



Black Sea Bass

2024 Specifications



Council and Board Meeting
August 8, 2023

Objective

- Recommend for 2024:
 - Commercial and recreational ACLs
 - Commercial and recreational ACTs
 - Commercial quota and RHL
 - Commercial in-season closure buffer
- Consider if changes are needed to the federal commercial measures which can be modified through specifications.

Overview

- Stock status
- Recent fishery performance
- Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report
- SSC ABC recommendation
- MC recommendations

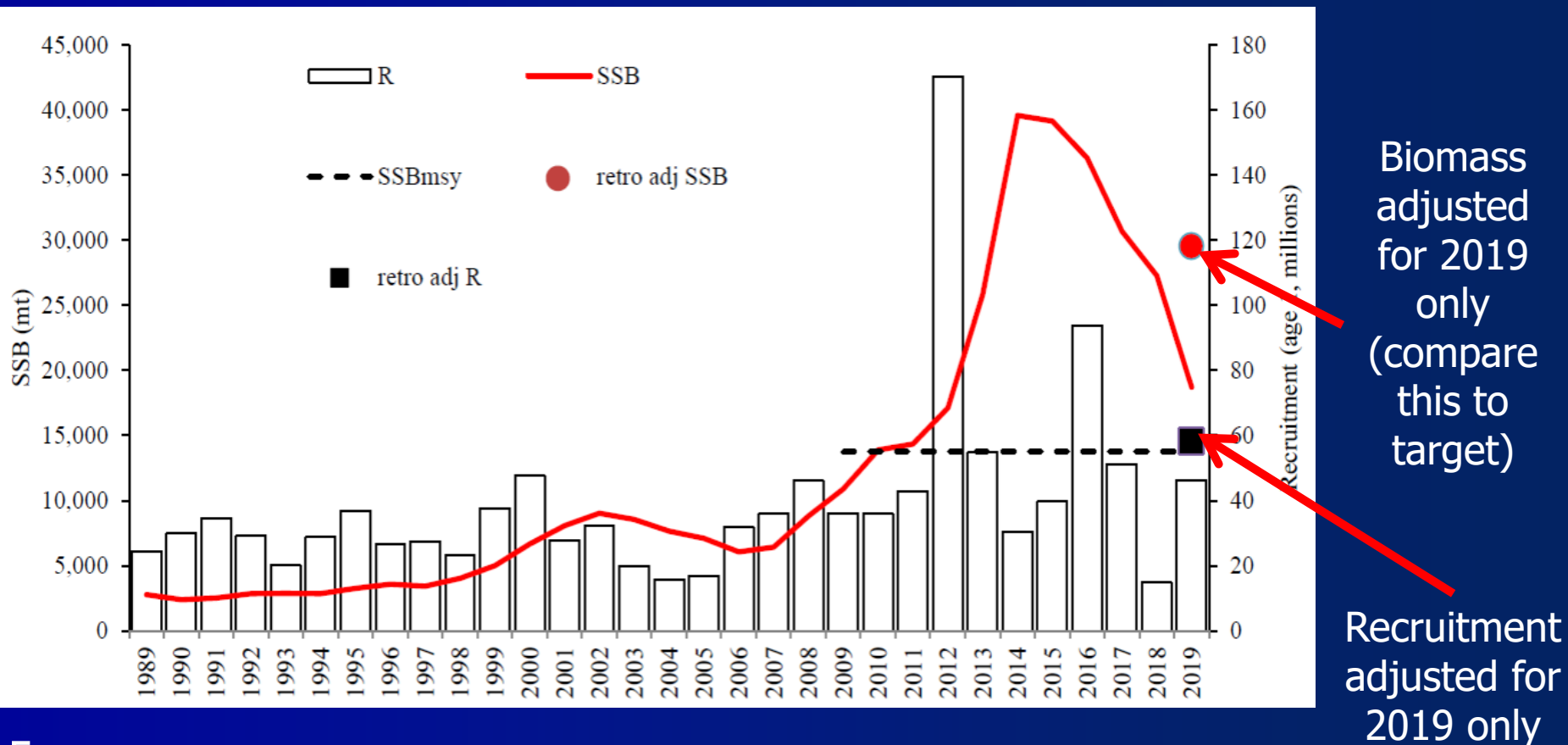
Stock Status

- 2021 management track assessment
 - Data through 2019
- Research track assessment currently in development
 - October 2023 peer review
- Stock status will be updated through a subsequent management track assessment in June 2024

