

**RI Marine Fisheries Council
Scup/Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel
Meeting Minutes
October 3, 2012, 1:00 PM
URI East Farm Campus**

W. Macintosh, Chairman	G. Tremblay*
M. Bucko*	S. Parente
T. Baker*	C. Grandquist*
C. Brown*	R. Ballou – DEM staff
R. Smith	J. Lake, DFW staff
M. Roderick	J. McNamee, DFW staff

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

B. Macintosh 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 (see attached). 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 2013. After the presentation the group would discuss and vote on the proposals presented to provide advice from the panel to the RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) and the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

J. McNamee started with scup. He discussed stock status, the main point of which was that the stock was no longer overfished and overfishing was not occurring, and the stock was considered rebuilt. Despite the improvement in stock status, the quota for scup would decrease in 2013. This was due to a constant mortality strategy embraced by the Science and Statistics Committee (SSC) of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). Even with the decrease though, the quota remained very high. J. McNamee stated that the commercial fishery performed well in 2012 with regard to not having any closures, however due to the large quotas seen in 2012 the quota was in danger of being under-harvested as it was in 2011 despite very high possession limits. It was almost assured that the entire period would remain open. A number of possession limit adjustments were needed to attempt to fully utilize the states allocation as the floating fish trap sector had severely under harvested their allocation, so an abundance of pounds were rolled in to the general category. The current weekly limit was at a very high possession limit.

The DFW recommended a few changes in scup management for 2013. J. McNamee indicated that due to a projected high quota, the DFW recommended setting the starting possession limit at 10,000 lbs/week in each of the three sub periods.

B. Macintosh opened the discussion up to the group. The group began with a discussion on floating fish traps and being able to allow them to take advantage of the quota even if they run out of there specific allocation. The point being that they should be allowed to dip in to the general category fishery were they to get a slug of fish and should not be

shut out because they rolled the majority of there quota to the general category. R. Ballou stated that this two way allocation movement idea is being addressed by the Directors office through deliberations from a previous public hearing process.

T. Baker introduced an idea of trading scup allocation for more black sea bass. J. McNamee stated that this group had discussed that in the past but the current situation was that everyone had a lot of scup quota and nobody had a good black sea bass quota, therefore there was not much incentive for other states to trade due to this.

C. Brown stated that leaving a portion of the quota uncaught is not a terrible situation, it was insurance for future catches.

At this point B. Mackintosh asked for a vote on the DFWs proposal. **The motion was to approve the DFW proposal of increased starting possession limits in 2013. The group voted unanimously to approve.** There were no other proposed management changes.

J. McNamee went on to discuss black sea bass. He began with a discussion about stock status. The stock status for black sea bass was that overfishing was no longer occurring and the stock was no longer overfished. Despite this improvement in stock status, the management board did not vote to increase the quota in 2013, citing major uncertainty in the assessment. In fact the Board did not have a choice due to the categorizing of the black sea bass assessment in to a low level by the SSC, thereby requiring the implementation of a constant catch strategy until the uncertainty in the assessment improves or is addressed. The board approved remaining at a status quo quota in 2013. J. McNamee indicated that a benchmark assessment was completed in early 2012, but unfortunately the stock assessment did not pass peer review. R. Ballou noted that the DFW in its capacity would continue to work diligently to help with addressing the remaining uncertainty issues in the stock assessment. Due to the extremely low commercial quota in 2012, the fishery did not perform very well and had frequent and long closures. The sub period allocations were met relatively closely. J. McNamee stated that the DFW did not have any specific recommendations for management in 2013.

R. Smith voiced concern over the low quota, and also echoed the sentiment of many in attendance about the unusually high abundance of black sea bass of all age groups in state waters in this current year. D. Monti echoed the sentiment of the high black sea bass abundance in state waters from his own experiences. J. McNamee described the situation with the quota in more detail and also noted that he operates the Narragansett Bay beach seine survey, and he was witnessing a historically high recruitment event, so supported R. Smiths evidence of high abundance in state waters. J. McNamee wanted the group to know that the science supports the claims that the fishermen were making, however there was a policy issue related to the reauthorization of the Magnussen-Stevens Act that was creating their current low quota situation. R. Smith finished by stating that they were in danger of losing their market if they keep incurring such large closures over the coming years.

C. Brown stated that this was another fishery where we were managing by looking at landings, when we should be managing by mortality. By keeping the quota and possession limits so low, mortality would still remain high because biomass is high and there would be a high discard rate. B. Mackintosh also noted that there was a plan being forwarded looking to give the lobster fishery its own allocation of black sea bass, and one of the reasons was to turn some of their discards in to landings instead of throwing back dead fish. This would stem what was perceived to be an impending effort increase on black sea bass from the lobster fishery from cuts that they were about to incur in the lobster fishery.

S. Parente had submitted a proposal on black sea bass (see attached) on behalf of the RI Commercial Rod and Reel Anglers Association (RICRRAA). He presented this proposal, stating that the fishery was completely a bycatch fishery at this point due to the lack of quota and the low possession limits. Therefore their proposal was to decrease the possession limit to 25 pounds per day during the spring through fall sub periods in an effort to keep the bycatch fishery open for a longer period, thus decreasing discards. C. Brown stated that he didn't think this proposal would help with the flow of product to market. R. Smith state that he liked the proposal and felt that it would help the smaller inshore vessels by keeping the fishery open longer.

