



## February 2017 Council Meeting Report

February 14 – 16, 2017

Kitty Hawk, North Carolina

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's February 2017 meeting in Kitty Hawk, NC. Presentations, briefing materials, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's website at [www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2017](http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2017).

### Black Sea Bass Management

#### **2017-2019 Black Sea Bass Specifications**

The Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) approved revised specifications for the 2017 black sea bass fishing year as well as specifications for the 2018 fishing year. The revised specifications are based on the results of the 2016 benchmark stock assessment, which found the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for black sea bass in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Please note that specifications for 2018 may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

Year	Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)	Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL)	Commercial Mesh Size	Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)
2016	2.70	11"	4.5"	2.82
2017	4.12	11"	4.5"	4.29
2018	3.52	11"	4.5"	3.66

The approved limits are consistent with the recommendations of the Council's Science and Statistical Committee. The Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval. The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore).

#### **Black Sea Bass Recreational Specifications**

The Council and Commission maintained status quo recreational measures in federal waters and in state waters from Delaware through North Carolina for 2017. These include a 12.5-inch TL minimum size, 15 fish possession limit, and open seasons from May 15 - September 21 and October 22 - December 31 (note: measures for federal waters are not final until approved by NOAA). Northern region states (Massachusetts through New Jersey) have the flexibility to continue 2016 management measures or develop new measures that will collectively constrain harvest to the 2017 RHL. Recognizing the favorable stock condition and the difficulty of precisely projecting the impacts of recreational management measures on overall harvest, the Commission and Council maintained status quo measures for 2017. Preliminary 2016 recreational harvest is estimated at 4.67 million pounds, roughly 380,000 pounds above the 2017 RHL. As additional 2016 harvest estimates become available, the Commission may review these data and consider the potential impacts to achieving the 2017 RHL.

#### **Black Sea Bass Commercial Accountability Measures Framework**

The Council met for the first framework meeting to consider modifying the black sea bass commercial accountability measures (AMs). The framework was initiated in December 2016 to consider adding flexibility in the commercial accountability measures for black sea bass based on stock status, similar to the AMs in place

for the Council's recreational species. The framework presents alternatives to the existing AMs with a focus on evaluating and accounting for commercial discards with options for both 1) evaluation of ACL overages and 2) responses to non-landing overages to account for the latest information and current stock status.

The Council considered a suggestion to add an alternative which would also evaluate commercial landing overage AMs based on stock status. After discussion, the Council decided to move forward with the original range of measures proposed by staff. The Council also considered adding summer flounder and scup to the framework but decided to hold off adding these species until later to determine if black sea bass AMs will be implemented in 2017. Depending upon the timing of that determination, staff will continue to move forward with black sea bass only framework or incorporate the additional species and bring the framework back for Council consideration at a future 2017 meeting.

### Summer Flounder Amendment

As requested at the December 2016 joint meeting, the Council and Board received preliminary guidance on which recreational issues under the Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment could potentially be addressed through a framework action. The Council and Board then revisited a tabled motion from the December meeting, and decided not to initiate a recreational framework action at this time. However, staff will continue to work with the ASMFC technical committee to address summer flounder recreational issues. As analyses are completed, those results will be made available for possible consideration by the Council in framework action.

### Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

The Council approved a hearing document for public hearings on the Squid Amendment. This could reduce the number of moratorium permits in both the longfin and Illex squid fisheries and create a new limited access incidental longfin squid permit. As part of this action, the Council is also re-evaluating the Trimester II quota rollover and closure provisions. Public hearings are anticipated in April 2017.

### River Herring and Shad

The River Herring and Shad (RH/S) Committee met to discuss criteria to assess programs in river herring and shad conservation. The Council tasked the Committee, working with Council and NMFS staff, to develop measurable criteria by which the Council will be better able to decide on management actions related to RH/S. Council staff will work with NMFS staff to develop draft criteria, which will be brought back to the RH/S Committee for further development.

### Other Topics

#### ***National Marine Sanctuary Nomination Process***

Paul Ticco gave a presentation on a new bottom-up approach for nominating potential National Marine Sanctuary sites. The Council also had an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on how fishing activities are managed in sanctuaries.

#### ***Black Sea Bass Research Update***

The Council received a presentation from Brad Stevens on black sea bass research being conducted at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. He provided an overview of several projects which address a range of topics, including black sea bass abundance, behavior, traps, habitat, and diet.

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## Next Meeting

**Tuesday, April 11, 2017 – Thursday, April 13, 2017**

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