



David E. Pierce
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

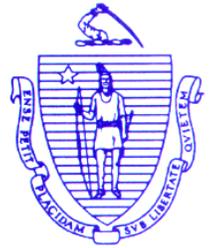
Division of Marine Fisheries

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400

Boston, Massachusetts 02114

(617) 626-1520

fax (617) 626-1509



Charles D. Baker
Governor

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Lieutenant Governor

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Commissioner

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February 23, 2016

Marine Fisheries Advisory

Recreational Black Sea Bass Management Options for Public Input

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is seeking public input on potential regulations for Massachusetts' 2016 recreational black sea bass fishery. A mandatory harvest reduction of 23% compared to the state's estimated 2015 harvest is required.

There are numerous combinations of changes to the possession limit, size limit, and season that could achieve the required reduction. This Advisory aims to provide a range of possible options. The final regulations may differ from all presented options based on public input. Not all presented options have been approved for use by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which is required before state implementation. DMF's goal is to announce the 2016 regulations by mid-March.

Public input can be provided by either attending a February 26 Scoping Meeting or submitting written comments by March 3 (Midnight). Details are below.

Scoping Meeting

February 26, 2016

1:00 PM

Hyannis Doubletree Hotel

287 Iyannough Road

Hyannis, MA

Written Comment (March 3 Deadline)

Address to: David Pierce, DMF Director

251 Causeway Street, 4th Floor

Boston, MA 02114

Email: marine.fish@state.ma.us

Fax: (617) 626-1509

Challenges

Enacting regulations that are projected to reduce harvest is relatively straightforward but accommodating all the various stakeholders is not. Black sea bass are not evenly distributed in time and space within Massachusetts, so amending the open season or possession limit can have uneven impacts on user groups. In addition, catch rates in recent years have been substantially higher in May and June than the later summer and fall months. Consequently, shortening the season from the front end is projected to achieve more reduction in harvest than cutting the same number of days from the tail end of the season.

Moreover, the desires of the various fishery participants are wide-ranging. Regulatory preferences are often based on fishing mode (shore, private vessel, charter and party boats) and geographic location. For example, testimony from past public hearings has revealed several trends, including:

- Many anglers that fish from shore or a private vessel favor a longer season at a lower bag limit to a shorter season at a higher bag limit.

- Certain charter and party vessel operators on the South Shore and Cape Cod place priority on having a spring fishery (opening mid-May) at the highest bag limit possible, at the expense of season length, in order to meet the demands of their clients. They indicate that an early season closure for black sea bass is acceptable because other fish are available and targeted in summer and fall.
- Some charter and party vessel operators (e.g., from Nantucket) would forgo a spring fishery in order to have a season throughout summer and early fall, because black sea bass don't tend to arrive locally until the summer months. The tourists that comprise their clientele show a similar seasonality and are satisfied with a low possession limit.

Options

With an understanding of the traditional views of the various user groups and angler types, DMF has devised the following array of options to reduce recreational black sea bass harvest in Massachusetts by the required rate in 2016. Note that proposals only include amendments to season and possession limit. An increase in the minimum size limit is not on the table due to concerns about effectiveness in reducing harvest and non-compliance. For reference, Massachusetts' 2015 regulations are listed first.

	<i>Fishing Mode</i>	<i>Open Season</i>	<i>Possession Limit</i>	<i>Minimum Size</i>
2015 Regulations	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 23–August 27 (97 days)	8 fish	14"

SINGLE MODE, UNIFORM POSSESSION LIMIT				
Options A–D apply a single set of regulations to all anglers, whether fishing from shore, private vessel, or hired vessel (charter or party boat). A uniform possession limit applies throughout the open season.				
	<i>Fishing Mode</i>	<i>Open Season</i>	<i>Possession Limit</i>	<i>Minimum Size</i>
Option A	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 21–July 1 (42 days)	8 fish	14"
	This option provides the same opening date (third Saturday of May) and bag limit as 2015. Because of high angler effort and black sea bass catchability in May and June, this option requires closing the fishery 55 days earlier than in 2015.			
Option B	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 28–July 29 (63 days)	8 fish	14"
	This option demonstrates how, compared to Option A, delaying the opening date by one week adds 28 days to the end of the season, for a net gain of 21 days. A season beginning on May 28 includes the Memorial Day Holiday Weekend (May 28–30).			
Option C	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 21–September 5 (108 days)	3 fish	14"
	This option provides the same opening date (third Saturday of May) as 2015 at a reduced possession limit in order to extend the season through the Labor Day Holiday Weekend (September 3–5). If the opening date were May 28 instead, the season could extend through September 13.			
Option D	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 28–August 20 (85 days)	5 fish	14"
	This option takes two weeks off the season compared to 2015, one at the beginning and one at the end, which allows a possession limit of 5 fish.			