Stock Status

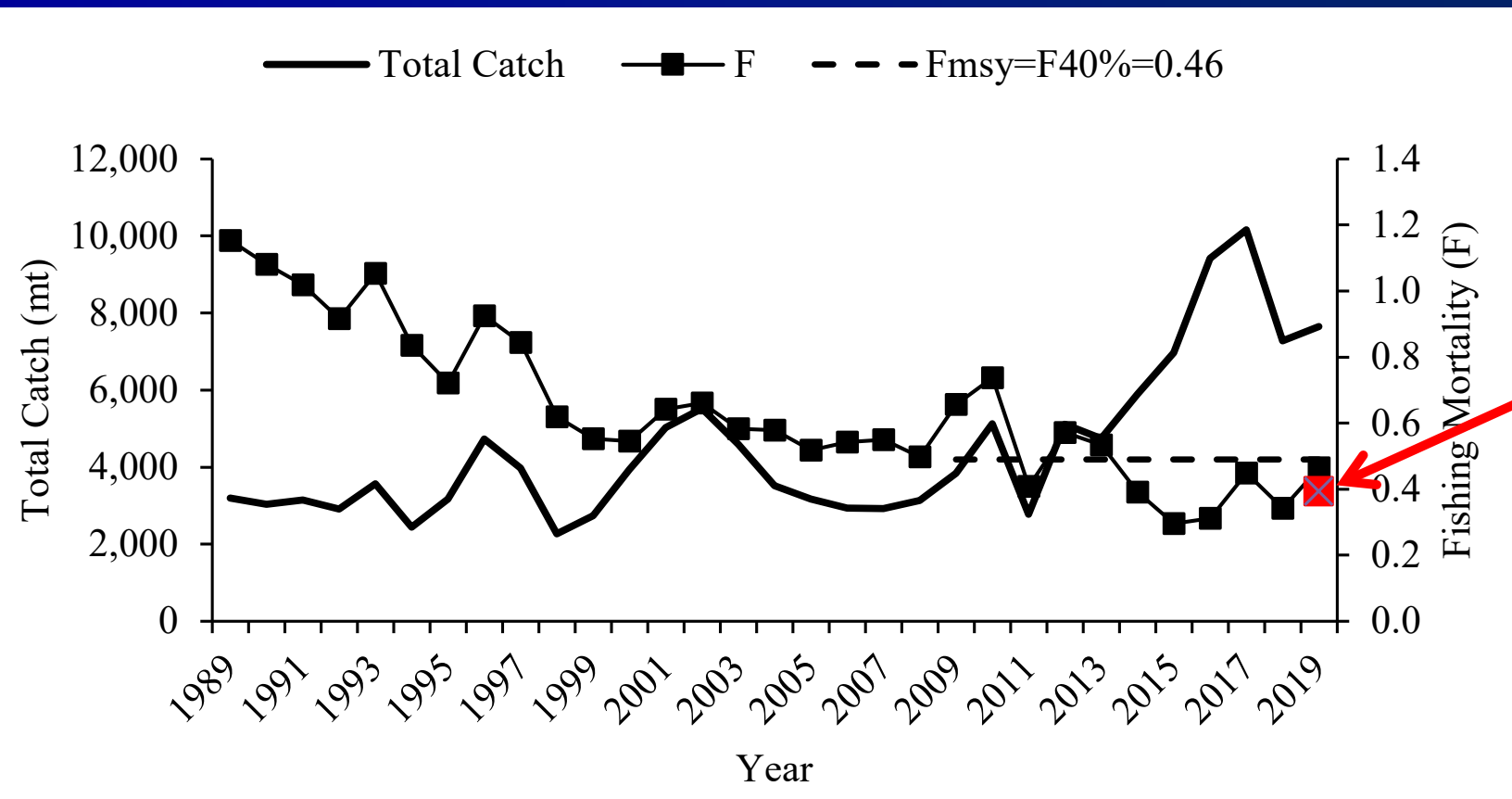
Not overfished.

Biomass about double the target level as of 2019.



Stock Status

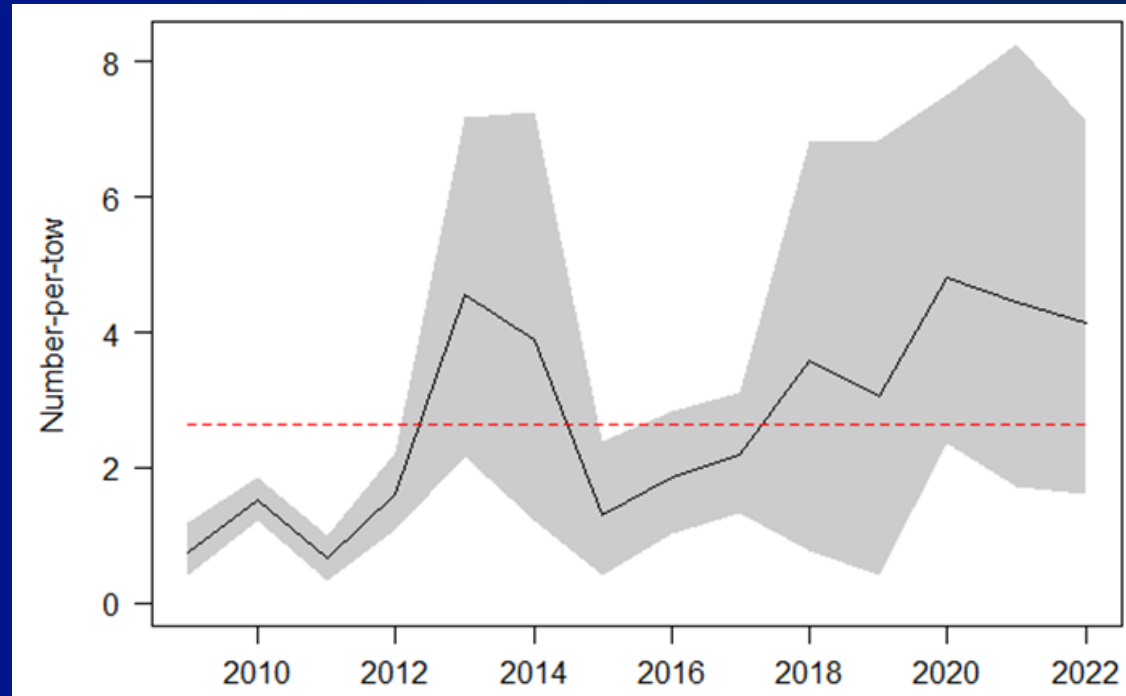
Overfishing not occurring as of 2019.



