

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2017

Secretary Wilbur Ross
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I write in regards to pending 2017 recreational management measures for black sea bass. As I wrote last month, I am concerned about the accuracy of the data used last year to estimate black sea bass harvest in New York. I urge you to maintain the 2016 levels for 2017 to ensure that Long Island anglers are not forced to enact restrictive management measures to achieve unnecessary high harvest reductions for this upcoming season. I also request your support for an experimental January-February recreational black sea bass fishery for 2018.

As you know, since the February meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAMFC) to set the 2017-2019 specifications for black sea bass and to establish catch limits for the upcoming year, additional data has been made available. Specifically, the Marine Recreational Information Program's preliminary Wave 6 (harvest from November to December) recreational black sea bass harvest totals have been released. This data states that the average amount of black sea bass caught in New York in November and December was twenty-nine times higher than the average amount caught during those same months for the last five years. Prior to this preliminary data being made available, the ASMFC and MAMFC had adopted status quo management measures for the 2017 recreational black sea bass fishery. I have concerns about the accuracy of this Wave 6 data because of the well-documented challenges of collecting recreational data and the extreme increase in harvest from the last five years to 2016. According to the ASMFC and other stakeholders, the recreational data is based on interviews at the dock and surveys of trips taken, and thus is more anecdotal and less comprehensive than commercial data. Therefore, I urge you to maintain the 2016 levels for the upcoming 2017 season for recreational black sea bass.

Recreational anglers on Long Island have also requested the establishment of a January-February experimental black sea bass fishery in 2018. It is my understanding that this proposal will be considered at the Joint Meeting with ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board on May 10. Historically, a January-February recreational black sea bass fishery existed but was closed due to overages in 2009, remaining closed with the exception of 2013. The Council and Board have since received positive information about the state of the black sea bass stock, and are considering a 2018 January-February fishery. With positive trends in the black sea bass stock and an opportunity to collect additional information regarding the fishery, I urge the support of such an experimental January-February fishery, supported with strict record-keeping.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these requests. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator