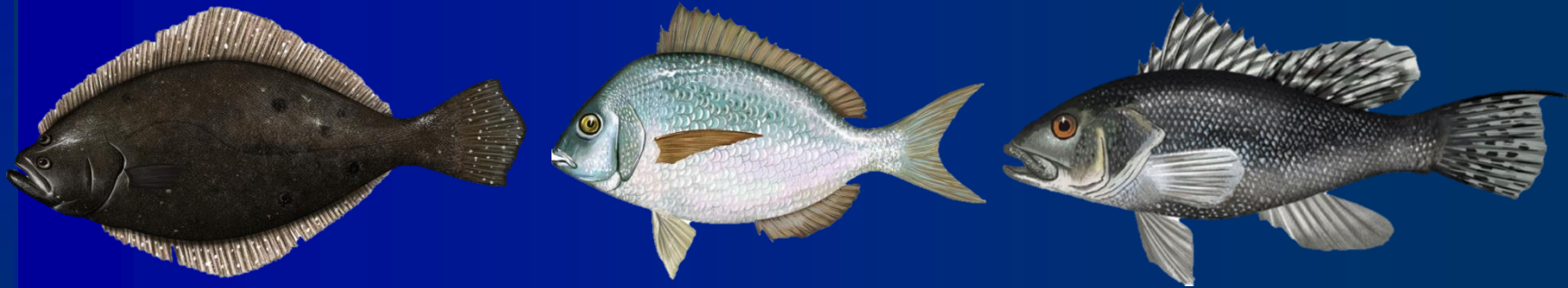




MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Commercial Measures Review

Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass



Council and Board Meeting

December 9, 2015

Annapolis, MD

Background

- MC/TC reviews several commercial measures through the annual specifications process
- Many measures have not been modified in several years, if at all
- This year, MC/TC tasked with reviewing commercial measures in more detail

Process

- **MC/TC meetings**

- July, September, and November 2015

- **Advisory Panel input**

- Summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass AP
 - Webinar
 - Online comment form
- Mackerel, squid, butterfish AP
 - Asked about a subset of measures affecting small mesh fisheries
 - Online comment form only

Measures Reviewed

■ All 3 species

- Minimum fish size
- Minimum mesh size
- Incidental possession limits

■ Scup & black sea bass

- Pot/trap regulations
- Roller gear regulations

■ Summer flounder:

- Small mesh exemption program
- Flynet exemption program

■ Scup

- Winter I and II quota period possession limits and quota rollover provisions

Minimum Fish Size

- Current regulations based on size at maturity
 - Summer flounder: 14" TL
 - Scup: 9" TL
 - Black Sea Bass: 11" TL
- Diversity of AP opinions - requests for no change, increases, decreases, and elimination

Minimum Fish Size

MC/TC recommended no changes for any species

- Changing minimum fish size would change fishery selectivity
- Should not increase discrepancies between commercial and recreational minimum sizes
- Not feasible to enforce different minimum fish sizes for different commercial gear types
- % of scup mature at age 2 has decreased; most 9" scup are age 3, when 100% are mature (should not decrease scup minimum size for this reason)

Pot/Trap Regulations

- Scup and black sea bass
- Requirements for size and number of escape vents, degradable hinges
- No new data since 2005 ASMFC-sponsored workshop

Pot/Trap Regulations

- MC/TC and AP recommended no changes
- AP comment: many black sea bass traps are not correctly configured
 - MC/TC response: should investigate to determine if problem is with wording of regulations or with compliance

Roller Gear Restrictions

- Trawl vessels cannot use rollers $>18''$ in diameter to target scup or black sea bass
- MC/TC and AP recommended no changes
- Observer data 2010-2014:
 - 98% observed “sweeps” $<12''$ (includes disks, cookies, and rollers)
 - Only 23 observed sweeps $\geq 18''$, 2010-2014

Minimum Mesh Sizes

- Summer flounder: 5.5" diamond, 6" square
- Scup: 5" diamond
- Black sea bass: 4.5" diamond
- Intended to complement minimum fish sizes
- AP comments:
 - Several requests for no changes
 - A few requests for consistency among three species, but some disagreement
 - A few requests for decrease in scup min. mesh size to 4" or 4.5" (MSB advisors)

