summing the coastwide harvest by RDM draw and taking the median of all of those draws.

| State | Status Quo Median Harvest (lbs) |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| MA | 554,158 |
| RI | 529,332 |
| CT | 449,579 |
| NY | 628,441 |
| NJ | 2,453,967 |
| DE | 236,211 |
| MD | 258,229 |
| VA | 157,639 |
| NC | 237,562 |
| Total | 5,860,833 |

Example Management Measures

Northern Region

The region explored the percent liberalizations and median harvest in pounds of black sea bass by state in the northern region (MA-NY) resulting from a region-wide minimum size limit of 16 inches and a region-wide minimum size limit of 15.5 inches, as estimated by the RDM. In addition, the increased season included for CT is for the private and shore modes, for 5/18-11/28.

| | Region-wide 16-inches minimum size and an increased season for CT | | Region-wide 15.5-inches minimum size and an increased season for CT | |
|-----------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|
| State | Percent Liberalization | Median Harvest (lbs) | Percent Liberalization | Median Harvest (lbs) |
| MA | 11.2% | 618,423 | 23.6% | 690,884 |
| RI | 12.4% | 576,565 | 22.2% | 627,123 |
| CT | 6.5% | 468,493 | 11.7% | 494,056 |
| NY | 25.4% | 777,968 | 57.1% | 991,949 |
| Coastwide | 13.9% | 2,488,961 ² | 29.1% | 2,901,998 ² |

Example Management Measures

Southern Region

The region explored the percent liberalizations and median harvest in pounds of black sea bass by state in the southern region (DE-NC) resulting from a region-wide minimum size limit of 12.5 inches and season from 5/1 through 12/31 and a region-wide minimum size limit of 12.5 inches and season from 4/19 through 12/31, as estimated by the RDM and adjusted by proposed methodology.

| State | Region-wide 12.5-inches minimum size and 5/1-12/31 season | | Region-wide 12.5-inches minimum size and 4/19-12/31 season | |
|-----------|---|------------------------|--|------------------------|
| | Percent Liberalization | Median Harvest (lbs) | Percent Liberalization | Median Harvest (lbs) |
| DE | 14.1% | 271,224 | 15.4% | 275,046 |
| MD | 11.2% | 286,263 | 13.1% | 292,464 |
| VA | 18.3% | 190,303 | 20.8% | 192,527 |
| NC | 21.8% | 290,701 | 28.5% | 306,706 |
| Coastwide | 16.5% | 1,077,131 ² | 19.9% | 1,109,552 ² |

Analyses

The TC assembled the following analyses and metrics by state to assist the Board with their decision:

- Angler Satisfaction
- Discard Ratios
- Coastal distribution
- Catch-per-Trip
- Coastwide Harvest Trends

Angler Satisfaction

Angler satisfaction is a measure of **Compensating Variation**. A common metric used in economic analyses.

This metric integrates changes in angler satisfaction due to regulations, the changes in availability of fish in the system, and is based on changes in expected trip-level harvest and discards of all three species.

For example:

- If fish are less available, compensating variation is how much money someone could be paid to offset the loss.
- If fish are more available, compensating variation is how much money could be taken away while leaving them no worse off.

It measures the angler welfare impact of a change, not just how spending changes. If fish are no more or less available and management measures do not change, the compensating variation, or angler satisfaction, would be **zero**.

Angler Satisfaction Continued

Data for this calculation is collected through the Marine Recreational Information Program's Socio-economic Assessment and NMFS 2022 angler choice experiment survey, an example of which is shown here.

