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# Commonwealth of Massachusetts

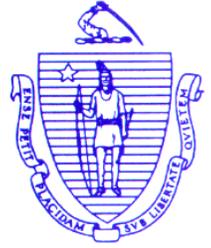
## Division of Marine Fisheries

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November 22, 2016

Marine Fisheries Advisory

### **DMF Informational Meeting on 2017 Recreational Black Sea Bass Management: December 8**

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The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has scheduled an informational meeting to review the management process and timeline for establishing 2017 recreational black sea bass regulations. The meeting will be held:

**Thursday, December 8, 2016 at 6:30 PM**  
**Hotel 1620 at Plymouth Harbor (Boardroom)**  
**180 Water Street, Plymouth, MA**

Black sea bass are subject to both federal and interstate management through the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission). These management bodies will be holding multiple meetings over the course of this winter to determine the coastwide 2017 recreational harvest limit for black sea bass and the management approach to restrict recreational harvest in 2017 to the limit. These processes and their timeline will be the focus of this meeting.

Only after the federal and interstate management decisions have been made will DMF be able to propose specific season, possession, and size limits for Massachusetts' 2017 recreational black sea bass fishery. We anticipate another public meeting in early spring to collect input on regulatory options. The rules are unlikely to be finalized until shortly before the season's start.

The recreational harvest limit (RHL) for 2017 has been set—on an interim basis— at 2.72 million pounds, the same as 2016. The 2016 benchmark stock assessment, which will be undergoing its peer review later this month, will provide the basis for revising the 2017 RHL. Based on the advice of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Council and Commission are expected to select next year's RHL in mid-February 2017. Next year's state and federal regulations will depend on the 2017 RHL as compared to coastwide recreational harvest in 2016. A preliminary full-year estimate of coastwide recreational harvest will not be available until mid-February. Currently, only a preliminary harvest estimates through August 2016 is available (3.5 million pounds); most states' seasons are open through the end of the year. At this point, it is impossible to conclude whether the states will be able to liberalize regulations in 2017 or must restrict them.

The last factor influencing the selection of specific regulations is the recreational management approach to be set by the Commission. For the past five years, the Commission has used an "ad hoc regional" approach to restrict harvest to the RHL. This approach puts the states of Massachusetts through New Jersey, which are responsible for 90–95% of coastwide harvest, into a Northern Region, and the states of Delaware

through North Carolina into a Southern Region. The Northern Region has faced mandatory cutbacks the past four years because of increasing harvest (while the RHL has been largely stagnant), with the states implementing state-specific regulations intended to reduce harvest by a uniform percent from their prior year harvest. There is no allocation of the RHL to each state. The Commission has the option to extend this management approach into 2017 by Board action at an upcoming meeting (in mid-December). The alternatives include defaulting to the interstate management plan's status quo of a single set of coastwide measures or—time permitting—changing the plan through an addendum to establish an entirely new management approach.

For more information about the informational meeting or black sea bass management, please contact Nichola Meserve, DMF Policy Analyst, at [nichola.meserve@state.ma.us](mailto:nichola.meserve@state.ma.us) or 617.626.1531.