

CHAPTER 4VAC20-950

PREAMBLE

This chapter establishes minimum size limits, gear restrictions, and quotas for the harvest of black sea bass. This chapter authorizes the aquaculture of black sea bass and sets forth the conditions required for black sea bass culture. This chapter is promulgated pursuant to the authority contained in §§28.2-201 and 28.2-204.1 of the Code of Virginia. This chapter amends and re-adopts, as amended, Chapter 4VAC20-950, which was adopted May 27, 2025, and made effective June 1, 2025. The effective date of this chapter, as amended, is May 1, 2026.

**4VAC20-950-10. Purpose.**

The purposes of this chapter are to (i) reduce fishing mortality in the black sea bass fishery to ensure that overfishing does not occur, (ii) promote the health of the spawning stock biomass, (iii) improve the yield from the fishery, (iv) distribute shares of the black sea bass quota to those fishermen who demonstrate a previous history of participation in the fishery, and (v) encourage safe black sea bass aquaculture practices.

**4VAC20-950-20. Definitions.**

The following words and terms when used in this chapter shall have the following meaning unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

"Black sea bass" means any fish of the species *Centropristis striata*.

"Land" or "landing" means to (i) enter port with finfish, shellfish, crustaceans, or other marine seafood on board any boat or vessel; (ii) begin offloading finfish, shellfish, crustaceans, or other marine seafood; or (iii) offload finfish, shellfish, crustaceans, or other marine seafood.

"Recreational vessel" means any vessel, kayak, charter vessel, or headboat fishing recreationally.

"Snout" means the most forward projection from a fish's head that includes the upper and lower jaw.

"Total length" means the length of a fish measured from the most forward projection of the snout, with the mouth closed, to the tip of the longer lobe of the tail (caudal) fin, excluding the caudal fin filament, measured with the tail compressed along the midline, using a straight-line measure, not measured over the curve of the body.

**“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”**

**CHAPTER 4VAC20-950**

**4VAC20-950-30. Minimum size limit.**

A. The minimum size for black sea bass harvested by commercial fishing gear shall be 11 inches in total length. It shall be unlawful for any person to sell, trade, or barter, or offer to sell, trade, or barter any black sea bass less than 11 inches in total length, except as described in 4VAC20-950-70.

B. The minimum size of black sea bass harvested by recreational gear, including hook and line, rod and reel, spear and gig, shall be 13 inches in total length.

C. It shall be unlawful for any person to possess any black sea bass smaller than the minimum size limit, as designated respectively, in subsections A and B of this section, except as described in 4VAC20-950-70.

**4VAC20-950-40. Gear restrictions.**

It shall be unlawful for any person to place, set, or fish any fish pot in Virginia tidal waters for the purposes of harvesting black sea bass or to possess or to land in Virginia black sea bass harvested by fish pots which are not constructed as follows:

1. With two escape vents of 2-1/2 inches diameter circular dimension, or 2 inches square dimension, or 1-3/8 inches by 5-3/4 inches rectangular dimension.

2. With hinges or fasteners on one side panel or door, which measures at least 3 inches by 6 inches, made of the following materials:

- a. Untreated hemp, jute, or cotton string of 3/16 inches or less diameter;
- b. Magnesium alloy, timed float releases (pop-up devices), or similar magnesium alloy fasteners; or
- c. Ungalvanized or uncoated iron wire of 0.094 inches or less in diameter.

**4VAC20-950-45. Recreational possession limits and seasons.**

A. It shall be unlawful for any person fishing with hook-and-line, rod and reel, spear, gig, or other recreational gear to possess more than 15 black sea bass. When fishing from a recreational vessel where the entire catch is held in a common hold or container, the possession limit shall be for that vessel and shall be equal to the number of persons on board legally licensed to fish, multiplied by 15. The captain or operator of the vessel shall be responsible for that vessel possession limit. Any black sea bass taken after the possession limit has been reached shall be returned to the water immediately.

**“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”**

**CHAPTER 4VAC20-950**

B. Possession of any quantity of black sea bass that exceeds the possession limit described in subsection A of this section shall be presumed to be for commercial purposes.

C. In 2026, the open recreational fishing season shall be from May 11 through December 31. In 2027, the open recreational fishing season shall be from April 1 through December 31.

