



Joint Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and Bluefish Board

April 30, 2018
Arlington, VA

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) on Monday, April 30 to consider: (1) joint approval of a Public Hearing Document (PHD) for the Summer Flounder Commercial Issues Amendment, (2) a draft discussion document regarding a strategic plan for reforming recreational black sea bass management; (3) draft alternatives for the recreational management framework and addendum for all three species; and (4) preliminary harvest estimates from the February 2018 recreational black sea bass fishery. The Council also met jointly with the ASMFC's Bluefish Management Board to review a scoping document for the Bluefish Allocation Amendment.

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered during this meeting. Briefing materials, presentations, and audio recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/april-30-2018>. Additional meeting information is also available on the Commission's website at <http://www.asmfc.org/home/2017-spring-meeting>.

Summer Flounder Commercial Issues Amendment Public Hearing Document

The Council and Board approved a joint public hearing document for the Summer Flounder Commercial Issues Amendment. This amendment proposes potential modifications to the commercial summer flounder fishery, as well as the existing fishery management plan objectives for summer flounder. The hearing document serves as an abridged version of the Council and Board's full amendment documents. The Board approved their version of the draft amendment at this meeting, while the Council will consider approval of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) at their June meeting. This amendment was initiated in 2014 in response to stakeholder concerns with summer flounder management, and considers four issues:

- 1. Requalifying criteria for federal commercial moratorium permits to address latent effort in the fishery** – The amendment includes options to reduce the number of eligible commercial federal moratorium permits by implementing requalifying criteria for existing permits.
- 2. Modifying commercial quota allocation** – The amendment proposes several options for revising the current commercial allocation, which has been in place since 1993 and is based on 1980-1989 landings data.
- 3. Adding commercial landings flexibility as a framework issue in the Council's FMP** – This action does not consider implementing landings flexibility policies at this time but considers allowing the Council to implement landings flexibility through a future framework action instead of an amendment. Landings flexibility policies would give commercial vessels greater freedom to land or possess summer flounder in the state(s) of their choice.
- 4. Revise the FMP objectives for summer flounder** – This amendment proposes revisions to the current FMP objectives for summer flounder management, to provide more meaningful and up to date guidance to managers.

Public hearings are tentatively scheduled for September 2018. The Council and Board will determine the public comment period as well as the schedule of public hearings following the June Council meeting. Final action on this amendment is expected at the December 2018 Council Meeting. Additional information about this amendment is available at <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/summer-flounder-amendment>.

Strategic Plan for Reforming Recreational Black Sea Bass Management

A draft discussion document on reforming recreational black sea bass management was developed by the Board Chair and Vice-Chair in response to various concerns with the current recreational management program. The draft document is aimed at providing a starting point for discussion on the development of a comprehensive reform strategy. At the meeting, the four major topic areas included in the draft document were presented and briefly discussed. The Council and Board offered support for continued development of the strategy over the next few months, first through direct input from members, then through a joint working group process.

Draft Alternatives for the Recreational Management Framework and Addendum

The Council and Board considered draft alternatives for the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Recreational Management Framework and Addendum, initiated at the December 2017 joint meeting. After considering the recommendations of the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) and the Council's Demersal Committee and a subset of the Board, the Board and Council approved draft alternatives for the Framework and Addendum. The draft alternatives include options for the use of conservation equivalency for the recreational black sea bass fishery, conservation equivalency rollover for summer flounder and black sea bass, the option to use slot limits in recreational fisheries for all three species, and Block Island Sound transit provisions. The transit provision alternatives include two alternative transit zone areas which could apply to recreational fisheries only, or to both commercial and recreational fisheries for all three species, depending on the alternatives selected. The Board and Council considered but chose not to include alternatives for evaluating and modifying recreational management measures based on a comparison of catch to the Annual Catch Limit in this action; however, this issue will be discussed by the working group formed to further develop the black sea bass strategic planning document (see above). A draft public hearing document will be presented at the Council and Board's August joint meeting, with final action tentatively scheduled for December 2018. Additional information about this framework is available at <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/sfsbsb-recreational-management-fw>.

Preliminary February 2018 Recreational Black Sea Bass Harvest Estimates

The Board and Council received a report on the preliminary harvest estimates for the February 2018 black sea bass recreational fishery. Virginia and North Carolina were the only states to participate in the fishery, and the total harvest between both states is estimated between 4,826 and 5,206 pounds of black sea bass.

Bluefish Allocation Amendment

The Council also met with the ASMFC Bluefish Board to review and approve a scoping and public information document for the Bluefish Allocation Amendment. This action is being developed to review and possibly revise the Fishery Management Plan goals and objectives, allocation between the commercial and recreational fisheries, the commercial allocations to the states, and the transfer processes. There was some discussion of whether the scoping process should be delayed until after the new MRIP numbers are released. This was previously discussed at the December 2017 meeting when the Council and Board agreed to move forward with the amendment without any specific requirements regarding timing of scoping. Staff reiterated that the objective of scoping is to survey the public on issues that should be included in the amendment and that alternatives will not be developed until a later date. The Council and Board recommended a few minor changes to the scoping document and voted to approve the modified document for public scoping hearings. Updates and additional information about this action are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>. A schedule of scoping hearings and link to the final scoping document will be posted on the Council and ASMFC webpages in the coming weeks.