

RI Marine Fisheries Council
 Scup – Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel
 Meeting Minutes
 October 15, 2013, 7:00 PM
 URI Bay Campus, Coastal Institute

W. Mackintosh, Chairman	K. Booth
C. Brown*	J. Carvalho
MM	
R. Ballou - RIDEM	J. McNamee, DFW staff

(*primary advisory panel member; ^A alternate member)

W. Mackintosh began the meeting. He stated that J. McNamee of the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW or Division) had a presentation which covered the first 7 agenda topics and was broken in to a scup section followed by a black sea bass section. He stated that after each section of the presentation the panel would discuss any proposals they may have for commercial management for scup or black sea bass in 2014.

J. McNamee began the DFW presentation with a discussion about stock status for scup. The stock was rebuilt and overfishing was not occurring. He then went over the fishery performance in RI in 2013. The fishery went well in 2013, though catch rates started off extremely high and a drop in weekly possession limit was enacted in the first sub period. Several rollovers from the floating fish trap sector in to the general category fishery were needed in an effort to get the states allocation caught. In addition to the rollovers, a portion of the floating fish trap allocation was given to New York so that they did not have to incur any overages in 2013 (150,000 lbs). J. McNamee concluded by stating that the DFW would approve any option that was believed to remain within the quota allocated to the state. The DFW currently suggested similar starting possession limits to 2013 as there would be drops in quota over the coming years.

W. Mackintosh went to the panel for discussion. Several panel members voiced their displeasure with the upcoming quota decreases. They wanted this sentiment passed on to the Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC), as they felt the current policies for setting quotas was too conservative.

J. Carvalho stated that the state should not have had to give any of RI's quota to NY. He stated that other states will take our quota if we don't work to harvest it and he felt we could have harvested all of our allocation if we hadn't dropped the possession limit in the early season. J. McNamee stated that he didn't disagree but at the time there was going to be an overage, and it is the DFW's policy to manage for the sub period.

C. Brown stated that the split between the general category and the floating fish traps was not justified anymore, and this should be something that we should revisit, because the only reason the fishery did not close was because of the rollovers were triggered. There are no guarantees that these will be available in the future.

J. Carvalho submitted a proposal. He stated that the sub periods should be removed and there should be one possession limit set that would get them through the whole

state waters season. This would have helped in 2013 by most likely not having had the possession limit decrease in the early sub period. C. Brown stated that he had some hesitation about this proposal due to the possibility that there would not be any rollover from the floating fish traps and this could lead to a long closure during the state waters period. W. Mackintosh took a vote on the two proposals, status quo and J. Carvalho's proposal. The vote was split 2 for status quo and 2 for J. Carvalho's proposal. J. Carvalho withdrew his proposal so that the group might reach consensus.

M. Bucko offered an alternative. Instead of removing all of the sub periods in this first year, **he suggested combining the first two sub periods but leaving the fall sub period intact.** He then suggested they could run it this way in 2014 and re-evaluate next year to see if they would like to make the state waters period one single sub period or go back to the 3 sub period set up. **The panel accepted this proposal as a consensus proposal from the AP.**

J. McNamee then went through a discussion about the black sea bass fishery. The stock was rebuilt and overfishing was not occurring according to the only peer reviewed stock assessment available, but J. McNamee then went on to describe the situation that recently occurred with the benchmark assessment, the result of which was the assessment was rejected. A data workshop was held for black sea bass in January of 2013 and the result of this was a decision that nothing that is currently available will help the current assessment move in to a higher tier. A new spatially structured assessment was needed. One final note was that a recent meeting of the Mid Atlantic SSC resulted in an increase in the allowable catch for black sea bass in 2014. He then went over the fishery performance in RI in 2013. The fishery remained at a low possession limit and had numerous closures, all related to the very small quota. J. McNamee concluded by stating that the DFW would approve any option that remained within the allocated quota for the state. The DFW did make one suggestion that splitting the July through October sub period in to two sub periods with equal allocation might help get some fish in to the fall sub period.

W. Mackintosh went to the panel for discussion. C. Brown began the discussion by noting that the biomass of black sea bass had shifted northward. J. Carvalho and C. Brown noted that almost all of the harvest was directed at larger fish.

T. Baker made a few comments. He stated that the resource was extremely valuable to the industry and to RI. Because of this, money should be designated to fix whatever needed to be fixed for this species assessment. He suggested to the panel that they speak to local politicians to get them to devote resources to this species. He concluded by adding that they could request that DEM also support these requests to give them more weight. **The group agreed to this by consensus and formally made this request to the RIMFC, specifically that the RIMFC and DEM should reach out to local politicians and legislators to seek support for studying this species as it is a valuable resource to the state.**

J. Carvalho stated that black sea bass at its current quota is strictly a bycatch fishery. **The state should set a single possession limit to keep the fishery open all year.** The number presumably would be low so he suggested that they could **switch from a poundage to a number of fish possession limit.** His main point was to keep from having so many long closures as it was damaging their markets. MM agreed with this statement.

K. Booth made a counter proposal. He agreed with many of the concepts that J. Carvalho noted but he thought the best approach would be to **set a 25 pound per day possession limit under the current sub period set up**. Later he stated that he did not see much benefit in the DFWs proposal as it simply moved the problem around rather than helping it.

MM agreed with J. Carvalhos proposal. He felt the bycatch helps offset other costs associated with fishing for other species. He thought that the possession limit should remain pounds though, as a count can lead to other issues like high grading to maximize profits.

C. Brown stated that he agreed that the small quota does create a situation where this has become a bycatch fishery for many, but he stated that it was still a target of some fishermen. T. Baker agreed that it was a target species for pot fishermen. C. Brown went on to state that he agreed with the suggested modification by the DFW, but he did not agree to a 25 pound possession limit as he felt it would encourage more cheating and black market sales. He stated later that he did not agree with J. Carvalhos proposal as it was a defacto reallocation from the winter period.

T. Baker made a suggestion to **adopt the DFW suggested change to the summer/fall allocation period, but to adopt a 25 pounds possession limit beginning in May and going through October. In addition he supported dropping to 100 pounds in the sub period that starts in November.**

W. Mackintosh then noted that a proposal had been submitted on behalf of the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermens Association. They suggested creating aggregate limits in the sub periods so that the fish that are currently discarded could be turned in to landings. The group discussed the written proposal (attached) but in the end the panel opposed the proposal as they felt it would increase effort and exacerbate the current fishery closures.

This concluded the discussions and W. Mackintosh adjourned the meeting.