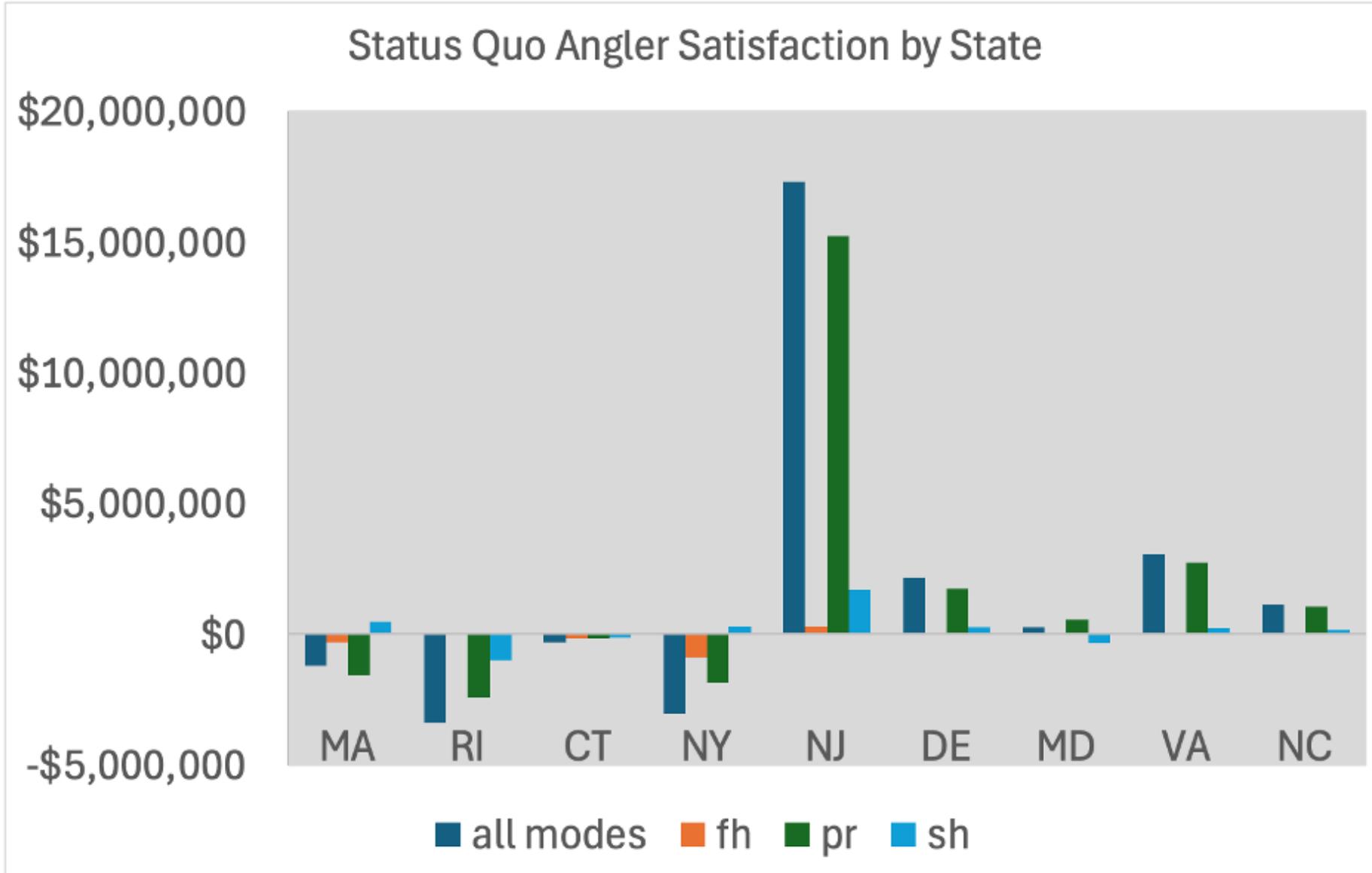
SECTION B: SALTWATER FISHING TRIPS

Suppose that you have the choice between two recreational saltwater fishing trips (**Trip A** or **Trip B**) and not going recreational saltwater fishing (**Trip C**). Below the table, indicate which of these three options would be your first choice.

| REGULATIONS |
|------------------------------------|
| You are legally allowed to keep: |
| 4 Fluke, 18" or longer |
| 10 Black Sea Bass, 12.5" or longer |
| 5 scup, 9" or longer |

