



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: December 4, 2020
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: Julia Beaty, staff
Subject: Potential Impacts of Alternatives in Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment/Draft Addendum XXXIII

Introduction

This document summarizes a preliminary analysis of the potential impacts of the alternatives under consideration in the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council's) Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission's) Draft Addendum XXXIII. Both actions consider the same alternatives, which are briefly summarized below. The alternatives as well as additional background information are described in more detail in the Council's public hearing document¹ and the Commission's draft addendum.²

Note that for ease of identification of the alternatives, a prefix of 1, 2, or 3 was added to indicate the alternative group as described in the public hearing document and Draft Addendum XXXIII. A prefix of 1 indicates an alternative associated with the state allocation percentages. A prefix of 2 indicates alternatives related to adding the state allocations to the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP). A prefix of 3 indicates alternatives associated with federal in-season closures.

The impacts of the alternatives are expected to be mostly socioeconomic in nature; however, the potential impacts on the black sea bass stock are also considered in this document. A more complete impacts analysis, including consideration of impacts on other components of the ecosystem such as non-target species, marine mammals, species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and marine habitats will be included in a forthcoming Environmental Assessment for the Council's amendment. Major impacts to these other components of the ecosystem are not expected as none of the alternatives are expected to have notably different impacts than the impacts of the overall coastwide quota. As described below, the alternatives may impact the spatial distribution of landings, though they will have lesser impacts on the spatial distribution of fishing effort, and they may impact discards, mostly in state waters fisheries; however, they are not expected to have notable impacts on the overall amount of catch or effort in the commercial black sea bass fishery, which will continue to be primarily driven by the coastwide quota. The impacts of the coastwide quota and landings limits

¹ Available at: https://www.mafmc.org/s/BSB_com_state_allocation_PHD.pdf.

² Available at: http://www.asmfc.org/files/PublicInput/BSB_DraftAddendumXXXIII_PublicComment.pdf.

are analyzed separately through the annual specifications process. This action considers only how to allocate the quota among states and other changes to how the quota is managed.

Table 1 summarizes the potential socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives. Potential impacts on the black sea bass stock are not summarized in the table as all alternatives are expected to have moderate positive impacts as the currently positive stock status should be maintained under all alternatives, as described in more detail later in this document.

Unless otherwise noted, socioeconomic impacts are evaluated with regards to potential future revenues for fishermen, commercial fish dealers, and support businesses. Actual revenues will be impacted by multiple factors in addition to the state quota allocations, including, but not limited to, the overall quota level, prices, and market demand. The impacts discussions below generally consider the state allocations in isolation and assume that these other factors will remain constant. They also assume that the commercial fishery will operate in similar ways as it has under the historical range of quotas through 2019. The 2020 commercial quota was the highest implemented for black sea bass, and the 2021 quota will be 9% higher than the 2020 quota. However, performance of the commercial fishery in 2020 is not representative of typical conditions as the fishery was greatly impacted by reduced market demand due to COVID-19 restrictions such as restaurant closures.

It is worth noting that the state quota allocations may have different impacts under different coastwide quota levels. For example, under high coastwide quotas, the state allocations will be less impactful than under low coastwide quotas.

Table 1: Summary of expected socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives.

Alternative	Expected Socioeconomic Impacts
1-A. No change in state allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued moderate positive impacts for fishermen and dealers who have relied on black sea bass for notable amounts of their past revenues. • Some negative impacts for fishermen in states with currently low allocations but high black sea bass availability as avoiding or discarding black sea bass may negatively impact efficiency of the fisheries.
1-B. Increase CT allocation to 5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impacts for CT due to increased potential revenues under increased allocation. • No impacts for DE and NY as their allocations would not change. • Slight negative impacts for all other states due to decreased allocations and decreased potential revenues (degree varies by state).
1-C. Dynamic Adjustments to Regional Allocations (<i>multiple sub-alternatives</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many alternatives allow for a wide range of potential outcomes. Impacts will vary based on the specifics of any allocation changes. • Positive impacts for states with increased allocation percentages and negative impacts for states with reduced allocation percentages due to increased or decreased potential revenues from black sea bass landings. • Impacts may vary based on the scale and pace of change. Large and fast changes could cause short-term disruptions in the fishery and negative socio-economic impacts. Smaller and slower changes could have minor impacts. The optimum scale and pace of change may be a policy decision. • Most alternatives and combinations of sub-alternatives allow for consideration of tradeoffs associated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The benefits of predictability and stability (i.e., alternatives or combinations of sub-alternatives with greater reliance on historical allocations), and
1-D. Trigger approach (<i>multiple sub-alternatives</i>)	
1-E. Trigger approach with increase to CT and NY allocations first (<i>multiple sub-alternatives</i>)	
1-F. Percentage of coastwide quota distributed based on	

