

Recreational Reform Initiative

Overview

The Recreational Reform Initiative (Initiative) considers improvements to management of recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The initiative is a complementary effort between the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) to address a range of recreational management issues through a framework/addendum and/or an amendment.

The Initiative will further develop and consider the following topics and management issues:

- Better incorporating MRIP uncertainty into the management process
- Guidelines for maintaining recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits) from one year to the next
- A process for setting multi-year recreational management measures
- Changes to the timing of the recommendation for federal waters recreational management measures
- A harvest control rule (as proposed by six recreational organizations)
- Manage for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes (This would be addressed through a separate amendment process.)
- Address recreational catch accounting such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels (This would also be addressed in the same amendment process as above.)

Goal/Vision:

- **Stability** in the recreational management measures (bag/size/season)
- **Flexibility** in the management process
- **Accessibility** aligned with availability/stock status

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Timeline

Early 2019: The Council and Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board initiated the Recreational Reform Initiative during a joint meeting. A steering committee with representation from the Council, Commission, and NOAA Fisheries was formed. While this committee made some progress, work on this action was delayed while the Board and Council focused on the [Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial and Recreational Allocation Amendment](#).

June 2020: The Council and ISFMP Policy Board reviewed a draft outline of topics under consideration through the initiative. They also discussed moving some topics from the [Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial and Recreational Allocation Amendment](#) to this initiative. Staff was tasked with determining which items could be addressed through a joint framework/addendum and which would require an amendment.

October 2020: The Council and ISFMP Policy Board agreed to initiate complementary framework/addendum and amendment to address several recreational issues.

February 2021: The Council and ISFMP Policy Board agreed to focus on the harvest control rule proposal as an immediate next step. Council and Commission staff will work with NOAA Fisheries to consider how this proposal may need to be modified to comply with MSA requirements to implement annual catch limits and prevent overfishing.

June 2021: A joint Commission Plan Development Team (PDT) and Council Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) was created to further develop the harvest control rule. The joint PDT/FMAT continues to meet, and meeting times and information can be found the Commission's [calendar](#).

What is the Harvest Control Rule?

The harvest control rule was put forward in March 2020 by six recreational fishing organizations as a suggested alternative in the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment. The Council and Board agreed not to move forward with the harvest control rule within the allocation amendment and instead to further consider the components of the proposal addressing recreational management measures through the Recreational Reform Initiative.

The overarching goal of the harvest control rule is to rely less on expected fishery performance compared to a catch or harvest limit (e.g., expected harvest compared to the recreational harvest limit), but rather use a more holistic approach that places greater emphasis on traditional and nontraditional stock status indicators and trends. The harvest control rule would use predetermined recreational management measure “steps” associated with different biomass levels and stock indicators. An example of how this approach could be structured is illustrated in the figure below. The intent of the original proposal was to focus on the most liberal measures that anglers feel they would need to meet their needs, and anything more liberal would not have additional socioeconomic benefits. These liberal measures would be used when the indicators suggest a very healthy stock status. The most restrictive measures would be used when the indicators suggest poor stock status and would promote conservation of the stocks while providing some access to anglers and helping businesses that rely on recreational fishing (e.g., for-hire vessels, bait and tackle shops) to stay in business. Stakeholder input will be important for selecting the appropriate management measures for each step, especially for the most and least restrictive steps.