B. Macintosh then gave a proposal that had been submitted by K. Cokely via email (see attached). He proposed not dropping below 50 pounds, and suggested some modification to the sub periods. B. Mackintosh noted, per the implication in the proposal, that dropping to 25 pounds per day could increase discards rather than decrease them in certain fisheries.

A proposal from T. Baker was presented next (see attached). His proposal raised the minimum size, decreased the possession limit, and altered some of the season opening dates. There was discussion from the group on supporting a June opening. C. Brown asked about developing a conservation equivalency for RI if they went to a bigger minimum size, suggestion a 13" minimum. J. McNamee stated that the state could look in to this but he was unclear as to how this might work within the confines of the MAFMC process, as this was a jointly managed species.

There were two final proposals (see attached) which had come forward from J. Grant via email but were not his proposals so were anonymous. One increased the possession limits to 100 lbs per day in the summer sub periods, and the other would implement an aggregate program. S. Parente wanted to be on record to state that he was opposed to an aggregate program as he felt this would create legal loopholes, it would increase effort, and would close the fishery even quicker. Others voiced concerns over these two proposals.

B. Mackintosh then took votes on the proposals. The first was on the RICRRAA proposal. **The motion was to approve this proposal for 2013 black sea bass management. The vote was 2 to approve, 2 opposed, and 1 abstention. Therefore the motion failed.**

The next proposals voted on were the proposals forwarded by J. Grant. **The motion was to approve these options for 2013 black sea bass management. The vote was unanimously opposed to the motion.**

The K. Cokely proposal went next. **The motion was to approve this proposal for 2013 black sea bass management. The vote was unanimously opposed to the motion.**

The final proposal was the T. Baker proposal. **The motion was to approve this proposal for 2013 black sea bass management. The vote was 3 to approve, and 2 abstentions. Therefore this proposal was recommended by the panel.**

B. Macintosh adjourned the meeting.

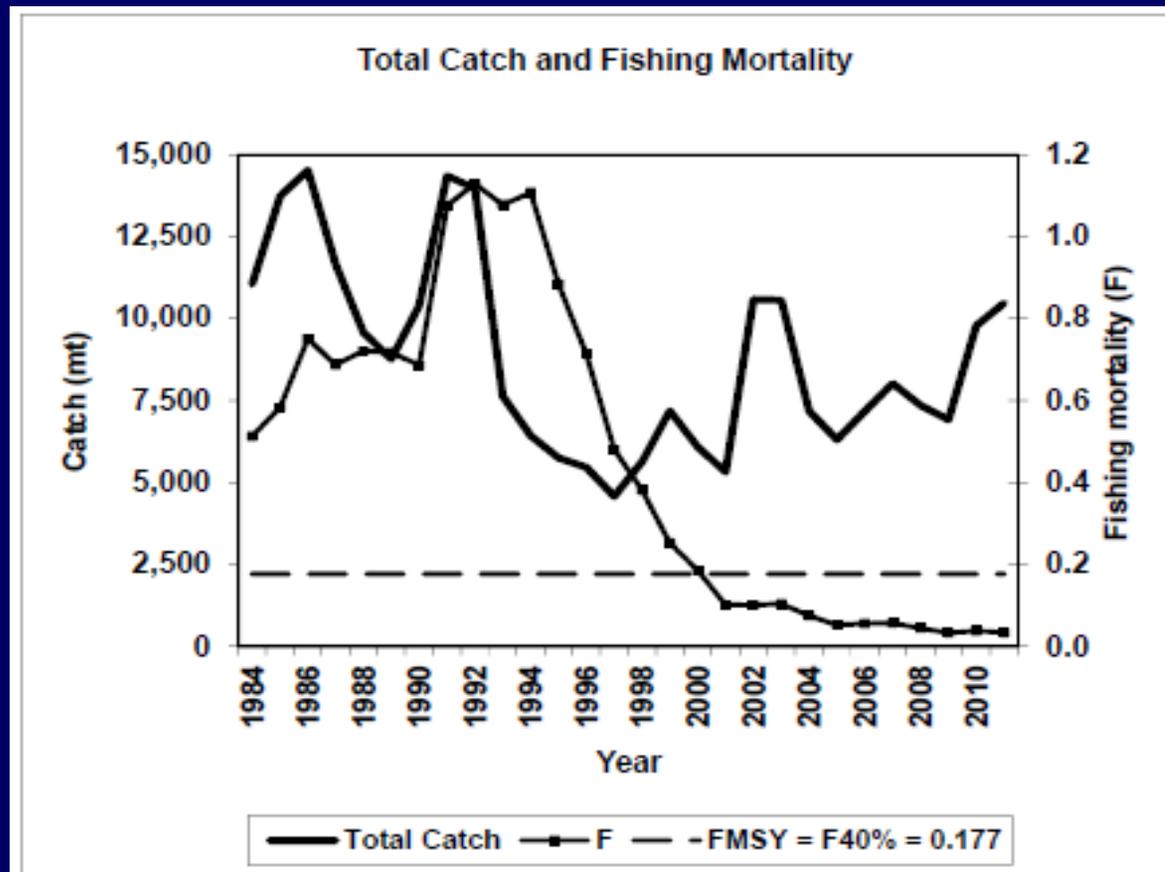
**Summary of Rhode Island Scup
and Black Sea Bass Stock
Status, 2012 Commercial Scup
and Black Sea Bass Fishery
Performance, and Division of
Fish and Wildlife
Recommendations for 2013**



Scup Stock Status

Stock Status:

- Relative to the DPSWG biological reference points, the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.
- There is a 50% probability that F in 2011 was between 0.026 and 0.042 . The fishing mortality threshold is $FMSY = 0.177$.