Alternative	Expected Socioeconomic Impacts
initial allocations (<i>multiple sub-alternatives</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The benefits of aligning allocations more closely with distribution of the stock to increase fishery efficiency (i.e., alternatives or combinations of sub-alternatives with a greater reliance on recent distribution information). ● Fishermen using trawl gear may be better able to take advantage of increased state allocations than pot/trap fishermen.
1-G. Regional configuration alternatives (<i>two sub-alternatives</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No meaningful socioeconomic impacts.
2-A. State allocations remain only in Commission’s FMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minor impacts compared to 2-B. Transfers after December 16 to prevent state-level overages could continue to occur through the Commission process.
2-B. Add allocations to Council FMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minor impacts compared to 2-A. Transfers after December 16 would be limited to unforeseen emergency situations.
2-B-1. State overage paybacks only if coastwide quota exceeded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative impacts due to potential lost revenues when paybacks are required. Impacts are less negative than under 2-B-2, which would require more frequent paybacks.
2-B-2. States always pay back overages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative impacts due to potential lost revenues when paybacks are required. Impacts are more negative than under 2-B-2, which would require less frequent paybacks.
3-A. No changes to federal in-season closure regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative impacts when an in-season closure is triggered, especially for states that have not fully landed their allocations. Closures could be triggered more frequently than under 3-B.
3-B. In-season closure at quota plus buffer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative impacts when an in-season closure is triggered, especially for states that have not fully landed their allocations. Closures could be triggered less frequently than under 3-A.
3-C. In-season closure at ACL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative impacts when an in-season closure is triggered, especially for states that have not fully landed their allocations. ● Cannot compare potential frequency of closures to 3-A and 3-B due to uncertainty in how this alternative would be put into practice. ● Additional negative impacts compared to 3-A and 3-B as closures may be harder to predict as NMFS would need to make assumptions about discards in-season.

Alternative Set 1: State Commercial Quota Allocation Percentages

The following alternatives are under consideration regarding the state commercial quota allocation percentages. Some alternatives include multiple sub-alternatives, which are not listed here. The alternatives and sub-alternatives are described in more detail in the Council’s public hearing document and the Commission’s draft addendum.

1-A. No action (status quo). This alternative would not change the current commercial state allocations.

1-B. Increase Connecticut’s allocation to 5% from 1%. Varying amounts of allocation would be taken from all other states except Delaware and New York based on a specific proposal described in the public hearing document and draft addendum.

1-C. Dynamic Adjustments to Regional Allocations (*includes multiple sub-alternatives which are not listed here*). This approach involves a gradual transition to allocations based on

a combination of the initial allocations and regional biomass distribution information. The allocations would be regularly adjusted. For this reason, and because there are many sub-alternatives to set the scale and pace of change, this approach could have a wide range of outcomes and the outcomes could vary over time.

1-D. Trigger approach (*includes multiple sub-alternatives which are not listed here*). Under this approach, the coastwide quota up to a pre-determined amount (i.e., the “trigger”) ranging from 3 million pounds to 4.5 million pounds would be distributed according to the base allocations and any surplus quota above that amount would be distributed either equally among states (except Maine and New Hampshire) or would be distributed in a way that accounts for regional biomass distribution.

1-E. Trigger approach with increase to Connecticut and New York allocations first. Under this alternative, any surplus quota above a 3 million pound trigger would first be used to increase Connecticut’s allocation from 1% to 5%. Any remaining surplus would then be used to increase New York’s allocation from 7% to 9%. Any additional remaining surplus would be divided among the remaining states based on the specific proposal described in the public hearing document and draft addendum.

