

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 14, 2020

Mr. Chris Moore
Executive Director
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Mr. Robert E. Beal
Executive Director
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Mr. Moore and Mr. Beal:

This week, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) will meet to continue discussing the adjustment of commercial black sea bass harvest allocations among eastern coastal states so that they better reflect the current abundance and distribution of the fish population. We write to express our strong support for adopting a revised quota system that is more reflective of existing conditions.

As you know, the abundance of black sea bass inhabiting the waters surrounding Connecticut has increased greatly over the last twenty years due to climate shifts. However, the state's commercial fishing industry has been struggling. Increasing Connecticut's quota would reinvigorate this traditional industry through a new economic opportunity while reducing bycatch, alleviating predatory pressure of seabass on other species, and increasing equitable access. We implore you to increase Connecticut's state-specific quota from 1 percent to 5 percent of the coastwide quota.

We remain disappointed that the black sea bass quota allocation system has not changed since 2003. Expansion of the black sea bass population in more northern waters, and a gradual northward shift of the area of highest abundance, has been apparent for many years and is well documented in reports released by both the ASMFC and MAFMC. Additionally, many of our constituents, who have spent their lives fishing in the waters surrounding Connecticut, have consistently voiced their concerns regarding unfair restrictions on the harvest of black sea bass given the species' robust population and the increased harvest opportunities enjoyed by fishermen from other states. These Connecticut fishermen have met with our offices to share firsthand accounts of the growth and abundance of this stock.

We are committed to managing our fish stocks sustainably. Connecticut fishermen, like those in other states, have sacrificed much in an effort to restore fish stocks. However, static allocations continue to shortchange Connecticut's hard working commercial fisherman and disrupt the species in our waters. With Connecticut's allocation being so low, our fishermen must continue to throw catch overboard, resulting in wasted resources.

On Wednesday, the ASMFC and the MAFMC will be deliberating changes to the black sea bass commercial fishery as they consider the options put forth in Draft Addendum XXXIII to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan. As the Commission and Council take on this important task, we ask that you give serious consideration to the option that increases Connecticut's quota to 5 percent prior to additional allocation adjustments. This action would make our state quota equal to the allocation assigned to the next lowest state (Delaware). In essence, this would establish 5 percent as a minimum allocation for states within the species' population distribution.

We realize that adjusting long-standing management to better align quota allocation with shifts in distribution and abundance, while striving to address the needs and interests of resource users, is difficult. However, it is the right thing to do for both the fish and the fishermen. We strongly encourage the MAFMC and ASMFC to do the right thing and increase Connecticut's black sea bass quota to 5 percent of the coastwide quota. Moreover, we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that fisheries quotas are allocated in a manner that reflects where fish stocks are currently, instead of where they were decades ago.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate

/s/ Joe Courtney

JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress