A meeting of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council’s Recreational Summer Flounder Advisory Committee was held via webinar on February 9, 2021 to discuss two options available for the 2021 recreational season and possible management scenarios for future New Jersey recreational summer flounder seasons beyond 2021.

**2021 Season**

At their February 2021 meeting, the ASMFC approved the State of New Jersey’s conservation equivalency proposal for the 2021 summer flounder season. Under this proposal, New Jersey is required to maintain the current 2020 size and possession limits of 18 inches and 3 fish. Allowed under this approval is the shift of season start and end dates for the 2021 fishing year to accommodate the historical start date of the Friday before Memorial Day. In 2021, Memorial Day occurs on May 31st while Labor Day occurs on September 6th.

The New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council and Advisors reviewed two options to maintain the New Jersey recreational harvest at the approved 2020 level. Both options continue the 18-inch minimum size limit and the 3 fish possession limit. Option 1 maintains the status quo season of May 22nd to September 19th totaling a 121-day season. Option 2 shifts the season back to May 28th to September 28th resulting in a 124-day season. Both options encompass the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. Ultimately, the Committee’s preferred option was the status quo option of May 22nd to September 19th with an 18-inch minimum size limit and a 3 fish possession limit for all waters along the coast except for Delaware Bay and tributaries and Island Beach State Park. For Delaware Bay and tributaries, west of COLREGS line delineating Delaware Bay from the Atlantic Ocean but not including waters of Cape May Canal east of Cape May Ferry Terminal, the size limit will be equal to or greater than 17 inches with a three fish possession limit and a season open from May 22 to September 19. For Island Beach State Park, shore-based anglers may retain 2 fish greater than or equal to 16 inches total length only at Island Beach State Park during the current open season for summer flounder.

**Future NJ Summer Flounder Management**

At the November 5, 2020 New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council meeting, Council requested Marine Fisheries Administration staff investigate several alternative recreational summer flounder fisheries management options for 2022 and forward. The suite of options requested for consideration include a continuous minimum size, slot sizes, split size and split bag for all waters, split size for inland versus ocean waters, split season, and split state north and south. The goal of this portion of the meeting was not to determine the 2022 regulations but rather explore what alternative measures could look like for the anglers of New Jersey. Staff presented these 7 option types as seen in the attached table below, followed by an in-depth discussion by Council, Advisors, and Staff. In the end, the three examples that garnered the majority of support include 1. A continuous minimum size, season, and bag; 2. A slot size limit of two fish with one trophy fish and a continuous season; and 3. An early season small size slot limit for inland waters with a larger minimum size limit for ocean fisheries later in the year, both with a 3 fish bag limit. Staff will continue to refine these options with a second planned advisory committee meeting occurring in late May/early June followed by a third meeting in mid to late September.

