



PRESS RELEASE

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Council Approves Changes to Scup Gear-Restricted Areas

During a meeting last week in Montauk, New York the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved a framework action to modify the boundary of one of the region's two Scup Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs). The proposed change to the Southern Scup GRA boundary is expected to increase the availability of longfin squid to small-mesh fisheries.

The GRAs were implemented in 2000 and are intended to reduce discard mortality of juvenile scup. The current GRA regulations include a Northern GRA, which is effective from November 1 through December 31, and a Southern GRA, which is effective from January 1 through March 15. Trawl vessels which fish for or possess longfin squid, black sea bass, or silver hake (also known as whiting) are required to use mesh 5 inches or larger in the GRAs during those times of the year. The scup stock has expanded substantially since the GRAs were first implemented, and analysis conducted by scientists at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center indicate that the GRAs were partially responsible for this rebuilding.

The GRAs have been modified several times in response to requests from commercial fishermen. In recent years, advisors have recommended further modification of the GRAs to restore access to certain areas for longfin squid fishing, arguing that modifications to the GRA boundaries would not harm the scup stock

In response to an industry request, the Council initiated a framework action in 2014 to address potential changes to the scup GRAs. The framework considered a range of alternatives, including modifications to the GRA boundaries and elimination of one or both GRAs.

After a lengthy discussion of the impacts of the proposed alternatives, the Council voted to modify the boundary of the Southern Scup GRA. The proposed change, shown in Figure 1, is based on a proposal developed by members of the Council's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel.

"By increasing access to important fishing grounds, the Council balanced the concerns of the squid industry with the possible impacts on the scup stock," said the Council's Executive Director, Chris Moore. "If the modification is approved by NMFS, the Council will be working closely with NMFS to monitor scup discards to make sure that mortality of juvenile scup does not increase as a result."

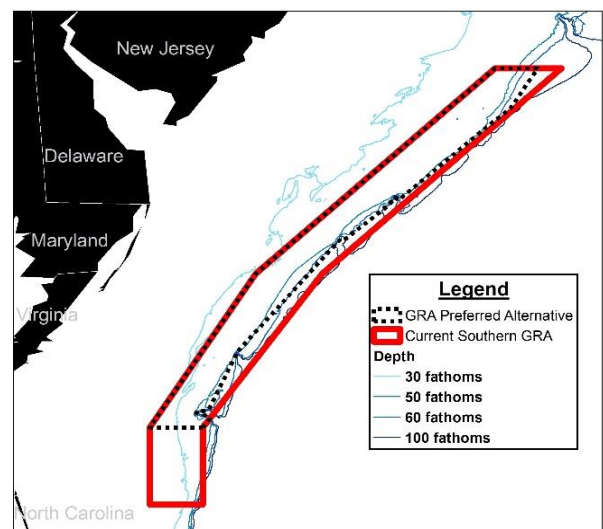


Figure 1. Proposed modification to the Southern Scup GRA boundary.