



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC & MAFMC Maintain Multi-Year Specifications for Black Sea Bass, Bluefish, and Scup and Modify Summer Flounder Specifications

Virginia Beach, VA – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) reviewed previously implemented specifications for scup, black sea bass and bluefish fisheries and modified specifications for summer flounder. The Commission’s actions are final and apply to state waters. The Council will forward its federal waters recommendations regarding summer flounder specifications to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish (2016 values are provided for comparison purposes). Please note specifications for years 2017 and beyond may be adjusted based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

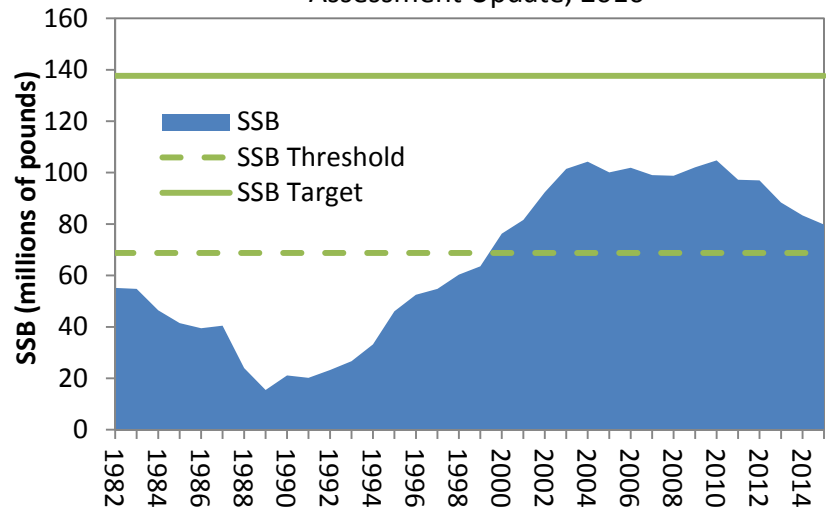
| Species | Year | Commercial Quota (millions of pounds) | Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL) | Commercial Diamond Mesh Size | Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds) |
|-----------------|------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Summer Flounder | 2016 | 8.12 | 14" | 5.5" | 5.42 |
| | 2017 | 5.66 | 14" | 5.5" | 3.77 |
| | 2018 | 6.63 | 14" | 5.5" | 4.42 |
| Scup | 2016 | 20.47 | 9" | 5" | 6.09 |
| | 2017 | 18.38 | 9" | 5" | 5.50 |
| | 2018 | 17.34 | 9" | 5" | 5.21 |
| Black Sea Bass | 2016 | 2.70 | 11" | 4.5" | 2.82 |
| | 2017 | 2.71 | 11" | 4.5" | 2.82 |
| Bluefish | 2016 | 4.88 | Varies by state | | 11.58 |
| | 2017 | 6.07 | Varies by state | | 11.58 |
| | 2018 | 7.24 | Varies by state | | 11.58 |

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 anadromous species.

Summer Flounder

For summer flounder, both groups approved a commercial quota of 5.66 million pounds and a recreational harvest limit of 3.77 million pounds for 2017, an approximate 30% decrease from 2016. This decrease in catch and landings limits responds to the findings of the 2016 stock assessment update, which indicates summer flounder has been experiencing overfishing since 2008. In 2015, fishing mortality exceeded its threshold by 26% (i.e., the level beyond which overfishing is occurring). The 2015 estimate of spawning stock biomass (SSB) is at 58% of the biomass target, and only 16% above the threshold. If the stock were to fall below the threshold, it would be considered overfished, requiring the development of a rebuilding plan to reduce fishing mortality and rebuild stock biomass. These results appear to be driven largely by below-average recruitment, an underestimation of the fishing mortality level in the last years of the assessment, and declining biomass indices. The assessment update indicates the stock experienced six below-average year classes from 2010 to 2015. Additionally, indices of abundance from state and federal surveys have indicated declines in abundance ranging from 9 to 97% from their most recent peaks (generally 2009 to 2012). The 2016 assessment update estimated biomass has been trending down since 2010. Summer flounder harvest limits for 2018 may be adjusted in the future based on changes in the fishery or new scientific information.

Summer Flounder Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB)
Source: Northeast Fisheries Science Center Stock Assessment Update, 2016



Scup and Black Sea Bass

For scup and black sea bass, the Commission and Council maintained the previously implemented multi-year specifications set in August and October 2015, respectively. The decline in harvest limits for scup since 2016 is due to a decrease in SSB as projected by the 2015 benchmark stock assessment.

For black sea bass, 2017 harvest limits remain unchanged relative to 2016 levels (in 2016, there was a reduction in the commercial quota due to overages in the previous year). Both the commercial quota and recreational harvest limit may be changed pending the results of next benchmark stock assessment, scheduled for peer review through the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee in late 2016. The Commission and Council will consider the results of the benchmark stock assessment in early 2017.

Bluefish

For the bluefish fishery, the final 2016 commercial quota is 4.88 million pounds and the recreational harvest limit is 11.58 million pounds. The final 2016 harvest limits include a 1.58 million pound transfer from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. The Commission and Council did not make any changes to the 2017 and 2018 specifications. The 2017 and 2018 commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits are preliminary and will likely change following release of 2016 and 2017 final Marine Recreational Information

Program harvest estimates. These estimates can impact how much is transferred from the recreational sector to the commercial sector.

For all four species, the Commission and Council actions are consistent with the recommendations of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee based on the best available scientific information. For more information about summer flounder, scup, or black sea bass, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior FMP Coordinator, at krootes-murdy@asmfc.org. For more information about bluefish, please contact Max Appelman, FMP Coordinator, at mappelman@asmfc.org.

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