

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program Update

August 10, 2023



Background of MAFMC RSA Program

- Developed as Framework I to the following FMPs
 - Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish
 - **Summer Flounder, Scup, and Back Sea Bass**
 - **Bluefish**
 - Tilefish
- **Mission:** Meet unaddressed research needs and increase science/industry collaboration and build public trust
- Final approval in 2001 and first projects funded in 2002
- Funding was generated through the sale of a portion of each species' quota (0-3% of a fishery's TAL)

General RSA Program Roles



- Program creation
- Set aside specifications
- Priority setting
- Proposal review support
- Application of results



- Program/grant administration
- Project selection
- Project oversight
- Technical support
- Compensation fishing permitting and oversight
- Proposal reviews
- Application of results



- Dockside enforcement
- Compensation fishing permitting and administration
- Quota monitoring, reporting and reconciliation

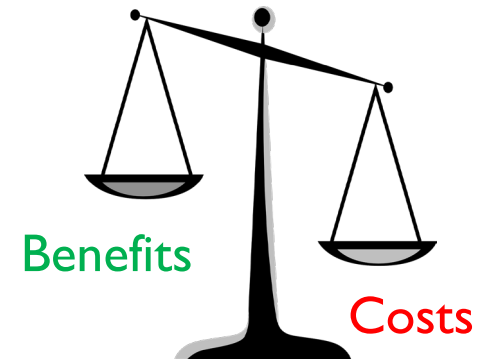
Program Strengths

- Funds high priority research that is supported entirely by the industry (no Federal dollars)
 - Gear conservation projects and SNE/MA NEAMAP survey
- Empowers managers in the decision process on what research gets carried out
- Gets fishermen and researchers working together (cooperative research)

However.....



MAFMC RSA Program Issues



- **Costs:**
 - Administrative and enforcement costs not considered initially
 - Value of fishing opportunities very different across species
 - Costs outweigh benefits
- **Enforcement:**
 - Uncovered financial incentives to not report trips/all RSA landings leading to noncompliance
 - National Standard I (prevent overfishing) concerns
 - Recreational landing reporting is not verifiable through dealer reporting
 - Capacity to monitor and enforce all RSA trips
 - 2014: 103 vessels, more than 2,000 trips
- **Research:**
 - Number of projects failed peer review
 - Application and utility to management
 - P.I. interest - limited number of projects, some long-term

All leading to a lack of public trust in program and suspension in 2015

Council Interest in Possible RSA Redevelopment

- Research needs and priorities continue and funding needs remain
- Series of four exploration workshops in 2021-2022
 - Review operation and issues of old program, identify potential new/revised approaches to address concerns of old program
 1. Research
 2. Funding
 3. Law Enforcement, Monitoring, and Administration
 4. Review and Recommendations
- **SSC Economic Work Group** – provided technical information and strategic advice on economic considerations and trade-offs of a revised program
- **Research Steering Committee** – coordinated workshops and met separately 4 times to take workshop feedback and develop a possible revised program

Areas of Consideration in Revised Program

- Revised and prioritized RSA program **Goals** and **Objectives**

Administration/Enforcement

- Call-in/notification/reporting requirements
- Shore-side monitoring of RSA quota
- Number of landing locations
- Number of vessels participating
- Verification of for-hire harvest
- Administrative burden and costs relative to benefit

Funding

- Species/FMP potential RSA allocation was available
- Portion of Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) set aside
- Funding mechanisms
- RSA quota allocation

- Lack of trust in third party quota process
- Disconnect and less collaboration between researcher and industry

Research

- Principal investigator disinterest/lack of project proposals
- Perceived conflicts of interest
- Quality research/peer review
- Funding for species research
- Data availability/open access
- Projects not used in science and management

ASMFC/State Engagement & Cooperation

- ASMFC and state partners will play a critical role in any future program
- New/expanded areas of state involvement in RSA redevelopment
 - Shoreside participation and provisions
 - For-hire tracking of harvest
 - Best practices or common/standard approaches for implementation across states – administration and law enforcement
- Any potential future program would likely need joint management action with ASMFC for consistency in joint managed species

