



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Meeting Summary

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

ASMFC & MAFMC Webinar
December 15 & 16, 2020

Toni Kerns, ISFMP, or
Tina Berger, Communications
For more information, please contact
the identified individual at 703.842.0740

Press Releases, Meeting Summary and Motions

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JOINT SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP AND BLACK SEA MANAGEMENT BOARD & MAFMC (December 15 & 16, 2020)

Meeting Summary

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass 2021 Recreational Management Measures

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and Bluefish Management Board met jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to develop recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish (for see action under Bluefish Management Board) for 2021.

During the meeting, the Boards and Council discussed the impact of COVID-19 on recreational data collection and fisheries management. In a typical year, preliminary data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for waves 1-4 (January through August) are used to project catch and harvest through the rest of the year. These projections are then compared to the recreational harvest limit (RHL) for the upcoming year to evaluate how harvest may need to be adjusted to prevent RHL overages. However, this year, recreational data collection was severely limited by restrictions related to COVID-19. As a result, projections of 2020 harvest could not be generated for any recreational species.

Scup and Black Sea Bass

The Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management measures for scup and black sea bass in state and federal waters in 2021. For scup, federal waters measures include a 9-inch total length minimum fish size, a 50 fish possession limit, and an open season of January 1 - December 31. For black sea bass, federal waters measures include a minimum size limit of 12.5 inches, a 15 fish possession limit, and open seasons of Feb 1-28 and May 15-Dec 31. The Board and Council discussed the lack of preliminary 2020 recreational catch and harvest estimates as well as the ongoing challenges with incorporating the new MRIP estimates into management. Some members of both bodies voiced concerns regarding the potential to exceed the RHL for these species; however, they ultimately agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to keep status quo measures given the data uncertainties related to COVID-19. The Board and Council emphasized that, similar to last year, this is a short-term approach to address a unique situation and allow for more time to consider how management should adapt to the revised recreational harvest estimates from MRIP. They agreed that it is essential to continue to make progress on the Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment for these species as well as actions associated with the Recreational Reform Initiative to ensure that recreational catch is appropriately constrained to meaningful catch limits.

Summer Flounder

The Board and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management measures for summer flounder in 2021 to achieve, but not exceed, the 2021 RHL of 8.32 million pounds. This includes the use of regional conservation equivalency with the same regions used in 2020. Conservation equivalency allows individual states or multi-state regions to develop customized measures that, in combination, will achieve but not exceed the coastwide RHL. Regional measures under conservation equivalency in 2021 will be the same as in 2020, with the exception of possible minor adjustments to season start and end dates in some states. While the RHL increased by 8% between 2020 and 2021, the Council and Board agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to keep status quo measures given uncertainty associated with the lack of 2020 recreational data.

The Council and Board also maintained the status quo non-preferred coastwide measures, which will be waived in favor of state regulations once conservation equivalency is approved by NOAA Fisheries. These measures include a 4-fish possession limit, a 19-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of May 15 – September 15. The Council and Board also made no changes to the current precautionary default measures (i.e., a 2-fish possession limit, a 20-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of July 1 – August 31) which would be implemented in any state or region that does not adopt measures consistent with the conservation equivalency guidelines.

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment

The Council and Board reviewed the Council's public hearing document and the Commission's draft amendment for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment. They approved both documents for public comment with minor modifications. They also discussed the timeline for this amendment relative to other ongoing actions, including the Recreational Reform Initiative. Some Council and Board members preferred prioritizing the Recreational Reform Initiative while others felt that a response to the revised MRIP estimates through this commercial/recreational allocation amendment should be the higher priority. Ultimately, the Council and Board decided to move forward with public hearings for this allocation amendment. Virtual public hearings for this action will be scheduled to begin in late January or early February 2021.

Black Sea Bass Draft Addendum XXXIII and Council Amendment on Commercial State Allocations

The Council and Board reviewed a Council amendment and Commission Draft Addendum XXXIII, both of which consider modifications to the state allocations of the commercial black sea bass quota, as well as whether the state allocations should be included in the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP). After considering public comments, input from the Advisory Panel, and draft impacts of the management options, the Council and Board agreed to only select alternatives related to federal management of the black sea bass state allocations at this meeting. They voted to postpone a decision on the state allocation percentages to the next joint meeting hosted by the Commission, likely in February 2021.

