

The Black Sea Bass Quandry

by Doug MacPherson

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) finalized addendum XXX in record time on February 8, 2018. As of this writing it is still not exactly clear what the final regulations will be for the state of Rhode Island recreational anglers. The intent of this new addendum was to bring fairness to the black sea bass recreational fishery as stated in the document...



“...the 2016 benchmark stock assessment have indicated a much higher abundance of the resource than previously assumed. This presented challenges in both restricting recreational harvest to the coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL) as well as crafting recreational measures that ensured equitable access to the resource along the coast.”

In the 2017 season we (RI) had an opening of on May 25, and a closure of 30 days (September 22 to October 21) which allowed recreational fishing through the rest of the year.

Well, to most of us, this seemed like a fair distribution, however it has now become abundantly clear that some sectors of the recreational fishery have loudly criticized that closure as damaging to their industry.

Moving on into the 2018 season, significant changes were being brought into the management of this fishery. We are now grouped into a four-state regional management of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York.

We are also required by the new addendum to match our regulations with the other states in this group by March 31, 2018 and it is apparently still being negotiated among the states as of this writing at the end March.

There is also a reduction in our allowable 2018 catch as shown here by this paragraph from the addendum...

“Based on the stock assessment, the Board and Council set the 2017 RHL at 4.29 million pounds, an increase of over 50% from the 2016 RHL. Biomass projected to decline in 2018 as the strong 2011 year class exits the fishery. Consequently, the Board and Council set the 2018 RHL at 3.66 million pounds, an approximate 15% reduction from the 2017 RHL.”

Data from 2017 indicates that **we exceeded** our recreational catch limit and as a region we are receiving a **10.2% REDUCTION** in our 2018 recreational fishing harvest limit.

Ok folks, if you are still with me, this is where the rubber hits the road. At the last R.I. Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) meeting on March 6, 2018, a new series of options (season, size limit, bag limit) were put on the table for consideration. Most of the early options were taken off the board and we were left with basically 3 options to chose from.

Option 6 with a July 1 opening, a 3-fish limit and a 15" minimum was recommended by a 4-2 vote with both recreational representatives pointing out during discussion out that **an opening that late in the season would disenfranchise not only anglers who fish for fluke and black sea bass traditionally in May and June, but all the shore anglers who catch BSB early in the season along the ocean front. (to page 33)**

Fisheries Council delays black sea bass season

by Capt. David Monti

The Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC), which makes recreational and commercial fishing regulation recommendations to Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Director Janet Coit, held their second meeting in ten days on March 14.



Highlights of the previous March 5 meeting included the elimination of the spring black sea bass (BSB) season due in part to a mandatory reduction in Recreational Harvest Limits (RHL) from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Last year the season started May 25 allowing shore anglers and Narragansett Bay fishermen to take advantage of this species when the water is cool and the fish are in the Bay.

This year the Council opted to extend the fall and winter season to accommodate charter and party boats and private anglers that do not fish in early spring but rather target BSB in early fall or catch them when tautog fishing.

The recommendation going to Director Coit (with **descending votes from Travis Barao and Dave Monti**, RISAA board members on the Council) starts the season in July with a three fish limit and then increases to five fish and runs to the end of the year.

SUMMER FLOUNDER CHANGES

Another notable recommendation is an increase in the summer flounder bag limit from four fish to six fish/person/day. Janet Coit, DEM Director, is expected to set final recreational fishing regulations by the end of March.

Highlights of the March 14 meeting included the review of an aquaculture lease in Segar Cove off Potter Pond, South Kingstown (a lease application made by Perry Raso, owner of the Matunuck Oyster Bar). The Council's domain is to advise the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) as to whether or not aquaculture lease areas are or are not in conflict with recreational or commercial wild harvest of shell fish or fin fish.

AQUACULTURE FARM VOTE BY COUNCIL

The Council dealt with the issue of an application by Perry Raso to create a new 3-acre aquaculture farm in Segar Cove off Potter Pond in Matunuck. There was much opposition to this application by RISAA members.

The Council voted a tie - three to three on the issue - with votes from Andy D'Angelo, Travis Barao and Dave Monti saying the farm is in conflict with wild harvest, and that RISAA members had voiced opposition saying they fished the lease area on kayaks.

Robert Ballou, chair of the RIMFC (and special assistant to DEM Director Coit) said, “The Council plans to send a letter to CRMC relating the vote and highlighting council comments on both sides of the issue.”