



Summer Flounder Management Strategy Evaluation - Regional Workshops

Workshop Background Information and Participant Expectations

March 2021

MSE Background and Stakeholder Input

Management strategy evaluation (MSE) is a tool that allows scientists, managers, and stakeholders to test different strategies (e.g., regulations or harvest control rules) and their ability to achieve specified management objectives. In many cases, an MSE uses quantitative models to simulate a population, its ecosystem, the different strategies being considered, and the interaction between all of these components. In addition, MSE's can consider and evaluate uncertainty, risk, and broader ecosystem factors and, therefore, are an integral part of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) structured framework process¹.

An MSE won't specify a single outcome or strategy that solves and addresses all management issues or concerns. It will, however, provide the Council an opportunity to evaluate and balance different management strategies and their associated biological, social, and economic trade-offs that best address their management objectives in an ecosystem context. This allows the Council to test different strategies before anything gets implemented and make more informed decisions when selecting a strategy or combination of strategies that are most likely to achieve the desired outcomes.

For this MSE, the Council selected the following management question for further evaluation and analysis:

Evaluate the biological and economic benefits of minimizing discards (both live and dead) and converting discards into landings in the recreational sector. Identify management strategies to effectively realize these benefits.

When selecting this question, the Council discussed the various management challenges in addressing and reducing regulatory discards, particularly within the recreational sector of the summer flounder fishery. The Council noted this question has the potential to align efforts and

¹ Please see the workshop background document #1 for more information about the Council's EAFM structured framework process.

outcomes between the EAFM process and the Council’s typical recreational review and management process.

A critical component of MSE development is stakeholder input and engagement throughout the process. Stakeholders will help the Council identify clearly defined objectives, performance metrics, and management strategies to test as part of the MSE. In an effort to solicit as much stakeholder input for this project as feasible, the Council is planning an extensive outreach and engagement approach.

The Council already held a kick-off webinar and mock MSE workshop with relevant Council advisory panels and solicited stakeholder input on the recreational summer flounder management through a public comment form². In addition, regional workshops scheduled to take place in late March/early April 2021 will provide an opportunity for participants to offer additional input and ideas for consideration in the MSE. Input provided from all of these broad outreach activities will then feed into more focused stakeholder workshops. For these stakeholder workshops, a small (10-15 in total) core group of participants representing the range of fishery perspectives will participate in a series of three workshops to help the Council more efficiently and effectively progress through the MSE process.

Summer Flounder Background

Summer flounder is one of the most popular and valuable fisheries along the entire Atlantic coast. Commercial and recreational summer flounder fisheries have existed for decades, as have sector conflicts and competing management objectives.

While many regional workshop participants are likely engaged in the summer flounder fishery, others may not be, and some may be less familiar with its management. In order to provide a general and baseline understanding among all workshop participants, below is an overview of some important biological, management, and recreational discard information.

General Summer Flounder Biology & Management

- Summer flounder is jointly managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) covering the management unit from the Canadian border through North Carolina.
- The summer flounder fishery management plan (FMP) was established in 1988 with the goals of reducing fishing mortality on immature summer flounder, increasing fishery yield, and minimizing regulations to achieve these goals.

² Please see the workshop background document #3 and #4 for more detail and information regarding summer flounder public comment form and stakeholder feedback.

- 60 percent of the summer flounder total allowable landings are allocated to the commercial sector as a commercial quota and 40 percent is allocated to the recreational sector as a recreational harvest limit³.
- In 2019, 738 vessels held a federal commercial summer flounder moratorium permit, and 829 vessels held a federal summer flounder party/charter permit.
- Bottom otter trawls account for over 90% of all commercial summer flounder landings.
- In 2019, an estimated 8.67 million recreational trips were taken targeting summer flounder.
- In 2019, 87% of the harvest was estimated to come from private/rental boats, followed by anglers fishing from shore (10%), and then patrons on for-hire vessels (3%).
- Based on the latest stock assessment with data through 2017, summer flounder is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing.
- Based on the same stock assessment, the summer flounder stock was estimated to be at 78% of the target biomass in 2018.
- Most summer flounder, both males and females, are sexually mature at age 2, or approximately 16 inches.
- Summer flounder can reach a maximum age of 20 years.

Recreational Summer Flounder Discards

As noted above, this MSE will focus on strategies to maximize the biological and economic benefits in minimizing recreational discards (dead and alive) and below is some of the latest discard information.

- Over the last five years, nearly 90% of all recreationally caught summer flounder are released.
- It is estimated that 1 out of every 10 summer flounder that is released ends up dying (10% discard mortality rate) in the recreational fishery.
- Recreational dead discards account for 13% of the total (commercial and recreational) summer flounder catch.
- Recreational dead discards account for 22% of the total recreational catch.

What to Expect During the Workshop

All regional workshop participants should bring their own unique background, experiences, and perspectives of summer flounder and other mid-Atlantic fisheries as you participate in the workshop. Be prepared to discuss and provide feedback on the future management of summer flounder and bring your ideas on how to reduce recreational discards.

We will start the workshop with some introductory presentations to familiarize everyone with the Council's EAFM process, give a quick introduction to the MSE process and approach, and

³ The Council and ASMFC are currently considering a management action that might change the current commercial/recreational allocation percentages. For more information, please see: <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/sfsbsb-allocation-amendment>

provide an overview of the regional results received through the scoping feedback. Then we will have both full and smaller breakout group sessions to allow for some focused discussion and feedback. Participants will be asked to provide input on topics such as recreational discard concerns, possible management objectives, and performance metrics strategies to achieve these objectives. We will then reconvene as a larger group and report out and discuss the ideas generated by each breakout group.

These regional workshops are intended to allow stakeholders to bring ideas into the process early on and before any analysis begins or any management decisions are made. There are no wrong ideas or perspectives, and the goal is to identify and highlight as many concerns, management objectives and goals, and strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the fishery. All ideas and recommendations are welcome; however, it worth pointing out that not all of them will be able to be considered in this MSE. This may be due to a variety of factors such as: a lack of data, the inability to model an idea, outside the scope of the MSE (i.e., recreational discards), enforceability concerns, or higher management priorities etc. We will provide some examples of each of these situations throughout the workshop. This is not meant to discourage feedback and ideas but to highlight that it is impossible to incorporate and address everything. Rest assured that all ideas will be considered, and we will document and provide rationale for why recommendations were/were not incorporated in this MSE.

So please bring an open mind, your ideas, and be ready to discuss the future management of the recreational summer flounder fishery. Your input will improve the MSE and provide the Council and ASMFC will valuable information to make future management decisions.