Fishing mortality adjusted for 2019 only (compare this to threshold)

Data Update

- Relative abundance from NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey has generally increased since 2015.
- Above avg. 2011, 2015, 2016, and 2019 cohorts apparent in aggregate index and/or age composition data.



Stratified mean number-per-tow \pm 90% CI from spring bottom trawl survey, 2009-2022 (Bigelow years). The red dotted line represents the median.

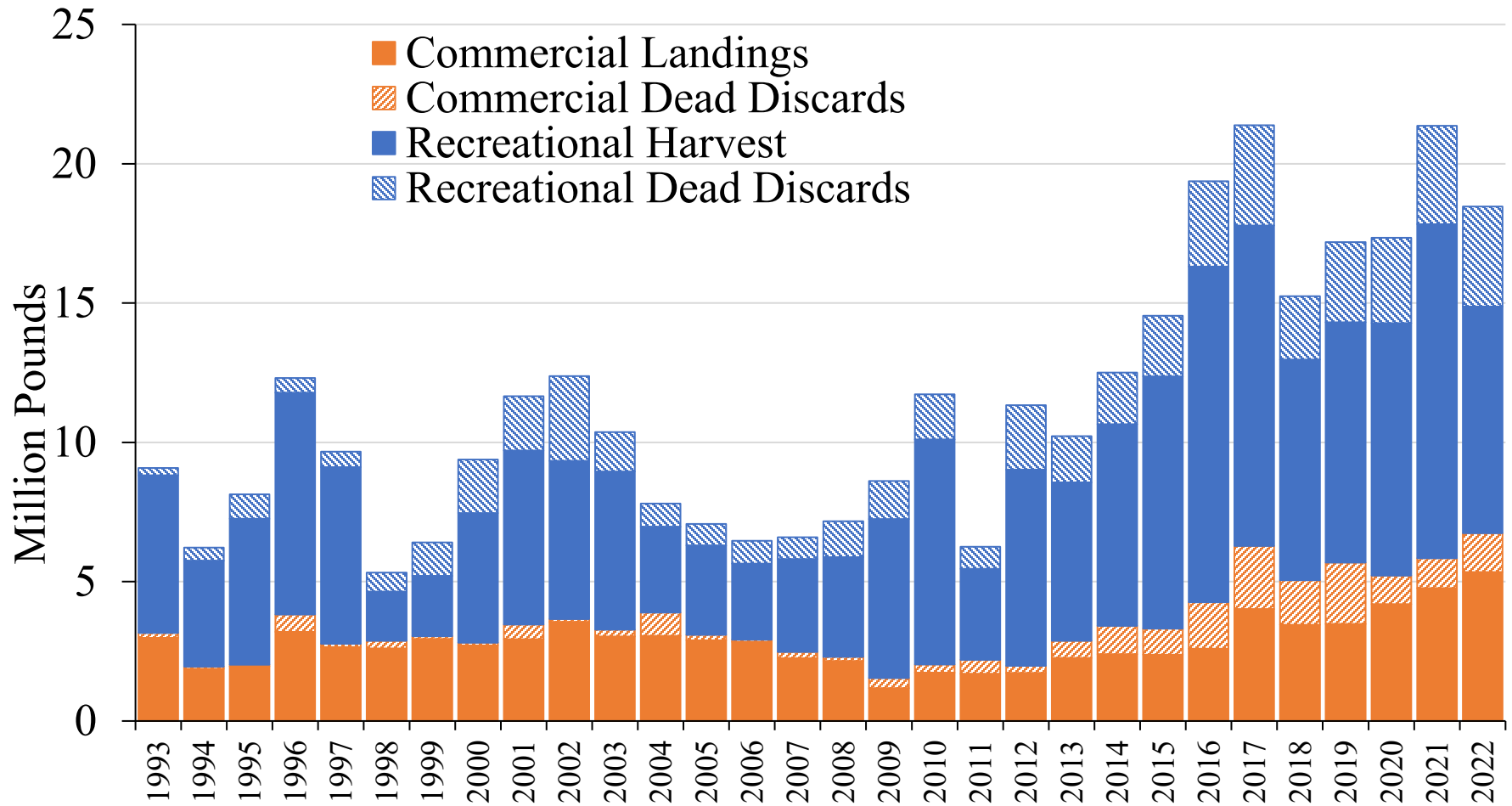
OFLs and ABCs

Year	Total dead catch	OFL	OFL over/under	ABC	ABC over/under
2010	2.03	NA	NA	4.50	-55%
2011	2.10	NA	NA	4.50	-51%
2012	5.96	NA	NA	4.50	+32%
2013	5.99	NA	NA	5.50	+9%
2014	7.92	NA	NA	5.50	+44%
2015	7.92	NA	NA	5.50	+44%
2016	10.66	NA	NA	6.67	+60%
2017	11.70	12.05	-3%	10.47	+12%
2018	9.97	10.29	-3%	8.94	+12%
2019	9.64	10.29	-6%	8.94	+8%
2020	17.33	19.39	-11%	15.07	+15%
2021	21.35	17.68	+21%	17.45	+22%
2022	18.46	19.56	-6%	18.86	-2%
2023	--	17.01	--	16.66	--

Limits/catch values in millions of pounds.