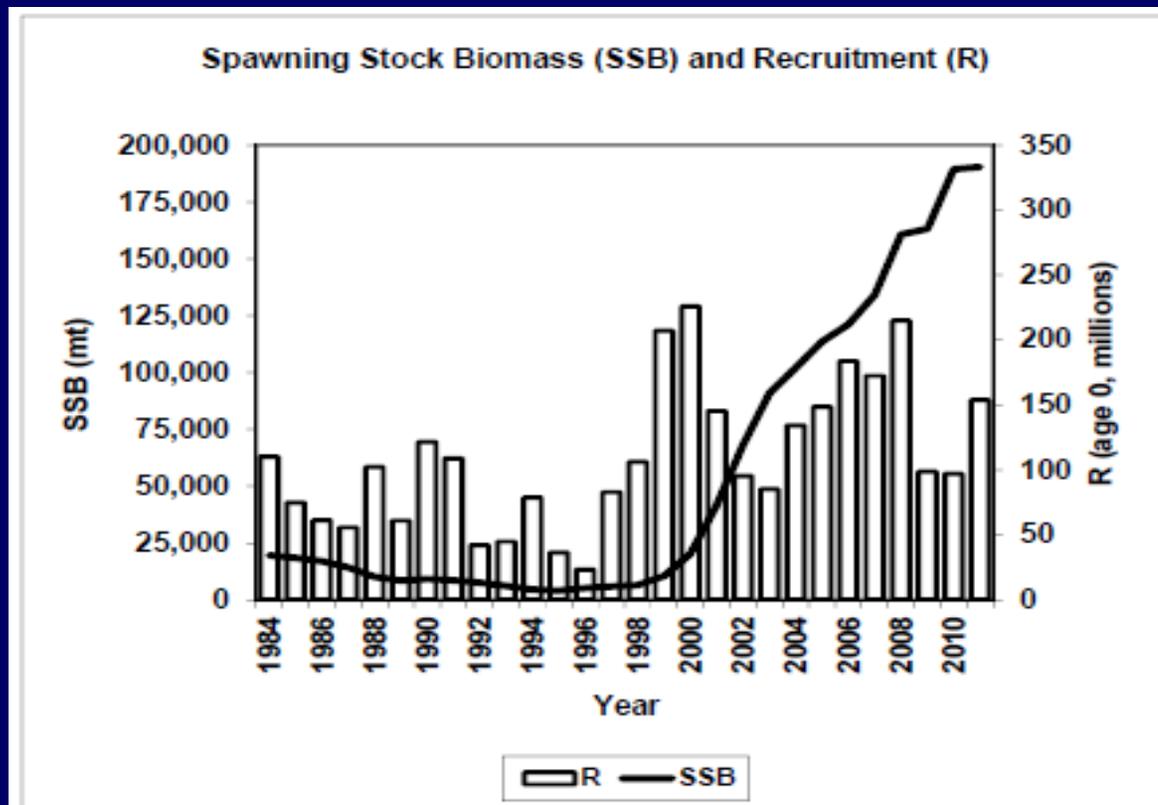


Scup Stock Status

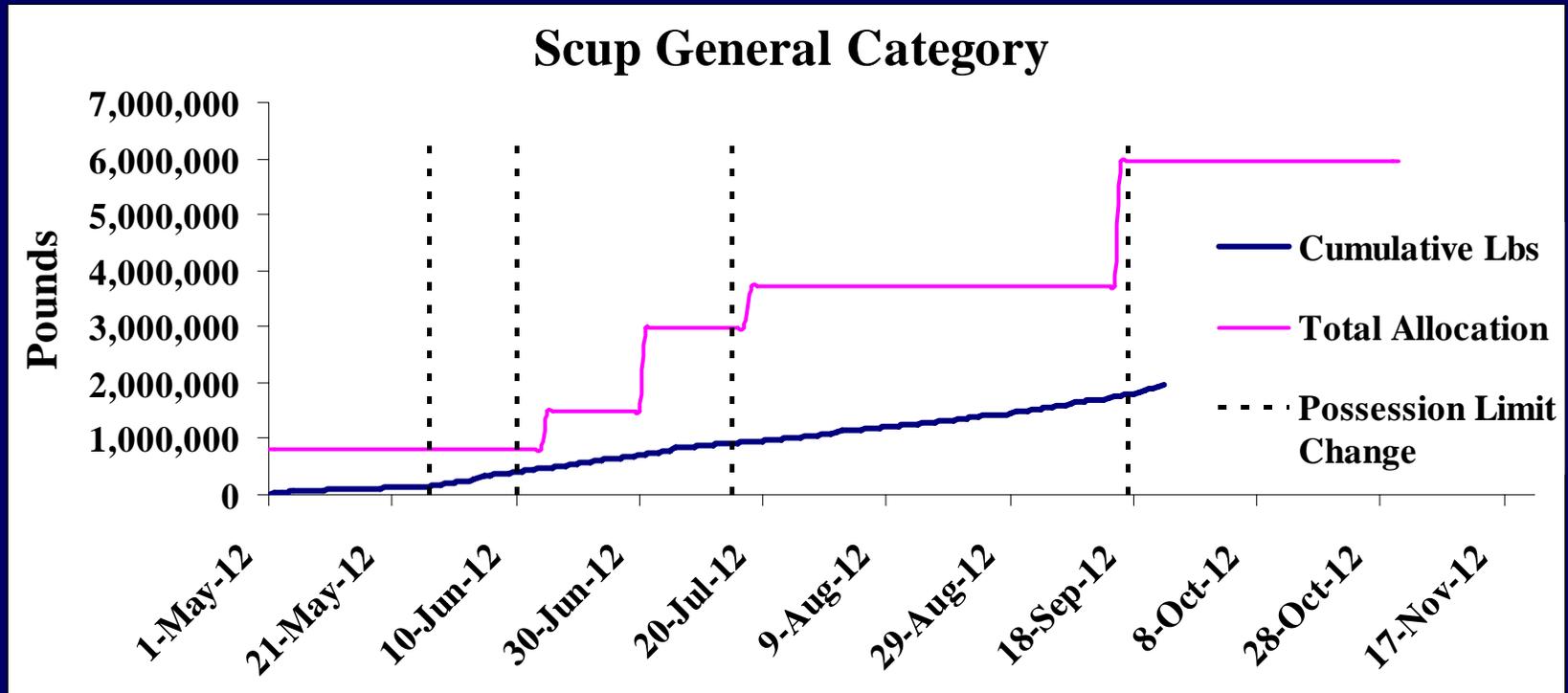
Stock Status:

SSB has steadily increased to about 418.8 m lbs in 2011 (slightly down from 2008). The SSB reference point is $SSB_{MSY} = 202.9$ m lbs. The minimum stock size threshold, one-half SSB_{MSY} , is estimated to be 101.5 m lbs.

Recruitment exceeded the 1984-2011 average of 104 million in 2011.



Commercial Landings – Scup General Category



Possession Limit Changes:

