



PRESS RELEASE

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Mid-Atlantic Council to Initiate Scup Amendment

Philadelphia, PA—Last week the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted to initiate an amendment that could result in changes to catch allocations in the scup fishery. Under the current system, the commercial catch limit is set at 78% of the allowable catch, and the recreational harvest limit is set at 22%. If passed, the amendment could shift allocation from the commercial industry to the recreational sector and may also change the distribution of the commercial allocation among seasonal fishing periods.

The amendment was proposed in response to growing concerns about the current allocation system, which has not been revised since it was first established in 1996. The fishery was managed under a rebuilding plan from 1999 until it was declared rebuilt in 2009. During this ten-year period, commercial and recreational participants were restricted by low quotas and strict management measures to allow the stock to rebuild.

As a result of these efforts, stock size has continued to increase, and the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission were able to increase the 2012 catch limit to a level that was more than double the 2010 limit. Despite these increases, the recreational community has continued to voice frustration that higher catch limits have not resulted in more liberalized recreational regulations. In addition, fishermen harvesting scup in the summer have indicated that they should have a higher allocation.

“Prior to 2009, allocation concerns were typically associated with the low limits required under the rebuilding plan,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “We are now able to set higher harvest limits and quotas, and neither the recreational nor commercial sectors came close to exceeding their catch limits in 2011. However, our management partners at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and many of our constituents are still questioning whether the system that was established in 1996 is still appropriate for the fishery in 2012 and the future.”

The Council began discussing strategies for evaluating scup allocations more than two years ago, but this is the first time the Council has voted to initiate an amendment to address the issue. The amendment development process will begin with a thorough biological, social, and economic analysis of the current system.

“One of the most prominent themes that we heard from all stakeholder groups during the Visioning Project was that they want the Council to make decisions using contemporary data,” said Chairman Robins. “Scup allocation is an issue that the fishery community feels strongly about, but it speaks to the broader importance of considering whether the regulations we have for all of our managed fisheries are still appropriate as socioeconomic and biological conditions change over time.”

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) is one of eight regional councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council has primary responsibility for twelve species of fish and shellfish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between 3 and 200 miles off the Mid-Atlantic coast. Member states include New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. For more information, visit our website: www.mafmc.org.