



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
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 Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | G. Warren Elliott, Vice Chairman  
 Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

## M E M O R A N D U M

**Date:** March 26, 2018  
**To:** Council  
**From:** Matthew Seeley, Staff  
**Subject:** Development and Approval of 2019-2021 Blueline Tilefish Specifications

As part of the 2019-2021 multi-year specification process for Blueline Tilefish, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Tilefish Monitoring Committee (MC) reviewed the most recent information to develop and approve specifications.

The following materials are enclosed:

- 1) Blueline Tilefish MC Summary (March 2018)
- 2) SSC Report – See Committee Reports Tab (March 2018)
- 3) Blueline Tilefish Requested Analyses (March 2018)
- 4) Staff Recommendation Memo to Chris Moore (February 2018)
- 5) Blueline Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (February 2018)
- 6) Blueline Tilefish AP Information Document, Council Staff (February 2018)

Additional materials can be found on the [Council Website](#)

- 1) Tilefish Pilot Survey Report
- 2) SEDAR 50 Report
- 3) Blueline Tilefish DLMTTool Final Report (MAFMC/SAFMC Subcommittee) (March 2018)

	OFL	ABC		Rec ACL	Rec TAL	Comm ACL	Comm TAL
SSC	North of Hatteras 236,329 lbs (107.20 mt)	SAFMC 78,980 lbs (35.82 mt)	MAFMC 100,520 lbs (45.60 mt)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MC	N/A	100,520 lbs (45.60 mt)		73,380 lbs (33.28 mt)	71,912 lbs (32.62 mt)	27,140 lbs (12.31 mt)	26,869 lbs (12.19 mt)



**Tilefish Monitoring Committee  
Webinar Meeting Summary  
March 16, 2018**

**2019-2021 Blueline Tilefish Recommendations**

**Attendees:** Matt Seeley and José Montañez (Council Staff), John Maniscalco (NYSDEC), Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Dan Farnham (Golden Tilefish Fishing Industry), Jeff Brust (NJDFW), and Cynthia Hanson for Doug Potts (GARFO). **Others in attendance:** Laurie Nolan (Golden Tilefish Fishing Industry and Council Member), Dewey Hemilright (Blueline Tilefish Fishing Industry and Council Member), Frank Green (Tilefish Advisory Panel Member), Fred Akers (Recreational Tilefish Angler), Steve Heins (Tilefish Committee Chair), and Jason Didden (Council Staff).

**Discussion:** The Tilefish Monitoring Committee (MC) was presented with a summary of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) deliberations of the March 2018 SSC meeting, where the SSC reviewed the 2018 Blueline Tilefish Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report, the 2018 Blueline Tilefish Advisory Panel Information Document, and the DLMTTool ABC recommendations from the joint Mid- and South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee. Based on the updated information presented, the SSC recommended a three-year ABC based on the DLMTTool with a 150% CV buffer. The blueline tilefish recommended ABC for each year 2019, 2020, and 2021 is 100,520 pounds (45.6 mt). The monitoring committee discussed the different components of the blueline tilefish catch and recent fishery trends.

**The Monitoring Committees' Comments and Recommendations**

***Annual Catch Targets and Landings Limits and Basis for Derivation***

The recommendations in this section were made for the next three years (2019-2021). The Monitoring Committee endorses the management measures recommended by staff for 2019-2021. The Tilefish MC recommended the annual catch limit (ACL) equal the annual catch target (ACT; no adjustment for management uncertainty)<sup>1</sup> of 73,380 pounds (33.28 mt) for the recreational sector and 27,140 pounds (12.31 mt) for the commercial sector for each year 2019, 2020, and 2021. The MC recommended the total allowable landings (TAL) be reduced by 2% and 1% for recreational and commercial discards, respectively. The recommended recreational TAL is 71,912 pounds (32.62 mt) for each year (2019, 2020, and 2021). The recommended commercial TAL is 26,869 pounds (12.19 mt) for each year (2019, 2020, and 2021). All catch and landings limits are shown in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The MC discussed industry concerns related to recreational blueline tilefish landings. The MC believes that the limited data available outside of MRIP is the best available science. The MC will continue to monitor this issue.

The MC shares the SSC's concern over the poorly described level of recreational catch for blueline tilefish. The MC notes that recreational effort and landings by party/charter vessels have increased in recent years and that private vessel activity has the potential to greatly alter total landings. Effort to develop private recreational methods is underway and anticipated to be in effect in 2020.

### ***Recreational Management Measures***

The MC recommended no changes to the current recreational management measures. The recreational season will run May 1 – October 31 with bag limits set at 7 fish for U.S. Coast Guard inspected vessels, 5 fish for uninspected vessels, and 3 fish for private vessels. The MC recommended to not use MRIP numbers to estimate recreational harvest of blueline tilefish. Intercepts are continuously low for blueline tilefish (e.g. rare event species). The MC questioned whether MRIP recreational harvest estimates remain below the detection levels of the survey.

