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Black Sea Bass

Life History

Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*) inhabit Atlantic coastal waters from the Gulf of Maine to the Florida Keys, concentrating in areas from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Canaveral, Florida. Two distinct stocks of black sea bass exist along the Atlantic coast with overlapping ranges. The northern stock migrates seasonally and spawns off of New England in the late summer. A temperate reef fish, black sea bass commonly inhabit rock bottoms near pilings, wrecks, and jetties. Black sea bass rely on their large mouth and swift ocean currents to catch prey, which include fish, crabs, mussels, and razor clams. Black sea bass summer in northern inshore waters at depths of less than 120 feet and winter in southern offshore waters at depths of 240 to 540 feet.

Black sea bass are protogynous hermaphrodites, which mean they start life as a female and when they reach 9-13 inches (2 - 5 years of age) they change sex to become males. Thirty-eight percent of the females in the Mid-Atlantic demonstrate sex reversal between August and April, after most fish have spawned. Even though some fish are males when they reach sexual maturity, most produce eggs when they first mature. Following transition, a sea bass will either become a dominant male, characterized by a



Scientist aboard the NEAMAP SNE/MA Nearshore Trawl Survey with a dominant, male black sea bass as evidenced by the large, dark, bumpy skin on its head and

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Addendum XXX

Black Sea Bass
Habitat Factsheet

Amendment 13
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Species Profile

Bluefish

Coastal Sharks

Cobia

Horseshoe Crab

Jonah Crab

Northern Shrimp

Red Drum

Scup

Shad & River Herring

Spanish Mackerel

Spiny Dogfish

Spot

Spotted Seatrout

Summer Flounder

Tautog

Weakfish

Winter Flounder

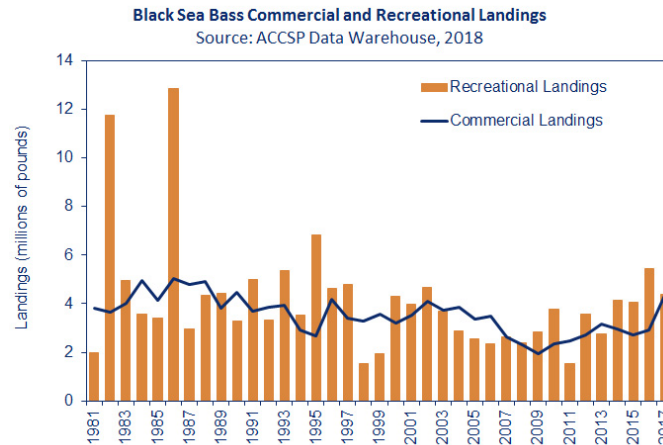
larger size and a bright blue nuchal hump during spawning season (see accompanying photo), or a subordinate male that has few distinguishing features.

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Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

Black sea bass are highly sought by both commercial and recreational fishermen throughout the Mid-Atlantic. Fisheries change seasonally with changes in fish distribution. Inshore and more southern commercial fisheries primarily use fish pots and handlines, and when fish move offshore in the winter, they are primarily caught in trawl fisheries targeting summer flounder, scup and Loligo squid. Recreational fisheries generally occur during the period that sea bass are inshore. Since the fishery management plan's approval in 1997, the black sea bass commercial fishery has operated under a quota. The recreational fishery is restricted by a coastwide recreational harvest limit.

Commercial landings have been recorded since the late 1800s. Fish were primarily harvested by handlines until the early 1950s. From 1887 through 1948, commercial landings north of Cape Hatteras fluctuated around six million pounds. By 1952, with the emergence of the trap fishery, landings peaked at 22 million pounds. Since implementation of quotas in 1998, commercial landings ranged between 2.9 and 3.5 million pounds until 2007. Landings declined to 1.6 million pounds in 2009 and have since increased, with landings reaching 3.8 million pounds in 2017. Commercial fishery discards historically represented a small fraction of total fishery removals from the stock at less than 0.4 million pounds per year, but have increased in recent years. In 2017, commercial discards were 1.78 million pounds. Otter trawls and fish pots/traps have accounted for the majority of the black sea bass landings in most states. Other important gear include handlines and lobster pots.



Black sea bass are also an important recreational species in the Mid-Atlantic, commonly caught using squid and natural bait. In 1965, over half of the total catch of black sea bass was credited to recreational fishing. Angling pressure increased markedly in the mid-1980s. In 1998 and 1999, recreational landings decreased substantially, which may be partially attributed to an increase in minimum size limits. Landings started to increase in 2000 and averaged 4 million pounds from 2000 to 2004. Recreational landings in 2017 were estimated at 4.2 million pounds. Recreational discard losses have also increased to about 85% of total catch over the last 10 years. Assuming a 15% hook and release mortality, in 2017, estimated mortality from recreational discards was 1.93 million fish, equal to 45% of the total recreational removals (harvest plus dead discards).

