

The ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board and Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council met in a joint session in Philadelphia on Wednesday, December 12 to set the recreational specifications for 2002. The discussion of each species began with the recreational landings, regulations and harvest limits in recent years. This was followed by a discussion of the effectiveness of state recreational regulations in place during 2001 and the resulting landings adjustments for 2002.

The summer flounder recreational harvest limit increased from 7.16 million pounds in 2001 to 9.72 million pounds for 2002. However, significant overages in recreational landings in 2001 will require some states to reduce their landings in 2002. The Management Board voted to adopt conservation equivalency for the summer flounder fishery, as provided for in Framework II to the Summer Flounder Fishery Management Plan. Conservation Equivalency allows each state to devise a management program, including minimum size limits, bag limits and seasons, to achieve their target harvest limit. These proposals will be sent to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission by January 15 for review by the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Technical Committee and approval by the Management Board prior to being instituted. A non-preferred, coastwide alternative was also developed for recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce, as required by the fishery management plan. This alternative allows for a 17 inch minimum size and an 8 fish bag limit. In addition, a "precautionary default" measure of an 18 inch minimum size and a 1 fish bag limit was approved in the event a state did not develop an acceptable proposal under conservation equivalency.

The scup stock has experienced a recovery similar to summer flounder, allowing for a 2.77 million pound harvest limit in 2002, up from 1.76 million pounds in 2001. Recreational landings in 2001, however, are projected to be 4.97 million pounds, significantly over the harvest limit, and will therefore require some states to reduce their landings in 2002. The Management Board voted to explore the creation of an addendum to the Scup Fishery Management Plan allowing for conservation equivalency in the recreational fishery. ASMFC staff will draft this document in early 2002 and, once approved by the Management Board, will hold hearings to obtain public input. As specified in the Scup FMP, the Mid-Atlantic Council was required to make a coastwide recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce. The alternative approved was 50 fish possession limit, a 10" minimum size, and a season of January 1- February 28 and July 1 – October 31 for scup in 2002.

Black sea bass have a 2002 recreational harvest limit of 3.468 million pounds, up from 3.148 in 2001. There were some landings overages, but not as much as seen in summer flounder or scup. The Management Board and Council jointly approved a coastwide management program including a minimum size limit of 11.5 inches, a 25 fish bag limit and an open season.