The Council and Board voted to include the state allocations of the commercial black sea bass quota in the Council's FMP. As they were previously included only in the Commission's FMP, this change means future changes to the allocations will now be considered through a joint action between the Council and Board. If approved, NMFS will be responsible for monitoring state landings and approving interstate transfers. The two bodies also agreed to modify the regulations for federal in-season closures such that the entire commercial fishery will close in-season for all federally permitted vessels and dealers once landings are projected to exceed the coastwide quota plus an additional buffer of up to 5%. The Council and Board will agree to the appropriate buffer for the upcoming year through the specifications process. The additional buffer helps minimize negative economic impacts of coastwide closures on states that have not fully harvested their allocations.

The Council and Board will consider changes to the state allocation percentages at their next joint meeting, which is expected to take place during the Commission's Winter Meeting in February 2021. Given the complexity of the proposed approaches for modifying the state allocation percentages, as well as additional challenges related to COVID-19, the Council and Board felt additional time was needed for deliberation on how and whether to modify the state allocation percentages.

Recreational Reform Initiative

The Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Policy Board met jointly with the Council to receive an update on the Recreational Reform Initiative and discuss next steps. The Recreational Reform Initiative considers improvements to management of the recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. At their last meeting in October, the Council and Policy Board initiated two actions associated with recreational reform: (1) a joint amendment to address recreational sector separation and catch accounting, and (2) a joint framework/addendum to address several other recreational management topics. During this meeting, staff presented a recommendation to address three of the topics originally planned for the framework/addendum through a technical guidance document instead. This would allow the Council and Commission to more efficiently address the various recreational issues associated with the Recreational Reform Initiative. They also reviewed draft timelines for development of the technical guidance document, framework/addendum, and amendment. After discussing considerations related to staff workload given other ongoing actions for these species, Council and Board agreed to further discuss the Recreational Reform Initiative during their next meeting.

For more information on the Commission's actions regarding summer flounder and scup, please contact Dustin Colson Leaning at dleaning@asmfc.org, and for more information on the Commission's actions regarding black sea bass, please contact Savannah Lewis at slweis@asmfc.org.

Motions

Scup 2021 Recreational Specifications

Move to maintain status quo state and federal waters recreational measures for scup in 2021, including a federal waters minimum size limit of 9 inches, a 50 fish federal waters possession limit, and open federal waters season of January 1 through December 31.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Fote and seconded by Ms. Meserve. Motion carries by consent without abstention.

Council: Cimino/Risi (19/0/0). Motion carries

Black Sea Bass 2021 Recreational Specifications

Move to maintain status quo state and federal waters recreational measures for black sea bass in 2021, including a federal waters minimum size limit of 12.5 inches, a 15 fish federal waters possession limit, and open federal waters seasons of Feb 1-28 and May 15-Dec 31.

Council: Lenox/Bolen (18/0/1)

Board: Motion made by Mr. Fote and seconded by Mr. Clark. (10/0/0/1)

Motion carries

Summer Flounder 2021 Recreational Specifications

Move to adopt status quo management based on conservation equivalency, utilizing the same regional management structure and measures established for 2020, for 2021 summer flounder recreational management, with non-preferred coastwide measures including a 19-inch minimum size, 4 fish possession limit, and open season from May 15-September 15. In addition, the precautionary default measures would include a 20-inch minimum size, 2 fish possession limit, and open season from July 1-August 31.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Mr. Borden. Motion carries by consent without abstention.

Council: Davidson/Cimino. Motion carries (20/0/0).

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment
Move to approve the Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment public hearing document and Commission draft amendment document for public comment as modified today.

Council: DiLernia/Duval (15/5/0)

Board: Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Dr. Davis (10/2/0/0).

Motion carries

Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment and Draft Addendum XXXIII
Move that the Council and Board adopt option B under 3.2.2 as the preferred alternative (coastwide federal in-season closure at quota plus a buffer of up to 5%).

Council: Pentony/DiLernia (18/0/0)

Board: Motion made by Mr. Borden and seconded by Ms. Meserve (11/0/0/0).

Motion carries

Main Motion

Move to adopt option B under 3.2.1 (allocations in both FMPs) and sub-option B1 (states only pay back overages if coastwide quota is exceeded).

Council: Cimino/Hughes

Board: Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Batsavage.

Motion to Postpone

Move to postpone until the February 2021 Commission meeting.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. Fote.

Council: deFur/DiLernia (10/10/0)

Motion to postpone fails for lack of Council majority.

Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute option A (allocations remain only in Commission FMP) for option B under 3.2.1.

Board: Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Mr. Hasbrouck.

