



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Outlook for Recreational Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Regulations in 2024

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) understands that recreational anglers and for-hire fishing captains are making plans and booking trips for the upcoming 2024 fishing season and are looking for more information about the potential regulations for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. We are providing the following preliminary information to assist in your planning.

Overall, on a coastwide basis, a 28% harvest reduction is required for summer flounder, a 10% harvest reduction is required for scup, and level harvest is required for black sea bass in order to achieve each species' recreational harvest target. Each Atlantic coast state is preparing a range of regulatory proposals to be approved by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in mid-February. DMF anticipates conducting public scoping on its range of proposals in early March, then selecting measures to implement by emergency rulemaking in order to make changes by May 1.

Summer Flounder: Massachusetts is considered its own region for recreational summer flounder management under the interstate management plan and thus can design its own set of regulations (open season, bag limit, and size limit) that are expected to achieve a 28% harvest reduction relative to the state's projected harvest under the 2023 regulations. A 1" size limit increase can achieve most of the required reduction, consequently DMF expects to have an option for a 17.5" size limit with little impact to the bag or season. However, in response to implications for discards and prior comment about the disparity between the commercial and recreational size limit, the range of options will also consider a ½" size limit increase or no size limit increase, with greater cuts to the bag limit and season. Under these options, the season may exclude harvest opportunities in May/early June or late-August/September and include a reduced bag limit.

Scup: Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York have been able to maintain largely consistent regulations through working as a region and will try to do so again to achieve a 10% harvest reduction relative to the region's projected harvest under the 2023 regulations. The range of options (at a minimum) is expected to include a size limit increase with little-to-no effect on bag and season, and a bag limit reduction with little-to-no effect on size and season.

Black Sea Bass: The states are required to maintain their 2023 regulations but with an allowance to make minor adjustments to the season provided harvest is not projected to increase. DMF expects to change the season start date from May 20 to May 18 to maintain a Saturday opening this year. The

closing date of the season will need to move up similarly, still terminating in early September, with the exact date to be determined. There will be no change to the 4-fish bag limit and 16.5" minimum size limit.

More information will be provided as soon as possible about the 2024 recreational management measures for these species over the next several months. We appreciate your patience with the necessary timeline for these interstate managed species. The measures ultimately implemented for summer flounder and scup in 2024 are expected to remain in place for 2025, while measures for black sea bass will take into consideration the results of a stock assessment to be completed this year.