



March 2019 Council Meeting Summary

March 6-7, 2019

Virginia Beach, VA

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's March 2019 meeting in Virginia Beach, VA. Presentations, briefing materials, and webinar recordings are available on the Council website at www.mafmc.org/briefing/march-2019.

Summer Flounder Specifications and Management Measures

Summary of Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW)/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) 66

Dr. Jon Hare of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented the outcomes of the November 2018 peer review of benchmark stock assessments for summer flounder and striped bass. The summer flounder assessment concluded that the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2017 relative to the revised biological reference points. The assessment incorporated the revised time series of recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program, which contributed to increases in the estimated summer flounder biomass over the assessment time series.

Summer Flounder 2019-2021 Specifications

The Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission's) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) approved revised summer flounder catch and landings limits for 2019, as well as new limits for 2020-2021, based on the results of the recent benchmark stock assessment. The approved specifications include constant catch and landings limits to be applied in each year based on a three-year averaging approach.

The table below summarizes the proposed commercial quota and recreational harvest limit (RHL) for summer flounder in each year 2019-2021. 2019 interim values and the percent change from these values are provided for comparison purposes. Interim and revised limits are prior to any deductions for past discards and landings overages.

| | <i>2019 Interim Limits (mil lb)</i> | <i>Council and Board Recommended 2019-2021 Limits (mil lb)</i> | <i>% Change from Interim 2019 Limits</i> |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Commercial Quota | 7.72 | 11.53 | +49% |
| RHL | 5.15 | 7.69 | +49% |

The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The Council will forward its recommendations for federal waters (3 – 200 miles from shore) to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for review and final approval.

Summer Flounder 2019 Recreational Measures

The Council and Board approved the continued use of regional Conservation Equivalency for the recreational summer flounder fishery in 2019 to achieve, but not exceed, the recommended 2019 summer flounder RHL of 7.69 million pounds.

Conservation equivalency allows individual states or multi-state regions to develop customized measures that, in combination, will achieve the coastwide RHL. The Council and Board also maintained the status quo non-

preferred coastwide measures that are written into the federal regulations but waived in favor of state regulations once conservation equivalency is approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). These measures include a 4-fish possession limit, a 19-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of May 15 – September 15. The Council and Board also maintained the status quo precautionary default measures (i.e., a 2-fish possession limit, a 20-inch total length minimum size, and an open season of July 1 – August 31) which would be implemented in any state or region that does not adopt measures consistent with the conservation equivalency guidelines.

The Board moved to consider regional proposals for recreational measures that maintain *status quo* harvest relative to preliminary 2018 MRIP recreational harvest. The Board will consider final approval of any regional proposals in early April 2019.

Summer Flounder Commercial Issues and Goals and Objectives Amendment

The Council and Board selected preferred commercial management alternatives in the [Summer Flounder Commercial Issues Amendment](#), and recommended revisions to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) goals and objectives for summer flounder.

The Council and Board recommended no changes to the current eligibility criteria for commercial moratorium permits for summer flounder, established through Amendment 2 in 1993.

The Council and Board also agreed to modify the state-by-state commercial quota allocations such that annual coastwide quotas of up to 9.55 million pounds would be distributed according to the current allocations. In years when the coastwide quota exceeds 9.55 million pounds, additional quota beyond this trigger would be distributed in equal shares to all states except Maine, Delaware, and New Hampshire, which would split 1% of the additional quota. This is a modified version of Alternative 2C considered through the amendment. If approved by NMFS, these revised allocations may be effective as early as January 1, 2020, but would more likely be effective January 1, 2021.

The Council and Board considered, but did not approve, a motion that would have allowed for additional commercial allocation options to be developed for future consideration.

Additionally, the Council considered, but ultimately did not approve, adding landings flexibility policies as a frameworkable issue in the Council's FMP. Any future landings flexibility policies considered by the Council would likely need to be considered through an FMP amendment process. Currently, landings flexibility can be considered through state level agreements without Council action.

The Council and Board also approved revised FMP goals and objectives for summer flounder, which focus on ensuring biological sustainability of the summer flounder stock, supporting and enhancing development of effective management measures, and optimizing social and economic benefits from the resource.

Interim 2020 Specifications for Black Sea Bass, Scup, and Bluefish

The Council approved interim 2020 catch and landings limits for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish. These include the same commercial quotas and RHLs implemented for these three species for 2019. These measures are expected to be in place only for the first few months of 2020 and will be revised as soon as possible once the results of the forthcoming operational stock assessments for all three species are available later this year. Council action was required to allow the 2019 specifications to extend into the first few months of 2020 because catch and landings limits for these three species do not roll over from one year to the next.

Black Sea Bass Management Reform

The Council and the Board discussed ongoing work related to recreational and commercial management reform. They revisited the Commission's strategic plan addressing broad issues for black sea bass recreational

management, including annual variability in management measures and equity in regional harvest opportunities. The Council and Board reaffirmed their previous commitment to form a new joint working group to further develop and analyze approaches for improving management in these areas.

They also reviewed progress made by the Commission's Commercial Black Sea Bass Working Group on options for revisions to the commercial state-by-state quota allocations and discussed implications of the federal in-season closure regulations on state-by-state quota management. The Board will continue work on these issues through their Plan Development Team. The Council initiated an amendment to address commercial black sea bass issues but agreed to postpone development of management alternatives until later in the year to allow the Commission's Plan Development Team to further develop options which may warrant consideration of Council action.

Chub Mackerel Amendment

The Council approved a suite of management measures for Atlantic chub mackerel in federal waters from Maine through North Carolina. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the Chub Mackerel Amendment will add chub mackerel to the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP.

The management measures approved by the Council include an annual total allowable landings limit of 4.50 million pounds, a 40,000 pound commercial possession limit when 90% of this limit is projected to be landed, and a 10,000 pound possession limit when 100% of this limit is projected to be landed. In addition, commercial fishermen will be required to have one of the existing federal commercial permits for longfin squid, *Illex* squid, Atlantic mackerel, or butterfish in order to retain any amounts of chub mackerel in federal waters from Maine through North Carolina. Fishermen who do not already have one of these permits can obtain one of the existing open access permits. Similarly, for-hire vessels will be required to have the mackerel, squid, butterfish party/charter permit in order to retain chub mackerel.

SSC Membership

The Council approved reappointments of all 16 members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee who reapplied for additional three-year terms.

Kitty Hawk Wind Project

The Council received a presentation from Avangrid Renewables on their Kitty Hawk Wind Project, which is currently in the planning, assessment, and stakeholder outreach stage.

Next Council Meeting

Monday, April 8, 2019 – Thursday, April 11, 2019

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