There is currently no system set in place to monitor the recreational ACL. The Delphi method was run in 2016 and offered recreational landings for charter, headboat, and private anglers. The Delphi method was used to develop a recreational time series for blueline tilefish through extrapolation of survey results. To identify an adjusted proportion for the private anglers to charter anglers, in 2015 (terminal year of data analyzed in the Delphi), private landings of 11,326 pounds was divided by the charter landings of 10,770 (Table 2). This ratio was used to back calculate private recreational landings in relation to charter landings from vessel trip reports (VTRs). This method had been peer reviewed and accepted as best available science by SEDAR 50 and further recommended by the MC. In 2017 and 2018, Council staff combined party/charter VTRs and MRIP data to estimate recreational landings<sup>2</sup>. However, the MC questioned whether MRIP detectability issues for estimating blueline private recreational harvest have improved enough to warrant the use of the MRIP survey in monitoring the recreational component. To monitor the recreational fishery in the future, the MC recommended using the Delphi percentage of 105.16% of charter vessel landings to estimate landings for the private angler. This is an interim fix to not having private recreational landings and will be used until more data is available or an improved method is developed. Party and charter landings will continue to be monitored using the most updated VTRs as those anglers are required to report, there are better data requirements, and more outreach effort has been applied to party/charter fishermen.

### ***Commercial Management Measures***

The MC recommended changes to the current 300-pound (gutted weight) blueline tilefish commercial trip limit. The commercial trip limit will start at 500 pounds per trip on January 1 of the fishing year until 70% (18,808 pounds or 8.53 mt) of the commercial TAL has been met. Then,

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<sup>2</sup> For-hire landings as reported through VTRs are in numbers of fish. Numbers were further projected into pounds by using the available MRIP landings in numbers and pounds to calculate the average weight per blueline tilefish. This weight was applied to the number of fish as reported through VTRs to calculate estimated for-hire landings in pounds. Using "total catch" in the MRIP Query as the type of catch resulted in an average weight of 4.4 pounds per fish (15,166 pounds/3444 fish).

the commercial trip limit will be reduced to 300 pounds per trip for the remaining 30% (8061 pounds or 3.66 mt) of the commercial TAL. Previous comments on Amendment 6 to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan indicated that a 500-pound commercial trip limit will lead to some directed blue-line tilefish trips. Trip landing data under the 300-pound trip limit suggested little evidence for targeted commercial blue-line trips. Increasing the trip limit offers a greater chance of reaching optimum yield, while the reduction to 300 pounds at 70% of the TAL offers a buffer to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the commercial TAL and further spreads landings throughout the year. All MC members are supportive of this alteration to the commercial trip limit.

### ***Discards***

The MC recommended no changes to the 2% recreational and 1% commercial reduction from ACT to TAL regarding blue-line tilefish discards. The current measures were developed using the average percentage of discards from 2011-2015. According to VTR data, discards in the recreational and commercial fisheries were both ~1%. Due to the uncertainty in landings within the recreational fishery and the change in trip limit for the commercial fishery, the MC recommended a status quo reduction from the ACT to TAL.

**Table 1.** Summary of SSC and MC recommendation for catch and landings limits for blueline tilefish for 2019-2021.

Specification	Recreational	Commercial
<b>ABC</b>	100,520 lbs (45.60 mt)	
<b>ACLs</b>	73,380 lbs (33.28 mt)	27,140 lbs (12.31 mt)
<b>ACTs</b>	73,380 lbs (33.28 mt)	27,140 lbs (12.31 mt)
<b>TALs</b>	71,912 lbs (32.62 mt)	26,869 lbs (12.19 mt)

**Table 2.** Recreational time series for VA-ME (numbers of fish) from 2003-2015 constructed from the Delphi Method (Memo to Chris Moore from Jason Didden on February 23, 2016).

Year	Charter VTR	Headboat VTR	Adjusted Charter (5.99X)	Adjusted Headboat (1.40X)	Private (105.16% of Charter)	Total landings	Total Catch (2% Discards)
2003	Confidential but low - 2003-2006 data averaged for annual total amounts					211	215
2004						211	215
2005						211	215
2006						211	215
2007	500	2,498	2,995	3,495		6,490	6,623
2008	216	391	1,294	547		1,841	1,878
2009	313	3,861	1,875	5,402		7,277	7,426
2010	159	2,127	952	2,976		3,928	4,009
2011	324	3,261	1,941	4,563	2,041	8,544	8,719
2012	381	9,670	2,282	13,530	2,400	18,212	18,584
2013	711	11,127	4,259	15,569	4,479	24,306	24,802
2014	983	14,866	5,888	20,800	6,192	32,881	33,552
2015	1,798	11,636	10,770	16,281	11,326	38,377	39,160

Report of the March 2018  
Meeting of the MAFMC SSC

See Committee Reports

*Tab # 9*



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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** March 26, 2018  
**To:** Council  
**From:** Matthew Seeley, Staff  
**Subject:** Blueline Tilefish Requested Analyses

Following the Tilefish Advisory Panel Meeting, Council Staff received a request for specific blueline tilefish analyses. This request came in response to the comments provided in the Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report. These data analyses support the Blueline Tilefish Fishery Information Document and provide further detail on the fishery.

1. What is the breakdown by gear of pounds of blueline tilefish landed (and percent) in 2017?

<b>Gear</b>	<b>Pounds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Longline</b>	2844	28.56
<b>Handline</b>	1932	19.40
<b>Trawl</b>	3728	37.44
<b>Gill Net</b>	9	0.09
<b>Dredge</b>	95	0.95
<b>Unknown</b>	1349	13.55
Sum	9957	100.00

2. Of the 2017 landings, what gear was used and how many trips landed 1-99 lbs, 100-199 lbs, 200-299 lbs, 300-399 lbs, or 400+ lbs?