D. It shall be unlawful for any person fishing recreationally to take, catch, or possess any black sea bass, except during an open recreational season.

E. From February 1 through the last day of February, it shall be unlawful for any person to possess or land any black sea bass harvested from a recreational vessel, unless the captain or operator of that recreational vessel has obtained a Recreational Black Sea Bass Permit from the Marine Resources Commission (commission).

1. The captain or operator shall be responsible for reporting for all anglers on the recreational vessel and shall provide that captain's or that operator's Marine Resources Commission identification (MRC ID) number, the date of fishing, the number of persons on board, the mode of fishing, and the number of black sea bass kept or released. That report shall be submitted to the commission on forms provided by the commission or through the Virginia Saltwater Fisherman's Journal.

a. It shall be unlawful for any permittee to fail to report each trip where black sea bass were targeted, whether black sea bass were harvested, released, or not caught, by March 15 of the current calendar year.

b. It shall be unlawful for any permittee who did not take any fishing trips to target black sea bass in the February recreational black sea bass season to fail to report lack of participation by March 15 of the current calendar year.

2. It shall be unlawful for any permittee to fail to contact the Law Enforcement Operations at 1-800-541-4646 before or immediately after the start of each fishing trip. The permittee shall provide the Law Enforcement Operations with the permittee's name, MRC ID number, the point of landing, a description of the vessel, estimated return to shore time, and a contact phone number.

3. Any permittee shall allow the commission to sample the vessel's catch to obtain biological information for scientific and management purposes.

**“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”**

**CHAPTER 4VAC20-950**

**4VAC20-950-46. Directed fishery and bycatch fishery permits.**

A. It shall be unlawful for any person to participate in the commercial black sea bass fishery or to possess, harvest, or sell black sea bass, except as described in 4VAC20-950-60 and 4VAC20-950-70, without first qualifying for and obtaining either a directed fishery permit or a bycatch fishery permit from the commission, as described, respectively, in subsections B, C, and D of this section, unless that person meets the requirements described in 4VAC20-950-48.2.

B. Any person who qualified for a directed commercial black sea bass fishery permit, as of January 1, 2003, by satisfying all the eligibility criteria listed in this subsection shall remain eligible for that permit, unless that person permanently transferred all that person's shares of the directed fishery quota.

1. That person shall hold either a Commercial Fisherman Registration License or a Seafood Landing License in addition to a federal Black Sea Bass Moratorium Permit; and

2. That person shall have landed and sold in Virginia at least 10,000 pounds of black sea bass from July 1, 1997, through December 31, 2001.

C. Any person who meets the eligibility criteria of subsection B of this section but no longer meets the requirements of subdivision B 1 of this section shall remain eligible to transfer shares of that person's directed fishery quota in accordance with 4VAC20-950-48.1.

D. A person shall be considered eligible for a bycatch commercial black sea bass fishery permit by satisfying all of the following eligibility criteria:

1. That person shall hold either a Commercial Fisherman Registration License or a Seafood Landing License, in addition to a federal Black Sea Bass Moratorium Permit; and

2. That person shall have landed and sold in Virginia at least one pound of black sea bass from July 1, 1997, through December 31, 2001.

**4VAC20-950-47. Commercial harvest quotas.**

A. The commercial landings of black sea bass shall be limited to the annual quota pursuant to the joint Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council/Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan, except as specified in subsection B of this section.

B. If a quota transfer occurs between Virginia and another state participating in the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for black sea bass, Virginia's annual quota for the current calendar year shall be limited to the annual quota amount as adjusted for transfers.

## "PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS"

## CHAPTER 4VAC20-950

C. The commercial black sea bass directed fishery quota shall be allocated 100% of the annual quota each year except the commercial directed fishery quota shall not include the amount of annual quota allocated to the commercial black sea bass bycatch fishery specified in subsection B of this section. When it has been announced by the commission that the directed fishery quota has been projected as reached and the directed fishery has been closed, it shall be unlawful for any commercial black sea bass directed fishery permittee to possess aboard any vessel or land in Virginia any black sea bass.

