



MID-ATLANTIC

FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Council Revises 2016 Spiny Dogfish Specifications

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has revised the spiny dogfish specifications that were previously recommended for the 2016 fishing year. During the [December 2015 Council Meeting](#) last week in Annapolis, Maryland, the Council approved a revised acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit of about 52 million pounds and a commercial quota of 40 million pounds. The revised commercial quota represents an increase of nearly 60% relative to the quota originally recommended for 2016. In addition, the Council approved ABCs of 51 million pounds for 2017 and 50 million pounds for 2018.

At a previous meeting in October, the Council had [recommended substantial reductions](#) in spiny dogfish catch limits for 2016, including a 50% cut in the commercial quota, in response to the findings of the 2015 spiny dogfish stock assessment update. Although the update concluded that the stock was neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, the new estimate of stock biomass had decreased markedly. The Council's recommendations would have reduced the commercial quota for spiny dogfish by 50% next year.

However, the Council expressed concern that the spiny dogfish assessment update did not include any data from 2014 – the result of mechanical issues with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) trawl survey vessel – and requested that the SSC work with the NEFSC to evaluate alternative ABC-setting methods that could address this data gap. Three different methods for calculating spiny dogfish biomass were evaluated, and the SSC identified a Kalman filter as the best available approach for overcoming the missing data.

Using the alternative approach, the SSC recommended ABCs that resulted in commercial quotas of approximately 40 million pounds for 2016, 39 million pounds for 2017, and 38 million pounds for 2018. This represents a 20% reduction in quotas from 2015 to 2016. However, landings have been below 50% of the commercial quotas for the last two full fishing years, and the reduced quota is unlikely to be constraining.

After considering additional public comment during last week's meeting, the Council accepted the SSC's revised ABC recommendation and associated management measures. The New England Fishery Management Council also approved similar specifications at its December meeting for this jointly-managed species, and if approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the new measures will go into effect May 1, 2016.