1-F. Percentage of coastwide quota distributed based on initial allocations (*includes multiple sub-alternatives which are not listed here*). This approach would allocate a fixed percentage of the annual coastwide quota ranging from 25% to 75% using the initial allocations. The remaining amount would be distributed either equally among states (except Maine and New Hampshire) or would be distributed in a way that accounts for regional biomass distribution.

1-G. Regional configuration alternatives (*includes two sub-alternatives*). Alternatives C-F above require consideration of regional biomass distribution. This alternative set contains two alternatives for how to define the regions.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Alternatives for State Commercial Quota Allocation Percentages

Under the no action alternative (alternative 1-A), the current state allocations would remain unchanged and continued moderate positive socioeconomic impacts would be expected for fishermen and commercial fish dealers that have relied on black sea bass landings for noteworthy amounts of their income in recent years. These continued positive impacts may be greatest for fishermen who land their catch in states with higher quota allocations, and dealers based in those states, compared to those in states with lower allocations. Some continued negative socioeconomic impacts may be felt by fishermen who operate in states with currently low allocations but high black sea bass availability, as avoiding or discarding black sea bass may negatively impact the efficiency of their operations. However, in both cases, these positive and negative impacts under the no action alternative would not be different than the recent impacts of the current quota allocations, which have been in place since 2003. This would represent a continuation of the current positive impacts for some fishermen and dealers and negative impacts for others. Neutral impacts would be expected for fishermen who have not historically caught black sea bass and dealers that have not historically relied on revenues from black sea bass.

In general, under all alternatives which would modify the state allocation percentages, positive socioeconomic impacts would be expected for states with increased allocation percentages and negative impacts for states with reduced allocation percentages. These positive and negative impacts would mostly derive from increased or decreased potential revenues for commercial fishermen, dealers, and other commercial fishery support businesses. The magnitude of the impacts will depend on the magnitude of the change in allocation.

Price data from 2010-2019 (adjusted to account for inflation) suggest that higher landings can be associated with lower prices paid by dealers to fishermen in New Jersey through North Carolina (Figure 1). Therefore, the positive socioeconomic impacts of increased landings in those states could be partially, though not entirely, offset by a decrease in price. Price data show no strong relationship between price and landings in Maine through New York (Figure 1); therefore, an increase in landings in those states may not impact price. The relationship between price and landings in either region may change if future landings are much different (higher or lower) than they have been in the past, or if there are changes in other factors besides landings which impact price.

It is worth noting that the coastwide quota is regularly updated based on the best scientific information available. Commercial fishermen, dealers, and support businesses already experience year to year variation in revenues from black sea bass due to fluctuations in the annual coastwide quota, variations in price and market demand, and other factors. Changes in the state allocations may not have major impacts on revenues unless they result in changes that are outside the range of recent revenue fluctuations based on variations in the annual coastwide quota, prices, and other factors.

Although commercial fishermen and dealers must always make business decisions under uncertain future conditions, the state allocations provide some level of predictability. The allocations ensure that each state receives a certain percentage of the annual coastwide quota. Alternatives which use fixed allocation percentages (i.e., alternatives 1-A and 1-B if not used in combination with other alternatives) would provide a greater degree of predictability than alternatives which utilize variable or dynamic allocations (i.e., alternatives 1-C through 1-F). However, it is worth noting that all alternatives allow for some degree of stability and predictability as the allocations under all alternatives would always be at least partially based on the historical allocations. The details vary by alternative, as described in the Council's public hearing document and the Commission's draft addendum.

Predictability and stability in the allocations can be considered positive socioeconomic impacts. However, this could come at the cost of disparity between the quota allocations and local black sea bass availability, which can impact fisheries efficiency and therefore net revenues. Many of the alternatives allow for explicit consideration of these tradeoffs. Allocations which partially account for recent biomass distribution information (i.e., alternatives 1-C and 1-E and some combinations of sub-alternatives under alternatives 1-D and 1-F) could allow the commercial fishery to better take advantage of locally available fish, which could lead to increased efficiency and increased net revenues for some fishermen, compared to alternatives which do not account for biomass distribution (i.e., alternatives 1-A, 1-B, and some combinations of sub-alternatives under alternatives 1-D and 1-F).