	<b>1-99</b>	<b>100-199</b>	<b>200-299</b>	<b>300-399</b>	<b>400+</b>	<b>Sum</b>
<b>Longline</b>	10	3	4	3		20
<b>Handline</b>	10	3	1	1	1	16
<b>Trawl</b>	101	4	4			109
<b>Gill Net</b>	1					1
<b>Dredge</b>	2					2
<b>Unknown</b>	23	4	1			28
<b>Sum</b>	147	14	10	4	1	176

3. Based on VTR data, what statistical areas accounted for the most harvest in 2017?

<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Stat Area</b>
49.76	616
17.86	626
12.21	622
9.72	537
5.38	621
5.07	Other

4. What are the commercial landings by state in 2017?

<b>State</b>	<b>Landings (lbs)</b>
CT	338
DE	245
NJ	1300
NY	2638
RI	2309
VA	3127



5. In 2017, how many trips landed both golden and blueline tilefish? What gear landed both species?

<b>Gear</b>	<b>Number of trips</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Longline</b>	19	13.97
<b>Handline</b>	7	5.15
<b>Trawl</b>	89	65.44
<b>Gill Net</b>	1	0.74
<b>Dredge</b>	2	1.47
<b>Unknown</b>	18	13.24
Sum	136	100.00

6. In 2017, when a blueline tilefish was caught in trawl gear, what other species were landed?

<b>Species</b>	<b>Landings (lbs)</b>
Squid (Loligo)	877,550
Scup	182,166
Summer Flounder	90,681
Butterfish	83,936
Silver Hake	80,294
Squid (Illex)	39,728
John Dory	33,768
Black Sea Bass	29,515
Angler	29,377
Winter Skate	20,227
Golden Tilefish	17,515
Red Hake	16,620
Atlantic Croaker	7,740
Whiting (King)	3,870



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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** February 23, 2018  
**To:** Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director  
**From:** Matthew Seeley, Staff  
**Subject:** Blueline Tilefish ABCs

### Summary

This memo supports the March 2018 SSC meeting for setting blueline tilefish specifications for up to three years (2019-2021).

### Introduction

The Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) as currently amended requires each Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to provide, among other things, ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catches (ABCs). The SSC recommends ABCs to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (the Council) that address scientific uncertainty such that overfishing is unlikely to occur per the Council's risk policy. The Council's ABC recommendations to NMFS for the upcoming fishing year(s) cannot exceed the ABC recommendation of the SSC. As such, the SSC's ABC recommendations form the upper limit for catches of Council-managed species.

Once the SSC meets and decides on an ABC, the Tilefish Monitoring Committee will meet to discuss if changes to other management measures should be recommended per the ABCs from the SSC and other management considerations. These measures include Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), Annual Catch Targets (ACTs), and Accountability Measures (AMs). Based on the SSC's and Monitoring Committee's recommendations, the Council will make recommendations to the NMFS Northeast Regional Administrator. Based on NMFS' evaluation of the Council's recommendations, NMFS will publish a Proposed Rule for specifications and then a Final Rule, which may change from the Proposed Rule based on public comment.

### Regulatory Review

In June of 2015 emergency regulations were put into place in the Mid-Atlantic to temporarily constrain fishing effort on the blueline tilefish stock. These regulations consisted of a 300-pound commercial trip limit and a recreational seven fish bag limit and were extended through the 2016 fishing year.

In 2016, based on the output of the DLM Toolkit, which simulates stock responses to different harvest strategies, the SSC recommended a 2017 blueline tilefish ABC of 87,031 pounds as meeting the Council's risk policy to best avoid overfishing when guidance from a standard stock assessment is not available. This toolkit has been used previously by the SSC to develop ABC recommendations for black sea bass and Atlantic mackerel. Details on the analysis and rationale of the SSC can be found in the working group's report, available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/april-2016> (see subcommittee report and SSC presentation). This document also notes that due to the limited information on recreational blueline tilefish catch, the recreational catch histories used in the toolkit resulted from a Delphi Approach workshop with fishermen to develop an approximation of 2015 recreational catch, and then a time series was created based on the Delphi Approach estimate and other available data.

In Spring 2017 the SSC recommended a status quo ABC of 87,031 pounds for 2018. Specifications were only recommended for one year as the SEDAR 50 benchmark assessment was anticipated to be completed late in 2017 and dramatically change the biological reference points.

### **Biological Reference Points, Stock Status, and Projections**

In early 2017, the SSC determined that under the ABC control rule, blueline tilefish are classified as a fishery where the overfishing limit (OFL) cannot be specified given the current state of knowledge and thus, the SSC used methods that do not rely on biological reference points.

The SEDAR 50 assessment for blueline tilefish concluded in late 2017. Within the assessment, blueline tilefish were split into two separate stocks, north and south of Cape Hatteras. ABC recommendations were set for the region south of Cape Hatteras (not overfished, overfishing not occurring), but data limitations restricted an ABC recommendation for the region north of Cape Hatteras, which encompasses the Mid-Atlantic management areas. To assist in developing an ABC recommendation, the Mid- and South Atlantic Councils/SSCs, as well as staff from the Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers developed a joint subcommittee to rerun the DLM Toolkit for the region north of Cape Hatteras. The results will be partitioned at the Council boundaries using coastwide catch data from the recently completed pilot tilefish survey funded by the MAFMC out of SUNY Stony Brook.

