
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

PRESS RELEASE



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Council Addresses 2010 ABC for Black Sea Bass Emergency Rule

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Cambridge, Maryland from February 9 through February 11, 2010. In addition to receiving several presentations and reports, the Council discussed and acted on NMFS' Emergency Rule for the 2010 black sea bass fishery, convened a public workshop on the Council's Research Set-Aside Program, conducted public hearings for Amendment 11 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Amendment 5 to the Monkfish FMP, and selected risk alternatives for its Annual Catch Limit / Accountability Measures (ACL/AM) Omnibus Amendment.

Following the Council's December meeting decision to request the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to reconsider its black sea bass acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation, the Council's SSC met with the Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee and subsequently revised its ABC recommendation for the 2010 black sea bass fishery. Given the revised black sea bass ABC, the Council requested the Regional Administrator to implement an emergency action to increase total allowable landings (TAL) from 2.30 million pounds to 3.70 million pounds. Based on a 51% allocation to the recreational fishery, the recreational harvest limit is 1.83 million pounds, an increase of 61% over the 2009 level. Consequently, the Council passed a motion recommending a minimum size requirement of 12.5 inches total length, a daily possession limit of 25 fish, and suggested examining a split season of May 22 through August 8 and September 4 through October 4 to determine if these measures would meet the necessary required reduction in fishing mortality for the 2010 fishing year. If the reduction can not be met, the Council recommended accepting the same measures that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved: a single season of May 22 through September 12, a daily possession limit of 25 fish, and a minimum size requirement of 12.5 inches total length.

A Research Set-Aside Program Workshop was held on Tuesday to review the history of the program; its strengths and challenges; the administrative and grant processes; and, other regulatory requirements inherent in the program. The Workshop also addressed the economics, costs, benefits, business practices; considered alternative business models; explored proposed measures to improve the program; and revisited the program's objectives as originally designed by the Council to determine if they are still relevant or need updating. Some members felt the program is a good tool while others thought it was creating problems.

For the Omnibus Annual Catch Limits (ACL) / Accountability Measures (AM) Amendment, the Council voted to accept seven risk alternatives for the Public Hearing Document.

The Council held two public hearings during its meeting. The first public hearing addressed Amendment 11 to the Squid, Mackerel, and Butterfish FMP. Amendment 11 is considering: 1) Capping fishing capacity in the mackerel fishery; 2) Updating Essential Fish Habitat (EFH); 3) Mitigating gear impacts on *Loligo* egg EFH caused by fishing; 4) Establishing a recreational mackerel allocation; and, 5) Avoiding at-sea processing problems.

A public hearing was also held for Amendment 5 to the Monkfish FMP. The Monkfish Plan is a joint plan with the New England Fishery Management Council. Amendment 5 will address Magnuson-Stevens Act ACL/AM mandates for the fishery. The hearing was held to discuss these changes to the FMP and their potential impacts on the fishery. The amendment will also specify total allowable catch and associated days-at-sea and trip limits for the 2011 through 2013 fishing years.

The Council received several presentations during its meeting. Dr. Paul Rago of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) provided a report addressing Annual Discards for 2009 and Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Priorities for 2010. Dr. Rago also presented a peer review report of the NEFSC's vessel calibration study between the Research Vessels Albatross and Bigelow. Dr. James Weinberg provided a report on the 49th Stock Assessment Review regarding the butterfish and surfclam assessments. The review panel concluded that the decline in the butterfish stock appears to be driven more by environmental processes and low recruitment than by fishing. The overfished status of butterfish is still unknown due to assessment uncertainties. Regarding the surfclam stock, the review panel determined that the surfclam stock is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring. Preston Pate provided the Council with a Marine Recreational Information Program update.

The Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee met with the Council as a Committee of the Whole. Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, presented the Administration's view on Ocean Policy Task Force and Coastal and Marine Special Planning. Jay Odell of The Nature Conservancy presented the Council with information regarding Marine Spatial Planning.

The Executive Committee met to discuss the January Council Coordination Committee meeting and to finalize details concerning the Council's Catch Shares Workshop to be held March 16-18, 2010 in Williamsburg, VA. The Committee also discussed the search for a new Executive Director.

During the Highly Migratory Species Committee report, the Council agreed to support NMFS efforts to implement obligations to restrict entry into any port or place of the United States and access to port services by vessels on the illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) vessel lists. The Council supports the proposed rule that will allow the Assistant Administrator to deny entry into US to listed IUU vessels, or if allowed in, the Assistant Administrator may inspect the vessel, deny the vessel access to port services, or prohibit the vessel from engaging in commercial transactions.

PLEASE NOTE NEW COUNCIL ADDRESS: 800 N. State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901.
(The phone number, fax number, and web address remain the same).