5/1/12 - 5000 lbs/wk

5/27/12 - 10000 lbs/wk

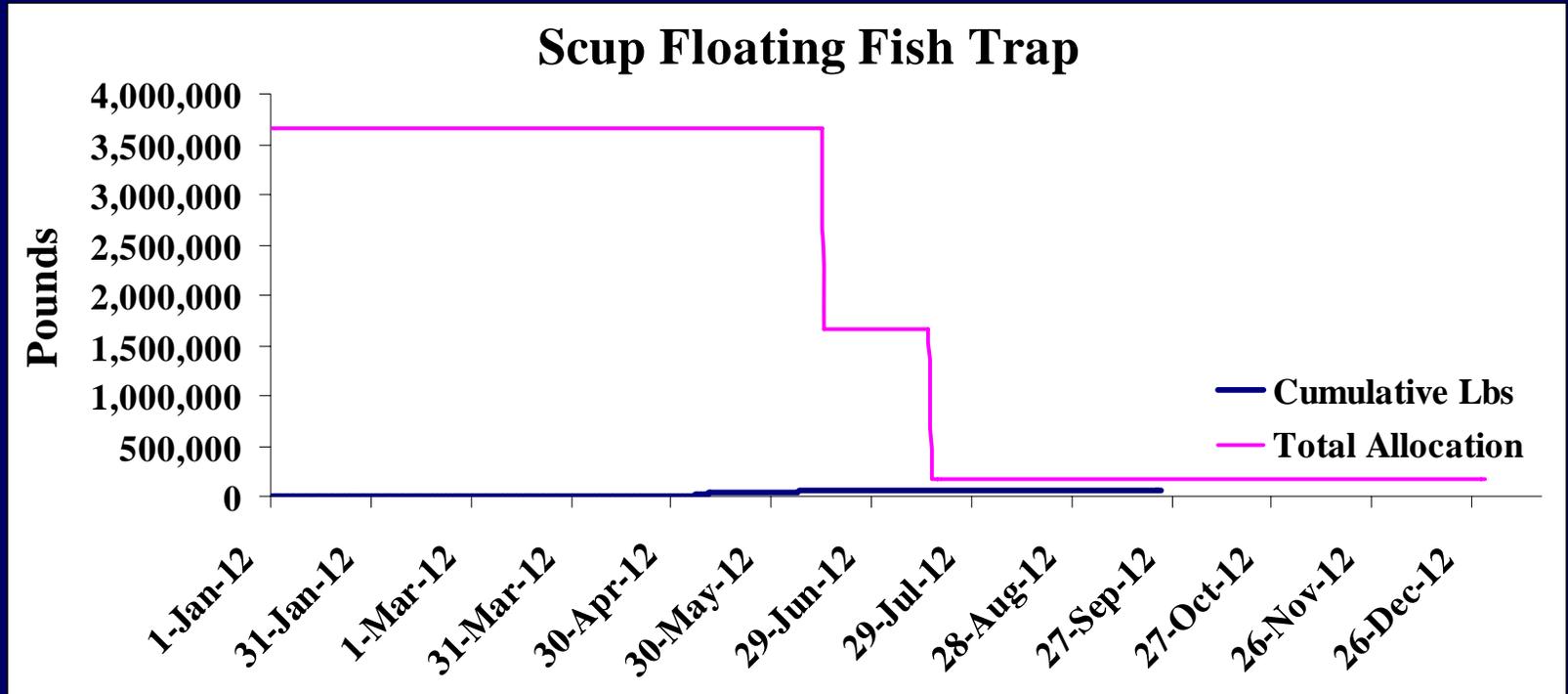
6/10/12 - 20000 lbs/wk

7/15/12 - 30000 lbs/wk

9/17/12 - 50000 lbs/wk



Commercial Landings – Scup Floating Fish Traps



Trap Rollovers:

6/15/12 – 2,000,000 lbs

7/18/12 – 1,500,000 lbs



Commercial Landings – Compliance with the Aggregate program

- Total participation was 412 vessels to date (w/o unknown or from shore)
- Total times participants landed over the weekly aggregate amount were 3 to date
- The total additional pounds landed for entire state period (to date) were 32,027 lbs (less than 1% of Gen. Cat. Allocation)



Scup Management Measure Recommendations 2013

•MAFMC and ASMFC Management Board Recommendations for 2013:

- A Coastwide commercial quota of 23.53 m lbs
- Maintain current possession limits. (Winter I: 50,000 lbs per trip/1,000 lbs at 80% quota; Winter II: 2,000 lbs/1,000 lbs at 80% quota, unless trip limits increased by Winter I rollovers)
- Maintain current minimum fish size and net mesh requirements. (9 inch-TL; 5 inch mesh at trigger)
