



## August 2018 Council Meeting Summary

**August 13-16, 2018**

*Virginia Beach, VA*

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's August 2018 meeting in Virginia Beach, VA. Presentations, briefing materials, and webinar recordings are available on the Council website at [www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2018](http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2018).

### Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) reviewed previously approved specifications for scup and established specifications for black sea bass, bluefish, and summer flounder fisheries. 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 the 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

### ***Black Sea Bass 2019 Specifications***

For black sea bass, the Council and Commission 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 Council and Commission 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.

### ***Summer Flounder 2019 Specifications***

For summer flounder, the Council and Commission 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 Council and Commission 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 2019 Specifications**

For scup, the Council and Commission 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 Council and Commission 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 Council and Commission 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).

**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			

**Bluefish 2019 Specifications**

For bluefish, the Council and Commission 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 Council and Commission 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.

**Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Framework and Addendum on Conservation Equivalency, Block Island Sound Transit, and Slot Limits**

The Council and Commission discussed a joint framework action and addendum (Draft Addendum XXXI), which includes alternatives for conservation equivalency for black sea bass and summer flounder, Block Island Sound transit provisions, and slot limits for all three species. Both groups reviewed and approved a range of alternatives, and the Commission approved Draft Addendum XXXI for public comment. Additional information is available at <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/sfsbsb-recreational-management-fw>.

**Black Sea Bass Wave 1 Fishery and Letter of Authorization (LOA)**

The Council and Commission voted to open the 2019 wave 1 recreational black sea bass fishery to all anglers through the regular specification process with the following management measures: a season of February 1 – 28, a 15 fish possession limit, a 12.5 inch minimum size, and a 100,000-pound allocation divided to the states based on historical wave 1 catch. These management measures are the same as were implemented for the 2018

wave 1 fishery. The Council and Commission also discussed developing a Letter of Authorization (LOA) program to open the wave 1 fishery in future years but ultimately decided not to move forward with this option.

### Bluefish Allocation Amendment

The Council and Commission reviewed public scoping comments on the Bluefish Allocation Amendment, discussed next steps, and agreed on a number of issues that should be considered in the amendment. Some members of the Council and Commission expressed concern that the recent release of revised recreational catch and effort estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) could have significant implications for the status and management of the bluefish fishery. The Council and Commission considered a proposal to halt amendment development until the completion of an assessment which incorporates these updated MRIP numbers (expected in the spring of 2019). Although Council and Commission members were generally in agreement that the amendment should incorporate the results of the operational assessment, some felt that postponing amendment development was unnecessary. After some debate, the Council and Commission decided to continue to work on the amendment but agreed they will not finalize the public hearing document or hold public hearings until after the results of the bluefish operational assessment are available in the spring of 2019. For additional information and updates on this amendment, please visit <http://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>.

### Atlantic Mackerel Framework and Specifications

The Council approved a Framework Adjustment to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan projected to rebuild mackerel in five years (by 2023). The framework also includes Atlantic mackerel specifications for 2019-2021. After proactively reducing mackerel catch limits by 91% from 2010 to 2016, the Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) for the first three years of the rebuilding period would be 29,184 MT, 32,480 MT, and 33,747 MT, translating into an increase in the commercial quota from 9,177 MT in 2018 to 17,371 MT in 2019, with slightly higher quotas in 2020 and 2021. The Council anticipates that an updated stock assessment will be available in 2020 to evaluate early rebuilding progress.

The Council also approved a modified closure process that is expected to slow the mackerel fishery effectively as the quota is approached and minimize regulatory discards. In addition, the Council set new river herring and shad (RH/S) caps on the mackerel fishery that would reduce the acceptable RH/S encounter rate by 17%, from approximately 0.64% of all catch to 0.53% of all catch. Since the mackerel quotas are set to increase, the absolute value of the RH/S caps increase from 82 MT currently to 129 MT in 2019, 152 MT in 2020, and 159 MT in 2021. Given the mackerel fishery closed early at the current RH/S encounter rate in 2018, lowering the acceptable RH/S encounter rate even more will strongly incentivize RH/S avoidance. To ensure active avoidance when mackerel landings are low, the Council added a provision where the cap starts at 89 MT and only increases beyond 89 MT if the fishery can first land 10,000 MT of mackerel without hitting the initial 89 MT RH/S cap.

### *Illex* Squid Control Date and 2018-2019 Quotas

Taking into consideration the high volume and fast pace of 2017 and 2018 *Illex* squid landings, as well as relatively high recent trawl survey indices, the Council requested NMFS consider an in-season adjustment in 2018 of up to 2,000 MT of additional *Illex* catch. Based on the same information, the Council has also asked its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to consider an increase to the *Illex* ABC for 2019 and 2020. In addition, the Council voted to reaffirm an *Illex* control date of August 2, 2013 and requested that staff begin development of an action to reconsider the permitting system for the *Illex* fishery.

### Other Business

#### **MRIP Presentation on New Estimates**

Dave Van Voorhees and Kelly Denit (NMFS) gave a presentation on the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). The Council had an opportunity to review historical estimates from

the old survey method (the Coastal Household Telephone Survey) compared with estimates from the new Fishing Effort Survey. There was some discussion about the management implications of the new estimates. Additional information about the transition to the FES is available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/effort-survey-improvements>.

### ***Draft Amendment 11 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP for Management of Shortfin Mako Sharks***

The Council received a presentation on Draft Amendment 11 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) FMP, which includes management measures to address overfishing of North Atlantic shortfin mako sharks. The most recent stock assessment for shortfin mako sharks found the stock to be overfished with overfishing occurring. NOAA Fisheries has already implemented management measures to address overfishing through an emergency rule effective March 2, 2018. Amendment 11 includes a range of management measures intended to address overfishing when the interim rule has expired. Following the presentation, the Council directed the HMS committee to draft a letter regarding the amendment's monitoring and rebuilding measures.

### ***Responsible Offshore Development Alliance***

The Council received a presentation from Annie Hawkins about the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA), a coalition of fishing industry associations and fishing companies with an interest in improving the compatibility of new offshore development with their businesses. RODA is working with NMFS and other partners to coordinate science and policy approaches to managing development of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in a way that minimizes conflicts with existing traditional and historical fishing.

### ***Swearing in of Reappointed Council Members***

The Council swore in four reappointed members: Adam Nowalsky of New Jersey, Peter deFur of Virginia, Tony DiLernia of New York, and Sara Winslow of North Carolina. The Council also welcomed Joe Cimino, who will be serving as the designated state official from New Jersey.

### ***Election of Officers***

During the yearly election of officers, the Council reelected Mike Luisi as Council Chairman and Warren Elliott as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Luisi is the director of the Fisheries Monitoring and Assessment Division at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Elliott serves as the Pennsylvania Citizen Representative to the Chesapeake Bay Commission and as a member of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

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## Next Council Meeting

**Tuesday, October 2, 2018 – Thursday, October 4, 2018**

Congress Hall

200 Congress Place

Cape May, NJ 08204 609-884-8421