### **Landings**

Updated 2017 dealer landings information is provided in Table 1; the lower 2015/2016 commercial landings were the expected outcome of the emergency regulations in place for part of 2015 and most of 2016. In 2016, dealer landings adjustments were made (landings times 0.89) for landings coming from Virginia. Landings from statistical areas 631 and 632 (which straddle the North Carolina-Virginia border) were apportioned half to north of the North Carolina/Virginia border and half south. These adjustments were initially made to account for landings lacking area information or for the chance those fish may have been caught south of the Virginia border, yet landed in Virginia. For 2017, no adjustments were made to the dealer landings following the methods and recommendations from the joint Mid- and South Atlantic

Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee, which stated that landings into a certain state within the modeled area are 100% landings into that state.

The Delphi process<sup>1</sup> judged VTR records as unreliable before 2012, so the included VTR time series begins in 2012 to facilitate comparison with the most recent years (Table 2). Since 2016, MRIP (2017-preliminary) has estimated substantial blueline tilefish catch for the Mid-Atlantic, totaling 36,818 fish in 2016 (10,644 MD, 3,040 NJ, 23,134 VA) and 3,444 fish in 2017 (all VA). Considering the current changes occurring with MRIP and since blueline tilefish are a rare event species it remains unclear on how these numbers may be affected in the near future.

### **OFL/ABC Recommendations**

#### **OFL**

The SSC determined that the approach to estimating the ABC for blueline tilefish qualifies it as a stock for which there is no accepted OFL. Additionally, an OFL recommendation was not provided through the SEDAR 50 assessment.

#### **ABC**

The joint Mid- and South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee ran the DLM Toolkit for the stock north of Cape Hatteras using a more recent time series of total blueline tilefish catch (2002-2015) than the SEDAR 50 assessment. The subcommittee agreed that the recommended ABC would be the mode of the total allowable catch distribution provided by a composite management procedure, which is a combined distribution comprised of total allowable catch values estimated by DLMTool's Fdem\_ML and YPR\_ML management procedures. The DLM Toolkit provided an ABC for the stock north of Cape Hatteras of 236,329 pounds.

To appropriately partition this ABC recommendation to the Mid- and South Atlantic Council's jurisdictions, the subcommittee agreed that using blueline tilefish catch data from the Mid-Atlantic Council funded pilot tilefish survey offered the most updated and reliable stock distribution information. The pilot tilefish survey was conducted using a random stratified design across the Mid-Atlantic from just north of Hudson Canyon to Cape Hatteras (Figure 1). This region was broken into nine strata. Strata 1-3 were removed for blueline tilefish evaluation due to no catch in those regions. Of the 75 blueline tilefish caught, 37 were north of the North Carolina/Virginia border and 38 were between the North Carolina/Virginia border and Cape Hatteras. Incorporating this catch with the sampled stratified area plus a 24.8% area adjustment (in strata 9 of the survey) to account for the unsampled area within strata 9 resulted in a stratified proportion of 56% - MAFMC and 44% - SAFMC.

Considering the recommendations from the joint Mid- and South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee and given recent fishery performance, which has been constrained by the

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<sup>1</sup> A Delphi Approach workshop with fishermen was used to develop an approximation of 2015 recreational catch, and then a time series was created based on the Delphi Approach estimate and other available data.

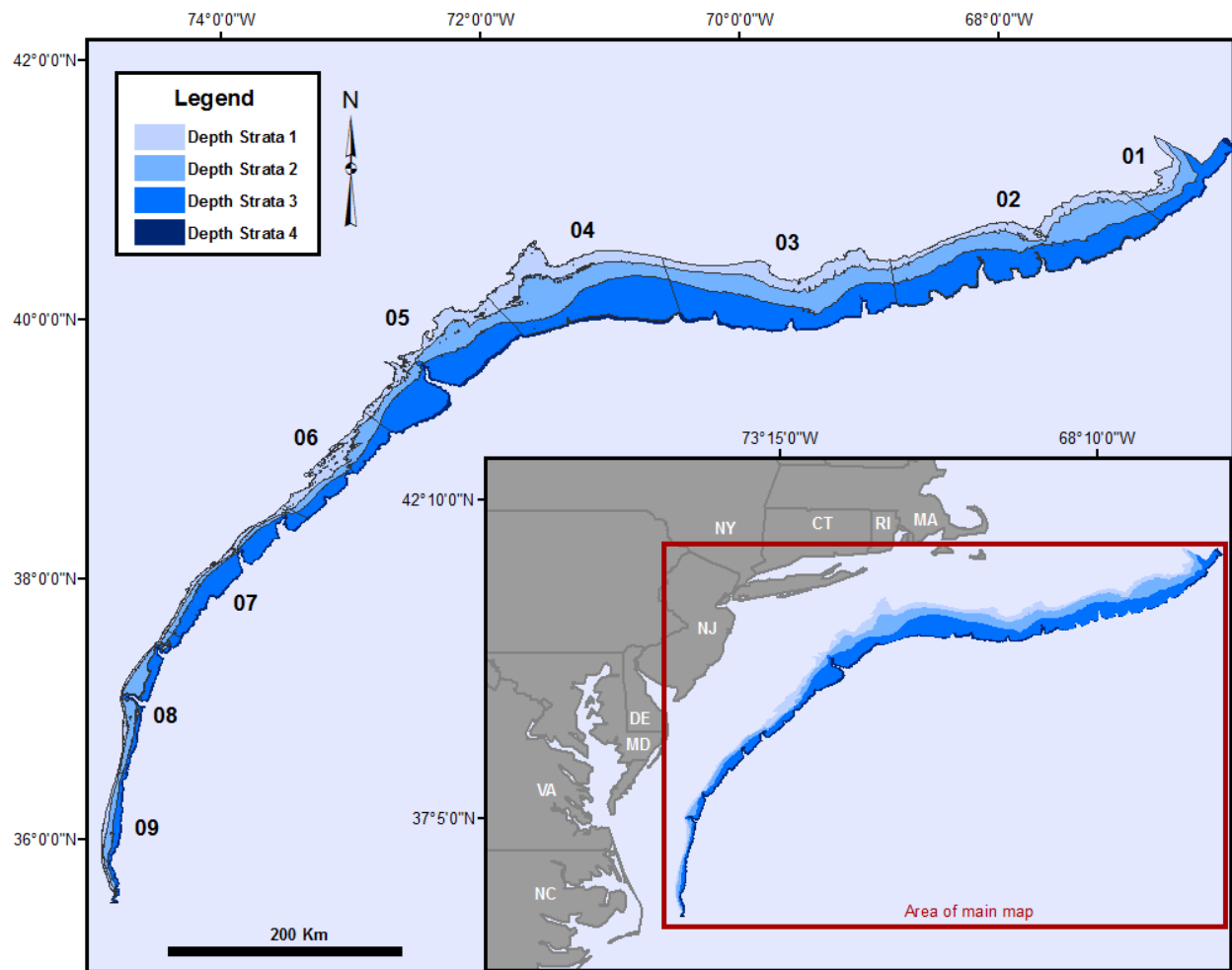
regulations, Council staff recommends a blueline tilefish ABC of 132,344 pounds and specifying it for 3 years (2019-2021).