- Maintain current GRAs.
- Maintain current escape vent requirements in scup pots.



Preliminary 2013 Commercial Allocations

- Coastwide Commercial Quota = 23,530,000 lbs
- Coastwide Summer Allocation (38.95% of total, RSA not removed) = 9,164,935 lbs
- RSA assumed to be roughly 3% of quota
- Coastwide Summer Allocation (assumed RSA removed) = 8,889,987 lbs
- RI 2013 Commercial Quota (56.19%, estimated RSA removed) = 4,995,284 lbs (16% decr from 2012 quota)
- 2013 Floating Fish Trap allocation = 2,997,170 lbs
- 2013 General Category = 1,998,113 lbs
 - May 1 – June 30 = 666,038 lbs
 - July 1 – Sept 15 = 666,038 lbs
 - Sept 16 – Oct 31 = 666,037 lbs



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

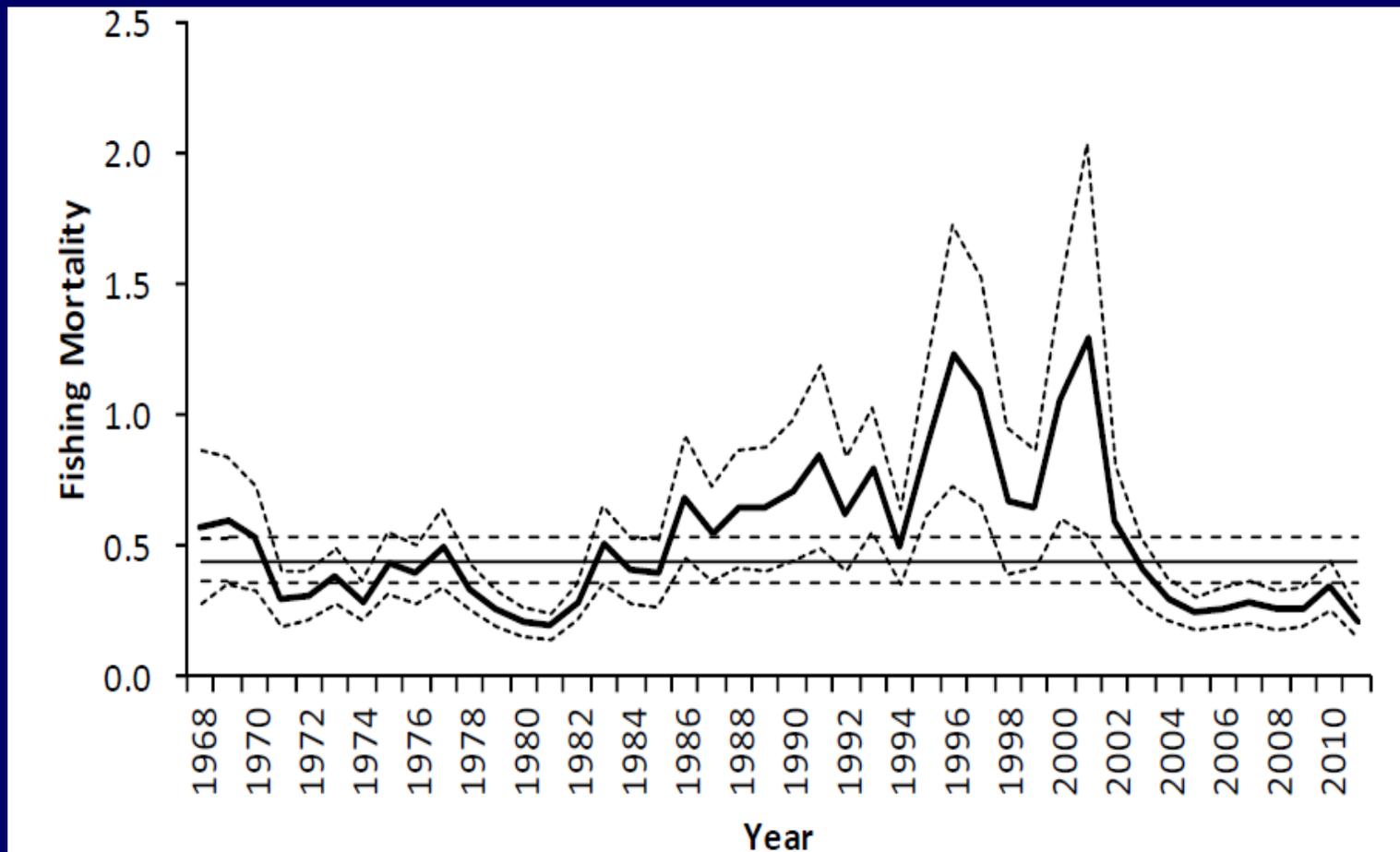
- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes increasing the starting aggregate limits in an effort to keep up with the high level of quota. The Division recommends the following:
 - May – June 30 = 10,000 lbs/wk
 - July 1 – Sept 15 = 10,000 lbs/wk
 - Sept 16 – Oct 31 = 10,000 lbs/wk