Stock Status

The 2016 benchmark stock assessment found black sea bass not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. With improved recruitment and declining fishing mortality rates since 2007, spawning stock biomass (SSB) has steadily increased. SSB in 2015 was estimated at 48.9 million pounds, 2.3 times the SSB target of 21.3 million pounds, and fishing mortality (F) was estimated at 0.27, well below the F target of 0.36. To account for the fact that black sea bass are protogynous hermaphrodites, which change sex from female to male, the assessment defined SSB as the total of male and female mature biomass to adjust for changes in sex ratio. Recruitment at age 1 averaged 24.3 million fish from 1989 to 2015, with peaks in 2000 (1999 cohort) at 37.3 million and at 68.9 million in 2012 (2011 cohort). The large 2011 cohort, which is currently moving through the fishery, was dominant in the northern area and less so in the south. Since 2012, recruitment has been average with the 2014 cohort estimated at 24.9 million fish. The distribution of black sea bass continues to expand northward into the Gulf of Maine.

Atlantic Coastal Management

Black sea bass is managed jointly by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)

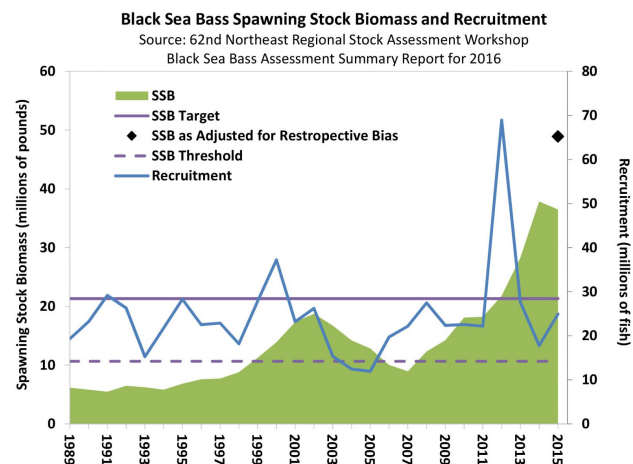
under Amendment 13 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (August 2002) and its subsequent addenda (Addenda XII-XXXII). The objectives of the FMP are to reduce fishing mortality to assure overfishing does not occur, reduce fishing mortality on immature black sea bass to increase spawning stock biomass, improve yield from the fishery, promote compatible regulations among states and between federal and state jurisdictions, promote uniform and effective enforcement, and minimize regulations necessary to achieve the stated objectives.

The management program divides a total annual quota between the recreational fishery (51%) and the commercial fishery (49%). The recreational fishery is currently managed on a regional basis using a combination of minimum size limits, bag limits and fishing seasons to achieve a regional allocation of the recreational harvest limit (RHL). The commercial quota is divided into state-by-state quotas annually. Specific management measures for the commercial fishery are set by each state, which may include 1) minimum size limits, 2) minimum mesh requirements for trawls or 3) a moratorium on entry into the fishery and closed seasons.

Although the black sea bass fishery was declared rebuilt in 2009, the unique characteristics of the species (e.g., it is a protogynous hermaphrodite) contributes to uncertainty about the size of the stock. The response of this species, as well as other hermaphroditic species, to exploitation is not fully understood. Given these concerns, the Commission approved and the Council recommended a 3.52 million pound commercial quota and a 3.66 million pound RHL for the 2018 fishing season, and a preliminary 3.14 million pound commercial quota and a 3.27 million pound RHL for 2019.

In December 2018, the Board approved Addenda XXXI and XXXII to the FMP. Addendum XXXI adds to the suite of tools available for management, with particular focus on enhancing the compatibility of state and federal regulations, by allowing the use of conservation equivalency for recreational management starting in 2020. Conservation equivalency allows recreational management measures in federal waters measures to be waived, and instead requires recreational anglers to abide by the measures of the state in which they land their catch. The Board and Council will annually decide whether to enact conservation equivalency.