D. The commercial black sea bass bycatch fishery shall be allocated 40,000 pounds of the annual quota each calendar year. When it has been announced that the bycatch fishery quota has been projected as reached and the bycatch fishery has been closed, it shall be unlawful for any commercial black sea bass bycatch fishery permittee to possess aboard any vessel or land in Virginia any black sea bass. In the event the bycatch fishery quota is exceeded, the amount of the bycatch fishery quota overage shall be deducted from the following year's bycatch fishing quota.

**4VAC20-950-48. Individual fishery quotas; bycatch limit; at sea harvesters; exceptions.**

A. Each person possessing a directed fishery permit shall be assigned an individual fishery quota, in pounds, for each calendar year. A person's individual fishery quota shall be equal to that person's percentage of the total landings of black sea bass in Virginia from July 1, 1997, through December 31, 2001, multiplied by the commercial black sea bass directed fishery quota for the current calendar year. Any directed fishery permittee shall be limited to landings in Virginia in the amount of the permittee's individual fishery quota, in pounds, in any calendar year and it shall be unlawful for any permittee to exceed the permittee's individual fishery quota. In addition to the penalties prescribed by law, any overages of a permittee's individual fishery quota shall be deducted from that permittee's individual fishery quota for the following year.

B. In the determination of a person's percentage of total landings, the commission shall use the greater amount of landings from either the National Marine Fisheries Service Dealer Weigh-out Reports or National Marine Fisheries Service Vessel Trip Reports that have been reported and filed as of November 26, 2002. If a person's percentage of the total landings of black sea bass is determined by using the Vessel Trip Reports as the greater amount, then the person shall provide documentation to the Marine Resources Commission to verify the Vessel Trip Reports as accurate. This documentation may include dealer receipts of sales or other pertinent documentation, and such documentation shall be submitted to the commission by December 1, 2004. In the event the commission is not able to verify the full amount of the person's Vessel Trip Reports for the qualifying period, the commission shall use the greater amount of landings, from either the Dealer Weigh-Out Reports or the verified portion of the Vessel Trip Reports to establish that person's share of the directed fishery quota.

“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”

CHAPTER 4VAC20-950

C. It shall be unlawful for any person harvesting black sea bass to possess aboard any vessel in Virginia waters any amount of black sea bass that exceeds the combined total of any portion of the Virginia permitted landing limit, as described in subsection A of this section, and the North Carolina legal landing limit.

D. It shall be unlawful for any person permitted for the bycatch fishery to do any of the following:

1. Possess aboard a vessel or land in Virginia more than 200 pounds of black sea bass in addition to the North Carolina legal landing limit or trip limit, in any one day, except as provided in subdivision 2 of this subsection;
2. Possess aboard a vessel or land in Virginia more than 1,500 pounds of black sea bass in addition to the North Carolina legal landing limit or trip limit, in any one day, provided that the total weight of black sea bass on board the vessel does not exceed 10%, by weight, of the total weight of summer flounder, scup, Longfin squid, and Atlantic mackerel on board the vessel; or
3. Possess aboard a vessel or land in Virginia more than 100 pounds of black sea bass in addition to the North Carolina legal landing limit or trip limit, when it is projected and announced that 75% of the bycatch fishery quota has been taken.

E. It shall be unlawful for any person to transfer black sea bass from one vessel to another while at sea.

F. An individual fishery quota, as described in subsection A of this section, shall be equal to a person's current percentage share of the directed fishery quota, as described in 4VAC20-950-47 A.

**4VAC20-950-48.1. Individual transferable quotas.**

A. Shares of the directed fishery quota, in pounds, held by any permitted fisherman in the directed fishery may be transferred to another person, and such transfer shall allow the transferee to harvest, possess and land black sea bass in Virginia in a quantity equal to the shares of the directed fishery quota transferred, provided that transferee satisfies the eligibility requirements described in 4VAC20-950-46 B 1.

B. Any transfer of black sea bass shall be limited by the following conditions.

1. Commercial black sea bass shares of the directed fishery quota shall not be transferred in any quantity less than 200 pounds.

**“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”**

**CHAPTER 4VAC20-950**

2. No person permitted for the directed fishery may hold more than 20% of the annual directed fishery quota.

3. No transfer of shares of the black sea bass directed fishery quota shall be authorized unless such transfer is documented on a form provided by the commission and approved by the commissioner.

