



**Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee  
Webinar Meeting Summary  
July 25, 2016**

**Monitoring Committee Attendees:** Mike Bednarski (MA DMF), Jason McNamee (RI DFW), Peter Clarke (NJ F&W), Greg Wojcik (CT DEEP), Katie May Laumann (VMRC), Steve Doctor (MD DNR), Rich Wong (DE DFW), John Maniscalco (NY DEC), T.D. VanMiddlesworth (NC DMF), Kiley Dancy (Council staff), Julia Beaty (Council staff), Kirby Rootes-Murdy (ASMFC staff), Wilson Laney (USFW)

**Additional Attendees:** Liz Scheimer (NMFS GARFO), Nichola Meserve (MA DMF), Douglas Christel (MA DMF), Greg DiDomenico (Garden State Seafood Association), Katie Almeida (Town Dock), Mike Ruccio (NMFS GARFO)

**General Comments**

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The Monitoring Committee does not currently have any formal control rules for the recommendation of Annual Catch Targets (ACTs). The Committee recognizes the need to develop ACT control rules or guidelines for addressing management uncertainty in the future, which would be applicable to all three species.

The Monitoring Committee will continue to pursue additional analyses requested by the Council and Board in December 2015 related to the review of commercial measures conducted last fall (i.e., review of the feasibility of a common minimum mesh size, summarization of past gear studies, and scup-specific measures as discussed below).

**Summer Flounder Comments and Recommendations**

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The Monitoring Committee shares the SSC's concerns regarding declining stock status. Based on the revised SSC recommendations for Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), the Monitoring Committee recommends corresponding revised sector-specific Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and ACTs, as presented in Table 1.

The Monitoring Committee recommends no reduction from the commercial ACLs to the ACTs in 2017-2018 to address management uncertainty. For the commercial fishery, the monitoring and fishery closure system is timely and has typically been successful in holding the landings close to the quota. States should continue to be diligent in managing their state quotas.

The Committee also recommends no reduction from the recreational ACLs to the recreational ACTs for 2017-2018. The recreational fishery has performed relatively well relative to the harvest limits for the past few years. However, the Monitoring Committee and Technical Committee will need to carefully consider the potential effects of proposed decreases in landings limits for 2017-2018, especially given the lack of in-season closure authority for the recreational fishery. The Monitoring Committee will consider management uncertainty explicitly when recommending recreational management measures in the fall of each year.

The Committee agreed with the staff recommendation that no changes be made to the commercial minimum fish size (14-inch total length), gear requirements, and exemption programs.

## **Scup Comments and Recommendations**

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For the past five years the recreational and commercial scup fisheries have under-harvested their landings limits by 20-51%. The ABCs began to decline in 2012 and continue to do so through 2018. If recent fishery performance continues, by 2018, landings may begin reaching quota limits. The Monitoring Committee noted that given increasing landings over the past several years, as well as high estimates of recruitment indicating a large 2015 year class, an assessment update in 2017 could be beneficial by way of producing more up to date information on current stock status and population size for scup. This could potentially mitigate issues created by the decreasing ABC and possibly increasing population size.

The commercial landings monitoring and fishery closure system is timely and successful in managing the landings. States should continue to be diligent in managing their state quotas to ensure that large overages do not occur.

The Committee agreed with the staff recommendation that no changes be made to the implemented management measures, including the 2017 and 2018 ACTs (Table 2), commercial minimum fish size (9-inch total length), gear requirements, and possession limits.

The Monitoring Committee will evaluate the timing of the seasonal commercial quota periods, as requested by the Council and Board in December 2015. The Monitoring Committee discussed ideas for analyzing the biological and economic impacts of modifying the quota period dates. Any changes to the quota period dates would require a framework or amendment.

## **Black Sea Bass Comments and Recommendations**

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The Monitoring Committee agreed with the staff recommendation for no changes to the currently implemented ACLs and ACTs for 2017 (Table 3).

