



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC & MAFMC Maintain Specifications for 2015 Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Fisheries & Approve 2015 Bluefish Specifications *MAFMC Suspends Research Set Aside Program*

Washington, D.C. – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) reviewed and maintained previously established commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass for the 2015 fishing season. The Council decided to forgo setting Research Set Asides (RSA) for all the four species in 2015 due to concern regarding the misuse and illegal harvest of RSA by many participants. Earlier this summer the federal government issued 70 grand jury subpoenas throughout New York as part of two-year investigation into illegal harvest under the guise of RSA fishing. The Council did allow for the possibility of resuming the program in 2016 pursuant to improvements in quota monitoring and program oversight. The Council will conduct a thorough examination of the program in the coming months and develop options for moving forward.

The table below summarizes revised quotas and limits based on the Council's action on RSA (2014 values are provided for comparison purposes).

Species	Year	Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)	Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL)	Commercial Mesh Size	Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)
Summer Flounder	2014	10.51	14"	5.5"	7.01
	2015	11.07	14"	5.5"	7.38
Scup	2014	23.53	9"	5"	7.55
	2015	21.23	9"	5"	6.80
Black Sea Bass	2014	2.17	11"	4.5"	2.26
	2015	2.24	11"	4.5"	2.33
Bluefish	2014	7.49	---	---	13.59
	2015	5.12	---	---	13.07

The 2015 summer flounder commercial quota is 11.07 million pounds and the recreational harvest limit is 7.38 million pounds, an increase from 2014 levels. The increase responds to the findings of the 2013

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

benchmark stock assessment and peer review which projected increases in the spawning stock biomass (SSB) levels for 2015 and 2016. The Commission and Council also moved forward on the continued development of a Scoping Document for the Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment, which will be released for public comment over the next few weeks. The Amendment will consider changes to summer flounder management in both state and federal waters.

The commercial quota for the 2015 scup fishery is 21.23 million pounds, with a recreational harvest limit of 6.8 million pounds. This represents a decrease of 2.3 and 0.75 million pounds, respectively, compared to 2014 levels due to a slight decrease in the projected SSB. Based on previous action taken by NOAA Fisheries under the provisions of the FMP, the possession limit for the 2014 Winter II commercial season (November 1 – December 31) is 18,000 pounds due to a rollover of unused quota from Winter I to Winter II. The next scup benchmark assessment will be conducted in 2015.

The 2015 black sea bass commercial quota is 2.24 million pound and a recreational harvest limit of 2.33 million pounds. This is an increase from 2014 levels since none of the landings were allocated to the Research Set Aside program (RSA).

For 2015 the bluefish commercial quota is 5.12 million pounds, with a recreational harvest limit of 13.07 million pounds for 2015. These levels represent a decrease from 2014 to account for scientific uncertainty regarding the estimated biomass. The Commission also approved the Fishery Management Plan Review for the 2013 fishing year and the terms or reference for the 2015 bluefish benchmark stock assessment.

For all four species, the approved and recommended actions are consistent with the recommendations of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee regarding acceptable biological catch, which is the level of total removals that cannot be exceeded based on the best available scientific information.

For more information about the Commission's actions, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, FMP Coordinator, at krootes-murdy@asmfc.org.

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