



PRESS RELEASE

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Council Recommends Higher Butterfish Catch for Remainder of 2012

Dover, DE – During a special meeting last week the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted to recommend that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) increase the acceptable biological catch (ABC) of butterfish for the remainder of 2012 to a total of 4,200 metric tons (mt). The recommendation was based on advice from the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).

The proposed increase would have the most direct impact on participants in the longfin squid fishery. The Council has used a butterfish mortality cap to limit butterfish bycatch in the squid fishery since 2011. Under the existing ABC of 3,622 mt, the longfin squid fishery could be restricted toward the end of the year depending on butterfish catches. It is hoped that the increase will allow the squid fishery to stay open later in the year, allowing the squid fishery to utilize the full squid quota if squid are abundant and they continue to work to minimize butterfish bycatch.

“Butterfish and squid are some of the Council’s most unpredictable fisheries, and the recommendations of the SSC and Council are reasonable given the relatively high abundances of both butterfish and longfin squid indicated by the most recent data,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “This action allows us to avoid an unnecessary closure that would create hardships for the industry and families that depend on these fisheries, without compromising our statutory obligation to prevent overfishing.”

The impetus for an in-season adjustment was the Council’s June decision to increase the 2013 butterfish ABC to 8,400 mt. This increase more than doubles the existing 2012 ABC of 3,622 mt. At the August meeting, the Council discussed whether an in-season ABC adjustment was also appropriate and decided to have the SSC reconsider the 2012 butterfish ABC. The SSC met via webinar on September 13 and recommended that the ABC be increased to 4,200 mt for 2012, noting that the increase appeared likely to have no impact on the risk of overfishing the butterfish stock.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) is one of eight regional councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens 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.
