



**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council**  
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Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** September 23, 2015  
**To:** Chris Moore, Executive Director  
**From:** Kiley Dancy, Staff  
**Subject:** Reconsideration of Black Sea Bass ABCs for 2016-2017

On October 7, the Council is scheduled to reconsider their 2016-2017 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations for black sea bass in light of updated advice from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The revised SSC recommendations and their basis are described in the September SSC meeting report memo dated September 22, 2015.<sup>1</sup> The context for this discussion is briefly outlined below.

The impetus for reconsideration of the previous ABC recommendation is a new methodology for recommending catch limits for stocks where the overfishing limit (OFL) cannot be specified given the current state or knowledge ("Level 4" stocks).

Given the lack of a peer reviewed and accepted stock assessment and the lack of an accepted OFL for black sea bass, the SSC has been using a "constant catch" approach to recommending ABCs since 2010. In January 2013, at the request of the Council, the SSC reconsidered the constant catch ABC in place at the time (4.50 million lb or 2,041 mt). Although the SSC concluded that there was no new information that would justify a change in the assessment level or to the constant catch approach, they also indicated that the previous level of constant catch was overly conservative, and recommended an increase to 5.50 million lb (2,494 mt).<sup>2</sup> In the fall of 2013, and again in the summer of 2014, the SSC, Council, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Black Sea Bass Board reviewed this ABC for 2014 and 2015, and concluded that there was no new information at the time upon which to base any changes.

In late 2014, members of the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee and Commission's Technical Committee began working on alternative, dynamic options for deriving ABC recommendations for Level 4 stocks, with the goal of working with the SSC to identify methods that would

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<sup>1</sup> Found in Tab 3 of the October briefing book for spiny dogfish specifications, or at <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2015/sept-16-17>.

<sup>2</sup> See the January 2013 SSC meeting report: <http://www.mafmc.org/s/SSC-Meeting-Report-January-30-2013.pdf>.

be an improvement over the constant catch approach. In March 2015, the SSC received a presentation<sup>3</sup> from Jason McNamee, a Technical Committee member, describing a Data Limited Toolkit with Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) capabilities that appeared promising for use with stocks that do not have a specified OFL. At this meeting, the SSC encouraged further development of the approach and identified an SSC subcommittee to advise a subgroup of the Technical Committee on this work.

At their July 2015 meeting, the SSC received an update on the development of these approaches for black sea bass, based on work conducted by Jason McNamee, Gavin Fay, and Steven Cadrin.<sup>4</sup> The SSC committed to further evaluating the proposed approach, but requested additional review by a subcommittee of the SSC prior to using this work as the basis for ABC recommendations. In the interim, the SSC recommended a continuation of the previous constant catch ABC for 2016 and 2017 (5.50 million lb) as a short-term measure, with the intention of revisiting this recommendation in September 2015 after subcommittee peer review of the alternative approach.

On September 10, the Scientific Uncertainty Subcommittee of the SSC met to conduct a peer review of the Data Limited Techniques approach as applied to black sea bass.<sup>5</sup> The following week, the full SSC met to review the recommendations of the subcommittee and reconsider the 2016-2017 black sea bass ABC recommendation. The SSC's revised recommendations and their basis are described in the SSC meeting report dated September 22. In summary, the SSC revised their ABC recommendation for 2016 and 2017 to **6.67 million lb (3,024 mt)**.

After the Council considers this revised advice on October 7, the Commission's Board may also revisit the previous ABC recommendation at their next meeting, in November 2015. Staff will work with the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office to package any revised recommendations for implementation as soon as possible for the 2016 fishing year.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2015/march-18-19>.

<sup>4</sup> Materials available at: <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2015/july-21-23>.

<sup>5</sup> The Data Limited Techniques final report, code, presentation, and SSC subcommittee peer review report can be found at: <http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2015/sept-16-17>.