**Table 1.** Dealer Landings

<b>Year</b>	<b>Pounds Landed</b>
1999	33
2000	2,446
2001	955
2002	269
2003	7,601
2004	5,829
2005	2,032
2006	3,039
2007	20,459
2008	8,749
2009	9,635
2010	8,360
2011	8,182
2012	9,624
2013	26,780
2014	217,016
2015	73,668
2016	14,203
2017	9,957

**Table 2.** For-hire VTR kept fish from VA-ME (numbers of fish)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Party Kept Fish</b>	<b>Charter Kept Fish</b>
2012	9,670	381
2013	11,127	711
2014	14,866	983
2015	12,138	2,253
2016	13,476	2,017
2017	8,213	1,413



**Figure 1.** Pilot tilefish survey sampling regions based on a random stratified design.

## **2018 Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP) Blueline Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (FPR)**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council's) Tilefish Advisory Panel (AP) met via Webinar on February 21, 2018 to review the fishery information document and develop the **Blueline** Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (FPR) based on advisor perspectives on catch/landings patterns and other trends in this fishery. The following is the report from the AP.

The Advisers in attendance were: David Arbeitman, Skip Feller, Jeffrey Gutman, and John Nolan III. They represent tilefish commercial fishermen (from New York); recreational fishermen (private/head boats, bait and tackle business, from New Jersey and Virginia). Also in attendance were: Laurie Nolan – Council Member; Ec Newellman; Paul Nitschke – NEFSC; Yan Jiao – SSC Member; Matthew Seeley and José Montañez – Council Staff.

The fishery performance report's primary purpose is to contextualize catch histories for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) because of the potential importance of this and related information for determining Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) in cases of fisheries with high levels of assessment uncertainty. The goal is to allow comparing and contrasting of the most recent year's conditions (2016/2017) and fishery characteristics with previous years. The following trigger questions were used to guide discussion, and the summary of the AP's input follows.

\*What factors have influenced recent catch?

– Markets/economy? – Environment? – Fishery regulations? – Other factors?

\*Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?

-Gear regulations and exemptions? -Trip Limits? -Others?

\*Where should the Council and Commission focus their research priorities?

\*What else is important for the Council to know?

### **General Observations**

- No major changes have been observed for bluelines in terms of catch rates/composition. Once blueline limits are met then recreational trips search for other targets (goldens). There is a sense from some AP members that the fishery restrictions are/will be benefiting recreational catch per unit effort (CPUE).
- Two AP members want to leave the 3, 5, 7 bag limit (very important). If head boat bag limits drop lower than 7 the head boat community will have greater difficulty filling their trips. The larger bag limit is necessary to encourage anglers to come out.

### **Factors Influencing Catch**

- When targeting other species, trip limits restrict commercial fishermen from targeting areas where bluelines are present.

- Recreational limits depress catch and effort.
- Weather continues to impact effort – Weather in 2017 (hurricanes) similar or slightly windier vs 2016.
- Recreational effort changes – Some areas seem to have higher numbers of deep-droppers (Northern), others lower in 2017 (Mid Delmarva area – less offshore activity generally in 2017). The fishery is becoming more and more understood and more people have the required gear. Moderate tuna availability in deeper water translates into highest effort (enough tuna to create effort, but not so much as to occupy interest for a whole trip). This applies for bluelines even more than goldens due to shallower depth of bluelines.

