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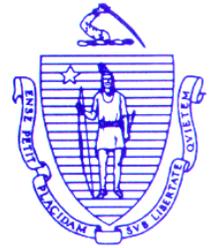
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January 28, 2016

### *Marine Fisheries Advisory*

## **Expectations for 2016 Recreational Fluke, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management**

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The recreational management of fluke (summer flounder), scup, and black sea bass is subject to a joint federal/interstate process that relies on annual harvest estimates to establish the following year's regulations. For example, the coastwide recreational harvest estimate for 2015 is compared to the 2016 coastwide harvest limit—as established through the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council—to determine if any increase or decrease in harvest is warranted for 2016; the states then develop and implement regulations to achieve the increase or decrease in harvest, subject to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approval. Because full-year recreational harvest estimates from the federal recreational fishing survey are not available until mid-February of the following year, the states are unable to model possession limit, season, and size limit regulations for these three species until that time. Implementing any regulatory revisions is then subject to each state's rule-making process; in Massachusetts, this may take three or more months.

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) recognizes that this delayed management process can impact business and travel plans being made by for-hire fishing businesses and private anglers. The Division's goal is to finalize the regulations as far in advance of the seasons' opening as possible. In the meantime, this Advisory is intended to provide a forecast for recreational fluke, scup and black sea bass management for 2016. Note that these expectations are based on preliminary and projected data and are thus subject to change. Additional notices will be issued for updates.

### Fluke

The coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL) for fluke has been set at 5.42 million pounds for 2016. While this represents a 27% decrease from 2015, we do not expect to have to reduce harvest in 2016. This is because coastwide recreational harvest in 2015 is projected to be below the 2016 RHL. Next week, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will establish the management regions under which the states will determine regulations. Under all options, Massachusetts is expected to remain its own region and be allowed to maintain its current fluke measures: 5-fish daily limit, 16-inch minimum size, and May 22–September 23 open season.

### Scup

The coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL) for scup has been set at 6.09 million pounds for 2016. While this represents a 10% decrease from 2015, we do not expect to have to reduce harvest in 2016. This is because coastwide recreational harvest in 2015 is projected to be below the 2016 RHL. Next week, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is expected to approve the states' 2016

recreational scup regulations. The northern region states (MA-NY) have not proposed any revisions to their 2015 regulations. Consequently, Massachusetts' scup regulations are expected to be: 30-fish daily limit, 10-inch minimum size, and May 1–December 31 open season, except that the possession limit aboard for-hire fishing vessels during May 1–June 30 is 45 fish.

### Black Sea Bass

The coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL) for black sea bass has been set at 2.82 million pounds for 2016. While this represents a 21% increase from 2015, we do expect to have to **reduce harvest** in 2016. This is because coastwide recreational harvest in 2015 is projected to be above the 2016 RHL. Currently, the mandatory reduction in harvest stands at 23% (based on landings through October 2015). Next week, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will determine whether the fishery will be managed under coastwide measures or regional measures. Assuming a continuation of regional management, the states of Massachusetts through New Jersey will comprise a region that must adopt state-specific regulations that collectively achieve the mandatory reduction.

Following next week's Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting and the release of November/December 2015 harvest estimates, *Marine Fisheries* will be able to develop specific regulatory options to achieve the required harvest reduction for black sea bass. These options will be released in a mid-February Advisory, and will include **potential changes to the opening date, closing date, and possession limit**. *Marine Fisheries* will accept written comment and hold a public meeting on the options. This public scoping process will be concluded in advance of the March 10, 2016 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission Meeting, where the Director of *Marine Fisheries* will make his recommendation. Important details, including the date and location of this public meeting, will be available in the mid-February Advisory.

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