Black Sea Bass Stock Status

Stock Status:

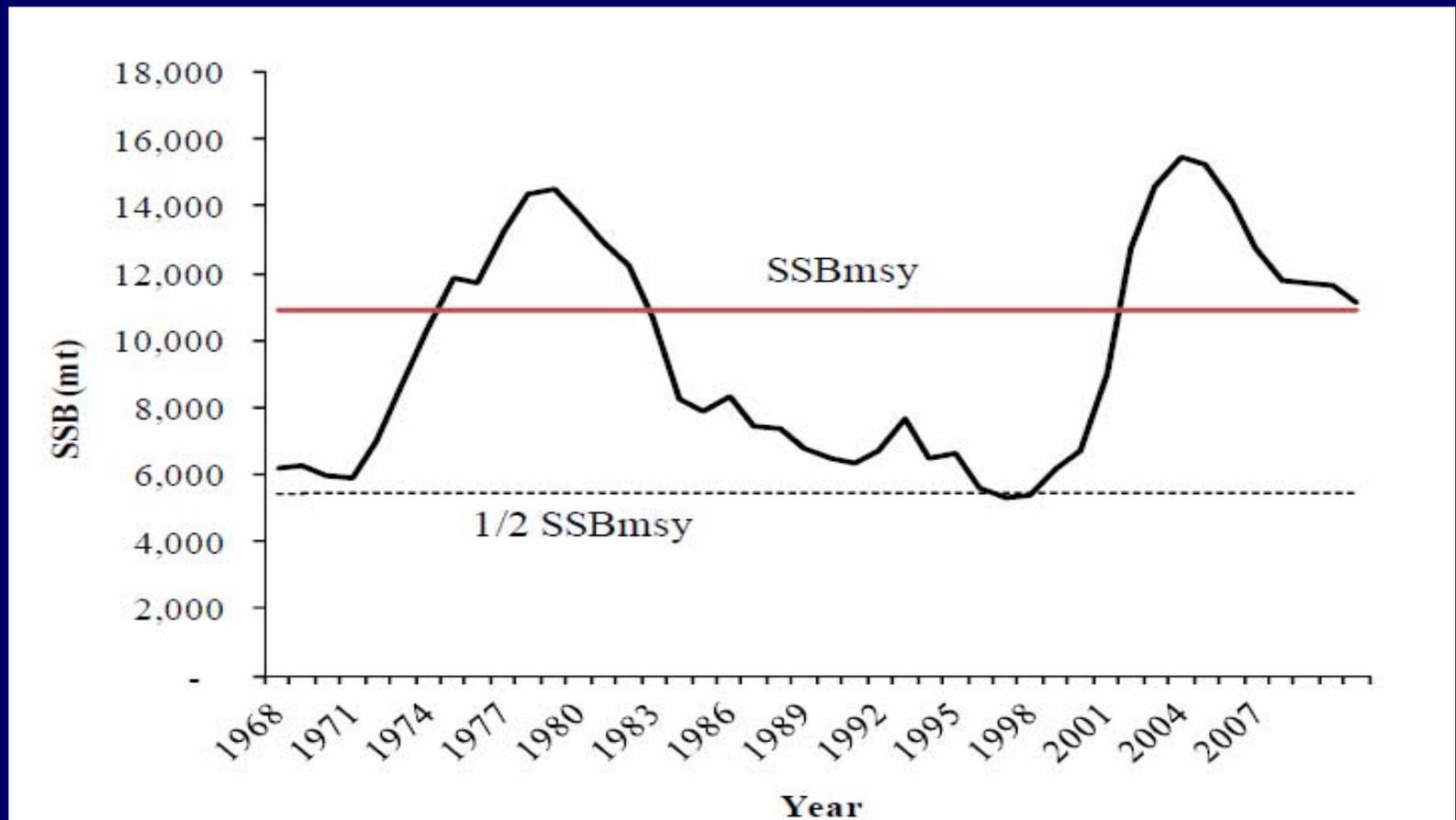
- Relative to the DPSWG biological reference points, the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.
- Fishing mortality $F = 0.21$ in 2011, less than the threshold $F = 0.44$