### **Input on Regulations**

- Has the 300-pound incidental trip limit caused any regulatory discarding? Not too often – incidental landings in 2017 were typical and generally accommodated by the 300-pound trip limit. Some southern area effort has had to shift within particular trips to avoid bluelines once 300 pounds were retained.
- Has the 7-fish recreational trip limit caused any regulatory discarding? No, but it continues to cause shifts in effort away from bluelines once the limit is reached.
- Some AP members would like the Council to consider a higher trip limit for longer recreational trips, structured after Gulf of Mexico regulations (makes filling trips easier). Other AP members were concerned about the impact of higher recreational limits on the overall fishery especially given low ABC and recreational catch uncertainty. Advisors want to avoid creating a directed fishery especially with the uncertainty of the overall stock.
- Regarding the recreational measures in Amendment 6<sup>1</sup> to the Tilefish FMP: Advisors recommended multi-day considerations for head boat trips. Following this recommendation, one advisor recommended standing pat with the current system as it is very important to keep the recreational and commercial sector within the ABC.

### **Research Priority Ideas**

- Continue to organize/facilitate surveys to help inform the assessments.
- Need a successful assessment to provide biological reference points.

### **Other Issues Raised**

- General concern about appropriateness of current ABC given recent catches. Blueline ABC is 1/20<sup>th</sup> of golden tilefish despite likely similar productivity in mid-Atlantic – does not make sense.

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<sup>1</sup> May 1 – October 31 and per-person recreational bag limits of 7 blueline tilefish on for-hire inspected vessels, 5 blueline tilefish on for-hire uninspected vessels, and 3 blueline tilefish on private vessels





Credit: Duane Raver, Jr.

## **Blueline Tilefish - Advisory Panel Information Document<sup>1</sup> February 2018**

### **Management System**

A final rule was published to establish management measures for the blueline tilefish fishery north of the Virginia/North Carolina border through Amendment 6 to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan. This rule also publicized status quo management measures for 2018. The intended effect of this action was to establish permanent management measures for the fishery consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This rule became effective on December 15, 2017. Under this rule commercial vessels can fish year-round until closure and are limited to 300 pounds gutted (heads and fins attached) weight. The recreational blueline tilefish season runs from May 1 through October 31 and the possession limit depends on the type of vessel being used. Anglers fishing from private vessels are allowed to keep up to three blueline tilefish per person per trip. Anglers fishing from a for-hire vessel that has been issued a valid Tilefish Charter/Party Permit but does not have a current U.S. Coast Guard safety inspection sticker can retain up to five blueline tilefish per person per trip. Finally, anglers on for-hire vessels that have both a valid Tilefish Charter/Party Permit and a current U.S. Coast Guard safety inspection sticker can retain up to seven blueline tilefish per person per trip.

### **Basic Biology**

Blueline tilefish are primarily distributed from Campeche, Mexico northward through the Mid-Atlantic (Dooley 1978, NMFS survey and observer data). Several recently-completed studies suggest that blueline tilefish from the eastern Gulf of Mexico through the Mid-Atlantic are comprised of one genetic stock (<http://sedarweb.org/sedar-50-data-workshop>). Blueline tilefish inhabit the shelf edge and upper slope reefs at depths of 46-256m (Sedberry et al. 2006) and temperatures between 15-23°C. Blueline tilefish are considered opportunistic predators that feed on prey associated with substrate (crabs, shrimp, fish, echinoderms, polychaetes, etc.) (Ross 1982). They are considered relatively sedentary and thought not to undertake north-south migrations along the coast. The species constructs burrows in sandy areas in close association with rocky outcroppings in the South Atlantic Bight (SEDAR 50 Stock ID workshop). Blueline tilefish, like other tilefish species, are a large, long-lived fish, reaching sizes up to about 900 mm. This species also exhibits dimorphic growth with males attaining larger size-at-age than females. Males are predominant in the size categories greater than 650 mm FL. An aging

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<sup>1</sup> This document was prepared by the MAFMC staff. Data employed in the preparation of this document are from unpublished National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Dealer, Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs), Permit, and Marine Recreational Statistics (MRFSS/MRIP) databases.

workshop conducted to support the new blueline tilefish assessment (SEDAR 50) has called into question the ability to accurately age blueline tilefish, so previous age determinations may have substantial error. They are classified as indeterminate spawners, with up to 110 spawns per individual based on the estimates of a spawning event every 2 days during a protracted spawning season from approximately February through November.

The Council funded a pilot survey for golden and blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic to develop better information about the state of the golden and blueline tilefish stocks off the Mid-Atlantic. A review committee is analyzing the final report to identify significant findings and provide recommendations on next steps.

The SAFMC's SSC has provided an updated blueline tilefish ABC for the region south of Cape Hatteras (172,000, 175,000, 178,000 pounds whole weight for 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively). Genetic work done for SEDAR 50 suggests a genetically homogenous population off the entire Atlantic coast, but does not suggest what catch may be appropriate off various parts of the coast.

