

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 an amendment.

The first task of the Initiative is to develop and consider the following topics and management issues through the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda:

- Better incorporation of 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
- Further development of a proposal on a recreational harvest control rule put forward by six recreational organizations

A future, separate **amendment** will consider options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes (referred to as sector separation) and will also consider options related to recreational catch accounting such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels. Current work is focused on the development of the Recreational Harvest Control Rule through complimentary addenda and a framework.

Goal/Vision:

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

The goal of the Draft Addenda and the Council's Framework is to establish a process for setting recreational bag, size, and season limits for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish such that measures aim to prevent overfishing, are reflective of stock status, appropriately account for uncertainty in the recreational data, take into consideration angler preferences, and provide an appropriate level of stability and predictability in changes from year to year.

Contacts

- **Dustin Colson Leaning**, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, dleaning@asmfc.org, 703. 842.0740
- **Julia Beaty**, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, jbeaty@mafmc.org, 302.526.5250

Timeline (Note: future dates are subject to change)

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 in March 2019. A steering committee with representation from the Council, Commission, and NOAA Fisheries was formed and met several times.

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. They tasked staff 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 complimentary 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 put forward by six recreational organizations 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 in the Commission's [calendar](#).

August/October 2021: The Council and ISFMP Policy Board reviewed a range of harvest control rule options presented by the PDT/FMAT. Both bodies approved the options for further development and inclusion in the Addenda/Framework under development.

February 2022: The ISFMP Policy Board approved Draft Addendum XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP and Draft Addendum II to the Bluefish FMP for public comment, and the Council approved the final range of options in the Harvest Control Rule Framework.

Spring 2022: The Commission distributed a [press release](#) with a link to the Draft Addenda and public hearing schedule. Public input can be offered at public hearings and written comments can be sent to comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: Harvest Control Rule).

Summer and Fall 2022: Final action will be taken to select a harvest control rule approach. Measures will begin to be crafted using proposed models or other statistical methods by the Technical Committee.

Winter 2022: Measures for 2023 will be selected and put into place prior to the start of the 2023 fishing year.

What is the Recreational Harvest Control Rule?

In March 2022, the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) and the Council approved for public comment the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Draft Addenda to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP and Bluefish FMP. The Draft Addenda consider changes to the process used by the Commission and the Council to set recreational management measures (bag, size, and season limits) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The Council is considering an identical set of options through a framework action. These potential changes are intended to provide greater stability and predictability in recreational management measures from year to year and allow for more explicit consideration of stock status when setting the measures. The Draft Addenda proposes five possible approaches for setting recreational measures. Key differences between the options include the information considered when setting measures and the circumstances under which measures would change. These differences have implications for how often measures would change and the magnitude of those changes. Taking final action on these addenda will not implement any specific bag, size, or season limits but will modify the specification process for setting specific measures.

The Draft Addenda are available at

http://www.asmf.org/files/PublicInput/HCR_DraftAddenda_PublicComment_March2022.pdf

or via the Commission's [public input webpage](#). Public hearings will be conducted through March and April and the deadline for public comment is April 22. The Policy Board and the Council are expected to take final action on the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Draft Addenda and Framework in June of 2022.