**NJ Marine Fisheries Council**

**Recreational winter scup fishery proposal**

The following message was sent to all recreational scup advisors on October 25, 2023.

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Advisors, Council, Staff;

At the Joint Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) / Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Board meeting in August 2023, the topic of re-opening the recreational scup fishery in January-April was discussed.  The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) indicated that the results of the Percent Change Approach this year would inform if the 2024 winter recreational scup season could be open in federal and state waters. In anticipation of those results, GARFO is preparing for this possible reversal of the scup seasonal regulations.  We will not know if that reversal will be possible until the Percent Change Approach to Fisheries Management results are compiled and reviewed sometime in December.  As such, there will not be adequate time for NJ to implement a change in the recreational regulations if we wait to make a decision in December.  Therefore, we are asking you for your opinion now ahead of the November 2, 2023 NJ Marine Fisheries Council Meeting to weigh in on whether you would like to see the fishery re-open in January – April.  This re-opening may or may not result in less open days later in the season during August 1 to December 31 which is our current open fishery.  Please respond to this email with your choice of;

1. Open the fishery during Jan-April which may result in fewer open days during the remainder of the year. The regulations in state waters would remain 30 fish at 10 inches, but regulations in federal waters have not been established.
2. Keep the fishery closed during Jan-April to maximize the season during the remainder of the year.

We will need your response by Tuesday, October 31, 2023 in order to compile the information for the NJ Marine Fisheries Council to take action during their November 2, 2023 meeting.

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Responses were received from 8 advisors. Six recommended not opening the season, one was in favor of opening the season, and one suggested a compromise. Full comments are provided below (not all provided rationale for their recommendation).

* I would choose option 2 as we have no porgy fishery in the time frame indicated in option What we have in the fall is limited but helps fill the bag of fish the customers take home.
* Option 1, Open the fishery during Jan-April which may result in fewer open days during the remainder of the year. The regulations in state waters would remain 30 fish at 10 inches, but regulations in federal waters have not been established.
* Option 2
* Option 2 : is good I want to catch fish from May to December
* I would not object to the season being open in January if the for-hire fleet would like to do that. Some of the party boats make offshore trips during that month and they currently have to throw back all the sea bass and scup they catch while targeting other bottom species. It would be nice if their fares could bring home some scup. I don't think their catch would impact the rest of the season too much. However, I don't trust the MRIP numbers so I would suggest only opening it for January or even extending our current season  into just the first 15 days of of the month if that will help them out. Perhaps we could try in on a trial basis for the upcoming year.
* I would go  for Option # 2. While I would like to see the season open all year, I favor Option # 2. Reduction in the amount of fish anglers can take home may result in fewer of them going for porgies on charters and party boats later on in the season.
* 2 ; In my opinion, having extra days in January would be a benefit to boats looking to extend their season. However, as we have all learned in the past, anytime it looks like the federal government he’s going to give us something back, they take it back two fold when we need it in the middle of the season! Therefore begrudgingly, I would vote for option two, and I do say that begrudgingly! At this point in my career, and in my life, I do not trust, NMFS in doing anything that might help hard-working fisherman! They say that risk is worth the reward, but as we all know in our field we have not been rewarded! I believe we are a business that is asked to take a 30 to 40% reduction every year and expected to survive!
* 2; *If* doing so does not lessen the season from August 1 to December 31(many of us would prefer to see it open in July through December 31, if possible), it would be beneficial for it to open for January and maybe a week or two in February. My guestimate is that if it is left open all the way through April that they will find a way to conclude we’ve exceeded and nip us the next year. If it takes a real chunk out of the August through December 31 season, however, then I’d be hesitant to see it open.