



Species Profile: Black Sea Bass

New Amendment and Addendum will consider changes to commercial and recreational allocations

Introduction

Black sea bass are an important recreational and commercial fishery ranging from Maine to Florida. There are two distinct stocks on the Atlantic Coast, divided by Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.



The northern stock is jointly managed by the ASMFC and the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC). The commercial fishery dates back to the 1800s with landings reaching a peak of 22 million pounds in the 1950's, but then declined to only a few million pounds by the early 1990s. In 1997, the Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was implemented, instituting a commercial fishery quota and a recreational harvest limit (RHL) in order to reduce fishing mortality and recover the stock.

The fishery was officially declared rebuilt in 2009, and commercial landings have since increased to a high of 3.8 million pounds in 2017. Due to warming waters, the distribution of the fishery and catches have expanded northward in recent years.

Based on the 2019 operational stock assessment, black sea bass are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The assessment found spawning stock biomass (SSB) to be well above the target level. However, 2018 recruitment fell below the time series average. This could lead to a decrease in exploitable biomass in coming years. Currently, black sea bass quota is divided almost equally between recreational and commercial fisheries. An amendment is

currently under development to consider changes to the commercial and recreational allocations based on updated data for both fisheries. An addendum is also underway, which will consider modifications to the state shares of the commercial black sea bass quota, which have not changed since being implemented in 2003.

LIFE HISTORY

Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*) inhabit Atlantic coastal waters from the Gulf of Maine to the Florida Keys, concentrating in areas from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Canaveral, Florida.

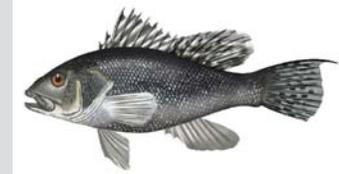
A temperate reef fish, black sea bass commonly inhabit rock bottoms near pilings, wrecks, and jetties. Black sea bass rely on their large mouth and swift ocean currents to catch prey, which include fish, crabs, mussels, and razor clams. Two distinct stocks of black sea bass exist along the Atlantic coast with overlapping ranges. The northern stock migrates seasonally, summering in northern inshore waters at depths of less than 120 feet and wintering in southern offshore waters at depths of 240 to 250 feet. Spawning occurs off New England in the late summer.

Black sea bass are protogynous hermaphrodites, which men they start life as a female and then change sex to become males when they reach 9-13 inches (2-5 years of age). More than a third of females in the Mid-Atlantic reverse sexes between August and April after most fish have spawned. Even though some fish are males when they reach sexual maturity, most produce eggs when they first mature. Following transition, a sea bass will either become a dominant male, characterized by a larger size and bright blue nuchal hump during spawning season (see photo), or a subordinate male that has few distinguishing features.

COMMERCIAL & RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

Black sea bass are highly sought after by both commercial fishermen and recreational anglers throughout the Mid-Atlantic. (to page 34)

Species Snapshot



Black Sea Bass
Centropristis striata

Management Unit

Massachusetts to north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina

Common Names: Black, will, chub, pinbass, old humpback

Family: Serradidae (true sea bass)

Interesting Facts

- They are protogynous hermaphrodites; about half the population changes sex from female to male between the ages of 2 and 5.
- Breeding males have vivid hues of fluorescent blue and green around the eyes and nape.
- Larger male fish are commonly called "humpbacks" because of the pronounced lump of their foreheads; the lump is referred to as the nuchal hump.
- An older female can produce up to 1 million pelagic eggs.

Largest Recoded

10 lbs. 4 oz. (Virginia Beach, VA)

Maximum Age

20 years

Length at Maturity

7.48"

Stock Status

Not overfished and not experiencing overfishing