It is worth noting that there are time lags between actual distribution changes, availability of data to measure those changes, and a management response to the data. Therefore, dynamic or variable allocations which take distribution information into account may not account for current distribution, as this is always unknown due to data lags; rather they would account for recent distribution.

Some combinations of sub-alternatives would allow for a faster pace of change in the allocations than others. For example, a faster pace of change could occur under certain combinations of DARA sub-alternatives under alternative 1-C, a lower trigger value under alternative 1-D, and a lower percentage under alternative 1-F. A slower pace of change could occur under other combinations of DARA sub-alternatives under alternative 1-C, a higher trigger under alternative 1-D, and a higher percentage under alternative 1-F. The socioeconomic impacts of allocation

changes could be lesser in magnitude under a slower pace of change compared to a faster pace of change. Depending on the scale of the change in allocations, a faster pace of change could result in short-term negative socioeconomic impacts in the form of fishery disruptions. For example, it could be challenging for commercial fishermen and dealers in states which quickly lose allocation to adapt to a sudden loss in revenue from black sea bass landings. In contrast, those in states that quickly gain allocation may not be able to immediately take full advantage of the sudden increase if they do not have sufficient time to adapt their practices. If the scale of the change is minor, the pace of the change will have less of an impact.

Large changes in the amount of quota allocated to a state may have different impacts for fishermen using trawl gear compared to pots/traps. As described in more detail in the public hearing document and Draft Addendum XXXIII, input from fishermen and federal vessel trip report data from 2010-2019 suggest that in years with higher coastwide quotas, bottom trawl gear accounted for a greater proportion and pots/traps accounted for a smaller proportion of total commercial landings compared to years with lower quotas. Trawl fishermen may be better able to take advantage of large increases in quota than pot/trap fishermen. For example, their ability to land higher volumes may allow them to counteract the impacts of any reductions in price by landing more fish. Pot/trap gear does not allow for as high of a volume of landings as trawl gear; therefore, pot/trap fishermen may not be able to adapt their fishing practices in the same way to mitigate for any reductions in price that may occur as a result of increased local black sea bass landings. For this reason, if changes to the state allocations allow for a notable increase in landings in a given state, trawl fishermen in that state may experience greater benefits than pot/trap fishermen.

Each state uses a different approach to managing their commercial fishery to ensure that landings can meet but not exceed their allocations. The economic impacts of changes to state allocations may vary in part based on how states adjust their management measures in response to these changes. For example, an increase in the possession limit could have different impacts than an extension of the open season. Fishermen in states that use Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) may be impacted differently than non-ITQ fishermen, and impacts may vary between gear types.

Under all alternatives, negligible socioeconomic impacts are expected for Maine and New Hampshire as neither state has reported commercial black sea bass landings since 2012 and neither have a declared interest in the fishery through the Commission process.

The alternatives for regional configurations (alternative set 1-G) are not expected to have meaningful socioeconomic impacts as they would only define the regions used under alternatives 1-C through 1-F.

