



MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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**Mid-Atlantic Council Initiates Action in Response to
Overage of Black Sea Bass Catch Limit**

On December 15, 2016, at their meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council initiated a framework action to review and modify accountability measures (AMs) for the commercial black sea bass fishery. The Council initiated this action in response to new information from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) indicating that commercial catch in 2015 exceeded the annual catch limit due to higher than anticipated discards. On December 21, NMFS announced a rule which reduced the 2017 commercial quota by 34% in response to this overage, as required by the Council's AMs.

AMs are measures that are implemented if annual catch targets are exceeded and are intended to mitigate the negative biological impacts of such overages. Commercial AMs for black sea bass currently require pound for pound paybacks through quota deductions in following years, regardless of the circumstances of the overages. The Council initiated a framework action to consider adding flexibility in the commercial AMs based on stock status. The Council intends to develop and implement this framework by mid-2017.

Black sea bass management measures for 2017 may also be modified as a result of a new benchmark stock assessment, which was peer-reviewed this month. According to this assessment, black sea bass are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will meet in January 2017 to review the assessment and determine if it can be used to inform the Council's management decisions. If so, the SSC will recommend acceptable biological catch limits for black sea bass for 2017-2019. At their February 2017 meeting in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the Council plans to recommend commercial and recreational black sea bass catch and landings limits for 2017-2019 based on this new information. These recommendations are expected to result in a revised 2017 commercial quota that could reduce the magnitude of the reduction needed to address the overage of the 2015 annual catch target.