



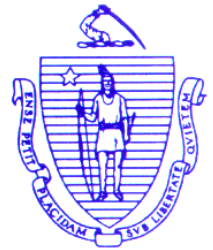
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February 11, 2019
Marine Fisheries Advisory

Recreational Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Options for Public Input

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is seeking public input on potential regulations for Massachusetts' 2019 recreational scup and black sea bass fisheries. Public input can be provided by submitting written comment by February 15 (Midnight). We apologize for the short notice; we are responding to interstate management decision made in early February, with the goal of determining the measures as quickly as possible. An announcement is likely before mid-March.

Written Comment: February 15 deadline

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Scup

Massachusetts is allowed to liberalize its recreational scup regulations for 2019, subject to provisions set by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) for our management region of MA-NY. Coastwide recreational harvest in 2018 is projected to be 5.66 million pounds, well below the 2019 limit of 7.37 million pounds, providing for additional harvest opportunities in 2019.

Options under consideration include one or a combination of the following revisions to Massachusetts' 2018 rules (Table 1):

- 1) increasing the for-hire "bonus season" bag limit from 45 fish to 50 fish;
- 2) adding a second two-month "bonus season" to the for-hire fishery, during either July–August or September–October; and
- 3) opening the fishery during March–April at a 30-fish bag limit (private and for-hire modes).

Table 1. 2018 Recreational Scup Rules in Massachusetts

Mode	Season	Daily Bag Limit	Minimum Size Limit
Private	May 1–December 31	30 fish (150/vessel max.)	9"
For-hire	May 1–June 30 ("bonus season")	45 fish	9"
	July 1–December 31	30 fish	

Please note the following in considering the options:

- The ASMFC did not approve changes to the private mode bag limit, due to a greater degree of uncertainty associated with the expected impact on harvest. Additionally, regional fishery data indicate that very few anglers fishing from shore or private vessel “limit out” at the existing 30-fish limit (<1% of compliant trips). During the current for-hire “bonus season”, about 20% of angler trips make use of the higher bag limit (31–45 fish harvested), with about 6% limiting out (at 45 fish). Outside the current “bonus season”, the per angler harvest rate aboard for-hire vessels is similar to the private mode.
- The timing of the current two-month “bonus season” within the MA–NY region differs, with MA selecting May–June and RI/CT/NY selecting September–October. A four-month “bonus season” would also be implemented differently as either:
 - May–August in MA, and September–December in RI/CT/NY; or
 - May–June and September–October in all four states.
- Federal waters are open year-round to recreational scup harvest, at a 50-fish maximum and 9” minimum size. Last year, MA–NY used an allowed liberalization to reduce our state waters size limit from 10” to 9”, to match the federal size limit. Harvesters are held to more restrictive state rules when landing in MA.
- While the proposed changes are expected to have a modest effect on recreational harvest and the robust scup resource, the ASMFC Technical Committee advises against significant modifications to the rules from year to year, as this creates challenges in evaluating and predicting the resulting impacts to harvest. Analysis this year is also based on “back calculated” recreational harvest estimates (due to recent improvements in survey methodology), adding additional uncertainty to the projected impact of alternative regulations.

Black Sea Bass

Massachusetts is allowed to maintain its 2018 regulations, or implement regulations that are deemed to be the conservational equivalent (i.e., have the same projected harvest as the 2018 regulations). DMF will consider opening the season one day earlier in 2019 (May 18) in order to maintain a Saturday opening date. Because of seasonal differences in daily harvest rates of black sea bass, opening the fishery one day earlier in May requires closing the fishery four days earlier in September (Table 2).

Coastwide, the recreational harvest limit for 2019 is unchanged from 2018 at 3.66 million pounds. The ASMFC voted in support of status quo management measures for 2019, based on technical advice that such measures would be unlikely to result in harvest above the limit in 2019, coupled with a desire for regulatory stability. States can amend their regulations provided they have the same projected harvest as status quo measures.

Table 2. Options for 2019 Recreational Black Sea Bass Rules in Massachusetts

	Season	Daily Bag Limit	Minimum Size Limit
Option 1 (status quo)	May 19–September 12	5 fish	15”
Option 2	May 18–September 8	5 fish	15”

Fluke

Decisions on recreational fluke management were delayed by the partial federal government shutdown and its repercussions on the scheduled completion of a stock assessment for the species. More information should be available after an early March meeting of the ASMFC with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

For more information, please contact Nichola Meserve at nichola.meserve@state.ma.us or 617-626-1531.

www.mass.gov/marinefisheries