

ASMFC Schedules Public Hearings on Draft Addendum XXV
Addendum Seeks Input on Management Options for 2014 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Fisheries

Arlington, VA – The Atlantic coast states of Massachusetts through Virginia have scheduled their hearings to gather public comment on Draft Addendum XXV to the Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plans.

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

January 8, 2014 at 6 PM

2600 Washington Avenue

4th Floor Conference Room

Newport News, Virginia

Contact: Rob O'Reilly at 757.247.2247

THE ENTIRE ADDENDUM XXV can be accessed at:

http://www.asmfc.org/files/PublicInput/SF_BSB_DraftAddendumXXV_PublicComment_Dec2013.pdf.

IN addition, please go to page 3 for the start of options. Pages 1 and 2 are the ASMFC justifications for the Addendum XXV.

Draft Addendum XXV proposes management approaches for the 2014 summer flounder and black sea bass recreational fisheries. For summer flounder, the Draft Addendum includes options that allow for management measures by region and the sharing of unused quota – both with the intent of providing more equity in recreational harvest opportunities along the coast. The specific regions being considered are (1) Massachusetts; Rhode Island through New Jersey; Delaware through Virginia; and North Carolina and (2) Massachusetts and Rhode Island; Connecticut through New Jersey; Delaware through Virginia; and North Carolina.

The Draft Addendum was initiated to address a growing concern that current summer flounder management measures (as established under the Fishery Management Plan) are not providing recreational fishermen along the coast with equitable harvest opportunities to the resource. Those measures, involving state-specific recreational management measures under conservation equivalency are increasingly being viewed as problematic due to several factors. These factors include: reliance upon recreational harvest estimates for a single year (1998) as the basis for individual state targets; a change in the abundance of the resource; and changes in the socio-economic characteristics of the fishery. The impact of the management program seemed to affect New York the most, with a 21" size limit (by 2009) and a short season including mid-season closure. In 2013, with a fully recovered stock, New York's minimum size (19") was at least one inch higher than any other state, one and a half inches higher than its bordering states.

The Draft Addendum proposes a more flexible and equitable conservation approach that allows the management program to adjust to past, current, and future changes to the resource and the fishery. The biological characteristics of the summer flounder have changed with the restoration

of this stock. In particular, there has been a substantial expansion in the size and age composition, with greater overall abundance and increased numbers of larger fish.

The Draft Addendum also proposes two options for the 2014 black sea bass recreational fishery (1) coastwide measures (currently proposed at 13" TL minimum size, a 5 fish possession limit, and a season from June 1 to September 30) or (2) the continued use of management measures by northern (MA – NJ) and southern regions (DE – NC). The regional management approach has been used since 2011 and offers some advantages over coastwide regulations, which can disproportionately impact states within the management unit. Specifically, regional measures can address geographic differences in the stock (size, abundance and seasonality) while maintaining the consistent application of management measures by neighboring states.

Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on Draft Addendum XXV, either by attending state public hearings or providing written comment. The Draft Addendum is available on the Commission website on the Public Input page at <http://www.asafc.org/about-us/public-input>. It can also be accessed directly at http://www.asafc.org/files/PublicInput/SF_BSB_DraftAddendumXXV_PublicComment_Dec2013.pdf. Public comment will be accepted until **5:00 PM (EST) on January 24, 2014** and should be forwarded to Kirby Rootes-Murdy, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, 1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201; 703.842.0741 (fax) or via email at krootes-murdy@asafc.org (Subject line: Draft Addendum XXV).

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3.1. Summer Flounder Options

The below options can be used stand-alone or in combination.

Option 1: Status Quo: Coastwide or Conservation Equivalency

The Board and Council specify coastwide measures to achieve a coastwide recreational harvest limit or permit conservation equivalent management measures using guidelines agreed upon by both management authorities in Framework 2 and Addenda XIV and XVII. Under conservation equivalency states can implement state-by-state measures or adjacent states or contiguous states can voluntarily enter into an agreement forming regions. Under either option the combined measures of all the states or regions are developed to achieve the coastwide recreational harvest limit.

