Atlantic Bluefish

Joint Council/Board Meeting
May 6, 2020
Outline & Objectives

- Amendment Goal
- Timeline
- Review public comment summary
- Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) summary and associated action items
- Board & Council discussion on Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Draft Amendment
  - Address each action item
Amendment Goal

The goal of this amendment is to review and possibly revise the allocation between the commercial and recreational fisheries and the commercial allocations to the states. This action is needed to rebuild the bluefish stock, avoid overages, achieve optimum yield, prevent overfishing, and reduce the need for quota transfers.
Supplemental Scoping

- Comment period Feb. 6 – Mar. 17
- 11 hearings (MA-FL)
- 273 comments

Issues 1-6

1. FMP Goals and Objectives
2. Commercial/Recreational Sector Allocations
3. Commercial Allocations to the States
4. Transfers (rec. to comm. and commercial state-to-state)
5. Rebuilding Plan
6. Other
The goal of the management plan is to conserve the bluefish resource along the Atlantic coast.

- Objective: Increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery.
- Objective: Provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish.
- Objective: Provide for cooperation among the coastal states, the various regional marine fishery management councils, and federal agencies involved along the coast to enhance the management of bluefish throughout its range.
- Objective: Prevent recruitment overfishing.
- Objective: Reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.
FMP Goals and Objectives

Suggested Revisions:
- Account for the needs of the bait/snapper fishery
- Emphasize the importance of shore-based fishing
- Encompass environmental conditions/shifting baselines
- Maximize abundance
- Reflect the value of bluefish to the recreational fishery
  - Intrinsic value of a released fish
  - Catch-and-release

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1: FMP Goals and Objectives</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports status quo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals and objectives should be re-evaluated and/or revised</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports maintaining one or more of the current objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bait/Snapper fishery is important</td>
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Commercial/Recreational Allocation

- Comments for status quo
  - MRIP data is unreliable
  - No reduction to commercial quota
  - No change to allocations so long as the ability to transfer quota remains
- Update time series (e.g. Most recent 10 years)
- Several comments support the use of catch-based allocations
Commercial Allocations to the States

- Opinion split by the north-south divide
- Comments in support of status quo:
  - Status quo until stock rebuilt
  - Prefer to utilize transfers rather than reallocate
- Comments in support of reallocation:
  - Base allocation on last 10 years of landings
  - States repeatedly underutilizing quota should face reductions
  - Reallocate quota to the northern states
Quota Transfer Processes

- Comments in opposition to sector transfer:
  - Sector transfers increase fishing pressure on the stock
  - Goes against the catch and release nature of the fishery
  - No transfers during rebuilding
- New transfer suggestion: make sector transfers bidirectional
- Majority support state-to-state transfers
  - State-to-state transfers offer flexibility and economic opportunity
Rebuilding Plan

- Two points of view on rebuilding
  - Rebuild as quickly as possible
  - Rebuild the stock over 10 years to allow more fishing to occur in the short term
- Why is $SSB_{MSY}$ at a level the fishery has never been before?
Updated Stock Status

Atlantic bluefish SSB and Recruitment

- SSB (MT)
- Recruitment (millions)

Legend:
- Recruitment
- SSB
- SSBMSY
- SSBThreshold
Updated Stock Status

Atlantic bluefish total catch and Fishing Mortality

- Total Catch (MT)
- Year: 1985 to 2017
- Categories: Rec Land, Rec Disc, Comm Land, F, FMSY

The graph shows the total catch of Atlantic bluefish from 1985 to 2017, with separate bars for different categories such as Rec Land, Rec Disc, and Comm Land. The line graph indicates the fishing mortality (F) and the fishing mortality at sustainable yield (FMSY).
Other Issues

- For-hire sector separation or allowance
  - Many other stakeholders oppose a separate for-hire sector or allowance
- Majority support increasing the bag limit
- Large variety of “other” comments
Issue 6 Continued

- Additional comments given under issue 6
  - Add a minimum size limit
  - Identify the intrinsic value of fish left in the water
  - Emphasize the catch-and-release aspect of the fishery
  - Maximize abundance
  - Address the discard mortality assumption rates
  - Ecosystem based management
  - More research on stock dynamics needed
  - Close the fishery until it is rebuilt
  - Georgia DNR – *de minimis* request
For-Hire Sector Separation

- Public comments included two methods of for-hire sector separation
  - For-hire sub-ACL
  - For-hire “allowance”

- Reasons for:
  - Catch a small portion of overall recreational catch
  - For-hire fleet is better managed under VTR data
  - Potential for more consistent management measures

- Reasons against:
  - Is it fair and equitable?
  - Complicates enforcement
The FMAT met via webinar on April 13th

