Two meetings of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council’s Recreational Summer Flounder Advisory Committee were held via webinar on January 10 and February 28, 2024 to discuss management options for the New Jersey recreational black sea bass and scup fisheries for the 2024 fishing year. Included in the January 10, 2024 meeting, scup management options were discussed as they relate to summer flounder.

**2024 Season**

At their February 2024 meeting, the ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass management board approved the State of New Jersey’s conservation equivalency proposal for the 2024 summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass recreational seasons. Under this proposal, New Jersey is required to reduce harvest by 28 percent for summer flounder, 10 percent reduction for scup, and remain at status quo measures for black sea bass as required under the ASMFC Percent Change Approach, and implemented under Addendum (34) XXXIV to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan. The current 2023 New Jersey recreational summer flounder regulations are an open season from May 2 – September 27 with 2 fish 17 inches to less than 18 inches and one fish 18 inches or greater. The current 2023 New Jersey scup regulations are an open season from August 1 – December 31 with a 30 fish possession limit and 10 inch minimum size limit.

For summer flounder, the Advisory Committee reviewed a total of 6 options, and for scup a total of 2 options, all options reviewed met the minimum reduction for each species, measures will be effective for two years including 2024 and 2025. Since options for summer flounder and scup are calculated dependent on one another, options are provided with both species as follows;

**Option 23** for summer flounder includes a 3 fish possession limit with a 17.5 inch minimum size limit and a 104 day open season from May 24 – September 4, scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 309 day open season from January 1 – June 30 and August 27 – December 31.

**Option 24** for summer flounder includes a 1 fish possession limit between 17-17.99 inches and 2 fish 18 inches or greater with an 89 day open season from June 4 – August 31, scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 309 day open season from January 1 – June 30 and August 27 – December 31.

**Option 32** for summer flounder includes a 3 fish possession limit, with an 18 inch minimum size limit and a 145 day open season from May 4 – September 25, scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 304 day open season from January 1 – June 30 and September 1 – December 31.

**Option 41** for summer flounder includes a 1 fish possession limit between 17-17.99 inches and 1 fish 18 inches or greater during the spring and early summer period from May 10 – June 30 shifting to a 3 fish possession limit with an 18 inch minimum size during late summer and early fall from July 1 – September 15 resulting in a total 129 day open season. Scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 304 day open season from January 1 – June 30 and September 1 – December 31.

**Option 57** for summer flounder includes a 3 fish possession limit, with an 18 inch minimum size limit for the private/rental and for-hire modes and a 2 fish possession limit with a 17 inch minimum size limit for the shore based mode. The resulting season length is 131 open days from May 16 – September 23. Scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 304 day open season from January 1 – June 30 and September 1 – December 31.

**Option 58** for summer flounder includes a 1 fish possession limit with a minimum size of 17.5 inches and a 2 fish possession limit with a minimum size of 18 inches and 111 open day season from May 26 – September 13. Scup maintains the current 10 inch size limit, 30 fish possession limit with a 304 day open season January 1 – June 30 and September 1 – December 31.



The committee’s preferred option was unanimously number 32 with support from all advisors with a non-preferred option of 57. Advisors and Council recognized the many obstacles presented to the anglers of New Jersey under a 28 percent required reduction for summer flounder and 10 percent reduction for scup. The options that were developed did not come easily and several hours of deliberation took place over the course of 2 meetings.

Several comments of concern were made regarding several of the options resulting in a much abbreviated season causing undo hardship to the fishing community, anglers and businesses alike. Many advisors felt the slot limits implemented in 2022 and 2023 posed a more restrictive regulation toward anglers than the current preferred option of 32 and view this particular option as a liberalization for 2024. Additional comments were made regarding the location of the Marine Fisheries Council meetings held in southern New Jersey providing challenges to stakeholders in the northern region of the state and their ability to attend in person given the time of day and location of the Council meetings. Advisors did express their applause for the Bureau seeking public input and inclusion of that input into these proceedings. Lastly, a request was made to staff to begin exploring additional shore based sites to mirror the current and future Island Beach State Park regulations of 2 fish at 16 inches. Delaware Bay and Tributary regulations of 3 fish at 17 inches will remain in effect for the 2024 and 2025 fishing season.