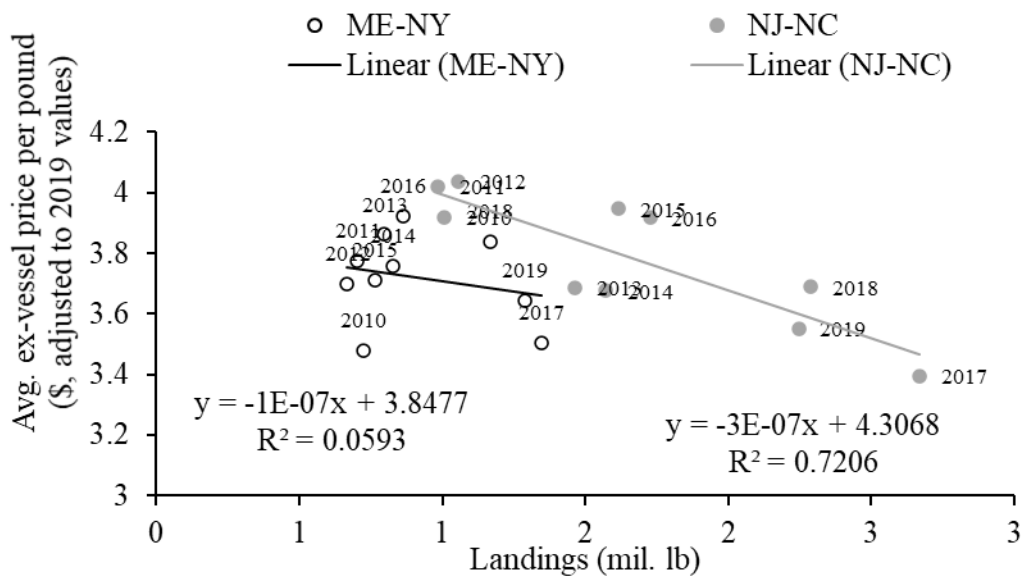


Figure 1: Average annual ex-vessel price per pound for black sea bass compared to annual black sea bass commercial landings by region (ME-NY and NJ-NC), 2010-2019, with associated linear relationship. Prices are adjusted to 2019 values based on the Gross Domestic Product Price Deflator. Data source: dealer data (CFDERS, provided by the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Analysis and Program Support Division).

Impacts of Commercial State Quota Allocation Alternatives on the Black Sea Bass Stock

As described in more detail below, all the state quota allocation alternatives, including the no action alternative, are expected to result in moderate positive impacts on the black sea bass stock because they are all expected to maintain the currently positive stock status (i.e., not overfished, overfishing not occurring). Any slight differences in impacts on black sea bass stock status between the alternatives are expected to be negligible.

The greatest impacts of the fishery management program on the black sea bass stock derive from the total amount of dead catch that is removed from the population each year. This is primarily driven by the coastwide annual catch and landings limits. The state commercial quota allocations determine how the annual coastwide commercial quota is divided among the states. The commercial quota accounts for landings only. Coastwide commercial landings have been very close to the quota for several years; therefore, any changes to the state quota allocations are not likely to impact coastwide landings. Any changes in the distribution of these landings among the states are not expected to change the currently positive status of the black sea bass stock.

The alternatives consider whether the allocations should be modified to partially account for distribution of the stock. It is not expected that any of the alternatives would shift landings in such a way that fishing pressure is too high in one region compared to another such that negative impacts to the stock result.

Any impacts on dead discards resulting from changes in the state quota allocations are expected to mostly occur in fisheries that operate in state waters as opposed to federal waters. These impacts will be challenging to accurately predict. The commercial dead discard estimates used in the stock assessment and in management are derived from the federal observer program and from federal vessel trip reports. These data are only collected from vessels with federal permits. Although they are not collected from vessels which do not have federal permits and operate only in state waters, it is assumed that they are representative of the entire commercial fishery.

Fishermen with federal permits have much more flexibility in where they can catch and sell their fish compared to fishermen who are only permitted to operate in state waters. For these reasons, changes to the state quota allocations may not have notable impacts on where black sea bass are caught in federal waters, though they may impact where they are landed. Many commercial black sea bass fishermen hold permits to land their fish in multiple states, in addition to a federal permit. This affords them flexibility in both where they can catch and where they can land their fish. Fishermen decide where to fish based on multiple factors including expected availability of black sea bass and other target species, as well as non-target species they may wish to avoid. In some cases, black sea bass may not be the primary target species and fishermen may choose their fishing location based on other considerations, such as availability of a different primary species (e.g., summer flounder; MAFMC 2020a). Other factors such as state waters possession limits and open/closed seasons, variations in the price paid by commercial fish dealers, weather, and other factors also influence where fishermen fish and where they land their catch.