Total catch calculated using "old" MRIP data through 2019, "new" MRIP data starting in 2020.

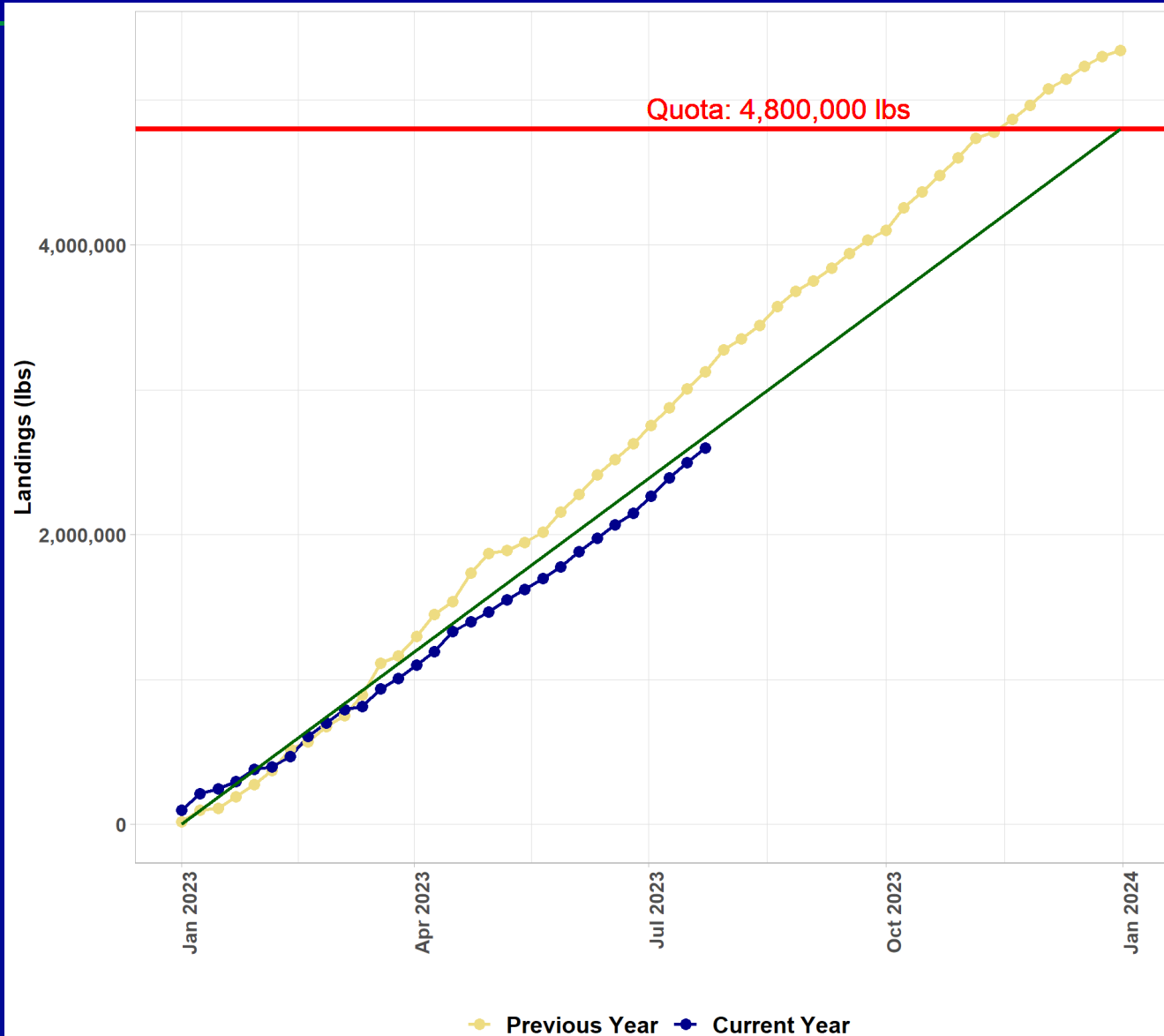
Total Catch



Commercial Fishery

Year	Com. land.	Com. quota	Quota over/under	Com. dead disc.	Projected com. dead discards	Disc. over/under	Com. dead catch	Com. ACL	ACL over/under
2014	2.40	2.17	+11%	1.01	0.36	+181%	3.41	2.60	+31%
2015	2.38	2.21	+8%	0.93	0.39	+138%	3.31	2.60	+27%
2016	2.59	2.71	-4%	1.67	0.44	+280%	4.26	3.15	+35%
2017	4.01	4.12	-3%	2.26	0.97	+133%	6.27	5.09	+23%
2018	3.46	3.52	-2%	1.59	0.83	+92%	5.05	4.35	+16%
2019	3.48	3.52	-1%	2.20	0.83	+165%	5.68	4.35	+31%
2020	4.20	5.58	-25%	1.03	1.40	-27%	5.22	6.98	-25%
2021	4.77	6.09	-22%	1.08	3.43	-69%	5.84	9.52	-39%
2022	5.35	6.47	-17%	1.39	3.63	-62%	6.74	10.10	-33%
2023	--	4.80	--	--	2.70	--	--	7.50	--