Addendum XXXII establishes an annual specifications process for developing recreational management measures. The Board will approve regional measures in early spring each year, based on technical committee analysis of stock status, resource availability, and harvest estimates. Public input on specifications will be gathered by states through their individual public comment processes. The specifications process will provide the Board more flexibility in adjusting measures, if necessary, to constrain harvest to the annual coastwide recreational harvest limit (RHL). Further, the process will enable the Board to consider a host of factors, including: regional equity; regulatory stability; species abundance and distribution; and late-



2019 Black Sea Bass Recreational Management Measures by State

State	Minimum Size (inches)	Possession Limit	Open Season
Maine	13	10 fish	May 19-September 21; October 18-December 31
New Hampshire	13	10 fish	January 1-December 31
Massachusetts	15	5 fish	May 18-September 8
Rhode Island	15	3 fish	June 24-August 31
		7 fish	September 1-December 31
Connecticut (Private & Shore)	15	5 fish	May 19-December 31
CT (Authorized party/charter monitoring program vessels)	15	5 fish	May 19-August 31
		7 fish	September 1-December 31
		3 fish	June 23-August 31
New York	15	7 fish	September 1-December 31
		10 fish	May 15-June 22
New Jersey	12.5	2 fish	July 1-August 31
		10 fish	October 8-October 31
		15 fish	November 1-December 31
Delaware	12.5	15 fish	May 15-December 31
Maryland	12.5	15 fish	May 15-December 31
Virginia	12.5	15 fish	February 1-28
	12.5	15 fish	May 15-May 31; June 22-December 31
North Carolina, North of Cape Hatteras (N of 35° 15'N)	12.5	15 fish	February 1-28
	12.5	15 fish	May 17-December 31
Minimum Federal Measures	12.5	15 fish	May 15-December 31

breaking recreational harvest estimates.

Contacts

Caitlin Starks, FMP Coordinator

Management Board, Bob Ballou, Chair

Technical Committee, Greg Wojcik, Chair

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel

Management Plans & FMP Reviews

Addendum XXXII: Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Management (December 2018)

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Addendum XXXI: Black Sea Bass Conservation Equivalency and Block Island Sound Transiting for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass (December 2018)

Black Sea Bass Addendum XXX: Recreational Management in 2018 (February 2018)

Addendum XXVII: Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Management in 2016 (February 2016)

Addendum XXV: 2014 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Management (February 2014)

Addendum XXIII: Black Sea Bass Recreational Management in 2013 (February 2013)

Addendum XXII: Black Sea Bass Recreational Management in 2012 (February 2012)

Addendum XXI (March 2011)

Addendum XX (November 2009)

Addendum XIX (August 2007)

Addendum XVI (May 2005)

Addendum XIII (August 2004)

Addendum XII (August 2004)

Amendment 13 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan - Executive Summary (August 2002)

Addendum VI (February 2002)

Addendum III (March 2001)

Addendum IV (January 2001)

Amendment 10 to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (January 1997)

Fishery Management Plan for Black Sea Bass (October 1996)

FMP Reviews [2018](#) [2017](#) [2016](#) [2015](#) [2014](#) [2013](#) [2010](#) [2006](#) [2005](#) [2004](#) [2002](#) [2000](#)

Stock Assessment Reports

Black Sea Bass Stock Assessment (Dec 2016)

Black Sea Bass Stock Assessment Summary (Dec 2016)

Proceedings of the 2013 Black Sea Bass Ageing Workshop (Dec 2013)

2004 Black Sea Bass Benchmark Stock Assessment (May 2004)

Meeting Summaries & Reports

Board Proceedings

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2009 Nov Aug May Feb	2007 Jul
2008 Oct Aug May Feb	
2007 Aug May Jan	
2006 Oct May Feb Jan	
2005 Dec Nov Aug Feb	
2004 Nov Aug May Mar	
2003 Dec Aug Jun Feb	
2002 Nov May Feb	
2001 Dec	

Press Releases

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[ASMFC Approves Addenda XXXI and XXXII to the Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan](#) (December 2018)

[States Schedule Public Hearings on Draft Addenda XXXI and XXXII: Management Board Seeks Input on Options for Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management](#) (October 2018)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Approve Catch and Landings Limits for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish for 2019: ASMFC Approves Black Sea Bass Addendum XXXI for Public Comment](#) (August 2018)

[Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board Revises Northern Region Recreational Management Measures](#) (May 2018)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board to Meet Via Conference Call March 20](#) (March 2018)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Addendum XXX for Recreational Black Sea Bass Management](#) (February 2018)

[States Schedule Public Hearings on Draft Addendum XXX: Board Seeks Input on Regional Management Options for Black Sea Recreational Fisheries for 2018 and Beyond](#) (January 2018)

[ASMFC Approves Black Sea Bass Draft Addendum XXX for Public Comment & ASMFC and MAFMC Initiate Bluefish Amendment](#) (December 2017)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Scup Addendum XXIX & Finalizes 2017 Black Sea Bass Recreational Management Measures](#) (May 2017)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Set Black Sea Bass Specifications for 2017 and 2018: Benchmark Assessment Finds Resource Not Overfished & Overfishing Not Occurring](#) (February 2017)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Maintain Multi-Year Specifications for Black Sea Bass, Bluefish, and Scup and Modify Summer Flounder Specifications](#) (August 2016)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Management Boards to Meet Via Conference Call to Review Recent Recreational Harvest Estimates](#) (June 2016)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Regional Management for 2016 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Fisheries](#) (February 2016)