The Committee notes that the commercial quota monitoring system is timely and is generally successful in managing the landings. Commercial landings have been very close to the commercial quotas over the last five years, with the exception of 2015. States and GARFO should work to identify specific reporting or monitoring problems that may be contributing to above-average overages.

The recreational fishery has had Recreational Harvest Limit overages ranging from 9 to 142% in four of the past five years. Additionally, there was a large adjustment between preliminary and final MRIP estimates for black sea bass in 2015 that resulted in an unlikely landings escalation in a single state, mode and wave. Realistically, the black sea bass recreational measures have not constrained the fishery to the recreational harvest limit in recent history. The Technical and Monitoring Committees continue to work to simplify regulations to reduce management uncertainty in the recreational fishery. The Committees will consider management uncertainty explicitly when recommending recreational management measures in the fall of each year.

The Committee agreed with the staff recommendation that no changes be made to the commercial minimum fish size (11-inch total length) and gear requirements.

**Table 1:** Currently implemented 2016 summer flounder catch and landings limits, and SSC and Monitoring Committee recommendations for revised 2017-2018 catch and landings limits. Numbers may not add precisely due to unit conversions and rounding.

Management Measure	2016 (current)		2017		2018		Basis for 2016-2018 Recs.
	<i>mil lb.</i>	<i>mt</i>	<i>mil lb.</i>	<i>mt</i>	<i>mil lb.</i>	<i>mt</i>	
<b>OFL</b>	18.06	8,194	16.76	7,600	18.69	8,476	Stock assessment projections
<b>ABC</b>	16.26	7,375	11.30	5,125	13.23	5,999	Stock assessment projections/SSC recommendation <sup>1</sup>
ABC Landings Portion	13.54	6,142	9.43	4,278	11.05	5,010	Stock assessment projections
ABC Discards Portion	2.72	1,233	1.87	847	2.18	989	Stock assessment projections
<b>Commercial ACL</b>	9.42	4,275	6.57	2,982	7.70	3,491	60% of ABC landings portion (per FMP allocation) + 49% of ABC discards portion
Commercial ACT	9.42	4,275	6.57	2,982	7.70	3,491	Monitoring Committee recommendation: no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty
Projected Comm. Discards	1.30	590	0.92	415	1.07	485	For 2016: 48% of ABC discards portion, based on 2012-2014 average % discards by sector For 2017-2018: 49% of ABC discards portion, based on 2013-2015 average % discards by sector
<b>Commercial Quota</b>	8.12	3,685	5.66	2,567	6.63	3,006	Commercial ACT, less projected commercial discards
<b>Recreational ACL</b>	6.84	3,100	4.72	2,143	5.53	2,508	40% of ABC landings portion (per FMP allocation) + 51% of ABC discards portion
Recreational ACT	6.84	3,100	4.72	2,143	5.53	2,508	Monitoring Committee rec.; no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty
Projected Rec. Discards	1.42	643	0.95	432	1.11	504	For 2016: 52% of ABC discards portion, based on 2012-2014 average % discards by sector For 2017-2018: 51% of ABC discards portion, based on 2013-2015 average % discards by sector
<b>Recreational Harvest Limit</b>	5.42	2,457	3.77	1,711	4.42	2,004	Recreational ACT, less projected recreational discards

<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the SSC deviated from the Council’s ABC control rule to recommend ABCs over the 2016-2018 period that phased in the required reductions in catch. This was done at the request of the Council to address socio-economic concerns over the magnitude of the reduction in the fishery catch in 2016 that would potentially be destabilizing. In July 2016, the SSC recommended revised 2017-2018 ABCs that reverted to the typical Council risk policy, due to concerns about the status of the summer flounder stock, including the potential for summer flounder to become overfished in the near future.

**Table 2:** Currently implemented scup catch and landings limits for 2016-2018. The SSC and Monitoring Committee recommend no changes to the implemented measures for 2017-2018. Numbers may not add precisely due to unit conversions and rounding.