Example of a Coastwide Measure for 2013:

The Council's Monitoring Committee developed a coastwide set of measures of 18 inches, 4 fish, and a season from May 1-September 30. It provided an alternative season of May 15-October 15. These measures would constrain the coast to the 2014 RHL (7.01 million pounds).

State-by-state conservation equivalency: (This has been in place since 2001): If state-by-state conservation equivalency is chosen, states would be required to implement size, possession and season limits that constrained the state's harvest to the 2014 harvest target based on the coastwide RHL (see below tables):

2014 Coastwide Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL) is divided among 9 states.

RHL = 7.01 million pounds, and with an average fish weight of 2.891 pounds, the RHL in numbers of fish = 2,421,720 AND the Virginia target (quota) for 2014 would be 404,427 recreational summer flounder. The 2013 quota was 417,000 fish and the estimated 2013 recreational summer flounder landings at a 16-inch minimum size limit and 4-fish possession limit are: just less than 190,000 summer flounder which is less than one-half of the 2013 quota.

Option 2: Utilization of Additional RHL

This option is designed to be used in conjunction with conservation equivalency as outlined in option 1 status quo. States/regions that may liberalize their 2014 summer flounder recreational regulations but choose not to fully utilize their entire harvest target, agree to allow for these potential "under-utilized fish" to be distributed to any other state/region, upon request. Savings would be distributed to any requesting states/regions through Board action. States/regions with the option to liberalize are not giving up their state/region portion of the 2014 RHL. For example, if a state/region adopts management measures that project that 2014 landings will be under target but achieves the full target, that state/region will incur no penalty. (THIS "FISH GIVING" took place in 2013 and Virginia contributed. New York and New Jersey were the recipients. There will be more fish available for giving in 2014 than 2013.

Option 3: Adaptive Regional Management

Due to the wide geographic range of this species, the application of single coastwide minimum size, possession limit, and season restrictions does not affect all jurisdictions involved in the fishery the same way; and the application of state-by-state conservation equivalency can result in disparate measures by neighboring states. Dividing the coastal states into regions allows states the flexibility to mitigate potential disproportionate impacts resulting from coastwide measures and to pursue more equitable harvest opportunities, while providing consistent measures to states within the same region, in many cases sharing the same fishing grounds. This option is not intended to implement new state allocations and is not intended to set a precedent for new state allocations. Under the adaptive regional approach, states would not give up their (1998-based) allocated portion of the RHL, would not be held accountable for anything other than their allocated portion of the RHL, and would retain the future opportunity (depending on what management approach is adopted for 2015) to continue managing their fisheries in accordance with their allocated portion of the RHL (VIRGINIA is proposed to join Maryland and Delaware in a region—see Addendum for examples).

Management for 2015:

1) Using state-by-state approach under conservation equivalency. If the ASMFC Board adopts the adaptive regional approach for 2014 and goes back to state-by-state conservation equivalency in 2015, the following process will occur. The Technical Committee will use the state harvest from 2014 to predict harvest in 2015 and compare that to the 2015 state harvest target (derived from the state's 1998-based portion of the 2015 RHL). If the state's predicted harvest is higher than the target, the state must adjust their regulations to constrain harvest to the 2015 target. If the state's predicted harvest is lower than the target, the state can adjust their regulations to achieve the 2015 target. (THIS HAS OCCURRED SINCE 2001, and there have been reductions and liberalizations over the years).

2) Using the adaptive regional approach. If the Board adopts the adaptive regional approach for 2014 and extends the regional approach for 2015, the following process will occur. The Technical Committee will use harvest estimates and fishery performance from 2014 to predict harvest in 2015. If the predicted 2015 coastwide harvest is higher than the 2015 target, regions will have to adjust their regulations in 2015. The Technical Committee will develop proposed measures for each region that, when combined, will constrain the coastwide harvest to the 2015 RHL. The suite of proposed 2015 measures, to be developed for Board consideration, will take into account the differences in each region's 2014 predicted and actual harvest. The proposed measures will be developed to be similar to the previous years' regulations but allow for some flexibility to allow for consistent harvest opportunity among the regions and follow the guidelines listed above. (NOTE: only an overage of the coast-wide RHL triggers the adaptive approach).