Two meetings of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council’s Recreational Black Sea Bass and Scup Advisory Committee were held via webinar on January 19 and 26, 2023 to discuss management options for the New Jersey recreational black sea bass and scup fisheries for the 2023 fishing year.

**2023 Season**

At their March 2023 meeting, the ASMFC management board approved the State of New Jersey’s conservation equivalency proposal methodology for the 2023 black sea bass and scup recreational seasons. Under this proposal, New Jersey is required to reduce harvest by 10 percent for both species as required under ASMFC Percent Change Approach, as implemented under Addendum XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan. The current 2022 New Jersey recreational black sea bass regulations are an open season from May 17 – June 19 with a 10-fish possession limit, July 1 – August 31 with a 2-fish possession limit, October 7 – October 26 with a 10-fish possession limit, and November 1 - December 31 with a 15-fish possession limit, again, all seasons have a 13-inch minimum size limit. The current 2022 New Jersey scup regulations are year-round with a 50 fish possession limit and a 10 inch size limit.

For black sea bass, the Advisory Committee reviewed a total of 34 example options, 19 of which met the 10 percent reduction and ultimately moved forward 4 options for Council consideration. For scup, the Advisory Committee reviewed 18 example options, 4 of which met the required 10 percent reduction and ultimately moved 2 options forward for Council consideration. Since options for black sea bass and scup are calculated dependent on one another, options are provided with both species as follows;

Option 1. For black sea bass, an open Season from May 17 – June 19 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit; July 1 – August 31 with a 1-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, October 1 – October 31 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, and November 1 – December 31 with a 15-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit. The accompanying scup options are an open season from August 1-December 31 with a 30 fish possession limit and a 10 inch size limit.

Option 2. For black sea bass, an open Season from May 17 – June 19 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit; July 1 – August 31 with a 1-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, October 1 – October 31 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, and November 1 – December 31 with a 15-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit. The accompanying scup options are an open season from January 1- October 15 with a 30 fish possession limit and a 10 inch size limit.

Option 3. For black sea bass, an open Season from May 17 – June 19 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit; July 1 – August 7 with a 2-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, October 1 – October 31 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, and November 1 – December 31 with a 15-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit. The accompanying scup options are an open season from August 1-December 31 with a 30 fish possession limit and a 10 inch size limit.

Option 4. For black sea bass, an open Season from May 17 – June 19 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit; July 20 – August 31 with a 2-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, October 1 – October 31 with a 10-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit, and November 1 – December 31 with a 15-fish possession limit and a 12.5 inch size limit. The accompanying scup options are an open season from August 1-December 31 with a 30 fish possession limit and a 10 inch size limit.

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The committee’s preferred option is number 1. Advisors and Council recognized the many obstacles presented to the anglers of New Jersey under a 10 percent required reduction. The options that were developed did not come easily and several hours of deliberation took place.

Several comments of concern were made in regards to the method of calculation this year made by the National Marine Fisheries Service. In past years, advisors preferred the ability of New Jersey Marine Fisheries staff having the ability to craft options quickly and with Council and Committee input. It should be noted that advisors requested consideration of splitting management options between sectors. The suite of options that were provided including a sector split did not result in a 10 percent reduction and therefore were not considered for management use for 2023. The committee recommends adopting the measures proposed in Option 1 for New Jersey’s 2022 recreational black sea bass and scup fishery.