Management Measure	2016 ( <i>current</i> )		2017		2018		Basis for 2016-2018 Recs.
	<i>mil lb</i>	<i>mt</i>	<i>mil lb</i>	<i>mt</i>	<i>mil lb</i>	<i>mt</i>	
<b>OFL</b>	35.80	16,238	32.09	14,556	29.68	13,464	Stock assessment projections
<b>ABC</b>	31.11	14,110	28.40	12,881	27.05	12,270	Stock assessment projections/ Council risk policy/SSC recommendations
ABC landings portion	26.56	12,047	23.88	10,832	22.55	10,227	Stock assessment projections
ABC discards portion	4.55	2,063	4.52	2,049	4.50	2,043	Stock assessment projections
<b>Commercial ACL</b>	24.26	11,006	22.15	10,047	21.10	9,571	78% of ABC (per FMP allocation)
Commercial ACT	24.26	11,006	22.15	10,047	21.10	9,571	Monitoring Committee recommendation; no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty
Projected commercial discards	3.80	1,721	3.77	1,710	3.76	1,705	83.4% of the ABC discards portion (the average percentage of dead discards attributable to the commercial fishery from 2012-2014)
<b>Commercial quota</b>	20.47	9,284	18.38	8,337	17.34	7,866	Commercial ACT minus discards
<b>Recreational ACL</b>	6.84	3,104	6.25	2,834	5.95	2,699	22% of ABC (per FMP allocation)
Recreational ACT	6.84	3,104	6.25	2,834	5.95	2,699	Monitoring Committee recommendation; no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty
Projected recreational discards	0.75	342	0.75	339	0.75	338	16.6% of the ABC discards portion (the average percentage of dead discards attributable to the recreational fishery from 2012-2014)
<b>Recreational harvest limit</b>	6.09	2,763	5.50	2,495	5.21	2,361	Recreational ACT minus discards

**Table 3:** Currently implemented black sea bass catch and landings limits for 2016-2017. The SSC and Monitoring Committee recommend no changes to the implemented measures for 2017. Numbers may not add precisely due to unit conversions and rounding.

Management Measure	2016 (current)		2017		Basis for 2016-2017 Recs.
	<i>mil lb.</i>	<i>mt</i>	mil lb.	mt	
<b>ABC</b>	6.67	3,024	6.67	3,024	SSC-recommended constant catch ABC
ABC Landings Portion	5.53	2,510	5.53	2,510	2012 assessment projections ratio (maintained based on 2014 proportions of landed and discarded catch) <sup>2</sup>
ABC Discards Portion	1.13	514	1.13	514	
<b>Commercial ACL</b>	3.15	1,428	3.15	1,428	49% of ABC landings portion (per FMP allocation) + 38% of ABC discards portion
Commercial ACT	3.15	1,428	3.15	1,428	Commercial ACL, less deduction for management uncertainty
Projected Commercial Discards	0.44	198	0.44	198	38% of ABC discards portion, based on 2013-2014 average % discards by sector
<b>Commercial Quota<sup>3</sup></b>	2.70	1,226	2.71	1,230	Monitoring Committee recommendation; no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty
<b>Recreational ACL</b>	3.52	1,597	3.52	1,597	51% of ABC landings portion (per FMP allocation) + 62% of ABC discards portion
Recreational ACT	3.52	1,597	3.52	1,597	Recreational ACL, less deduction for management uncertainty
Projected Recreational Discards	0.70	317	0.70	317	62% of ABC discards portion, based on 2013-2014 average % discards by sector
<b>Recreational Harvest Limit</b>	2.82	1,280	2.82	1,280	Monitoring Committee recommendation; no deduction from ACL for management uncertainty

<sup>2</sup> When the ABC was revised in early 2013, 2010-2011 projections were the most recent available to derive landings vs. discard projections when setting catch limits for 2013-2015. In these years, 83% of catch was landed and 17% was discarded. Based on the 2015 data update, these proportions were the same in 2014, and thus they were maintained for setting the catch limits for 2016-2017.

<sup>3</sup> Initial commercial quota for both years is 1,230 mt (2.71 mil lb); commercial quota for 2016 is reduced by 8,896 lb to account for a quota overage from the 2014 fishing year.