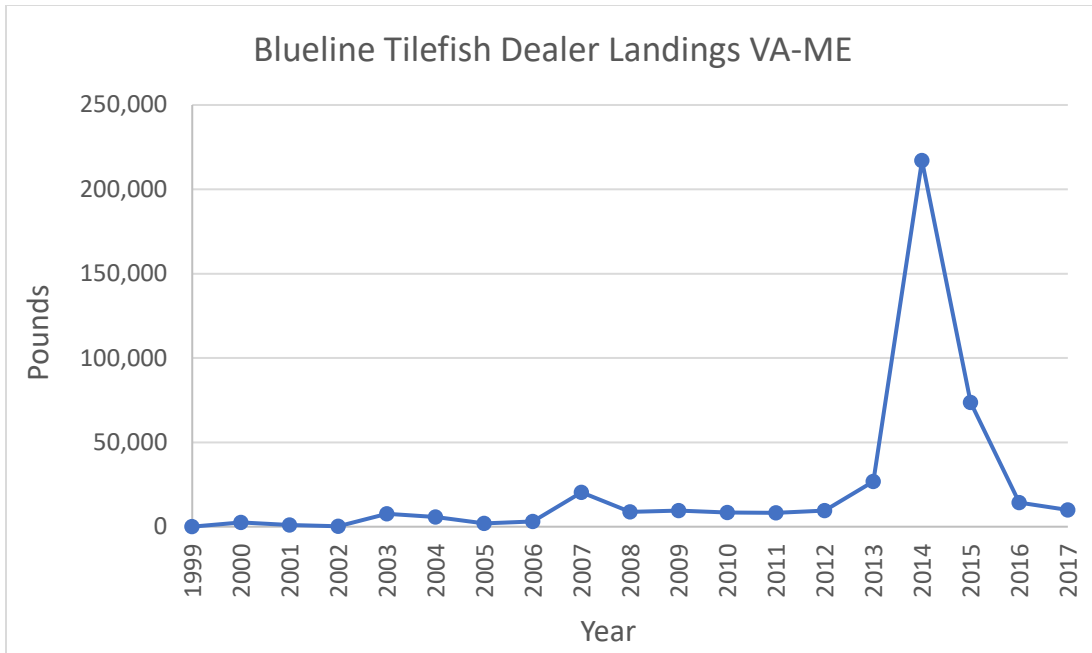
Given the differences between the blueline tilefish fisheries off the Mid- and South Atlantic, and the gaps in information on blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic incorporated in the last stock assessment, the results of SEDAR 50 (similar to those of SEDAR 32) are not sufficient for management off the Mid-Atlantic (north of Cape Hatteras). The MAFMC and SAFMC have formed a blueline tilefish subcommittee to assist in making ABC recommendations to their respective SSCs using the Data Limited Toolkit. This will offer an opportunity to partition blueline tilefish ABCs that cross the two management areas. The SSC will develop the 2019-2021 blueline tilefish ABC recommendations using recommendations from the subcommittee at its March meeting.

### **Status of the Stock**

NMFS lists blueline tilefish as overfished, but not overfishing from the SEDAR 32 assessment ([http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries\\_eco/status\\_of\\_fisheries/status\\_updates.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries_eco/status_of_fisheries/status_updates.html)). Updated stock status information was identified through SEDAR 50, the 2017 benchmark assessment. The blueline tilefish stock, which was split into north and south of Cape Hatteras stocks, was determined to be not overfished with overfishing not occurring for the region south of Cape Hatteras. Unfortunately, this assessment did not provide stock status information relevant to the Mid-Atlantic management area due to insufficient data. This is being addressed by the joint Mid- and South Atlantic blueline tilefish subcommittee.

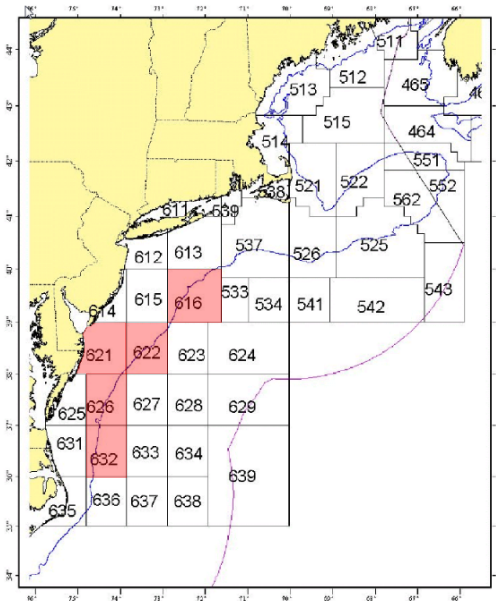
### **Fishery Performance**

Landings into VA-ME (Figure 1) were generally very low except for 2013-2015, when regulations south of Virginia, the lack of regulations in Federal waters from Virginia north, and the lack of state regulations in New Jersey drove effort somewhat northward and landings into New Jersey.



**Figure 1. Commercial U.S. Blueline Tilefish Landings (live weight) from Maine-Virginia, 1999-2017.** Source: 1999-2017 NMFS unpublished dealer data.

Landings were low and variable from VA-MA except for the higher NJ landings in 2013-2015. Further breakdown by year/state may violate data confidentiality rules (especially for 2016) Landings in 2017 were 9,957 pounds.

