



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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February 9, 2024

Marine Fisheries Advisory

Public Input Sought on Recreational Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Options and Modifying the For-hire Vessel At-sea Filleting Allowance for Striped Bass

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is seeking public input on a range of options to manage the Commonwealth's 2024 recreational summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. The interstate fishery management plan for these species requires a 28% recreational harvest reduction for summer flounder, a 10% recreational harvest reduction for scup, and status quo recreational harvest for black sea bass to achieve their coastwide recreational harvest targets in 2024.

Public input will be accepted on the range of options described below through 5PM on March 7, 2024. Written comment should be submitted by email to marine.fish@mass.gov and addressed to the attention of Director McKiernan. Comment is most informative when it includes the individual's primary mode of fishing (from shore, private vessel, or for-hire vessel) and the reasons for supporting particular management measures. DMF will also host a virtual public meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, February 21 at 6:00 PM. To register and receive a link to join the public meeting, please visit: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_OM_F3aObQZSgHPaqUUMYEA.

In addition, for-hire vessel operators and other interested individuals are invited to stay on the February 21 Zoom meeting to discuss the state's for-hire vessel at-sea filleting allowance for striped bass. Under recently adopted changes to the interstate management plan (see prior Advisory on [Addendum II](#) for more information), all states that allow such filleting must require that the racks of filleted striped bass are retained during the fishing trip to help promote compliance and enforcement of size and possession limits. Input is sought on DMF's implementation of this requirement, including crafting clear regulatory language and expectations about when and where retained racks may be disposed.

If you are unable to attend the public meeting but have questions about either of these issues before submitting written input, please email Nichola Meserve at nichola.meserve@mass.gov.

DMF and the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) will discuss these issues and the public input collected through this solicitation at the MFAC's March 19, 2024 [business meeting](#). The public will be notified as soon as possible thereafter on the selected set of recreational measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, as well as expectations for the striped bass for-hire filleting allowance. DMF will need to proceed with emergency rulemaking in order to meet the implementation deadlines for these coastwide management requirements.

(Continue to next pages for summer flounder, scup and black sea bass management options.)

Summer Flounder

Coastwide summer flounder harvest in 2024 is expected to exceed the recreational harvest target by 28% under the 2023 fishing rules. Because stock biomass is below the target level, the interstate management plan requires the full 28% recreational harvest reduction to be achieved in 2024. Each of five management regions is responsible for adopting measures to achieve a 28% regional harvest reduction. Massachusetts is considered its own region and thus can design its own set of measures. The measures implemented in 2024 are expected to remain in place for 2025. Massachusetts range of options is provided in the table below. The 2023 rules are provided for comparison only. Measures outside of this range of options are not possible.

| <i>Summer Flounder</i> | Recreational Fishing Mode | Open Season | Possession Limit | Minimum Size Limit |
|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2023 Rules (not an option) | All Modes | May 21 – Sept 29 | 5 fish | 16.5” |
| Option 1 | Private Vessel & For-hire Vessel | May 24 – Sept 23 | 5 fish | 17.5” |
| | Shore | | | 16.5” |
| Option 2 | Private Vessel & For-hire Vessel | May 24 – Sept 30 | 4 fish | 17.5” |
| | Shore | | | 16.5” |
| Option 3 (with seasonal sub-options a-d) | Private Vessel & For-hire Vessel | a) May 24 – Aug 27 <i>or</i> b) June 5 – Sept 2 <i>or</i> c) June 11 – Sept 15 <i>or</i> d) June 18 – Sept 29 | 3 fish | 17” |
| | Shore | | | 16.5” |
| Option 4 (with seasonal sub-options a-d) | For-hire Vessel | a) May 24 – Aug 26 <i>or</i> b) June 5 – Sep 2 <i>or</i> c) June 12– Sep 15 <i>or</i> d) June 18 – Sept 29 | 5 fish | 17.5” |
| | Private Vessel & Shore | | 2 fish | 16.5” |

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Scup

Coastwide scup harvest in 2024 is expected to exceed the recreational harvest target by 18% under the 2023 fishing rules. Because stock biomass is well above the target level, the interstate management plan caps the recreational harvest reduction to be achieved in 2024 at 10%. Each of three management regions is responsible for adopting measures to achieve a 10% regional harvest reduction. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York are considered a region and have collectively designed three options to meet this mandate. The measures implemented in 2024 are expected to remain in place for 2025. Massachusetts range of options is provided in the table below. The 2023 rules are provided for comparison only. Measures outside of this range of options are not possible.

| <i>Scup</i> | Recreational Fishing Mode | Open Season | Possession Limit | Minimum Size Limit |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2023 Rules (not an option) | Shore | May 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | 9.5” |
| | Private Vessel | May 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | 10.5” |
| | For-hire Vessel | May 1 – June 30 | 40 fish | 10.5” |
| | | July 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | |
| Option 1 | Shore | May 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | 9.5” |
| | Private Vessel | May 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | 11” |
| | For-hire Vessel | May 1 – June 30 | 40 fish | 11” |
| | | July 1 – Dec 31 | 30 fish | |
| Option 2 | Shore | May 1 – Dec 31 | 9 fish | 9.5” |
| | Private Vessel | May 1 – Dec 31 | 9 fish | 10.5” |
| | For-hire Vessel | May 1 – June 30 | 20 fish | 10.5” |
| | | July 1 – Dec 31 | 9 fish | |
| Option 3 | Shore | April 1 – Dec 31 | 20 fish | 10” |
| | Private Vessel | April 1 – Dec 31 | 20 fish | 11” |
| | For-hire Vessel | April 1 – April 30 | 20 fish | 11” |
| | | May 1 – June 30 | 40 fish | |
| July 1 – Dec 31 | | 20 fish | | |

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Black Sea Bass

The interstate management plan requires status quo black sea bass measures in 2024, except that states may make minor seasonal adjustments that are not expected to increase harvest. Massachusetts has proposed an option—Option 2 in the table below—to adjust the season to maintain a Saturday opening date for the fishery in 2024 (May 18), which requires taking four days off the end of the season. Unlike summer flounder and scup, measures may change again for 2025 based on the results of the upcoming 2024 stock assessment for black sea bass. Measures outside of this range of options are not possible.

| <i>Black Sea Bass</i> | Recreational Fishing Mode | Open Season | Possession Limit | Minimum Size Limit |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2023 Rules/ Option 1 | All Modes | May 20 – Sept 7 | 4 fish | 16.5” |
| Option 2 | All Modes | May 18 – Sept 3 | 4 fish | 16.5” |