Council: Farnham/Pentony (5/15/0)

Motion to substitute fails for lack of Council majority.

Main Motion

Move to adopt option B under 3.2.1 (allocations in both FMPs) and sub-option B1 (states only pay back overages if coastwide quota is exceeded).

Council: (15/5/0)

Board: (6/5/0/0)

Motion carries.

Move to postpone further action until the next joint meeting hosted by the Commission.

Council: Bolen/deFur. Motion carries (20/0/0).

Board: Motion made by Dr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Fote. Motion carries by consent without abstention.

BLUEFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD (December 15, 2020)

Meeting Summary

The Commission's Bluefish Management Board and Council agreed to maintain status quo recreational management measures for bluefish in state and federal waters in 2021. These measures include a coastwide 3-fish and 5-fish bag limit for the private and for-hire anglers, respectively. The Council and Bluefish Board discussed the lack of preliminary 2020 recreational catch and harvest estimates, the timing of when the current bag limits went into effect (mid-2020), as well as the ongoing issues surrounding incorporating the new MRIP estimates into management. Additionally, the Council and Bluefish Board acknowledged that bluefish is entering a rebuilding plan and is scheduled for a management track assessment in June 2021. Given these uncertainties and future bluefish developments, the Council and Bluefish Board agreed with the Monitoring Committee recommendation to maintain status quo measures for 2021.

The Bluefish Management Board also met separately to receive a Technical Committee (TC) report on recommendations to improve age and recreational angler release length frequency data sampling. In response, the Board initiated Draft Addendum II to Amendment 1 of the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan in order to make adjustments to the existing age data sampling program consistent with the recommendations included in the TC's report. The goal of the addendum is to expand the collection of age samples across more states and to update the spring and fall targets to better reflect seasonal bluefish abundance. In addition, the Board discussed the importance of expanding the recreational release length frequency data collection effort along the coast which provides valuable biological information for the stock assessments. In recognition that this data would be provided by anglers that catch more than just bluefish, the Board agreed that there would be efficiencies in making this a multi-species effort. Collecting biological data from recreational releases is crucial for other recreationally important species that the Commission manages. As such, the Bluefish Board decided to forward a recommendation to the Commission's ISFMP Policy Board to discuss this matter further at their next meeting in February 2021. Several Board members agreed that it would be beneficial to specifically identify what types of data should be collected, what species should be prioritized, and what type of data collection program should be developed. The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and the Assessment Science Committee were identified as key technical groups that could be best suited to collaborate on the development of a recreational release data collection program.

For more information on the Commission's actions regarding bluefish, please contact Dustin Colson Leaning at dleaning@asmfc.org.

Motions

Bluefish 2021 Recreational Specifications

Move to maintain status quo state and federal waters recreational measures for bluefish in 2021, including a 3-fish and 5-fish bag limit for private and for-hire anglers, respectively. This includes conservation equivalency measures for Georgia state waters, which includes a 15 fish bag limit, minimum size of 12 inches, and a closed season of March 1st through April 30th.

Board: Motion made by Dr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Clark (14/0/0/0).

Council: Pentony/Risi (16/2/0)

Motion carries.

ASMFC Bluefish Board Motions

Move to initiate an addendum to consider adjustments to the bluefish biological monitoring program consistent with the recommendations outlined in the September 28, 2020 technical committee memo to the Board.

Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Ms. Meserve. Motion carries by unanimous consent.

Move to recommend the ISFMP Policy Board task the Assessment Science Committee to work with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program to develop a comprehensive program for reporting released bluefish and other recreationally important species the Commission manages.

Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Ms. Patterson. Motion carries by unanimous consent.

JOINT INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM POLICY BOARD & MAFMC (December 16, 2020)

Meeting Summary

In October 2020, the Council and the Commission's ISFMP Policy Board initiated a joint framework/addendum, as well as a joint amendment to address several priority topics related to management of the recreational summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries. During their December 2020 joint meeting, they reviewed a staff recommendation to develop some topics through a technical guidance document, rather than a framework/addendum. This would allow the Council and Board to more efficiently develop three concurrent actions associated with the Recreational Reform Initiative. Both bodies also reviewed draft timelines for simultaneously developing a technical guidance document, a framework/addendum, and an amendment. After discussing considerations related to staff workload given other ongoing actions for these species, Council and Board agreed to further discuss the Recreational Reform Initiative during their next meeting.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, ISFMP Director, at tkerns@asmfc.org.

Motions

No motions made.