



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901
Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org
Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | G. Warren Elliott, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 26, 2017
To: Council
From: Brandon Muffley, Staff
Subject: Reconsideration of the 2018 Wave 1 Recreational Black Sea Bass Fishery – February 1 – 28 open season

Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) are re-considering a potential opening of the Wave 1 (January/February) fishery in 2018. At their joint meeting in August, the Council and Board considered a couple of options for the 2018 Wave 1 fishery (e.g. open the entire Wave 1 season, open only on weekends during Wave 1) but ultimately did not approve any option. Since the August meeting, Council members have developed an option for the Wave 1 fishery that was not considered by the Council and Board. Specifically, a season from February 1- 28, 2018 with a 15 fish possession limit and 12.5 inch minimum size will be considered by the Council and Board at their respective October meetings. If approved, these measures would be in place for 2018 while the Council and Board consider the implementation of a Letter of Authorization (LOA) program for the 2019 recreational black sea bass Wave 1 fishery.

This memo provides potential black sea bass harvest under different participation scenarios assuming a February 1 – 28 season, 15 fish possession limit and 12.5" minimum size. Based on these estimates, potential implications for the rest of the recreational black sea bass season in 2018 are considered. Information on preliminary 2017 recreational black sea harvest estimates are also provided.

Wave 1 Harvest Projections

The information and analysis used to determine the potential black sea bass harvest for a February 1 – 28 season was the same as that developed by staff when the Council and Board

were considering opening the entire Wave 1 fishery at their August meeting¹. In summary, Vessel Trip Report (VTR) data from federally permitted for-hire vessels from 2013, the last year the Wave 1 fishery was open, was used to generate harvest estimates for the for-hire sector under different levels of for-hire vessel participation. These for-hire estimates were then used to scale the private/rental and shore mode assuming 50% of the harvest would be from the private/rental and shore modes and 50% of harvest would be from the party and charter modes based on an evaluation of the Wave 6 (November/December) catch by mode (note: a subsequent analysis of Wave 2 (March/April) catch produced similar results). This 50/50 harvest ratio was then applied to the various estimates of Wave 1 black sea bass harvest by the for-hire sector in order to scale to entire fishery and develop estimates of total Wave 1 recreational black sea bass harvest (Table 1). The proportion of harvest and average harvest per day for February was then used to determine potential black sea bass harvest estimates for February only in order to evaluate the option under consideration.

Table 1. Estimated 2018 Wave 1 black sea bass harvest by for-hire vessels only, total Wave 1 harvest for all modes and total February harvest for all modes under varying participation levels. Federal for-hire VTR data from 2013 was used to calculate the average number of trips per vessel, average number of anglers per trip and average harvest per angler. MRIP data from 2016 was used to calculate the average weight of harvested black sea bass to convert harvest in numbers of fish to weight in pounds. Harvest estimates that include all modes assume 50% of the harvest from party/charter vessels and 50% from private/rental and shore mode. Information from 2013 is highlighted in grey.

Scenario	Number of Vessels	Number of Trips / Vessel	Ave Number of Anglers / Trip	Avg. Harvest / Angler	Total Wave 1 For-Hire Harvest (lb)	Total Wave 1 Harvest (lb)	Total February Harvest (lb)
1	25	6	26	11.1	88,312	176,623	64,821
2	30	6	26	11.1	105,974	211,948	77,785
3	39	6	26	11.1	137,766	275,532	101,120
4	45	6	26	11.1	158,961	317,922	116,677
5	50	6	26	11.1	176,623	353,246	129,641
6	55	6	26	11.1	194,286	388,571	142,606

Based on this analysis, total recreational black sea bass harvest for a February 1 – 28 season, 15 fish possession limit and 12.5” minimum size limit could range from 64,821 pounds to 142,606 pounds. If participation and effort declines, compared to 2013, total recreational black sea bass harvest in February could be as low as 64,821 pounds, or 1.8% of the 2018 RHL (Scenario 1 in

¹ See the July 12, 2017 staff memo to the Council regarding the 2018 Wave 1 recreational black sea bass fishery found at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/august-2017>.

Table 2). Under a more likely scenario of increasing participation and effort, compared to 2013, total harvest in February could be as high as 142,606 pounds, or 3.9% of the 2018 RHL (Scenario 6 in Table 2).

Implications for Rest of Recreational Black Sea Bass Season

Any catch and harvest that occurs during the 2018 Wave 1 fishery will be accounted for and evaluated against the recreational sector Annual Catch Limit (ACL) and Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL), respectively, along with the entire 2018 recreational black sea bass fishery. In order to constrain recreational catch and harvest and not exceed the ACL and RHL, any black sea bass catch that is “allocated” to the Wave 1 fishery will require adjustments to the rest of the year. The required adjustments for the remainder of the fishing year will depend on the catch and harvest that occurs during Wave 1.

