May 2017 Council Meeting Report

May 10, 2017
Alexandria, VA

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council during a joint meeting with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) on May 10, 2017 in Alexandria, VA. Additional details regarding Board actions are included in the Commission’s meeting summary, available at http://www.asmfc.org/files/Meetings/2017SpringMeeting/2017SpringMeetingSummary.pdf.


Scup Quota Period Framework
The Council and Board discussed a draft framework and addendum to modify the dates of the commercial scup quota periods. After considering public comments and recommendations of the technical committee, both the Council and Board recommended moving the month of October from the summer quota period to the winter II quota period. All other management measures would remain unchanged. Commercial possession limits vary by quota period. Moving October from the summer quota period to the winter II quota period would have the effect of increasing the commercial scup possession limit during October. This is expected to help the commercial fishery more efficiently reach, but not exceed, the annual commercial quota. Commercial landings have been 20-47% below the annual commercial quota since 2011.

Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment
The Council and Board reviewed a draft range of alternatives for commercial fishery issues within the Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment, with the goal of prioritizing and providing feedback on the range of issues to be addressed. The Council and Board determined that moving forward, staff should prioritize analysis of the following issues: 1) permits and latent effort, 2) commercial allocation, and 3) landings flexibility. Other issues, including safe harbor policies, commercial data collection and monitoring, and commercial summer flounder discards, are currently or will be taken up through other actions and initiatives, including possible Commission-only actions, Council-only actions, Greater Atlantic Regional Office initiatives, and other projects. Staff will continue to work with the commercial working group, the Fishery Management Action Team, the Demersal Committee, and the Board to further refine and analyze the alternatives. The Council and Board will consider a refined range of alternatives for the prioritized issues at the August joint meeting.

Black Sea Bass Wave 1 Fishery
The Council and Commission reviewed a white paper prepared by Council staff that evaluated the Wave 1 (January – February) recreational black sea bass fishery, the potential re-opening of the Wave 1 fishery in 2018, and its potential implications for the recreational fishery that occurs the rest of the year. This white paper was developed following the joint meeting in February in which the Council and Commission voted to consider an experimental Wave 1 black sea bass fishery for federally permitted for-hire vessels operating under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP). The Council and Commission decided against re-opening under an EFP for only federally permitted vessels; instead, the Council and Commission agreed to initiate a framework that would consider re-opening the Wave 1 fishery to any recreational vessel, provided that they obtain and adhere to any required conditions outlined under a Letter of Authorization issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Council and Commission will continue to discuss this framework action at meetings later this year.