



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC & MAFMC Approve Catch and Landings Limits for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish for 2019 **ASMFC Approves Black Sea Bass Addendum XXXI for Public Comment**

Virginia Beach, VA – The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) reviewed previously approved specifications for scup and established new specifications for black sea bass, bluefish, and summer flounder fisheries. The Commission also approved Draft Addendum XXXI for public comment and agreed to provide the states the opportunity to open their black sea bass recreational fisheries in February 2019.

Catch and landings limits for the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries were established for 2019 only. The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to NOAA Fisheries' Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval. The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish (2018 values are provided for comparison purposes).

Species	Year	Commercial Quota (millions of pounds)	Commercial Minimum Fish Size (TL)	Commercial Diamond Mesh Size	Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)
Summer Flounder	2018	6.63	14"	5.5"	4.42
	2019	7.72	14"	5.5"	5.15
Scup	2018	23.98	9"	5"	7.37
	2019	23.98	9"	5"	7.37
Black Sea Bass	2018	3.52	11"	4.5"	3.66
	2019	3.14	11"	4.5"	3.27
Bluefish	2018	7.24	Varies by state		11.58
	2019	7.71	Varies by state		11.62

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, the Commission and Council received a data update, including catch, landings, and survey indices through 2017, and stock projections for 2019. Taking into consideration the data update and model-projected increases in spawning stock biomass, the Commission and Council approved, on an interim basis, a commercial quota of 7.72 million pounds (16% increase from 2018) and RHL of 5.15 million pounds for 2019 (16% increase from 2018). Both the commercial quota and RHL may be changed in early 2019 pending the results of the upcoming benchmark stock assessment.

Scup

For scup, the Commission and Council received a data update, including catch, landings, and survey indices through 2017. The update indicates biomass continues to be high, and the 2015 year class appears to be above average. In response, the Commission and Council maintained the previously implemented multi-year specifications set in August 2017. For 2018 and 2019, the commercial quota is 23.98 million pounds and the RHL is 7.37 million pounds. The Commission and Council also adjusted the incidental possession limit for the commercial fishery to 2,000 pounds during April 15 – June 15 (see table below). The adjustment was considered based on a proposal submitted by Massachusetts and Rhode Island to address discards of scup in the inshore spring longfin squid fishery. The incidental possession limit applies to vessels with commercial scup permits fishing with nets with diamond mesh smaller than 5 inches in diameter (there is no separate incidental permit for scup). Note that during the summer quota period (May 1 - September 30), a state possession limit for directed trips may supersede the incidental possession limit.

2018 and 2019 Scup Incidental Possession Limits for Permitted Vessels Fishing with Diamond Mesh Nets <5"

	Winter I				Summer					Winter II		
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2018	1,000 pounds				200 pounds					1,000 pounds		
2019	1,000 pounds				2,000 pounds		200 pounds		1,000 pounds			

Black Sea Bass

For black sea bass, the Commission and Council received a data update, including catch, landings, and survey indices through 2017. The update indicates biomass continues to be high, and the 2015 year class appears to be above average. The Commission and Council established, on an interim basis, a 3.14 million pound commercial quota and a 3.27 million pound RHL for 2019. Both values are a slight increase from those recommended by the Monitoring Committee due to a change in the calculation of discards. Both the commercial quota and RHL may be changed in early 2019 pending the results of the upcoming operational stock assessment update.

Bluefish

For bluefish, the Commission and Council received a data update, including catch, landings, and survey indices through 2017. The update indicates all survey indices except one showed a decrease from 2016 values. The Commission and Council approved a 7.71 million pound commercial quota and an 11.62 million pound RHL. The final 2019 harvest limits include a transfer of up to 4 million pounds from the recreational to the commercial sector, which generally reflects the distribution of recreational and commercial landings in 2017. The 2019 commercial quota and RHL are preliminary and will likely change following release of 2018 final Marine Recreational Information Program harvest estimates. These estimates can impact how much is

transferred from the recreational sector to the commercial sector. An operational assessment is scheduled for 2019.

Framework and Addendum XXXI on Conservation Equivalency, Block Island Sound Transit and Slot Limits

The Commission and Council jointly approved for public comment alternatives included in the Council's Framework and Commission's Draft Addendum XXXI. Both documents propose options for conservation equivalency for black sea bass and summer flounder, and transit provisions for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass for Block Island Sound. The Council's Framework also addresses the use of slot limits for all three species in federal waters. The transit provision options include two alternative transit areas that could apply to recreational fisheries only, or both commercial and recreational fisheries for all three species, depending on the alternatives selected. They could also apply to differences in state and federal seasons, minimum fish sizes, and/or possession limits, depending on the alternatives selected. The Commission will issue a press release on Draft Addendum XXXI's availability for public comment and scheduled public hearings once the hearings have been finalized.

Black Sea Bass Wave 1 Fishery and LOA Program

The Commission and Council considered opening a 2019 black sea bass recreational fishery in wave 1 (January-February). In 2017, the Commission and Council agreed to open a recreational fishery in February 2018, and to continue development of a letter of authorization (LOA) program for possible implementation in 2019. For 2019, the Commission and Council approved a February fishery with a management program similar to that used in 2018. The 2019 wave 1 fishery will be open from February 1-28 with a 15 fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch minimum size limit for states that choose to participate in the fishery. All participating states are required to adjust their 2019 recreational management measures to account for their wave 1 harvest. The Commission and Council suspended further development of an LOA program.

For more information about summer flounder or scup, please contact Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Senior FMP Coordinator, at krootes-murdy@asmfc.org. For more information about black sea bass or bluefish, please contact Caitlin Starks, FMP Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

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