



The Watch

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Chairman



The RISAA Legislative Committee’s mission is to provide, in partnership with the Affiliated Clubs, a forum for improving the knowledge and understanding of fishery-related and government issues that affect recreational anglers. An informed membership encourages involvement and advocacy. The Legislative Committee will strive to advocate responsible fishery decision.

The Committee is comprised of RISAA Members and delegates from the Affiliated Clubs. The Committee meets two or three times a year, depending on the number of fishery and/or legislative issues that develop.

Fisheries Management Updates

Most of you already know that many of our most popular recreational fish in Rhode Island are actually managed by the **Mid-Atlantic Marine Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)** or jointly by MAFMC and the **Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission (ASMFC)**. This includes bluefish, scup, summer flounder, and black sea bass. This is why we keep a close eye on activities of the MAFMC, even though RI does not have a voting seat on the Council.

The Commission’s Management Boards for Bluefish and Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass met jointly with the MAFMC (Council) to adopt 2022-2023 specifications for all four species.

The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for all four species (2021 values are provided for comparison purposes).

No changes were made to the commercial management measures for any of the species.

I will present the science behind these decisions for each of the four species below, but from what I see in Rhode Island

waters, I don’t understand how the population of summer flounder (fluke) can tolerate a harvest increase of 25%, but black sea bass harvest can only be allowed to increase 6% and scup must remain basically status quo.

While these decisions are coastwide and I don’t have the information on RI limits for 2022 or 2023 for this column, I must say that we have seen black sea bass and scup much more in RI waters than we have seen fluke in the past few years.

Personally, this seems to be a time to conserve fluke populations and allow more harvest of black sea bass and scup which seem much more abundant.

Even the scientific discussions below indicate that fluke are at 86% of the biomass target, scup is at 2 times the biomass target, and black sea bass is at 2.1 times the biomass target, but yet fluke harvest limits are set for the largest increase.

Sometimes even though I am a scientist I find it hard to follow the science. Enough of my comment, here is what MAFMC has to say:

2022-2023 Commercial Quotas and Recreational Harvest Limits for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish (2021 values provided for comparison purposes)

	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>			Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Summer Flounder	12.49	15.53	15.53	8.32	10.36	10.36
Scup	20.50	20.38	17.87	6.07	6.08	5.41
Black Sea Bass	6.09	6.47	5.71	6.34	6.74	5.95
Bluefish	2.77	3.54	4.29	8.34	13.89	22.14

Note: Commercial quotas shown in the table may change slightly since they do not include any deductions for past overages.

Summer Flounder

The 2021 summer flounder management track stock assessment concluded the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2019. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 86% of the biomass target. The 2018 year class was above average at an estimated 61 million fish, the largest estimate of recruitment since 2009, while the 2019 year class is below average at 49



million fish. Based on the SSC’s recommendation, the Board and Council approved an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 33.12 million pounds for 2022 and 2023. After accounting for expected discards, the ABC results in a commercial quota of 15.53 million pounds and an RHL of 10.36 million pounds. These landing limits represent a 24% increase in the commercial quota and a 25% increase in the RHL from 2021 levels. **(to page 31)**