2023 Commercial Landings



Recreational Fishery

Year	Data	Rec. harvest	RHL	RHL over/under	Rec. dead disc.	Projected rec. dead discards	Rec. disc. over/under	Rec. dead catch	ACL	ACL over/under
2014	Old MRIP	3.67	2.26	+62%	0.84	0.50	+68%	4.51	2.90	+56%
2015		3.79	2.33	+63%	0.82	0.57	+44%	4.61	2.90	+59%
2016		5.19	2.82	+84%	1.21	0.57	+112%	6.40	3.52	+82%
2017		4.16	4.29	-3%	1.27	0.57	+123%	5.43	5.38	+1%
2018		3.82	3.66	+4%	1.10	0.70	+57%	4.92	4.59	+7%
2019		3.46	3.66	-5%	0.5	1.09	-54%	3.96	4.59	-14%
2020	New MRIP	9.05	5.81	+56%	3.06	0.93	+229%	12.11	8.09	+50%
2021		11.97	6.34	+89%	3.54	0.93	+280%	15.51	7.93	+96%
2022		8.14	6.74	+21%	3.59	2.02	+78%	11.73	8.76	+34%
2023		--	6.57	--	--	2.59	--	--	9.16	--

AP Fishery Performance Report

Recreational Fishery Issues

- Uniform % reductions in harvest across all states are especially hard on states with the most restrictive measures to start with.
- Rec. fishery is continually penalized despite robustness of the stock.
- One advisor noted that availability drives catch and expressed concern about comments that measures should be liberalized because biomass is high.

AP Fishery Performance Report

Recreational Fishery Issues, continued

- Rec. restrictions hurt the economy as support businesses also suffer.
- Multiple for-hire advisors support the use of different for-hire vs. private recreational measures.
- Lower minimum size limits help reduce discards, improve the fishing experience.
- One advisor recommended private rec. catch reporting through a cell phone app, use of a total cumulative length limit, prohibition on discards, larger hook sizes.

AP Fishery Performance Report

Recreational Fishery Issues, continued

- One advisor recommended “managing for abundance” – liberalize with caution, the stock assessment isn’t perfect.
- Another advisor disagreed – should take advantage of high biomass when it is available. Black sea bass are retained for food. Assessment doesn’t have a stock/recruitment relationship – extra caution may not result in increased biomass.

AP Fishery Performance Report

Commercial Fishery Issues

- Two recreational advisors supported reducing trawl discards (e.g., separate quotas for trawl vs. pot/trap).

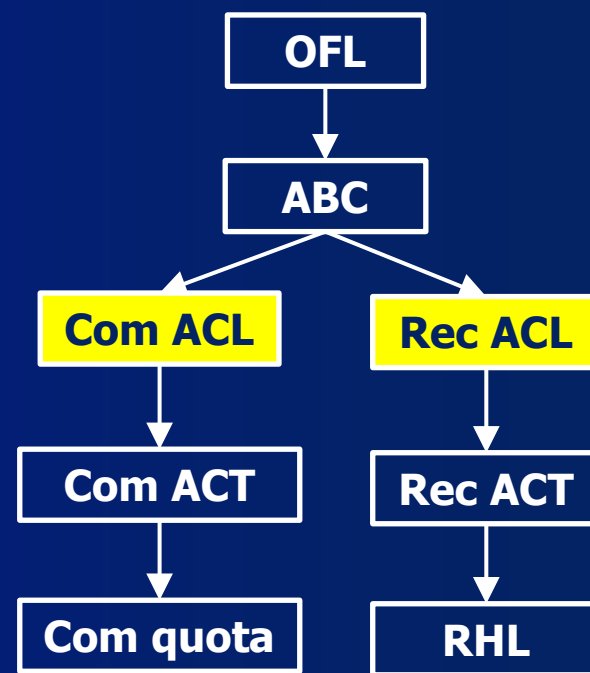
Additional AP comments

- Frustration with restrictive regs is leading to non-compliance – people just want to take home a fish.
- Regulations should be more consistent across states.
- Discards may not be accurately reported. Fishermen are concerned that discards will be used against them.
- Disappointment that research track delayed.
- Low commercial BSB prices last year.

- Insert SSC slides

Annual Catch Limits

- Defined by com/rec allocation.
- 45% of ABC = com. ACL.
- 55% of ABC = rec. ACL.
- ACLs unchanged from 2023.



