



# Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda

## Draft Action Plan

March 2024

<https://www.mafmc.org/actions/rec-measures-framework-addenda>

**Framework/addenda goal:** This management action is being developed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission). This is a follow-on action to the [Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda](#), which implemented the Percent Change Approach for setting recreational management measures. In adopting the Percent Change Approach, the Council and the Commission’s Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) agreed it should sunset by the end of 2025 with the goal of considering an improved measures setting process, as developed through this management action, starting with 2026 measures.

**Alternatives to be considered:** During their June 2022, August 2023, and December 2023 meetings, the Council and Policy Board agreed to further develop the following alternatives through this management action. The range of alternatives is expected to be further modified and refined prior to finalization for public hearings.

- **No Action Alternative** – Consideration of a no action alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act. If no action is taken by the Council and Policy Board to replace the Percent Change Approach before the sunset date, then the process for setting recreational measures, starting with 2026 measures, would revert back to the requirements of the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) prior to implementation of the Harvest Control Rule Framework Addenda. Specifically, measures would be set with the primary goal of allowing harvest to meet but not exceed the recreational harvest limit (RHL). Unlike the other alternatives under consideration, measures would be set for one year at a time.
- **Percent Change Approach** – This approach was implemented starting with the 2023 recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. It will also be used for bluefish once that stock is no longer in a rebuilding plan. Under the Percent Change Approach, a determination is made to either liberalize, restrict, or leave measures unchanged based on two factors: 1) Comparison of a confidence interval around an estimate of expected harvest under status quo measures to the average RHL for the upcoming two years and 2) Biomass compared to the target level, as defined by the most recent stock assessment. These two factors are used to define a target harvest level for setting management measures. The Percent Change Approach is described in detail in the [reference guide](#) and [final framework document](#) for the previous action. The Council and Policy Board agreed that further development of this approach should, at a minimum, include greater consideration of fishing mortality. This could include development of approaches to assign fishing mortality rates and targets to the recreational fishery.
- **Biological Reference Point Approach and Biological Based Matrix Approach** - These alternatives use a combination of indicators to place the stock in one of multiple potential management measure “bins.” The indicators vary by alternative and include expected harvest

under status quo measures, biomass compared to the target level, fishing mortality, recruitment, and/or trends in biomass. The intent is that bins associated with poor indicators would have more restrictive management measures and bins with positive indicators would have more liberal measures. These alternatives are described in more detail in the [reference guide](#) and [final framework document](#) for the previous action. In December 2023, the Council and the Policy Board agreed to modify these alternatives such that measures will no longer be assigned to all bins the first time either approach is used through the specifications process. Further consideration will be given to the appropriate method for setting measures under these alternatives.

**Other topics to be considered:** During their June 2022, August 2023 meetings, and December 2023 meetings the Council and Policy Board agreed that the following additional topics should also be considered through this management action. These are not management alternatives; rather, they are topics that will be considered in the context of the management alternatives listed above.

- **Target metric for setting measures** – The previous framework/addenda considered if recreational measures in state and federal waters should collectively aim to achieve a target level of harvest (e.g., based on the RHL), recreational dead catch (e.g., based on the recreational annual catch limit), or fishing mortality. This will be further considered through this action.
- **Starting point for measures** – Many recreational stakeholders have expressed frustration that the current measures do not appear to be aligned with stock status. The Council and Policy Board agreed that further consideration should be given to the starting point for measures under all alternatives.
- **Management uncertainty** – The Council and Policy Board agreed that further consideration should be given to the implications of the alternatives for management uncertainty buffers as currently defined in the Fishery Management Plan.
- **Use of the Summer Flounder Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) model** – The previously developed Summer Flounder MSE model will be used to analyze several aspects of this management action. For example, it may be used to evaluate the performance of potential indicator thresholds which define the boundaries between management measure bins, the management response to crossing those thresholds, and measures assigned to each management response. Given time constraints, simplifying assumptions will need to be made and realistic example measures are not expected to be generated for every bin under all alternatives.
- **Impacts on the commercial sector** – Although this action will only consider the process for setting recreational measures, the Council and Policy Board agreed to further evaluate potential indirect impacts to the commercial sector. This action will not consider any changes to commercial management and it will not consider transferring quota between the commercial and recreational sectors.
- **Other topics** – This action may consider other topics, as appropriate. For example, this could include potential revisions to the accountability measures and considerations related to conservation equivalency.

**Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) / Plan Development Team (PDT)**

An FMAT/PDT has been formed to assist with development and analysis of potential alternatives. FMAT/PDT members are listed in the table below. Other Council, Commission, and NOAA Fisheries staff, as well as other experts, will be consulted as needed.

<b>FMAT/PDT Member Name</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Role/Expertise</b>
Tracey Bauer	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission	FMAT/PDT Co-Chair
Julia Beaty	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council	FMAT/PDT Co-Chair
Chelsea Tuohy	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission	FMAT/PDT Co-Chair
Mike Celestino	New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection	Technical analysis and state management
Alexa Galvan	Virginia Marine Resources Commission	Technical analysis and state management
Emily Keiley	NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office	Fisheries policy and legal requirements
Marianne Randall	NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office	National Environmental Policy Act requirements
Scott Steinback	Northeast Fisheries Science Center	Recreational fisheries economist
Rachel Sysak	New York Department of Environmental Conservation	Technical analysis and state management
Corinne Truesdale	Rhode Island Department of Fish and Wildlife	Technical analysis and state management
Sam Truesdell	Northeast Fisheries Science Center	Stock assessments
Sara Turner	NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office	Scientific and technical analysis of federal fisheries management

**Commissioner/Council Member Work Group**

The Council and Policy Board established a small group of Commissioners and Council members to act as a liaison between the PDT/FMAT and the Policy Board. The purpose of the Work Group is to guide the FMAT/PDT on the intent of the Council and Policy Board, not to develop new options/alternatives. This group will periodically meet with the PDT/FMAT. Work Group members are listed below.

<b>Work Group Member Name</b>	<b>Council Member or Commissioner</b>
Skip Feller	Council member
Jason McNamee	Commissioner
Nichola Meserve	Commissioner
Adam Nowalsky	Both
Paul Risi	Council member

**Draft Timeline – Subject to change**

<b>May 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT formed.</li> </ul>
<b>June - July 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>August 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council and Policy Board meeting to review progress and discuss next steps.</li> <li>• Council member/Commissioner work group formed.</li> </ul>
<b>September - November 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT and Council member/Commissioner work group meeting.</li> <li>• AP meeting to review progress and provide input.</li> <li>• Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting to review progress.</li> <li>• MSE team begins work.</li> </ul>
<b>December 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council and Policy Board meeting to review progress and discuss next steps.</li> </ul>
<b>January - July 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT and Council/Commissioner work group meetings to continue development and analysis of alternatives and develop draft document for public hearings.</li> <li>• Continued MSE work.</li> <li>• Formation and meetings of SSC sub-group to review several aspects of the framework/addenda.</li> </ul>
<b>July 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final report on MSE work provided to FMAT/PDT and SSC.</li> <li>• SSC meeting to review draft sub-group report and finalize report from full SSC.</li> </ul>
<b>August 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council and Policy Board meeting to review progress and discuss next steps.</li> </ul>
<b>August-September 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT meeting(s) to develop recommendations for the final range of alternatives.</li> <li>• AP meeting to review draft range of alternatives and provide input to Council and Policy Board.</li> </ul>
<b>October 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council and Policy Board meeting to approve final range of alternatives and approve draft document for public hearings through Commission process.</li> </ul>
<b>December 2024 – February 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public hearings through Commission process.</li> </ul>
<b>March 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FMAT/PDT and AP meetings to review public comments and provide input to Council and Policy Board prior to final action.</li> </ul>
<b>April 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council and Policy Board meeting for final action.</li> </ul>
<b>April-December 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development, review, and revisions of framework/addenda documents.</li> <li>• Federal rulemaking.</li> <li>• Monitoring and Technical Committees use new process to set 2026 recreational measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Late 2025 or early 2026</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective date of implemented changes.</li> </ul>