

## 2021 Recreational Cobia Regulations Change – Council Meeting Briefing

NJ is a *de minimis* participant in the Atlantic Migratory Group (AMG) cobia recreational fishery, managed by ASMFC. The AMG cobia FMP provides that a *de minimis* state can choose its recreational regulatory measures from the following options:

- a) matching the regulations (season, size, bag and vessel limits) of an adjacent or nearest non-*de minimis* state, or
- b) the *de minimis* option offered by the cobia FMP.

Currently, we exercise option *a*, using our nearest non-*de minimis* neighbor Virginia's regulations. However, VA's regulations will be changing in 2021, so NJ must decide whether to maintain consistency with VA or adopt the *de minimis* option. The current regulations are:

Current NJ (VA) Regulations	
Bag Limit	1 fish
Vessel Limit	3 fish
Size	Minimum 40" TL
Season	June 1 – Sept. 30

Under the cobia FMP, non-*de minimis* states (i.e. VA) are required to review management measures every 3 years to evaluate their effectiveness for meeting quota allocation. Results of VA's 3-year review completed this Fall found a recreational harvest overage. VA is therefore adjusting its regulations for 2021-2023, in an effort to reduce recreational harvest to target levels as defined by the recently approved FMP Addendum I. Thus, NJ will also have to adjust its regulations. We can choose to either match the changes by VA or adopt the recently updated Addendum I *de minimis* choice. The following tables summarize our options:

VA Proposed Changes	
Bag Limit	1 fish
Vessel Limit	2 fish
Size	Minimum 40" TL, 1 fish over 50"TL
Season	June 15 – Sept. 15
*Prohibition on Gaffing	

De Minimis Option	
Bag/Vessel Limit	1 fish
Size	Minimum 37" TL
No Seasonal Restrictions	

Of note, VA's *prohibition on gaffing* is not a required regulation to match. We aim to implement these changes as soon as possible, following Council and public feedback.

See below table for recent NJ cobia recreational fishing statistics, based on MRIP estimates:

NJ Recreational Cobia Catch	
2018	
Landings	0 lbs, 0 fish
Released	2,879 fish
2019	
Landings	0 lbs, 0 fish
Released	10,166 fish