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role/Expertise</th>
<th>Agency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Seeley</td>
<td>FMAT Chair</td>
<td>MAFMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danielle Palmer</td>
<td>Protected Resources</td>
<td>NMFS GARFO</td>
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<td>David Stevenson</td>
<td>Habitat Conservation</td>
<td>NMFS GARFO</td>
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<td>Cynthia Ferrio</td>
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<td>Ashleigh McCord</td>
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<td>Tony Wood</td>
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<td>Matthew Cutler</td>
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<td>Samantha Werner</td>
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<td>Dustin Colson Leaning</td>
<td>Plan Coordinator</td>
<td>ASMFC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Celestino</td>
<td>Bluefish Technical Committee</td>
<td>NJDFW</td>
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Issue 1: FMP Goals and Objectives

- Suggested approach
  - Continued revision through Council/Board & FMAT recommendations
  - Draft Amendment will contain revised and status quo “options”
Issue 1 Action Items: FMP Goals and Objectives

- Are there important aspects of the fishery not currently captured by the proposed goals and objectives?
- Should a goal/objective be removed entirely?
- Are there any recommended revisions?
Proposed FMP Goals and Objectives

- **Goal 1.** Conserve the bluefish resource through stakeholder engagement to maintain sustainable recreational fishing and commercial harvest.
  - **Objective 1:** Ensure the biological sustainability of the bluefish resource in order to maintain a sustainable bluefish fishery.
    - **Strategy 1.1:** Achieve and maintain a sustainable spawning stock biomass and rate of fishing mortality.
    - **Strategy 1.2:** Promote catch and release within the recreational fishery.
  - **Objective 2:** Maintain effective coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council, Commission, and member states to support the development and implementation of management measures.
    - **Strategy 2.1:** Promote compliance and effective enforcement of regulations.
    - **Strategy 2.2:** Promote science, monitoring, and data collection that support and enhance effective ecosystem-based management of the bluefish resource under changing environmental conditions.

- **Goal 2.** Provide access to the fishery throughout the management unit that reflects constituent preferences.

- **Goal 3.** Balance the needs and priorities of different user groups and optimize economic and social benefits from utilization of the bluefish resource.
### Issue 2: Commercial/Recreational Allocations

- **The original FMP (1990)**
  - 80% recreational and 20% commercial of the ACL

- **Amendment 1 (1999)**
  - 83% recreational and 17% commercial of the ACL
  - Developed from 1981-1989 data

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<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>31%</td>
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Issue 2: Commercial/Recreational Allocation Action Items

- Which time series should be considered for further development?
- FMAT recommends minimum of 10-year time series
- FMAT recommends catch-based allocations
  - Should both catch and landings-based allocations be further developed?

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<tr>
<td>Catch-Based</td>
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Issue 2: Commercial/Recreational Allocation: Discards Action Items

- There are currently two methods of calculating recreational discards for management use.
  - NEFSC method
    - Used in stock assessments
  - MRIP method (used to set the 2020-2021 specs)
    - Used by GARFO for catch accounting

- Which method should be used in developing catch-based allocations?
What other approaches should be developed for consideration?

- Trigger-based approach
- Socioeconomic
- Any others?
**Issue 3: Commercial Allocations to the States**

- Amendment 1 (1999)
  - Developed from 1981-1989 data
  - Trends in state harvest have shifted, especially with annual state-to-state transfers in recent years

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<th>MA</th>
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<th>NY</th>
<th>NJ</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>GA</th>
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*Color indicates average state share is more than one standard deviation below or above allocation % in FMP*

Dealer Data
Issue 3: Commercial Allocations to the States **Action Items**

- Which time series should be considered?
- Should both catch and landings-based allocations be further developed?
  - FMAT recommends the use of landings-based allocations
- Commercial discards are considered negligible in the stock assessment
### Issue 4: Commercial State-to-State Transfers

- **FMAT recommends status quo**
  - Very useful tool for adaptive management
  - If removed, ensure transfers are added as a frameworkable action

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Issue 4: Commercial State-to-State Transfers

Action Items

- Should this management tool be further developed?
- If so, how?
- Do not adjust this provision?
## Issue 4: Sector Transfer (Rec to Comm)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>RHL</th>
<th>Comm. Quota (No Transfer)</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Comm. Quota (With Transfer)</th>
<th>Comm. Landings</th>
<th>Pounds of Transfer Used</th>
<th>% of Transfer used*</th>
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<td>9,580,000</td>
<td>7,499,868</td>
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<td>3,150,000</td>
<td>9,580,000</td>
<td>8,049,445</td>
<td>1,619,445</td>
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<td>6,432,102</td>
<td>1,865,102</td>
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<td>4,161,000</td>
<td>10,500,000</td>
<td>6,746,753</td>
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<td>5,085,000</td>
<td>10,500,000</td>
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<td>1,842,481</td>
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<td>9,380,000</td>
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<td>5,052,000</td>
<td>10,320,000</td>
<td>4,657,175</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>14,070,000</td>
<td>4,394,000</td>
<td>4,686,000</td>
<td>9,080,000</td>
<td>4,123,240</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>13,620,000</td>
<td>4,120,000</td>
<td>3,340,000</td>
<td>7,460,000</td>
<td>4,771,775</td>
<td>651,775</td>
<td>19.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>12,950,000</td>
<td>3,661,000</td>
<td>1,579,000</td>
<td>5,240,000</td>
<td>4,024,784</td>
<td>363,784</td>
<td>23.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>11,580,000</td>
<td>3,303,000</td>
<td>1,577,000</td>
<td>4,880,000</td>
<td>4,077,677</td>
<td>774,677</td>
<td>49.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>9,650,000</td>
<td>3,507,000</td>
<td>5,033,000</td>
<td>8,540,000</td>
<td>3,885,875</td>
<td>378,875</td>
<td>7.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>11,580,000</td>
<td>3,705,000</td>
<td>3,535,000</td>
<td>7,240,000</td>
<td>2,203,654</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*% of transfer used varies by state
Issue 4: Sector Transfer (Rec to Comm) 