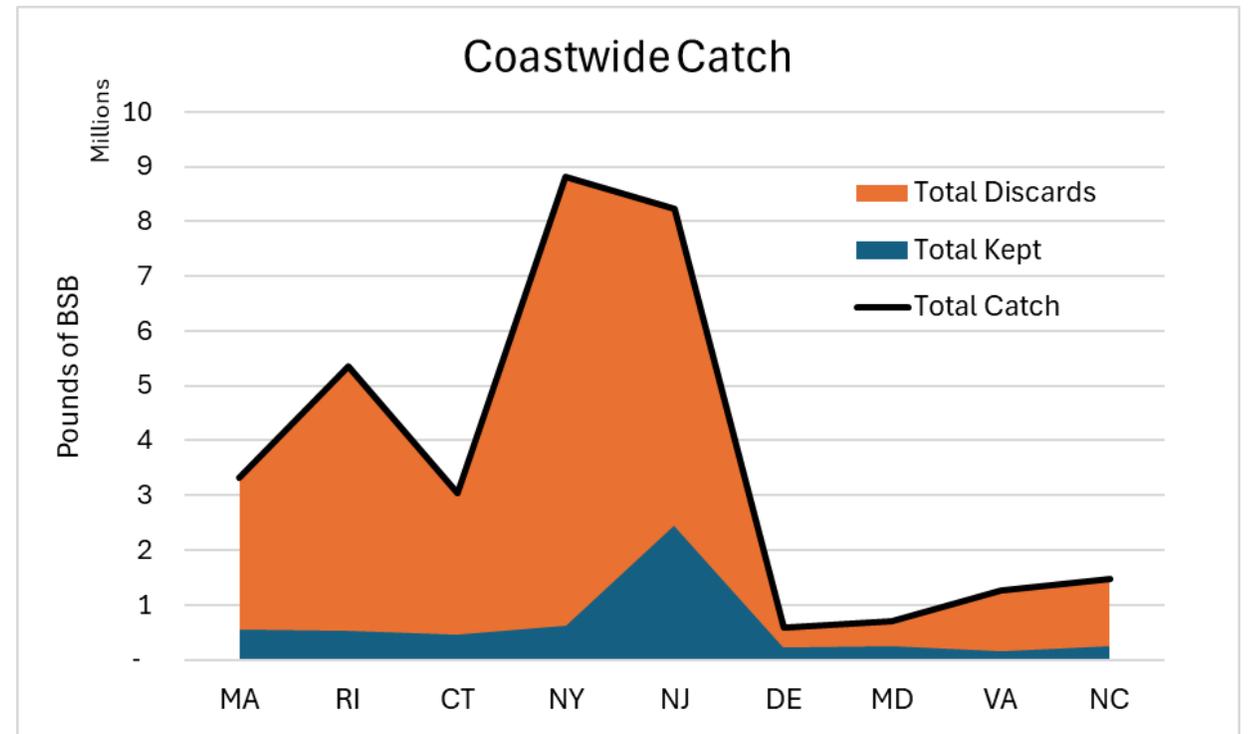
| TRIP FEATURES | | Trip A | Trip B | Trip C |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| CATCH | TOTAL NUMBER OF FISH YOU CATCH This number includes both undersized and legal size fish. | 6 Fluke | 15 Fluke | Do something other than saltwater fishing. |
| | NUMBER OF LEGAL-SIZE FISH YOU CAN KEEP These fish are <u>at least legal minimum size</u> . | 4 Fluke | 1 Fluke | |
| | TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FISH YOU CATCH Other fish you catch. | 20 Black Sea Bass 0 scup | 1 Black Sea Bass 3 scup | |
| | NUMBER OF OTHER LEGAL-SIZE FISH YOU CAN KEEP Other fish you catch on this trip that can be legally kept. | 1 Black Sea Bass 0 scup | 1 Black Sea Bass 3 scup | |
| TRIP DETAILS | TOTAL TRIP COST Your share of the fishing-related, transportation, and other expenses. This cost would not cover anyone else on the trip. | \$300 | \$225 | |