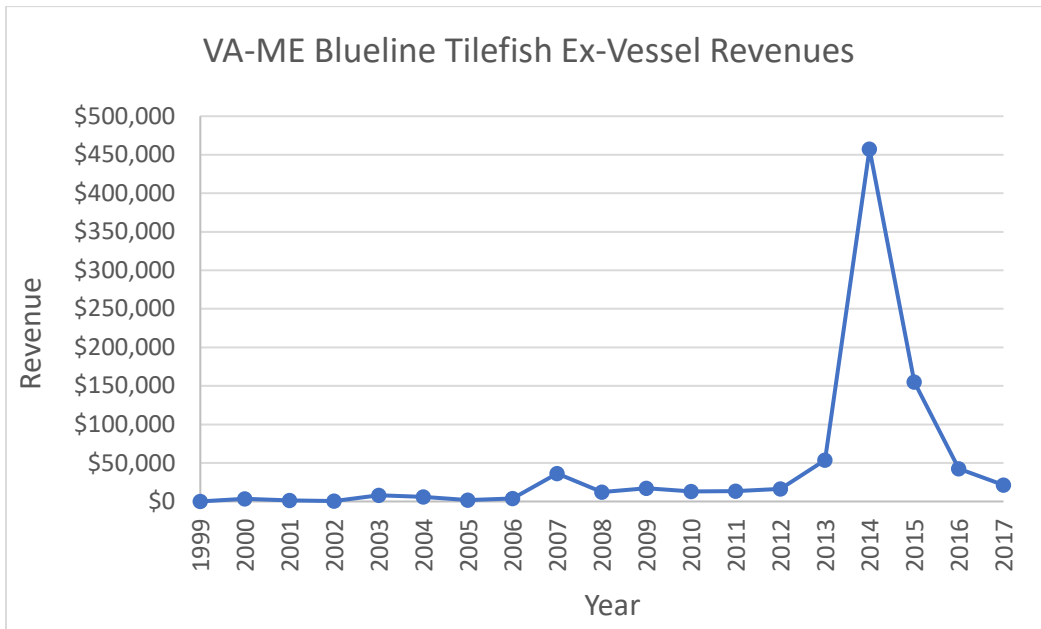


Landings from the entire time-series are approximately 2/3 from bottom longline, with most of the remaining landings coming from bottom trawl and handline. Over half of all landings in the time series were bottom longline into New Jersey in 2013-2015. Landings from all other gear types are low and variable from year to year.

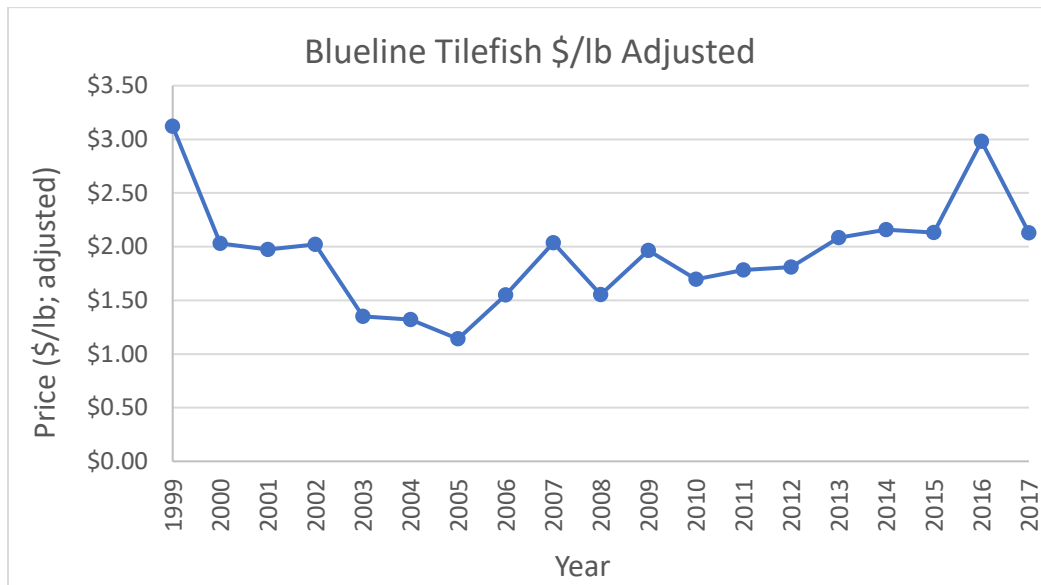
For location of catch, Statistical Areas 616, 621, 622, 626, and 632 accounts for the majority of catch in years without substantial trend other than the overall ramp up in the recent years in areas 621, 626, and 632. Further breakdown by year/area may violate data confidentiality rules (especially for 2016 and 2017).

**Figure 2. NMFS statistical areas accounting for the majority of blueline tilefish landings, 1994-2017 (Commercial and VTR).**

Commercial blueline tilefish ex-vessel revenues (nominal) and price (inflation adjusted to 2016 dollars) are described in the two figures immediately below.



**Figure 3. Ex-Vessel Revenues for blueline tilefish, Maine through Virginia combined, 1999-2017.**



**Figure 4. Price for blueline tilefish, Maine through Virginia combined, 1999-2017.** Note: Price data have been adjusted by the GDP deflator indexed for 2016 (2017 – unadjusted).

## Recreational Fishery

The recreational fishery is relatively small. Blueline tilefish intercepts in the MRIP program are an exceedingly rare event, but in 2016 MRIP estimates were 10,644 fish for Maryland, 3,040 fish for New Jersey, and 14,240 fish for Virginia. Preliminary 2017 MRIP estimates are 3,444 fish (all Virginia).

It is believed that VTR reporting compliance for blueline tilefish has been low, especially historically and for charter vessels. Table 1 provides the available VTR reports for blueline tilefish since 2012, when previous work with the advisors and other blueline tilefish recreational fishermen has suggested VTR reporting compliance began to encompass at least the primary head boats.

Year	Frequency	Number of Fish
2012	103	10,051
2013	120	11,838
2014	138	15,849
2015	170	14,391
2016	160	15,531
2017	112	9,682

**Table 1. Blueline tilefish VTR landings from ME-VA, 2012-2017.**