Fishermen who are only permitted to fish in state waters have less flexibility in where they can fish compared to those with federal permits. Therefore, it may be more challenging for state waters fishermen to avoid catching black sea bass and minimize discards of fish that cannot be landed, compared to federally permitted fishermen. An increase in the allocation to a state with high availability of black sea bass in state waters but a currently low allocation (e.g., Connecticut) might result in decreased discards in state waters as fishermen will be able to land more of the fish they previously would have discarded. However, the degree of this change is challenging to accurately predict based on available data and because an increased allocation may result in changes in fishing behavior. For example, if a higher allocation allows for a higher commercial possession limit or a longer open season in state waters, fishermen may target black sea bass to a greater extent, which may change patterns in discards and may not simply result in discards “turning into landings.” In addition, an increase in the allocation in one state would require a decrease in allocation in one or more other states. Therefore, any decrease in discarding in one state may be partially offset by an increase in discards in another state, depending on the scale of the change in each state and other factors such as fishing behavior and differences in black sea bass availability in all impacted states.

In summary, changes in the state commercial quota allocations may result in changes in discards, mostly in state waters fisheries, and they may result in changes in the distribution of landings. However, they are not expected to change the overall amount of landings. None of these changes are expected to impact the stock status of black sea bass. The most recent stock assessment update indicates that the black sea bass stock was more than double the target level and overfishing was not occurring in 2018 (NEFSC 2019). This positive stock status is expected to be maintained under all the alternatives for the state allocation percentages, including the no action alternative. For this reason, all these alternatives are expected to have generally moderate positive impacts on the black sea bass stock.

Alternative Set 2: Alternatives for Adding State Commercial Quota Allocations to the Council’s Fishery Management Plan

The following alternatives are under consideration regarding whether the state commercial quota allocations should be added to the Council’s FMP. Each alternative is described in more detail in the Council’s public hearing document and the Commission’s draft addendum.

2-A. No action. Under this alternative, the commercial state quota allocations would not be added to the Council’s FMP and would remain only in the Commission’s FMP. Future changes to the state allocations could be made by a vote of the Board only. Transfers of quota between states would continue to be managed by the Commission.

2-B. Add allocations to Council FMP. Under this alternative, the commercial state quota allocations for black sea bass would be included in both the Commission and Council FMPs. Future changes to the state allocations would be made by a vote of the Board and Council. Transfers of quota between states would be managed by NMFS.

Sub-alternative 2-B-1. States overage paybacks only if the coastwide quota is exceeded. This is the current process for state-level quota overages under the Commission's FMP.

Sub-alternative 2-B-2. States always pay back overages regardless of whether the coastwide quota was exceeded.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Alternatives for Adding State Commercial Quota Allocations to the Council's FMP

The socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives in this alternative set derive from differences in how quota transfers between states would be managed and the potential frequency of state quota overage paybacks.

Under alternative 2-B, the state quota allocations would be added to the Council's FMP and transfers of quota between states would be managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). If the state allocations remain only in the Commission's FMP (alternative 2-A), then the Commission would continue to manage quota transfers. This would allow greater flexibility in the use of late in the year transfers than under alternative 2-B. For example, the Commission allows transfers to occur at any time up to 45 days after the last day of the fishing season. NMFS allows late season quota transfers for other species; however, they are limited to unforeseeable late season events. Generally, the deadline for a state to submit routine transfer requests is the close of business on December 16. While the Commission allows transfers at the end or after the fishing season to help states balance quota overages, NMFS would likely not allow for such transfers unless the overage was unforeseen in the last two weeks of the fishery. The additional restrictions on late in the year transfers under alternative 2-B compared to alternative 2-A should have limited impacts as states should be closely monitoring their landings throughout the year and taking action as necessary to prevent state-level overages, regardless of which agency manages the transfers.

Alternative 2-B-1 would continue the current practice of requiring paybacks of state quota overages only if the coastwide quota has also been exceeded. This is expected to have lesser negative socioeconomic impacts than alternative 2-B-2, which would require paybacks of state-level overages regardless of if the coastwide quota was exceeded, as it would require less frequent paybacks. Under either alternative, overage paybacks would result in a reduction in potential revenues from black sea bass in the year in which the payback is applied. This can be considered a negative socioeconomic impact, though it could be partially offset by higher revenues in the year in which the overage occurred.

Impacts of Alternatives for Adding State Commercial Quota Allocations to the Council's FMP on the Black Sea Bass Stock

None of the alternatives in alternative set 2 are expected to meaningfully impact fishing mortality or stock status for black sea bass. Under all alternatives, the currently positive stock status is expected to be maintained.

