



PRESS RELEASE

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Council Approves Omnibus Recreational Accountability Measure Amendment

During a meeting last week in Eatontown, New Jersey, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted on a suite of alternatives that would change the way the Council manages recreational fisheries. The measures were part of the Omnibus Recreational Accountability Measure Amendment initiated by the Council in December 2012 in response to concerns that the current system of accountability measures (AMs) did not adequately consider the inherent uncertainty in recreational fishery catch estimates.

If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the Council's recommendations would adapt the system of AMs to the realities of uncertain catch estimates and management controls associated with recreational fisheries. "An overage in the black sea bass fishery may have triggered this Council action, but it led to a comprehensive re-examination of how we can improve the management of all our recreational fisheries," said Council Chairman Rick Robins.

AMs are required for all federally managed fisheries as a way of either preventing catch overages or responding to them when they occur. Current accountability measures for the Council's commercial and recreational fisheries require overages to be paid back, pound-for-pound, as a deduction from the catch limit in a subsequent year.

Under the new amendment, a management response (i.e. reactive AM) would be invoked when the lower confidence limit, rather than the point estimate, of recreational catch exceeds the Annual Catch Limit (ACL). If this condition is met, paybacks would only be required in certain cases, such as when the stock is overfished or when both the overfishing limit has been exceeded *and* the stock has fallen below a certain level. If those conditions are not met, accountability measures would consist of adjustments to the bag limit, size limit, and season to prevent future overages.

"The amendment would temper the Council's reaction to recreational overages by taking the statistical uncertainty of the catch estimate into consideration before applying corrective management responses," said Chairman Robins. "This action responds directly to concerns expressed by stakeholders during the Visioning Project regarding the Council's treatment of uncertainty in recreational data and the broadly-supported goal of regulatory stability, both of which have been incorporated into our [draft 5-year Strategic Plan](#)."

The Council also voted to eliminate the exercise of in-season closure authority. This decision reflects the Council's preference for addressing recreational overages in subsequent years instead of through closures, which can have regionally disproportionate impacts on the recreational fishing industry.

In cases where a payback is required, the Council recommended a scaled payback of the ACL overage rather than a pound-for-pound payback. This method would allow the payback amount to be scaled depending on the condition of the stock, meaning that payback for an overage in an overfished fishery would be more severe than payback for an overage in a non-overfished fishery.

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