Black Sea Bass Stock Status

Stock Status:

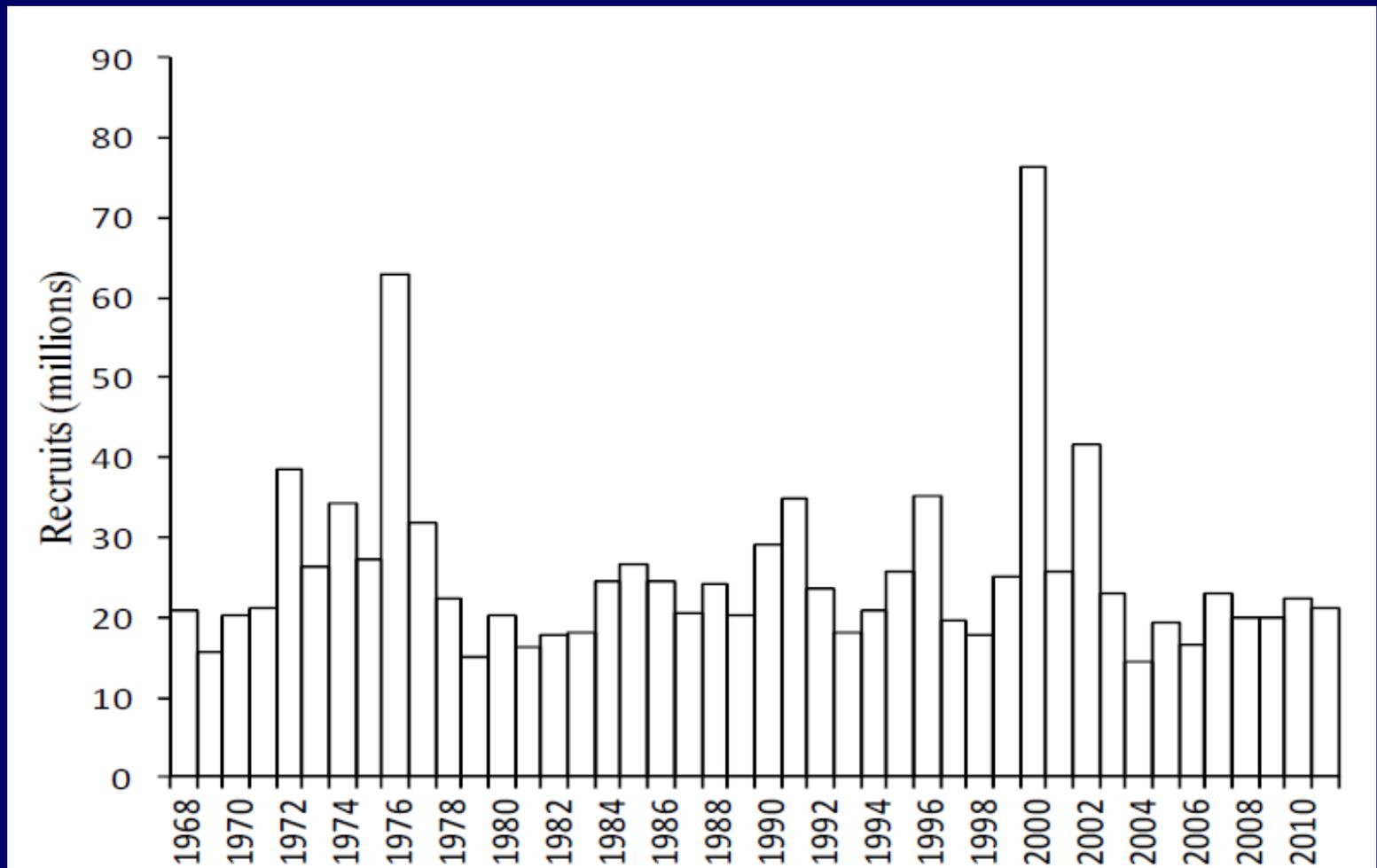
SSB was 24.6 million lbs in 2011. The SSB reference point is $SSB_{MSY} = 24.9$ million lbs. The minimum stock size threshold, one-half SSB_{MSY} , is estimated to be 12.5 million lbs.