Angler Satisfaction Continued



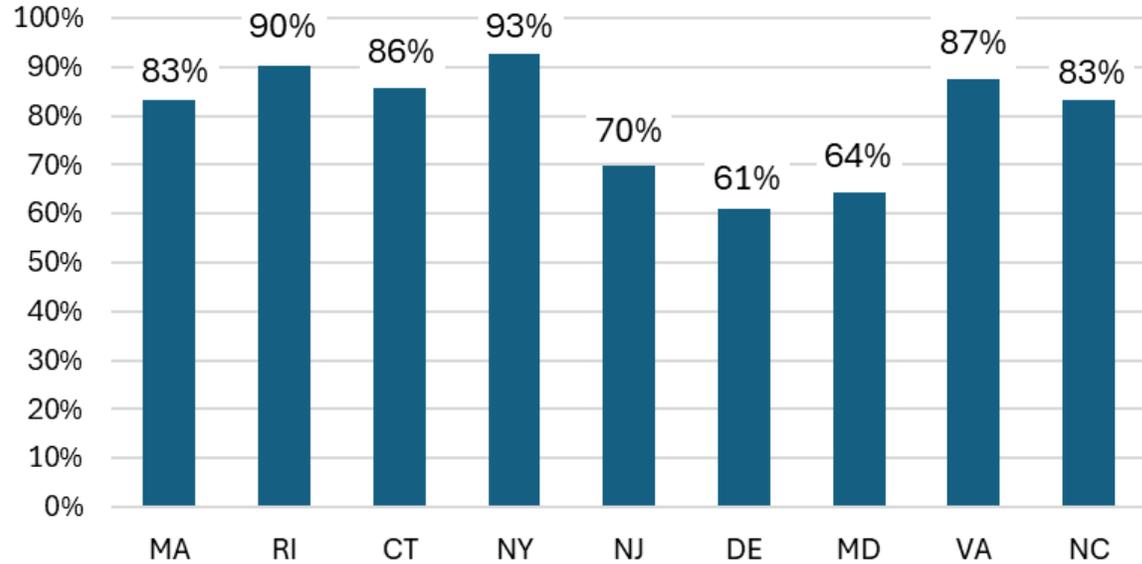
Discard Ratios

The following figures provide information on black sea bass discards relative to overall catch by state and region, as calculated by the RDM for 2026 under status quo measures.