Similar to prior analyses¹, total estimated recreational harvest for a 2018 February Wave 1 fishery under different participation scenarios were evaluated against the currently implemented 2018 RHL in order to determine the reductions needed to the rest of the recreational fishery. In order to evaluate the potential implications of a 2018 February Wave 1 fishery may have on the rest of the year, recreational season reduction examples were developed at the coastwide, regional and/or state level (Table 2).

The reductions provided do not account for any other adjustments that may be needed for the 2018 recreational black sea bass season. Similar to the information provided in the next section, the Council and Board will receive an update on preliminary 2017 recreational black sea bass harvest estimates and projections at their joint meeting in December. Depending on the information available, additional adjustments, either reductions or liberalizations, to 2018 recreational management measures may need to be considered. The reductions and seasonal implications provided in Table 2 only account for the harvest during the 2018 Wave 1 fishery and would be on top of any additional reductions that may be needed to constrain landings to the 2018 RHL.

Table 2. Estimated total 2018 February Wave 1 black sea bass harvest under varying participation levels and their potential implications for the rest of the 2018 recreational black sea bass fishing season at the coastwide, regional or state specific level. The reductions and seasonal implications provided below only account for the harvest during the 2018 Wave 1 fishery and would be on top of any additional reductions needed to constrain landings to the 2018 RHL.

Scenario	Projected Harvest (lb)	Reduction Needed to Rest of Recreational Fishery	Season Implications
1	64,821	1.7%	Coastwide: 3 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 2 days in Wv 3 or 2 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 1 day Wv 3 in MA; 1 day Wv 4 in NY; 1 day Wv 3 in NJ
2	77,785	2.1%	Coastwide: 4 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 3 days in Wv 3 or 3 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 1 day Wv 3 in MA; 2 days Wv 4 in NY; 1 day Wv 3 in NJ
3	101,120	2.8%	Coastwide: 5 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 4 days in Wv 3 or 3 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 2 days Wv 3 in MA; 2 days Wv 4 in NY; 2 days Wv 3 in NJ
4	116,677	3.2%	Coastwide: 5 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 4 days in Wv 3 or 4 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 2 days Wv 3 in MA; 2 days Wv 4 in NY; 2 days Wv 3 in NJ
5	129,641	3.5%	Coastwide: 6 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 5 days in Wv 3 or 4 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 2 days Wv 3 in MA; 3 days Wv 4 in NY; 2 days Wv 3 in NJ
6	142,606	3.9%	Coastwide: 7 days in either Wv 3 or Wv 5 Federal/Southern Region: 5 days in Wv 3 or 5 days in Wv 5 State Specific: 2 days Wv 3 in MA; 3 days Wv 4 in NY; 3 days Wv 3 in NJ

2017 Preliminary Recreational Harvest Estimates and Projections

Preliminary Wave 3 (May/June) MRIP catch and harvest estimates were made available on August 18, 2017 and the recreational black sea bass season was open for at least a portion of Wave 3 in all states. Preliminary 2017 estimates indicate the Wave 3 black sea bass harvest is 59% higher in numbers of fish and 38% higher in weight than the 2016 Wave 3 estimates (Table 3). The 2017 estimated Wave 3 harvest in weight is higher in all states, except for CT, when compared to 2016. From 2013 – 2016, Wave 3 accounts for 22.7% of the total recreational black sea bass harvest on average. Assuming a similar proportion for the 2017 Wave 3 harvest or assuming harvest in Waves 4-6 will be similar in 2017 to that observed in 2016 under similar management measures, results in a projected 2017 recreational black sea bass harvest of 5.55 million pounds. The projected preliminary 2017 harvest estimate of 5.55 million pounds is 51.6% higher than the 2018 RHL of 3.66 million pounds.

Table 3. Comparison of the final 2016 and preliminary 2017 Wave 3 (May/June) MRIP recreational black sea bass harvest estimates for the states of MA – VA.

State	2016		2017	
	# of Fish	Weight (lb)	# of Fish	Weight (lb)
MA	162,143	400,846	158,771	431,046
RI	7,477	14,136	51,852	101,605
CT	128,600	276,186	17,972	51,484
NY	0	0	1,297	2,184
NJ	140,641	206,937	460,334	631,460
DE	9,142	12,351	27,448	38,883
MD	14,743	19,865	18,210	26,703
VA	6,288	6,913	10,628	13,385
Total	469,034	937,234	746,512	1,296,750