Annual Catch Targets (ACTs)

- **MC recommendation: ACLs = ACTs**

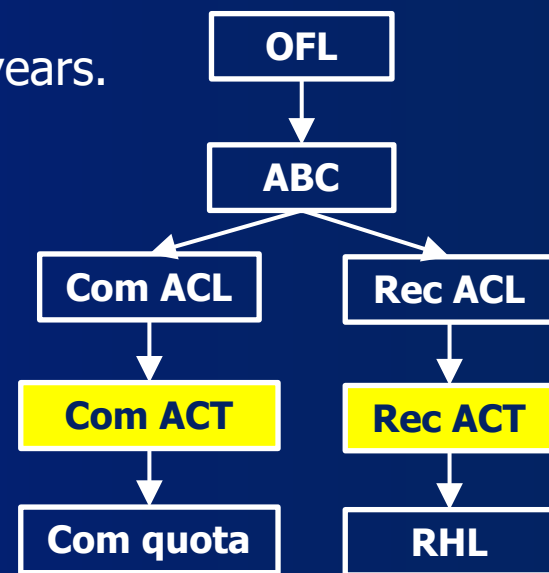
- No mgmt uncertainty buffers consistent with past years.

- **Commercial fishery**

- Landings data are a census of the fishery
- Timely monitoring
- Mostly limited access
- In-season closures
- Quota overages have been rare

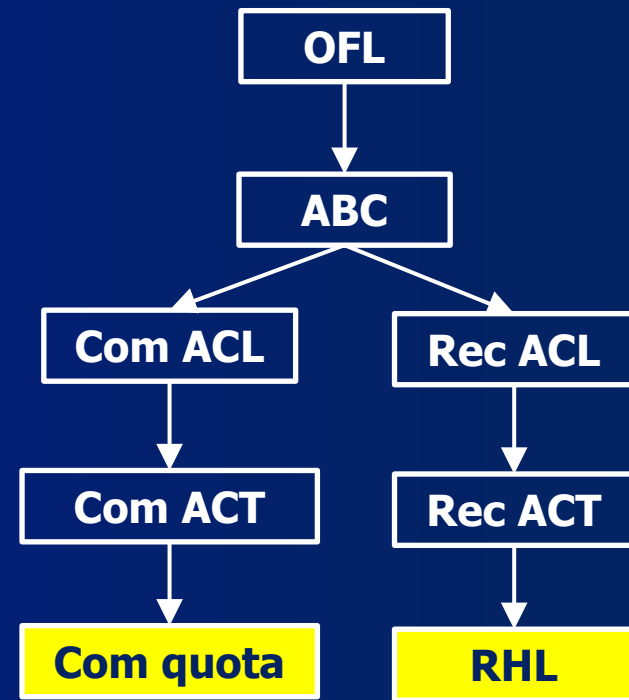
- **Recreational fishery**

- Catch not as well controlled (data lags, no in-season closures, open access)
- Some recent year overages were due to mgmt decisions
- New, potentially temporary, management process (Percent Change Approach) sets a new harvest target which can differ from the RHL
- Ongoing FW/addenda to consider new approach for setting rec. measures for 2026 and beyond



Com. Quota and RHL

- ACTs minus projected dead discards.
- Method for projecting dead discards is not prescribed in FMP and can vary on annual basis.
- **MC recommends maintaining same methods as 2023 but updating with 2020-2022 data.**



Com. Projected Dead Discards

- Method used starting with 2021 specifications:
 - 3 yr avg. proportion of com. dead catch that was discarded, applied to the commercial ACT
- 2023 specifications used 2017-2019 catch data
 - 36% of ACT discarded = 2.70 mil lb dead disc.
- **Updated with 2020-2022 data for 2024 specifications**
 - **20% of com. ACT discarded = 1.50 mil lb dead discards**
 - 7.50 mil lb. ACT – 1.50 mil lb dead disc = 6.00 mil lb quota

Rec. Projected Dead Discards

- Method used for 2023 = avg. of two approaches, using 2017-2019 data.
 - Same method as commercial = 2.14 mil lb
 - Straight 3 year avg = 3.04 mil lb
 - Avg. of two approaches = 2.59 mil lb
- **Updated with 2020-2022 data for 2024 specifications**
 - Same method as commercial = 2.38 mil lb
 - Straight 3 year avg = 3.40 mil lb
 - **Avg. of two approaches = 2.89 mil lb dead disc**
 - 9.16 mil lb ACT – 2.89 mil lb dead disc = 6.27 mil lb RHL

MC Discussion of Rec. Discards

- One MC member preferred using the same method as the commercial fishery. All other MC members supported maintaining the method used for the 2023 RHL.
- Rec. dead discards a smaller % of total rec. dead catch under old MRIP units compared to new MRIP units. MC not aware of any potential explanations for this difference.
- Performance of past methods:
 - Method used for 2021-2022 under predicted discards.
 - Limited ability to assess performance of 2023 method given currently available data.

MC Discussion of Rec. Discards

- Higher projected discards → lower RHL → more restrictive bag, size, and/or season → higher discards.
- Some MC members supported keeping projected rec. discards as low as possible; however, they agreed this needs further discussion and did not oppose maintaining the 2023 method for calculating 2024 projected discards.

