



MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Revises 2013 Black Sea Bass Catch Limits

Last week the Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit of 5.5 million pounds for black sea bass in 2013 and 2014, resulting in a recreational harvest limit of 2.26 million lbs and a commercial quota of 2.17 million pounds. Black sea bass have been managed with a 4.5 million lb constant catch level since 2010. The Council's decision to increase the ABC was based on recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee.

The recreational black sea bass fishery closed two months early last year after preliminary catch estimates indicated that the 1.32 million lb. recreational quota had been exceeded by 1.63 million lbs. Under the current management system, recreational overages are subject to accountability measures (AMs), meaning that overages must be "paid back" as a deduction from the subsequent year's quota.

The 2012 closure and the possibility of future quota reductions sparked frustration among members the recreational fishing community, many of whom felt that the overage was caused by an overestimation of fishing effort and an underestimation of the black sea bass stock size. The Council discussed these concerns at the December 2012 meeting and requested that the SSC reconsider the ABC recommendations in light of recent stock and landings information.

The SSC met in January and initially concluded that the additional information relative to fishery performance, stock size, and recruitment were still insufficient to justify an ABC adjustment for black sea bass. However, after evaluating the constant catch policy that has been in place for three years, the SSC concluded that 4.5 million pounds is "extremely conservative" and recommend an increase to 5.5 million pounds for the next two years until a revised stock assessment is completed.

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.