SINGLE MODE, IN-SEASON DECREASE IN THE POSSESSION LIMIT

Options E–G apply a single set of regulations to all anglers, whether fishing from shore, private vessel, or hired vessel (charter or party boat). The possession limit is split into two sub-periods, starting at a higher limit when black sea bass are generally most available in Massachusetts, then decreasing to a lower limit in order to maintain a longer season. Because recreational fishing data are collected in two-month periods (January/February, March/April, etc.), the split occurs after June 30.

	<i>Fishing Mode</i>	<i>Open Season</i>	<i>Possession Limit</i>	<i>Minimum Size</i>
Option E	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 21–June 30	6 fish	14"
		July 1–July 24	2 fish	
With the same opening date (third Saturday of May) as 2015, this option provides a 65-day season, with 41 days at 6-fish and then 24 days at 2-fish.				
Option F	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 28–June 30	6 fish	14"
		July 1–September 2	2 fish	
This option provides 33 more days than Option E by delaying the opening date by one week. Total season length is 98 days (similar to 2015), with 34 days at 6-fish and 64 days at 2-fish. The last open day would be the Friday before the Labor Day Holiday Weekend (September 3–5).				
Option G	All private anglers and for-hire patrons	May 28–June 30	5 fish	14"
		July 1–September 6	2 fish	
Compared to Option F, this option includes the Labor Day Holiday Weekend by setting the initial possession limit at 5 fish instead of 6 fish. Total season length is 102 days (34 days at 5-fish and 68 days at 2-fish).				

TWO MODES

Options H and I provide different regulations for private anglers and for-hire vessel patrons. Any of Options H1-H4 can be combined with any of Options I1-I4. These options were developed in response to various for-hire permit holders' requests to have separate regulations applicable to patrons aboard their vessels to accommodate consumer demand and business needs.

	<i>Fishing Mode</i>	<i>Open Season</i>	<i>Possession Limit</i>	<i>Minimum Size</i>
Option H	(1) Private anglers only	May 21–August 14 (86 days)	4 fish	14”
	(2) Private anglers only	May 21–September 3 (106 days)	3 fish	14”
	(3) Private anglers only	May 28–September 2 (98 days)	4 fish	14”
	(4) Private anglers only	May 28–September 10 (106 days)	3 fish	14”
	These options for anglers fishing from shore or private vessel compare the possible seasons at 3-fish and 4-fish possession limits, beginning either the same day as 2015 (third Saturday of May) or a one-week delay.			
Option I	(1) For-hire patrons only	May 21–June 24 (35 days)	8 fish	14”
	(2) For-hire patrons only	May 21–June 30	4 fish	14”
		July 1–September 4	2 fish	
	(3) For-hire patrons only	May 28–June 30	4 fish	14”
		July 1–October 10	2 fish	
	(4) For-hire patrons only	May 28–June 30	6 fish	14”
		July 1–September 8	2 fish	
	These options for anglers fishing aboard for-hire vessels compare possible seasons at a single possession limit (8 fish, same as 2015) and several dual possession limits. At a 4-fish and then 2-fish possession limit, Options I2 and I3 demonstrate how delaying the opening date by one week affects season length (107 days vs. 136 days). Option I4 provides a higher starting bag limit than Options I2 and I3 and a total season length of 104 days, from the Memorial Day Holiday Weekend to just after the Labor Day Holiday Weekend.			

The Division recognizes that all options require a sacrifice from one or more user groups. We join all stakeholders in hoping that the 2016 Benchmark Stock Assessment for black sea bass will reflect the true stock abundance of this species and result in a more realistic Recreational Harvest Limit for 2017, allowing for more liberal regulations at that time.

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