



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

Date: March 7, 2022
To: Scientific and Statistical Committee
From: Brandon Muffley, staff
Subject: Overview of Council Request: Recreational Harvest Control Rule

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) are considering changes to the process for setting recreational bag, size, and season limits (i.e., recreational measures) for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish through the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda. This management action is part of a larger Recreational Reform Initiative that considers a range of topics and issues aimed to improve the management of recreational fisheries. The goal of the Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda is to establish a process for setting recreational measures for these species such that measures aim to prevent overfishing, are reflective of stock status, appropriately account for uncertainty in the recreational data, take into consideration angler preferences, and provide an appropriate level of stability and predictability in changes from year to year.

At their February 2022 meeting, the Council and the Commission's Policy Board approved a draft HCR document for public comment¹. In addition, they passed a motion looking for SSC input regarding the five primary HCR alternatives that are considered in the draft document. The approved motion is as follows:

Request that the SSC provide a qualitative evaluation, in time for final action at the June 2022 Council/Policy Board meeting, regarding the potential effect of each of the five primary alternatives in the Harvest Control Rule Addendum/Framework on the SSC's assessment and application of risk and uncertainty in determining ABCs. The intent is to provide the Council and Policy Board with information to consider the tradeoffs among the different alternatives with respect to the relative risk of overfishing, increasing uncertainty, fishery stability, and the likelihood of reaching/remaining at B_{msy} for each approach at different biomass levels (e.g., for $\frac{1}{2} B_{msy} < B < B_{msy}$, the relative risk among alternatives is (highest to lowest) $E > C > B > A > D$).

At the March meeting, the SSC will receive an overview of the HCR framework/addenda, including details on the five primary alternatives being considered (one being no action). There will also be time for the SSC to discuss the HCR approach, offer any initial feedback, and

¹ The full public comment document and an alternatives reference guide are included as background material for the March 2022 SSC meeting: <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2022/march-2022-ssc-meeting>.

develop a plan to collectively address the Council motion. A sub-group of the SSC has been formed to help expedite the process and efficiently develop a response to address the Council motion. Between the March and May SSC meetings, the sub-group will meet to discuss and develop a report that provides a “quantitative evaluation” of the five primary HCR alternatives (note: if necessary, Terms of Reference may be provided to the SSC to address). The draft report will then be provided to the SSC as meeting material in preparation for SSC discussion and final input at the May meeting. The final SSC report will then be included in the briefing book for Council and Commission consideration during their deliberations at the June Council meeting when final action is anticipated.