Alternative Set 3: Alternatives for Federal In-Season Closures

The following alternatives are under consideration regarding federal in-season closures. Each alternative is described in more detail in the Council's public hearing document and the Commission's draft addendum.

3-A. No action. Under this alternative, a coastwide federal in-season closure would occur when landings are projected to exceed the coastwide quota, as is currently required in the federal regulations.

3-B. In-season closure at quota plus buffer. Under this alternative, a coastwide federal in-season closure would occur when landings are projected to exceed the commercial quota plus a buffer of up to 5%. The appropriate buffer would be determined through the annual specifications process.

3-C. In-season closure at ACL. Under this alternative, a coastwide federal in-season closure would occur when the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) is projected to be exceeded.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Alternatives for Federal In-Season Closures

It is important to note that the commercial fishery has not closed in-season to date. States have effectively monitored and controlled their harvest and used transfers to address minor state-level overages while preventing an overage of the coastwide quota. Therefore, any differences between these three alternatives are theoretical.

Under all alternatives in this alternative set, negative socioeconomic impacts would be expected when an in-season closure occurs, as this would result in reduced potential revenues from black sea bass landings, especially in any states that have not fully landed their allocations. Alternative 3-A could result in more frequent in-season closures than 3-B; therefore, it could have greater negative socioeconomic impacts due to lost revenues.

As described in the public hearing document/draft addendum, it is unclear how alternative 3-C would be put into practice as discards in weight are not monitored in-season. Therefore, it is challenging to predict if this could result in more or less frequent in-season closures than alternatives 3-A or 3-B. It could have less predictability than alternatives 3-A and 3-B, which could be considered a negative socioeconomic impact. For example, states monitor their landings in-season, but assumptions about discards would need to be made by NMFS, which may be more challenging for states to track in-season.

Impacts of Alternatives for Federal In-Season Closures on the Black Sea Bass Stock

As previously stated, the commercial fishery has not closed in-season to date. States have effectively monitored and controlled their harvest and used transfers to address minor state-level overages while preventing an overage of the coastwide quota. Therefore, any differences between these three alternatives are theoretical.

Moderate positive impacts to the black sea bass stock are expected under alternative 3-A as this alternative would not change the regulations regarding federal in-season closures, which have been in place for many years. This would not be expected to result in a change in stock status; the currently positive stock status would be expected to be maintained.

Alternative 3-B would allow quota overages, which could put the stock at risk; however, the additional risk is expected to be minimal as states would still close when their quotas are reached and states would still be required to pay back overages. In addition, the overall coastwide quota overage amount would be limited to 5% before an in-season closure occurred. Therefore, this is

expected to have moderate positive impacts on the stock (though of a slightly lesser magnitude than alternative 3-A) by maintaining the currently positive stock status.

As described in the public hearing document and Draft Addendum XXXIII, it is unclear how alternative 3-C would be put into practice as discards in weight are not monitored in-season. Depending on how this is addressed, this alternative could have a higher likelihood of resulting in ACL overages compared to alternatives 3-A and 3-B. Notable negative impacts on the stock would not be expected as states would still close when their quotas are reached and states would still be required to pay back overages; therefore, major ACL overages would not be expected. For this reason, the currently positive stock status could be maintained under this alternative.

References

ASMFC (Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission). 2020. Draft Addendum XXXIII to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan for Public Comment. Available at:

http://www.asmfc.org/files/PublicInput/BSB_DraftAddendumXXXIII_PublicComment.pdf.

MAFMC (Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2020a. Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Performance Report, June 2020. Available at:

https://www.mafmc.org/s/SFSBSB_FPR_June_2020_FINAL.pdf

MAFMC (Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2020b. Black Sea Bass Commercial State Allocation Amendment Public Hearing Document. Available at:

https://www.mafmc.org/s/BSB_com_state_allocation_PHD.pdf

NEFSC (Northeast Fisheries Science Center). 2019. Operational Assessment of the Black Sea Bass, Scup, Bluefish, and Monkfish Stocks, Updated Through 2018. Prepublication copy prepared for use by Fishery Management Council staff and SSC. 164 p. Available at: http://www.mafmc.org/s/Operational-Assessments-for-Black-Sea-Bass_Scup_Bluefish.pdf.