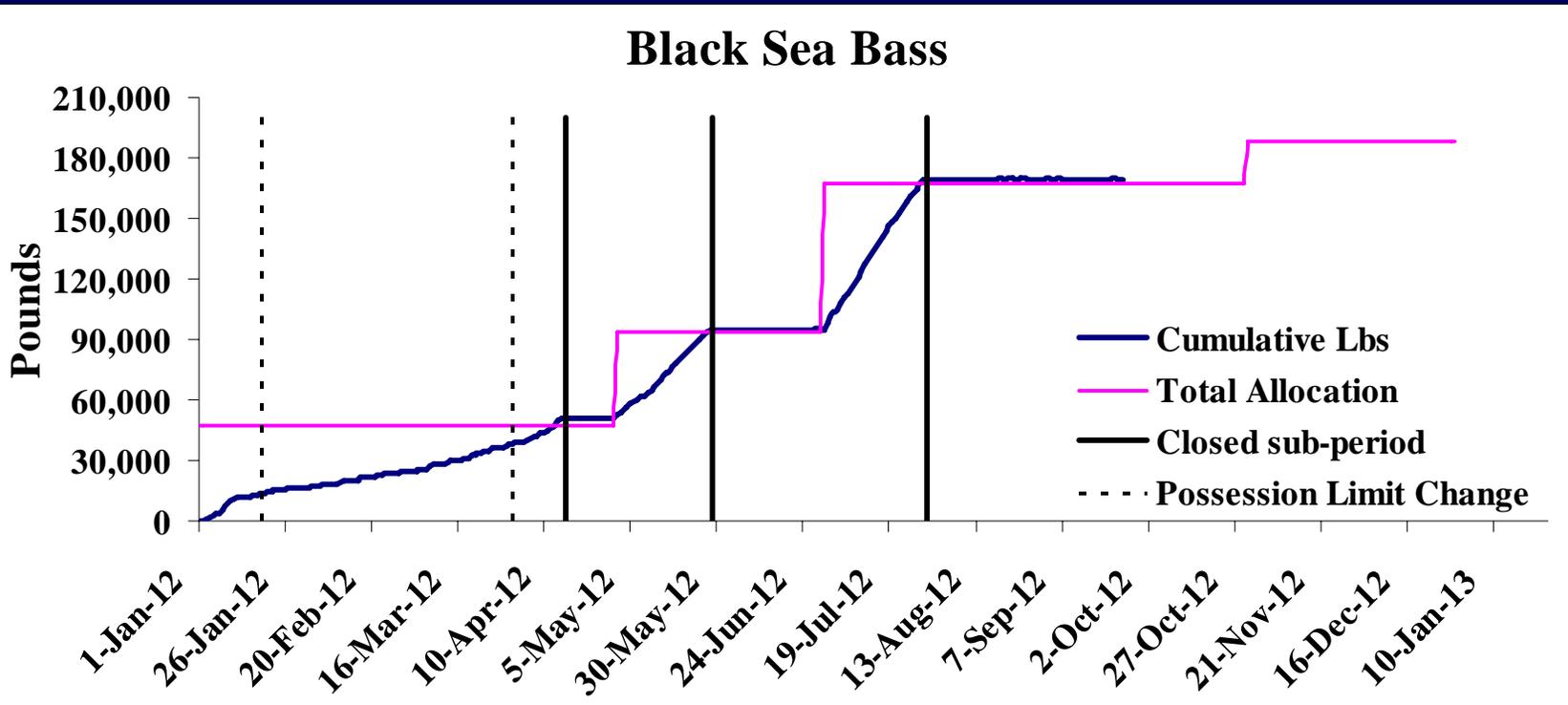
Black Sea Bass Stock Status

•Stock Status:

•2011 recruitment was 21 million fish, recent years have been near average.



Commercial Landings – Black Sea Bass



Possession Limit Changes:

1/1/12 - 750 lbs/day

1/19/12 - 500 lbs/day

4/1/12 - 250 lbs/day

4/16/12 - CLOSED

5/1/12 - 50 lbs/day (new sub period)

5/29/12 - CLOSED

7/1/12 - 50 lbs/day (new sub period)

7/30/12 - CLOSED



Black Sea Bass Management Measure Recommendations 2013

•Monitoring and SSC Recommendations for 2013:

•The SSC recommended remaining at status quo for 2013, citing significant uncertainty in the stock assessment.

•Coastwide commercial quota (RSA not removed) = 1,780,000 lbs

•RSA assumed to be roughly 3% of quota

•Coastwide commercial quota (assumed RSA removed) = 1,725,700 lbs

•RI 2013 Commercial Quota (11%, estimated RSA removed) = 189,827 lbs (1% incr from 2012 quota)

•2013 Sub period allocations

•January 1 – April 30 = 47,457 lbs

•May 1 – June 30 = 47,457 lbs

•July 1 – Oct 31 = 74,033 lbs

•November 1 – December 31 = 20,880 lbs



Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the black sea bass commercial fishery in 2013.
- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife believes that this stock can accommodate more harvest than is currently being removed from the stock, and will continue to work on improving the uncertainty estimates in the stock assessment as well as continuing to improve the stock assessment itself, so that harvest levels can be increased in the future.