MC Recommendations Summary

Measure	2023		2024		Basis
	mil lb	mt	mil lb	mt	
OFL	17.01	7,716	No change from 2023		SSC recommendation
ABC	16.66	7,557			
Com. ACL	7.50	3,401	No change from 2023		45% of ABC (commercial allocation)
Com. ACT	7.50	3,401			Equal to the ACL; no deduction for mgmt uncertainty
Projected com. dead discards	2.70	1,224	1.50	680	3-year avg proportion of com. dead catch that was discarded applied to the com. ACL (i.e., 36% based on 2017-2019 for 2023 and 20% based on 2020-2022 for 2024)
Com. quota	4.80	2,177	6.00	2,721	Com. ACT minus projected com. dead discards
Rec. ACL	9.16	4,156	No change from 2023		55% of ABC (recreational allocation)
Rec. ACT	9.16	4,156			Equal to the ACL; no deduction for mgmt uncertainty
Projected rec. dead discards	2.59	1,175	2.89	1,311	Avg of two methods recommended by MC in 2022, uses 2017-2019 discards data for 2023 and 2020-2022 for 2024
RHL	6.57	2,981	6.27	2,845	Rec. ACT minus projected rec. dead discards

Fed. Commercial Measures

- No possession limit (state-specific limits)
- Min. trawl mesh size of 4.5" diamond if retaining more than
 - 500 lb, Jan – Mar
 - 100 lb, Apr – Dec
- Pots/traps
 - 2 escape vents, degradable hinges
 - 1.375" x 5.75" rectangular, 2" x 2" square, 2.5" circular
- Min. size: 11" total length
- MC recommend no changes for 2024.

Com. In-Season Closure Buffer

- Revisions to in-season closure regulations expected to be effective Jan. 1, 2024.
- Commercial fishery will close coastwide to all federally permitted vessels and dealers once landings are projected to exceed the coastwide quota plus an additional buffer of up to 5%.
- Appropriate buffer should be adopted through specifications.
- Intent: minimize negative economic impacts when coastwide quota is reached before all states have fully harvested their allocations.

Com. In-Season Closure Buffer

- Staff recommend full 5% buffer in 2024.
 - Unlikely to be needed.
 - But also unlikely to negatively impact the stock.
 - Could provide some socioeconomic benefits in the unlikely event it is needed.
- MC discussion via email.
 - No opposition to 5% for 2024.
 - Unlikely to be needed.
 - May develop a more structured approach to determining appropriate % in the future.

Questions/Discussion

MC recommendations:

- 2024 rec. ACL = ACT = 9.16 mil lbs, RHL= 6.27 mil lbs
- 2024 com. ACL = ACT = 7.50 mil lbs, com. quota = 6.00 mil lbs
- 5% commercial in-season closure buffer for 2024
- No changes to commercial measures