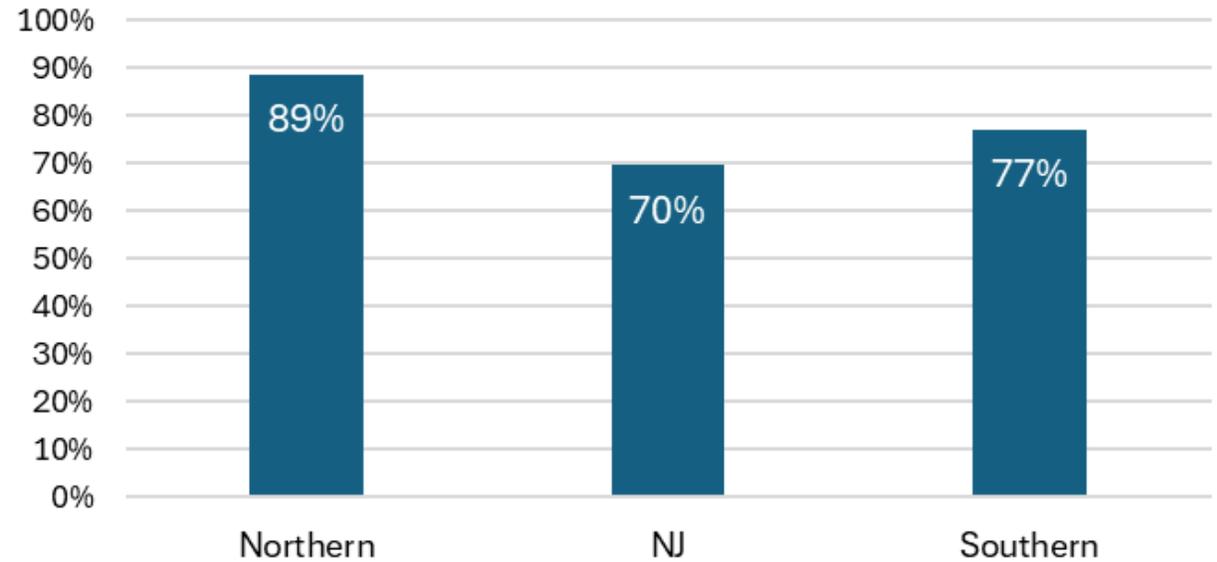


Discard Ratios Continued

Median Discard Rate by State



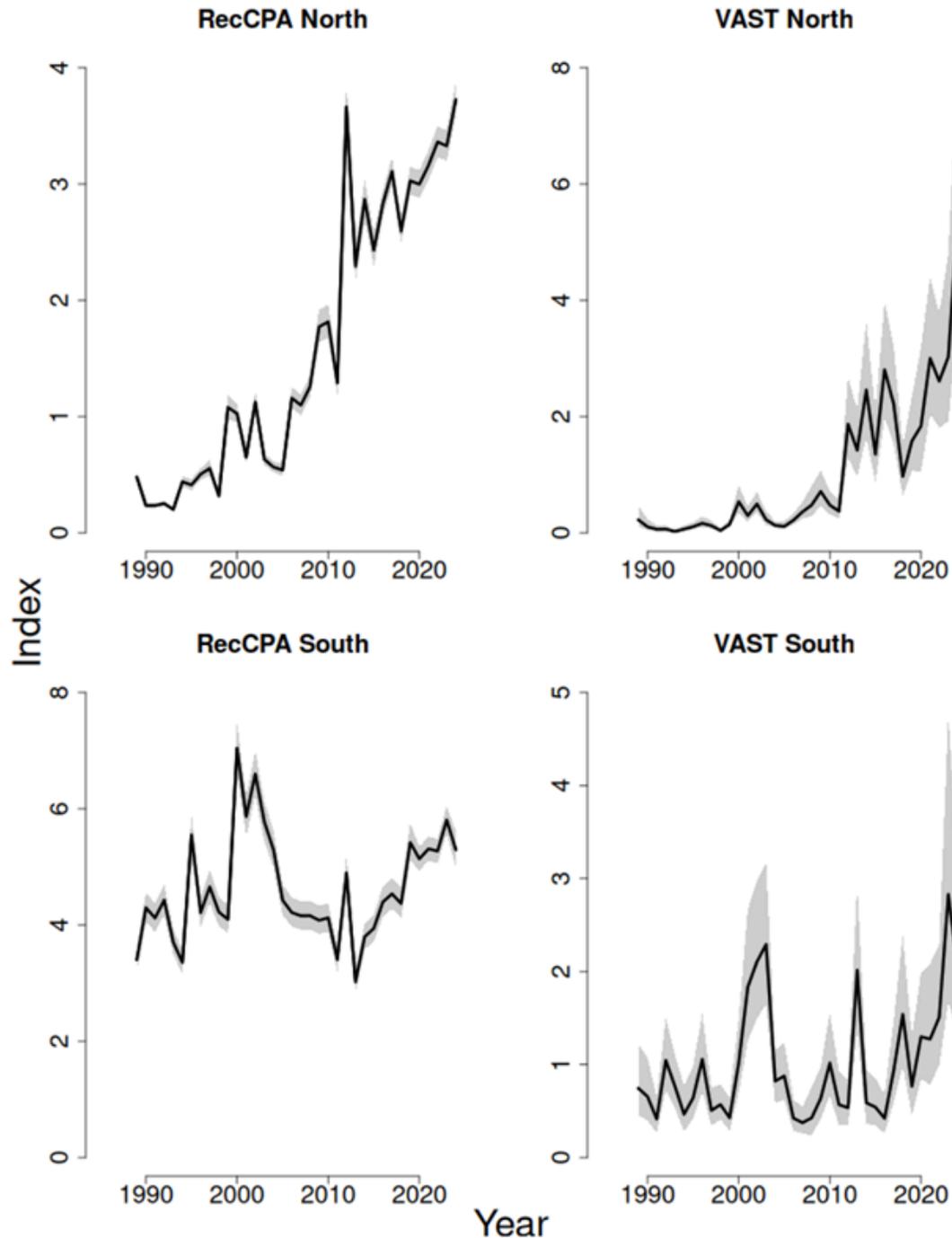
Median Discard Rate by Region



New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Connecticut have the highest black sea bass discard rates, while Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey have the lowest discard rates. When analyzing discards by region, the northern region would have the highest overall percentage of discards, followed by the southern region and New Jersey.

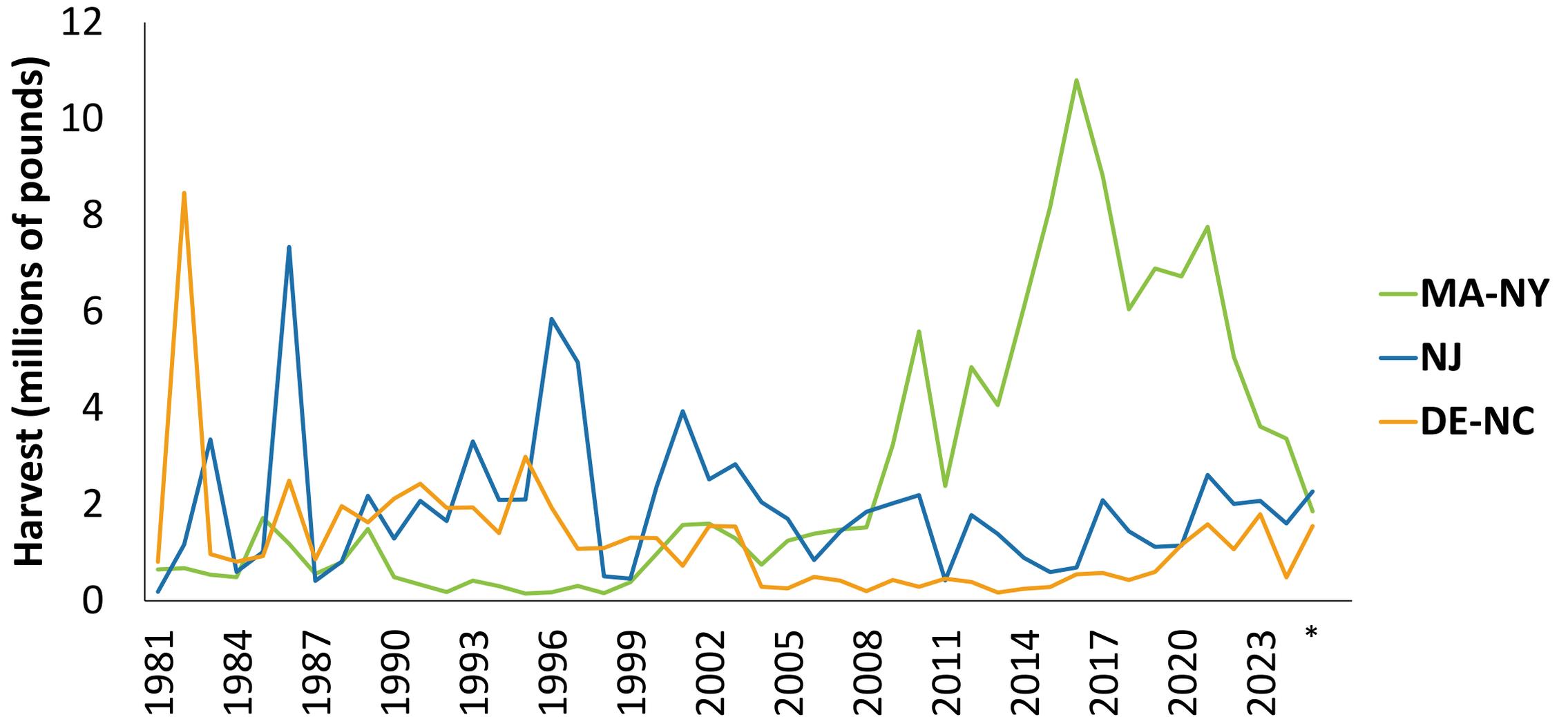
* Values from North Carolina include the entire state's estimated landings and discards.

