



PRESS RELEASE

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Council Considers Black Sea Bass Overage and 2013 Management Measures

At last week's meeting in Baltimore, MD, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council considered a number of issues related to the recreational black sea bass fishery. The fishery closed on November 1 after preliminary landings estimates indicated that the harvest limit had been exceeded. This closure prompted concerns related to the black sea bass stock assessment and the current accountability measures that could result in a recreational fishery closure in 2014.

Although the black sea bass fishery was declared rebuilt in 2009, the Council has faced ongoing challenges with recommending management measures due to uncertainty about the size of the stock. "If landings in 2012 are reflective of abundance, the population of black sea bass is quite healthy," said Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Director Dr. Bill Karp in a letter last month to the Council's Chairman. "As abundance increases and targeting continues or increases, overages will persist."

This year's closure and the threat of an entire closed season in 2014 have intensified the pressure to address issues of scientific uncertainty so that future overages can be prevented. As a first step, the Council voted last week to request that the Scientific and Statistical Committee reconsider their recommendation for the 2013 allowable biological catch (ABC) limit in light of the most recent black sea bass landings and stock information. The Council will discuss any changes to the ABC at its meeting in February. The Council also requested that the NEFSC conduct an operational assessment for black sea bass in the coming year. This assessment would follow a data workshop conducted with state scientists to review any available information on black sea bass. The assessment results will be reviewed in October 2013 when the Council develops management recommendations for 2014.

The Council also discussed whether the current system of accountability measures is effective and practical for all of the Council's recreational fisheries. "The current situation with the rebuilt stock of black sea bass demands that we revisit accountability measures in the context of biological reference points and the available recreational catch data," said Council Chairman Rick Robins. "This amendment will afford the Council an important opportunity to consider alternative approaches to evaluate and manage catch within our recreational fisheries." The Council voted unanimously to initiate development of an omnibus amendment that would consider alternative accountability measures for black sea bass and other Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The amendment will be completed by June 2013—in time to have any new regulations in place by January 2014.

The Council also met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board to consider 2013 recreational management measures. The Board voted to develop an addendum to allow for state-specific or regional recreational approaches in 2013, and the Council recommended measures for federal waters. If the addendum is adopted, federal management measures would be a 20 fish possession limit, a 12.5 inch minimum size limit, and an open season from January 1 through February 28, May 19 through October 14, and November 1 through December 31.