A meeting of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council’s Angler Survey Subcommittee was held in person at the NJ Marine Fisheries Administrative offices the evening of August 13, 2024 to discuss the proposed Council request of exploring a recreational angler survey for summer flounder as well as a recreational summer flounder length data collection logbook for implementation during the 2025 fishing year.

**Recreational Summer Flounder**

The New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council is responsible for implementing recreational regulations for summer flounder for each annual fishing year. The options that are available for management use include a variety of possible solutions to equitably address angler welfare throughout the entire state from Sandy Hook to Cape May as well as offshore to back bays. As such, there are a myriad of potential regulations to address the successful management of these fisheries. Each year, Council receives comments regarding the timing differences of summer flounder between essentially four regions: North and South, Inshore and Offshore. As such, advisory meetings are held each year to discuss these differences and qualitatively approach the best options for the state in its entirety. To address the differences throughout the State, Council is taking a proactive approach for summer flounder which will have a management change after two years of implemented regulations in 2024 and 2025 and will make changes for the 2026 and 2027 fishing year. Requested options in the past have included different size, seasons, bags, for each sector (for-hire vs. private) as well as inshore vs. offshore, and north vs. south. As part of this process, two methods have been proposed. 1. An angler questionnaire to address various demographics across the state, and 2. A length data collection program to address size differences among the four regions.

**Angler questionnaire**

Subcommittee members and advisors commented on potential design of an angler questionnaire and suggested including methods that are independent of the internet to ensure the survey captures all user groups including those without internet access or knowledge of its use. This would include providing a form on the Fish and Wildlife website as well as providing paper forms at local bait and tackle shops. Advisors suggested using the previous survey that was initiated by the Bureau of Marine Fisheries in February 2021. Inclusion of non-English speaking anglers was discussed and considered important to address in the survey. Advisors also mentioned incentives for completing the survey. Survey design was a main point of discussion, the subcommittee chairperson has offered services to begin designing the survey. Drafts of the survey will be provided to the committee for review and edits prior to a final decision being made by the full council for implementation. Participants expressed interest for conducting a similar survey for black sea bass following the same guidelines and methodology.

**Length Data Collection Logbook**

The second item discussed included a data collection of both harvested and released fish lengths. By completing a fishing log including lengths of all fish caught as well as location, staff will have quantitative information to help first, mold possible management options, and second, provide Advisors and Council with information to distinguish any differences among the four regions. Advisors commented first that there may be concern of completing the fishing log if it will result in the loss of resource and opportunity to fish. Some advisors felt the length data collection logbook should be completed only by the for-hire sector, while the majority of advisors felt inclusion of all sectors was important. Advisors were generally supportive of the length data collection concept, however would need to see an example of the logbook before total buy in.

Council has requested Bureau staff provide examples of the angler questionnaires for summer flounder and black sea bass, as well as the Length Data Collection Logbook to take the next step in review and possible implementation of both programs.

**Attendance**

*Subcommittee* *Staff* *Advisors*

Pat Donnelly Mike Celestino Raymond Bogan

Bob Rush Peter Clarke Paul Haertel

Eleanor Bochenek (chair) Jeff Brust Bob Cope

Adam Nowalsky

Jim Van Daley