Minimum Mesh Sizes

- MC/TC recommended no changes
 - MC/TC did not examine existing data on mesh size (e.g. discards)
 - Updated gear studies would be beneficial
 - Changing gear can be costly
 - If changes implemented, should provide long lead time so fishermen can plan for costs

Small Mesh Exemption

Summer flounder moratorium vessels fishing east of longitude $72^{\circ} 30.0'W$ from Nov 1-Apr 30, and using mesh smaller than 5.5-inch diamond or 6.0-inch square, may land >200 pounds (incidental limit) of summer flounder if they have a small mesh exemption program permit from NMFS

Small Mesh Exemption

- Criteria for evaluating:
 - % of observed trips with catch east of 72° 30' W that also used small mesh, landed >200 pounds of summer flounder, and discarded >10% of summer flounder catch
- Ranged from 1.8% to 5.2%, 2010-2015
- Several AP recommendations for no change, 2 requests to expand program area to decrease discards

Small Mesh Exemption

- % of trips meeting criteria
 - 2013-2014 – 1.8%
 - 2014-2015 – 5.2%
- MC/TC recommended no changes at this time, but will continue to monitor

Flynet Exemption

- Vessels fishing with a two-seam otter trawl flynet are exempt from the summer flounder minimum mesh size requirements
 - *Flynet definition: 8-64" mesh in wings, 35 or more meshes of $\geq 8"$ in the belly, mesh size decreases throughout the body of the net to $\leq 2"$*

Flynet Exemption

- Most flynet landings are from North Carolina
 - <2,000 lb of summer flounder landed since 2010
- Limited data available from other states (flynets not distinguished from other trawl nets)
- All AP comments were for no change
 - One request to expand the definition of flynet to include four seam box net

Flynet Exemption

- MC/TC recommended no changes to program
- Recommended changes to wording of regs
 - Description of evaluation criteria is inconsistent with original language and intent of exemption
 - Manner in which staff evaluate exemption is consistent with original intent, but not with current wording of regs
 - MC/TC recommend that wording of regulations be revised to be consistent with original intent and current practice

Scup Quota Period Measures

Quota Period	Dates	Allocation	Possession limit (pounds)
Winter I	Jan 1–Apr 30	45.11%	50,000
Summer	May 1–Oct 31	38.95%	State-specific
Winter II	Nov 1–Dec 31	15.94%	12,000

- Once 80% of Winter I allocation is reached, possession limit is reduced to 1,000 pounds
- If Winter I allocation is not fully harvested, Winter II possession limit increases by 1,500 lb for every 500,000 lb not caught during Winter I

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Scup Quota Period Measures

- A variety of AP opinions – no change, reduce Winter I limit, increase Winter II limit, allow quota to rollover from Winter I to Summer period
- MC/TC recommended no changes
 - Few trips land close to trip limits, especially in Winter I

Scup Quota Period Measures

- Advisor request to modify quota period dates
 - Cannot be modified through specifications
 - Would require an amendment or framework

Quota Period	Current Dates	Advisor-Proposed Changes	Difference
Winter I	Jan 1 – April 30	Jan 1 – May 15	+15 days
Summer	May 1 – Oct 31	May 16 – Sept 30	-46 days
Winter II	Nov 1 – Dec 31	Oct 1 – Dec 31	+31 days

- Request that quota allocations and possession limits remain unchanged
- Intended to help commercial fishery achieve quota

Scup Incidental Limits

November – March	500 lbs
April – October	200 lbs

- Trawl vessels possessing more than incidental limits are subject to the minimum mesh requirements
- Last modified in 2005, before scup declared rebuilt
- Several AP requests for an increase
 - One request for 1,000 and 500 lb

Scup Incidental Limits

- MC/TC analysis
 - Cannot predict fishing behavior
 - Examples of behaviors which complicate the assumption that increasing limits would turn discards into landings
 - Given changes in scup biomass, an increase in incidental limits warrants consideration

Scup Incidental Limits

- MC/TC recommendations:
 - Consider an increase in possession limit
 - Should not increase to higher than state directed fishery possession limits
 - Task MC/TC with analysis of specific questions

