



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass & Bluefish Management Boards

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass &
Bluefish Management Boards
Conference Call
July 6, 2016

For more information, please contact
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Meeting Summary

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Management Boards met via conference call to review the latest recreational harvest estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program. Most notably for both bluefish and black sea bass, the final 2015 recreational harvest estimates were uncharacteristically larger than the preliminary estimates. Based on this information, the Board discussed the need to change state recreational measures for the 2016 fishing season. While no management action was taken for bluefish since the 2016 annual catch limit had not been exceeded, the Board briefly discussed the possibility of transferring unused recreational quota to the commercial fishery (as allowed under the FMP). However, based on final 2015 bluefish harvest estimates, NOAA Fisheries anticipates the 2016 recreational quota will be fully utilized, prohibiting any transfer to the commercial sector. NOAA Fisheries will be releasing a final rule on 2016 bluefish fishery later this month. The Board and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council will discuss the final rule at their joint meeting in August.

Taking several factors into consideration, the Board chose to not take any management action for the recreational black sea bass fishery. Its decision was based on (1) the validity of the harvest estimates given the significant change from preliminary to final numbers; (2) concern about changing recently promulgated state regulations; (3) concern regarding socioeconomic impacts to the for-hire industry; (4) difficulty in enforcing mid-season regulatory adjustments; and (5) the potential for increases in discard mortality under more restrictive measures. The Board discussed a number of ways NOAA Fisheries could improve the annual specification process for these species. These include providing a more timely delivery of final recreational harvest numbers from the previous season, which would allow the states to more precisely tailor their regulations; incorporating vessel trip reports in its preliminary harvest estimates; and seeking ways to increase sample sizes in the for-hire fishery to more accurately represent catch and effort in this sector.

Representatives from NOAA Fisheries participated on the conference call to receive input from the states regarding their 2016 recreational black sea bass fisheries. NOAA Fisheries will be using this information as it develops and releases a final rule for the 2016 recreational black sea bass fishery this month. This final rule may implement precautionary default measures for the federal waters recreational fishery; the default measures being considered are: 3 fish possession limit, 14" minimum size limit, and an open season from July 15 – September 15.

For more information, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at krootes-murdy@asmfc.org for questions regarding black sea bass and Max Appelman, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at mappleman@asmfc.org for questions regarding bluefish.