

ASMFC: BLACK SEA BASS (from page 34)

The management program divides a total annual quota between the recreational fishery (51%) and the commercial fishery (49%). The recreational fishery is currently managed on a regional basis using a combination of minimum size limits, bag limits and fishing seasons to achieve a regional harvest target. The coastwide commercial quota is divided among the states annually. In addition to minimum requirements set annually on a coastwide harvest, states may set additional commercial management measures, including 1) minimum size limits, 2) minimum mesh requirements for trawls or 3) a moratorium on entry into the fishery and closed seasons.

Although the black sea bass fishery was declared rebuilt in 2009, the unique life history of the species contributes to uncertainty about the size of the stock. The response of this species, as well as other hermaphroditic species, to exploitation is not fully understood. Given these concerns, the Commission and Council approved a 3.52 million pound commercial quota and 3.66 million pound RHL for the 2019 fishing season. Based on the 2019 operational stock assessment results indicating SSB is larger than previously thought and the stock status is positive, the Board approved a commercial quota of 5.58 million pounds and a RHL of 5.81 million pounds for 2020 and 2021.

In December 2018, the Board approved Addenda XXXI and XXXII to the FMP. Addendum XXXI adds to the suite of tools available for management, with particular focus on enhancing the compatibility of state and federal regulations, by allowing the use of conservation equivalency for recreational management measures in federal waters measures to be waived,

and instead requires recreational anglers to abide by the measures of the state in which they land their catch. The ASMFC and MAFMC will annually decide whether to enact conservation equivalency; this policy will not be used in 2020.

Addendum XXXII establishes an annual specifications process for developing recreational management measures. The ASMFC will approve regional measures in early spring each year, based on technical committee analysis of stock status, resource availability, and harvest estimates. Public input on specifications will be gathered by states through their individual public comment processes. The specifications process will provide the Board more flexibility in adjusting measures, if necessary, to constrain harvest to the annual coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL). Further, the process will enable the Board to consider a host of factors, including: regional equity; regulatory stability; species abundance and distribution; and late-breaking recreational harvest estimates.

PENDING ACTIONS

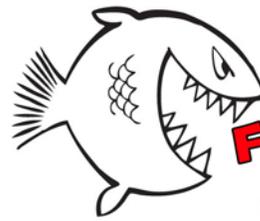
In October 2019, the Board and the Council initiated the development of a joint amendment to reevaluate the FMP's commercial and recreational allocations. This action will consider whether changes to these allocations are warranted given updated commercial data, and revised recreational catch and landing estimates provided by MRIP.

The ASMFC and MAFMC have approved a Public Information Document and public hearings and stakeholder input were held in February and March of 2020.



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