Action Items

- FMAT requests guidance from the Council/Board on whether additional modifications to the transfer process should be considered.

- Additional modifications for consideration:
  - Conditions that allow/prevent transfers
  - The transfer cap (10.5 M lbs as the CQ)
  - Bidirectional sector transfer (Comm -> Rec?)
Issue 5: Rebuilding Plan

- MSA requires that rebuilding plan be initiated by November 2021
- FMAT supports removing the rebuilding plan from the Amendment
  - Concerns about rushing the development of alternatives
- Staff recommends leaving rebuilding in for now
  - Efficiencies associated with keeping the development of alternatives together
Issue 5: Rebuilding Plan

- FMAT has selected 5 projection scenarios
  - Constant harvest of 7,385 metric tons (current ABC)
    - Rebuilt by ~2025 (estimated SSB = ~229,000 mt)
  - Constant F that rebuilds the stock within 10 years
  - Constant F that rebuilds the stock within 7 years
  - Constant harvest strategy that will allow the fishery to rebuild within 10 years – highest catch possible
  - Rebuilding strategy that utilizes P* approach
    - Considers the risk of overfishing given the current stock biomass compared to the target biomass
Issue 5: Rebuilding Plan Action Items

- Are additional projection scenarios needed?
- Should the rebuilding plan be removed or kept within the amendment?
FMAT recommends further development of “sector-specific management uncertainty”

- No accepted standard on how recreational discard projections are estimated
- Recreational management uncertainty is high
- Commercial management uncertainty remains low
Atlantic Bluefish Flowchart

Overfishing Limit (OFL) → Scientific Uncertainty

Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) = Annual Catch Limit (ACL)

Management Uncertainty

Recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) → Recreational Discards → Recreational Total Allowable Landings (TAL) → Research Set Aside → Recreational Harvest Limit

Commercial Annual Catch Target (ACT) → Commercial Discards → Commercial Total Allowable Landings (TAL) → Research Set-Aside → Commercial Quota → Individual State Quotas

Transfer
Issue 6: Other Issues - For-hire Sector Separation

- Further develop for-hire sector separation?
  - For-hire sub-ACL
  - For-hire “allowance”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bluefish Time Series</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Private/Shore %</th>
<th>For-Hire %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base Years</td>
<td>1981-1989</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Most Recent Years</td>
<td>2014-2018</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Most Recent Years</td>
<td>2009-2018</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Most Recent Years</td>
<td>2004-2018</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages are based on MRIP catch (A+B1+B2) in number of fish.
Issue 6: Other Issues - For-hire Sector Separation Action Items

- Remove or pursue further?
- Allocations could be based on:
  - Landings: A + B1
  - Catch: A + B1 + B2 or A + B1 + (B2*0.15)
- Sector allowance
  - Beneficial to further develop a policy on how separate measures are developed, accountability, etc.
  - FMAT concerned about fair and equitable access across user groups
Next Steps. Questions?

- May: FMAT will meet to develop draft alternatives
- June: Presentation of draft alternatives at the joint meeting
- June/July: Revise draft alternatives with the FMAT based on Council/Board input
- August: Presentation of revised draft alternatives at the joint meeting
  - Approve for input into a public hearing document
- December: Approve a public hearing document at the joint meeting
Catch vs. landings-based allocations

- Blue and green sectors.
- 50/50 allocation.
- In recent years, both sectors have equal landings, but dead discards in the green sector are double those in the blue sector.

- If the allocation is landings-based, both sectors will have the same quota, but the green sector will have a higher ACL due to its greater expected discards.
- If the allocation is catch-based, both sectors will have equal ACLs, but the blue sector will have a higher quota due to lower expected discards.
An increase in expected discards in the green sector impacts the blue quota under a landings-based allocation, but not under a catch-based allocation.

Example from previous slide:

 Same, but with higher expected green discards:
Figure 2. Comparison of the current risk policy (status quo) and the modified alternative.