Decision Points

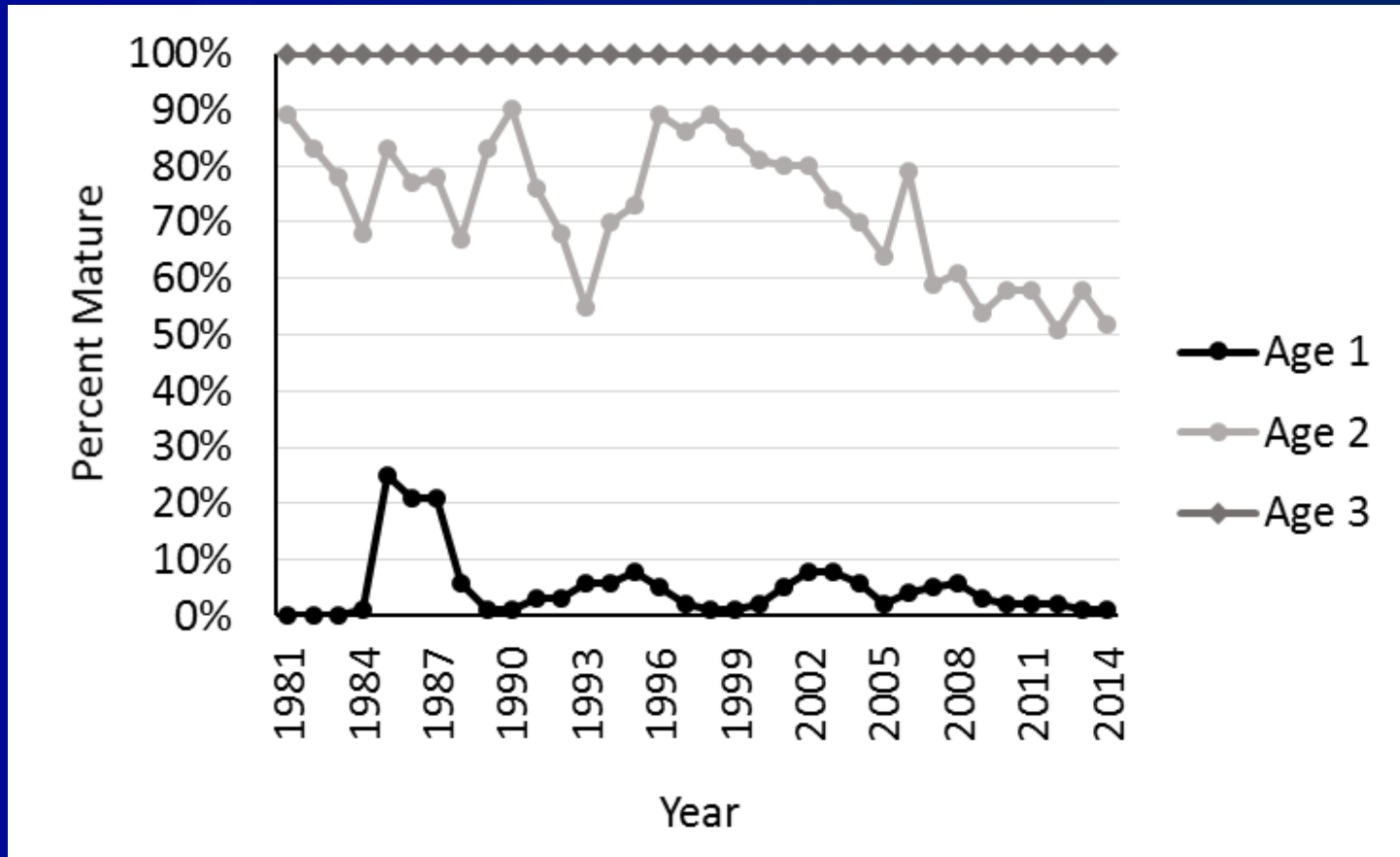
- Include modifications to any measures in specifications?
- Task MC/TC with additional analysis?

MC/TC Recommendations

- Modifications worth considering:
 - Wording of regulations regarding evaluation of summer flounder flynet exemption
 - Increase scup incidental possession limits
- Possibly investigate black sea bass pot/trap configuration issue – a problem with wording of regulations or with compliance?

Questions?

Scup maturity at age



Scup fishery performance

