

Memo to: Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council
From: Preston Pate, Chair, Research Set-Aside Committee
Subject: RSA Workshop
Date: January 25, 2010

The MAFMC in conjunction with the NMFS NE Regional office will hold a workshop on the Council's Research Set-Aside (RSA) program in the afternoon session of the Council's meeting on February 9, 2010. The purpose of the workshop is to receive the results of the RSA program review recently completed by the NE Fisheries Science Center and discuss the resulting recommendations for program improvement.

The stated goal of the programmatic review was "to provide guidance on optimizing RSA programs and to establish best practices needed in developing new RSA programs." Whereas the review was conducted for all RSA programs within the NE Region, our workshop will concentrate on the one administered by the MAFMC. The review generated a very thorough report on the history of the RSA program, its strengths and challenges, and recommendations for improvements. It will serve as the basis for more thorough discussions by the RSA Committee and Council of options for improving the use of the RSA program in our management efforts.

I look forward to a productive session and will see you there.

NEW JERSEY MARINE FISHERIES COUNCIL

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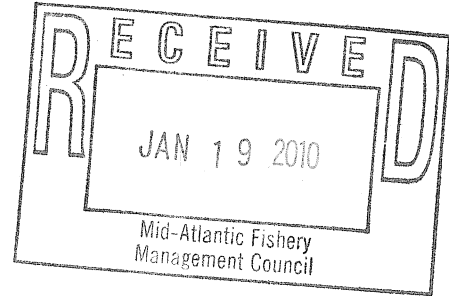
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January 15, 2010

Rick Robbins, Chairman
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Room 2115 Federal Building
300 South New Street
Dover, Delaware 19904-6790

Dear Chairman Robbins:

The current use of the Research-Set-Aside (RSA) quota allocated from the annual coastwide quotas for black sea bass, summer flounder, scup and bluefish is of concern to the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council (Council).

The recent unprecedented action by the National Marine Fisheries Service to implement a mid-season closure in the recreational black sea bass fishery in 2009 has brought the use of RSA to the Council's attention. In addition to the recreational fishery, there has been insufficient black sea bass quota available to the commercial fishery to prevent a premature closure of the commercial seasons in New Jersey during the last several years.

Although the Council can support the use of annual allocations for appropriate research it does not support taking quota from the recreational or commercial fishing communities that result in season closures because quotas are set so low. Until the quota levels are increased to reflect the current rebuilt status of these stocks, the recreational and commercial fishermen should be afforded the opportunity to take advantage of the entire amount of their respective percentages of the annual quotas for the four species mentioned.

The Council also wants to express its concern that the original intent of the RSA program has changed. It is our understanding that the RSA quota was originally set up so fish killed during research programs could be utilized as opposed to being discarded. In 2009 it appears that the majority, if not all, of the RSA quota (for the four species) was utilized to fund the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment

Program (NEAMAP) by directly targeting the various species through 'compensation fishing' separate from NEAMAP. The Council wholeheartedly supports NEAMAP because it is an essential sampling program that needs to be continued on a long term basis. However, it should be funded by Congress through an appropriation in the National Marine Fisheries Service budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gilbert H. Ewing, Jr.".

Gilbert H. Ewing, Jr.
Chairman

- c. V. O'Shea, Executive Director, ASMFC
D. Furlong, Executive Director, MAFMC

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Research Set-Aside Program Workshop
February 9, 2010 – Cambridge, MD
1-5:30 PM

Research Set-Aside Program Evaluation and RSA Workshop

RSA Workshop Goal:

This workshop will provide an opportunity to review findings of the RSA Programmatic review, present options for improving the program, and initiate discussions leading to further consideration (by the RSA Committee and the Council) of major policy changes for the Mid-Atlantic RSA program. Specific goals are:

- Present findings of the RSA Programmatic Review
- Consider proposed options to improve the program
- Discuss monitoring of RSA quota harvesting (recreational and commercial)
- Clarify Mid-Atlantic RSA Mission

Specific Workshop Objectives:

- Briefly review history of the Mid-Atlantic RSA program.
(10 minutes)
- Review RSA program listing strengths & challenges
(20 minutes)
- Briefly review RSA program administrative processes, grants processes, and other regulatory requirements pertinent to RSA programs and discuss improvements already made.
(15 minutes)
- Review RSA program economics, costs and benefits, and business practices and consider alternative business models.
 - Discussion of NFI auction
 - Enforcement issues
 - Accountability of quota monitoring (recreational and commercial) and funds transfers(90 minutes)
- Explore proposed measures to improve the RSA program and discuss what agency or entity is primarily responsible for each proposed action.
(60 minutes)
- Revisit RSA Program's Objectives as originally perceived by the Council and determine if they are still relevant or need updating. Clearly articulate RSA Mission. Define objectives in terms of percent long term monitoring versus short term focused research projects.
(60 minutes with a 15 minute wrap-up)