[States Schedule Public Hearings on Draft Addendum XXVII: Addendum Seeks Input on Regional Management Options for 2016 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Recreational Fisheries](#) (December 2015)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Revises 2016 Black Sea Bass Specifications & Initiates Draft Addendum for Regional Management of 2016 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Fisheries](#) (November 2015)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Approve Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Annual Specifications](#) (August 2015)

[ASMFC Begins Preparations for 2016 Black Sea Bass Benchmark Stock Assessment](#) (May 2015)

[ASMFC Approves Continuation of Ad-Hoc Regional Management Approaches for 2015 Black Sea Bass Recreational Fishery](#) (December 2014)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Maintain Specifications for 2015 Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Fisheries & Approve 2015 Bluefish Specifications: MAFMC Suspends Research Set Aside Program](#) (August 2014)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Schedules Conference Call for March 13 to Consider Approval of State and Regional Management Proposals](#) (February 2014)

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[States Schedule Public Hearings on Draft Addendum XXV: Addendum Seeks Input on Management Options for 2014 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Fisheries](#) (December 2013)

[ASMFC Approves Draft Addendum XXV for Public Comment Addendum Proposes Management Options for the 2014 Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass Recreational Fisheries](#) (December 2013)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Approve Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Specifications and Terms of Reference for 2014 Bluefish Benchmark Stock Assessment](#) (October 2013)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Addendum XXIV: New York & New Jersey May Modify Regulations to Access Additional Fish](#) (April 2013)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Schedules Conference Call for April 17 \(1 PM\) to Consider Approval of Draft Addendum XXIV](#) (April 2013)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Black Sea Bass Addendum XXIII & Initiates Draft Addendum on 2013 Summer Flounder Recreational Harvest Limit](#) (February 2013)

[Rhode Island Schedules Public Hearing on Black Sea Bass Draft Addendum XXIII](#) (January 2013)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Approve Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Annual Specifications and Initiate Development of Draft Amendment to the Scup FMP](#) (August 2012)

[ASMFC Black Sea Bass Board Finalizes 2012 Recreational Measures](#) (April 2012)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Establishes Recreational Fishery Measures for 2012](#) (February 2012)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Approve 2012 Specifications for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish](#) (August 2011)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup & Black Sea Bass Board to Meet April 20, 2011 to Discuss Recreational Black Sea Bass Proposals](#) (April 2011)

[ASMFC Black Sea Bass Board Establishes State Shares and Reduction Schedule for 2011 Recreational Fisheries](#) (March 2011)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board to Meet February 3, 2011 to Discuss Recreational Measures for Summer Flounder and Black Sea Bass](#) (January 2011)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Adopt 2011 Recreational Measures](#) (January 2011)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Approve 2011 TALs for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish](#) (August 2010)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Expands Recreational Black Sea Bass Season](#) (May 2010)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Addendum to Allow Commercial Quota Transfers for Black Sea Bass and Scup Between States](#) (November 2009)

[States Schedule Public Hearings on Scup and Black Sea Bass Draft Addendum XX](#) (September 2009)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Takes No Action Regarding Projected Recreational Overages](#) (September 2009)

[Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board to Meet in September, 2009 to Discuss Recreational Overages](#) (August 2009)

[ASMFC & Mid-Atlantic Council Approve 2010 TALs for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish](#) (August 2009)

[Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Announces Meeting Date to Discuss Recreational Overages](#) (April 2009)

[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Addendum XIX](#) (August 2007)

[ASMFC Approves 2008 TALs for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish](#) (August 2007)

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[ASMFC Board Approves Addendum XVI to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Plan: Addendum Establishes Procedures to Address Delayed Implementation of Required Fisheries Management Measures](#) (May 2006)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Approve 2006 TALs for Bluefish, Scup and Black Sea Bass](#) (August 2005)

[ASMFC to Hold Industry Workshop on Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass](#) (September 2004)

[ASMFC Board Approves Black Sea Bass State-by-State Allocation System for 2005 - 2007](#) (August 2004)

[ASMFC & MAFMC Approve 2005 TALs for Bluefish, Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass: Assessments Show Continued Improvements to Summer Flounder & Black Sea Bass Stocks](#) (August 2004)

[ASMFC Forwards New York Noncompliance Finding to the Secretaries of Commerce & the Interior for Action](#) (June 2004)

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[ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board Approves Addendum XXX for Recreational Black Sea Bass Management](#) (November -0001)

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Phone: 703-842-0740 Fax: 703-842-0741 info@asmfc.org 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201

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