



NEWS RELEASE



Robert E. Beal, Executive Director

Christopher Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 13, 2022

MAFMC PRESS CONTACT: Mary Sabo, 302-526-5261
ASMFC PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger, 703-842-0749

MAFMC & ASMFC Take First Step Toward Recreational Management Reform for Bluefish, Sumer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) approved changes to the recreational fisheries management programs for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The changes include a new process for setting recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) and modifications to the recreational accountability measures. The Council recommended these changes through a framework action, and the Policy Board adopted the new process through Addendum XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Addendum II to the Bluefish FMP. Approval of this new process is part of a broader long-term effort by both the Council and Commission to improve recreational management of these four species. The new management program aims to provide greater stability and predictability in recreational measures from year-to-year while accounting for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates.

The Council and Policy Board considered a range of management options and ultimately selected one referred to as the "Percent Change Approach," with an agreement to continue development of several other options for possible implementation by 2026. Under the selected approach, managers will consider two factors when determining whether recreational measures should be restricted, liberalized, or remain unchanged for the next two years. First, they will look at how recreational harvest limits (RHLs) for the next two years compare to recent estimates of recreational harvest. This gives an indication of whether recreational harvest is likely to exceed the RHL if management measures remain unchanged. Next, managers will consider the most recent estimate of stock size relative to the target stock size. These two factors, in combination, will be used to determine the percentage change in harvest that management measures should aim to achieve.

Under the new process, when recent harvest estimates are close to the future RHL, management measures will either remain unchanged or be reduced or liberalized by 10%, depending on stock size relative to the target. In cases where the RHL is substantially above or below recent harvest estimates, the specific reduction or liberalization will vary based on stock size and will either be fixed at 10% or will be based on the difference between recent harvest and the RHL but capped at 20% or 40% (see [this table](#) for additional details). The Council and Policy Board selected this option because it uses currently available data and gives additional consideration to stock status when making management decisions. Under this approach, changes will be considered every other year when new scientific information about the stock is available.

While the Percent Change Approach is similar in some ways to the current process for setting recreational measures, there are several key differences. To account for uncertainty in recreational data, future RHLs will be evaluated relative to the confidence intervals around recent recreational harvest estimates. A confidence

Given summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish's presence in, and movement between, state waters (0-3 miles from shore) and federal waters (3-200 miles from shore), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) jointly manage these species.

www.asmfc.org

www.mafmfc.org

interval indicates the range of possible values given the statistical uncertainties around the estimate. The new process also places greater emphasis on stock status, potentially reducing the magnitude of changes when the stock status is healthy. Finally, the new process will provide greater stability, as measures will be set for two years at a time instead of every year.

The Council and Policy Board acknowledged this approach will not solve all recreational fisheries management challenges. With this in mind, they agreed to continue refinement of the Percent Change Approach as well as two other options considered within the Draft Framework/Addenda, with particular emphasis on using improved statistical models to develop measures. Use of the approved Percent Change Approach will sunset no later than the end of 2025 with a goal of implementing a new and improved approach to managing the recreational fisheries by the beginning of 2026.

The Council and Policy Board also revised the recreational accountability measures for all four species. Specifically, when biomass is between the target and threshold levels, the requirement of paying back recreational catch limit overages will account for whether those overages contributed to overfishing based on the most recent stock assessment information.

The Council and Policy Board considered but did not recommend an option to set constraints around the use of the Commission’s conservation equivalency policy as applied to the recreational fisheries for these four species. They decided to maintain the current policy to allow individual states the flexibility to tailor management measures to meet the needs of their fisheries.

The Framework/Addenda’s changes to the recreational management program are final for state waters (0-3 miles from shore) and will be used to develop 2023 recreational measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The new process will not be used for bluefish until the stock is declared rebuilt. The Council will submit the framework to NOAA Fisheries for review, approval, and implementation.

For more information, please visit <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/hcr-framework-addenda> or contact either Julia Beaty, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, (jbeaty@mafmc.org, 302-526-5250) or Dustin Colson Leaning, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, (dleaning@asmfc.org, 703-842-0740).