Recent RSA Redevelopment Timeline

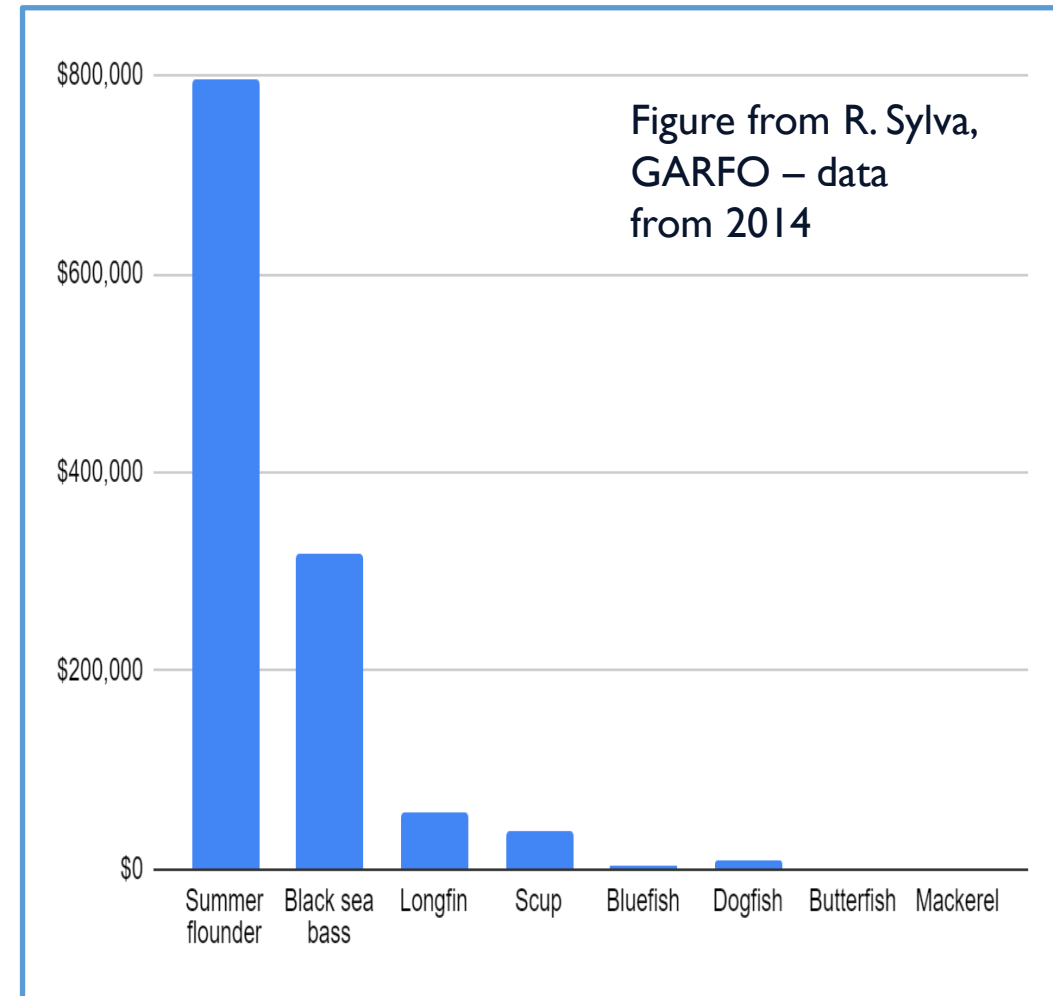
- June 2022, the Council supported the continued redevelopment of the RSA program, recognizing a lot more work remains before a final decision
- The RSC identified critical issues to address and the need to work through other program specifics
- ASMFC and state partner support and cooperation needed to successfully implement any program
 - Commitment of Council, ASMFC, States, NMFS resources
 - Short-term and long-term support

ASMFC Policy Board Input

- Met July 11, 2023 to provide input and make a recommendation regarding RSA program redevelopment
- Mixed opinions about restarting program and potential benefits
- Passed following motion (13-3-0-1)
 - Motion to recommend to the Mid Atlantic Council to consider future RSA programs only for those species that are not jointly managed with the ASMFC. This would preclude RSA programs being conducted for summer flounder, black sea bass, scup, dogfish and bluefish.*
- Address enforcement/monitoring concerns, minimize state impacts, and allow for Council to potentially redevelop program
 - Evaluate new program and potentially reconsider in future
- Motion is a recommendation but not binding

Future of RSA Program

- Without state/ASMFC support and participation – implementing a revised RSA program will be extremely challenging
- Without jointly managed species, significant reduction in available funds for research
 - Unclear if remaining species could generate enough funds to support research
- Draft framework and program elements developed by RSC would need to be reviewed/revise
 - E.g., approach similar to the NEFMC RSA program for scallops, At. Herring, monkfish



Today's Meeting

- Update on program and recent developments
- Given these challenges, staff recommend
 - Continue the suspension of the RSA program and partner with the ASMFC (and other regional partners) to prioritize cooperative research and identify and pursue appropriate funding sources to address the Council's research needs
- Council feedback and input on program