4. Any person who receives a permanent transfer of directed fishery quota but does not satisfy the eligibility requirements described in 4VAC20-950-46 B 1 shall remain eligible to transfer shares of that person's directed fishery quota in accordance with this section.

C. Transfers of all or a portion of any person's share of the directed fishery quota may be permanent or temporary. Transferred directed fishery quota shall only be used by the transferee for black sea bass landed in Virginia. Permanent transfers of shares of directed fishery quota shall grant to the transferee that transferred share of the directed fishery quota for future years, and the transferor loses that same transferred share of the directed fishery quota in future years. Temporary transfers of shares of the directed fishery quota shall allow the transferee to harvest that transferred share of the directed fishery quota during the year in which the transfer is approved. Thereafter, any transferred share of the directed fishery quota reverts back to the transferor.

**4VAC20-950-48.2. Alternate vessel authorization requirements.**

A. Any person possessing a directed fishery permit may authorize an alternate vessel to harvest, possess, and land any portion of that person's individual directed fishery quota, provided the following conditions are met:

1. The directed fishery permit holder has submitted a completed and notarized alternate vessel authorization form to the commission.

2. The alternate vessel named on the authorization form holds a federal Black Sea Bass Moratorium Permit and that alternate vessel either holds a Virginia Seafood Landing License or that alternate vessel's owner and operator holds a Commercial Fisherman Registration License.

3. The alternate vessel authorization has been accepted and approved by the commissioner.

4. The alternate vessel maintains copies of the alternate vessel authorization form and the permit of the directed fishery quota owner at all times while serving as the alternate vessel.

B. No authorization for an alternate vessel to land black sea bass shall extend for more than 60 days from the date the commissioner approves the authorization. After 60 days, any unused portion

**“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”**

**CHAPTER 4VAC20-950**

of directed fishery quota authorized for the alternate vessel shall revert to its directed fishery permit holder.

**4VAC20-950-49. Reporting requirements.**

A. It shall be unlawful for any person permitted for the directed fishery, the bycatch fishery, or for an authorized alternate landing vessel to fail to contact, within one hour of landing, Law Enforcement Operations to report that person's name and the name of the vessel, that person's permit number, the location where catch will be offloaded, and the estimated weight of the landing of black sea bass.

B. It shall be unlawful for any person permitted for the directed fishery, the bycatch fishery, or for an authorized alternate landing vessel to fail to contact, within 24 hours of landing, the Marine Resources Commission's Interactive Voice Recording System to report the name of the permit holder and the name of the vessel that landed the black sea bass, date of landing, the permit number and the weight of black sea bass landed.

C. Any buyer of black sea bass from a directed fishery permittee, a bycatch fishery permittee, or an authorized alternate landing vessel shall maintain records of all purchases for the current year and prior year and make those records available to the Marine Resources Commission upon request.

**4VAC20-950-50. (Repealed.)**

**4VAC20-950-60. Black sea bass aquaculture facility permit.**

It shall be unlawful for any person to operate an aquaculture facility in which any black sea bass will be cultured, possessed, offered for sale, or sold without first obtaining from the Marine Resources Commission (commission) a black sea bass aquaculture facility permit for that facility. Any person in violation of any permit condition issued under this section, may have the permit revoked at any time upon review by the commission. If the commission revokes any person's permit for an aquaculture facility, then that person shall not be eligible to apply for a like permit for a period of two years from the date of revocation.

**4 VAC20-950-70. (Repealed.)**

**4VAC20-950-80. Penalty.**

As set forth in §28.2-903 of the Code of Virginia, any person violating any provision of this chapter shall be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor, and a second or subsequent violation of any provision of this chapter committed by the same person within 12 months of a prior violation is a Class 1 misdemeanor.

“PERTAINING TO BLACK SEA BASS”

CHAPTER 4VAC20-950

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This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate copy of the chapter passed by the Marine Resources Commission, pursuant to authority vested in the Commission by §28.2-201 of the Code of Virginia, duly advertised according to statute, and recorded in the Commission's minute book, at meeting held in Hampton, Virginia on April 21, 2026.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

BY: *Joseph D. Grist*  
Joseph D. Grist  
Acting Commissioner

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 22 day of April 2026.

*Alexa Irene Galvan*  
Notary Public