Coastal Distribution



- Trends in black sea bass abundance in the North and South stock assessment sub-units, with the split in New Jersey approximately at Hudson Canyon
- North sub-unit abundance has been increasing since mid-2000's and is at time series high
- South sub-unit abundance varies without trend, although abundance has increased in last 5-10 years

Coastal Harvest Trends



* 2025 values are preliminary, through wave 5, and do not include NC

Catch Per Trip

| State | Average Catch-Per-Trip | Average Directed Trips |
|-------|------------------------|------------------------|
| MA | 2.89 | 58,116 |
| RI | 3.19 | 44,403 |
| CT | 2.59 | 30,567 |
| NY | 1.59 | 83,977 |
| NJ | 2.00 | 83,243 |
| DE | 1.83 | 9,618 |
| MD | 1.78 | 9,484 |
| VA | 1.61 | 10,388 |
| NC* | 3.69 | 7,254 |

* North Carolina values are statewide

- Average catch-per-trip currently input the RDM
- Average catch-per-trip ranges from 1.59 in NY to 3.69 in NC.
- Average directed trips ranges from 7,254 in NC to 83,977 in NY

Additional Methodology

The TC also reviewed a proposed methodology from the southern region to estimate harvest in MRIP waves that were not previously open to black sea bass recreational harvest.

Need: RDM would underestimate harvest during this period not previously opened. Wanted to be more conservative.

Methodology:

1. Calculate expected increase in harvest when changing from May 15th to May 1st
2. Divide by 14 to arrive at daily rate
3. Use daily harvest rate to estimate increase in harvest if expanding season in April by number of additional days

No objections from the TC on this methodology.

North Carolina Harvest estimated by the RDM

- The RDM was estimating black sea bass harvest for ALL of NC, not just North of Cape Hatteras (current stock boundary)
- Thus, RDM may be overestimating harvest by up to 4% in the last five years.
- **TC recommends continuing to include harvest as is from the RDM to use as a buffer and be risk-adverse**
- *This issue will be resolved in all future iterations of the RDM (i.e., will not include harvest south of Cape Hatteras).*

Proposed Timeline and Workflow

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| February 4 | Board provides direction on how to distribute liberalization |
| February 5 – February 18 | States work within their region to produce regional options |
| COB February 18 | All regional options under consideration must be posted to shared Google Drive |
| February 19 | Run all regional options through R code to determine which combinations are $\leq 20\%$ coastwide |
| February 19 – February 26 | Regionals will finalize the 5 options to be included in their proposals |
| February 26 | Completed proposals due to Commission staff & memo sent to Board with all options under consideration |
| March 5 | Board will approve proposals |

Decision Points

Distribution of the 20% Recreational Black Sea Bass Liberalization:

- a) The liberalization is distributed equally between regions, i.e., each region will work separately to achieve but not exceed a 20% liberalization.
- b) The Board assigns a percent liberalization to a region or regions, and the other regions' percent liberalizations are adjusted accordingly to achieve the 20% coastwide liberalization.
- c) The Board assigns one or more management measures to a region or regions, resulting in de-facto percent liberalization(s), and the other regions' percent liberalizations are adjusted accordingly to achieve the 20% coastwide liberalization.

Does the Board have any objections to the additional proposed methodology or the TC recommendations regarding the workflow and North Carolina harvest?

Questions?