Backup slides

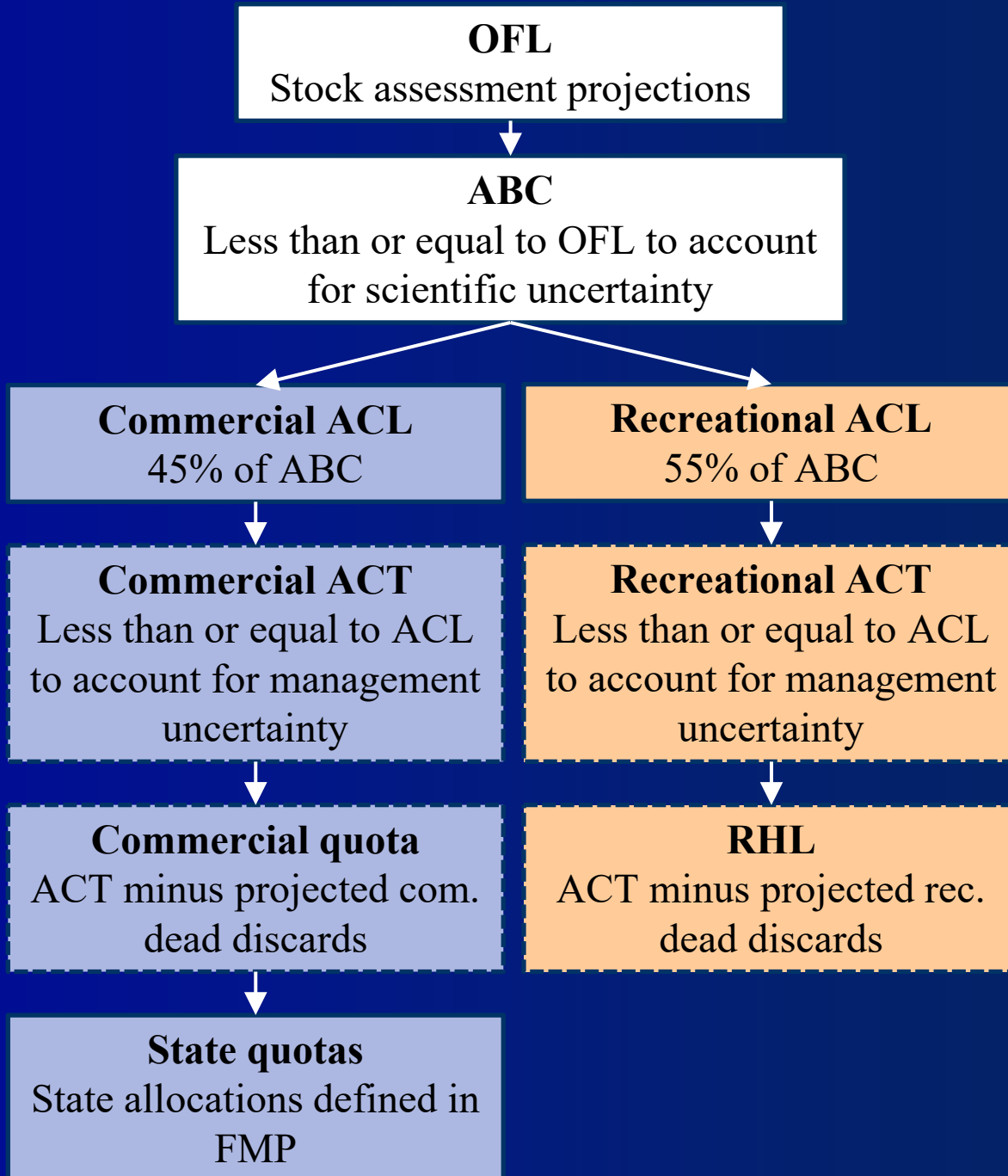
Percent Change Approach

RHL vs Harvest Estimate	B/B_{MSY}	Change in Harvest
Future 2-year avg RHL > upper bound of harvest estimate CI (harvest expected to be lower than RHL)	Very high ($\geq 150\%$)	Liberalization % = difference between harvest estimate and 2-yr avg RHL, <u>not to exceed 40%</u>
	High (100 – 150%)	Liberalization % = difference between harvest estimate and 2-yr avg RHL, <u>not to exceed 20%</u>
	Low ($< 100\%$)	10% liberalization
Future 2-year avg RHL within harvest estimate CI (harvest expected to be close to RHL)	Very high ($\geq 150\%$)	10% liberalization
	High (100 – 150%)	No change
	Low ($< 100\%$)	10% reduction
Future 2-year avg RHL < lower bound of harvest estimate CI (harvest expected to exceed RHL)	Very high ($\geq 150\%$)	10% reduction
	High (100 – 150%)	Reduction % = difference between harvest estimate and 2-yr avg RHL, <u>not to exceed 20%</u>
	Low ($< 100\%$)	Reduction % = difference between harvest estimate and 2-yr avg RHL, <u>not to exceed 40%</u>

2023 ABC

- Projections provided with 2021 mgmt. track.
- 100% OFL CV.
- Projections assumed a 2021 ABC overage due to rec. harvest.
 - Total assumed 2021 catch = 20.17 mil lb. Current estimate for 2021 catch = 21.35 mil lb.
- Could only recommend varying 2022-2023 ABCs to keep p^* below 0.5 in all years.
- Reviewed in 2022, no changes.

Year	OFL		ABC		ABC F	ABC p^*	SSB		SSB/ SSB _{MSY}
	MT	Mil. lb	MT	Mil. lb			MT	Mil. lb	
2022	8,735	19.56	8,555	18.86	0.41	0.49	22,637	49.91	1.57
2023	7,716	17.01	7,557	16.66	0.41	0.49	19,538	43.07	1.35



Year	Com. Landings	Com. Dead Disc.	Rec. Landings	Rec. Dead Disc.
2013	2.26	0.61	5.69	1.65
2014	2.40	1.01	7.24	1.85
2015	2.38	0.93	9.06	2.17
2016	2.59	1.67	12.05	3.07
2017	4.01	2.26	11.50	3.60
2018	3.46	1.59	7.92	2.28
2019	3.48	2.20	8.62	2.88
2020	4.20	1.03	9.06	3.06
2021	4.77	1.08	11.98	3.54
2022	5.35	1.39	8.14	3.59

2023 State Measures

State	Min. Size	Bag Limit	Open Season
Maine	13"	10 fish	May 19-September 21; October 18-December 31
New Hampshire	16.5"	4 fish	January-December 31
Massachusetts	16.5"	4 fish	May 20-September 7
Rhode Island private & shore	16.5"	2 fish	May 22-August 26
		3 fish	August 27-December 31
Rhode Island for-hire	16"	2 fish	June 18-August 31
		6 fish	September 1-December 31
Connecticut private & shore	16"	5 fish	May 19-June 23; July 8-December 1
CT authorized for-hire monitoring program vessels		5 fish	May 19-August 31
		7 fish	September 1-December 31
New York	16.5"	3 fish	June 23-August 31
		6 fish	September 1-December 31
New Jersey	12.5"	10 fish	May 17-June 19
		1 fish	July 1-August 31
		10 fish	October 1-October 31
		15 fish	November 1-December 31
DE, MD, NC (north of Cape Hatteras)	13"	15	May 15-September 30; October 10-December 31
VA	13"	15	May 15-July 6; August 9-December 31

Other MC Comments

After the meeting, MC members discussed state waters trawl survey catches over email.

- MA: 2023 spring survey shows slight decline in the stratified mean number per tow.
- RI: 2023 spring survey shows an increase in the mean number per tow.
- NY: 2023 so far shows signs of good recruitment.
- MD: an abundance of age 1 black sea bass this year.
- DE: signs of high black sea bass recruitment in two of the past three years.
- NJ: high black sea bass catches in 2018 and 2022.