

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MARINE FISHERIES



2016 Finfish Sector Management Plan

DRAFT

Authority: R. I. Gen. Laws Chapter 42-17.1, Section 20-1-4, and Section 20-2.1-9, in accordance with Chapter 42-35 of the Rhode Island General Laws of 1956, as amended.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2002 legislative session, the Rhode Island General Assembly adopted the Commercial Fisheries Management Act establishing a new commercial fishing license system and ending the moratorium on the issuance of new commercial fishing licenses that had been in place since 1995. To meet the purposes of the act, licensing regulations developed by DEM in 2002 created two endorsement categories for finfish: *Restricted* and *Non-Restricted*. The *Restricted* category is comprised of those finfish species in which commercial access to the fishery is limited (i.e., restricted); while species in the *Non-Restricted* category are available to all participants. Pursuant to RIGL §20–2.1-9, fisheries identified for consideration of restricted access are those “for which there is adequate or greater than adequate harvesting capacity currently in the fishery”, or are managed under a state quota system to prevent over-fishing. Hence, this management plan has been developed to identify those fisheries where access will be limited and those for which additional effort is warranted and new licenses may be issued pursuant to RIGL §20–2.1-9(5).

As stated in RIGL §20-2.1-2, the licensing regulations should seek to “*preserve, enhance, and allow for any necessary regeneration of the fisheries of the state, for the benefit of the people of the state, as an ecological asset and as a source of food and recreation*” and to “*provide Rhode Islanders who wish to fish commercially the opportunity to do so, and end the moratorium on issuance of new commercial fishing licenses so that new licenses may be issued..*” and “*respect the interests of residents who fish under licenses issued by the state and wish to continue to fish commercially in a manner that is economically viable.*” This plan will be updated annually and the list of restricted/non-restricted species evaluated with respect to stock status, current performance of the fishery, and quotas. In order to attain sustainable levels of effort (i.e. those effort levels that can be maintained while keeping fisheries open with economically viable possession limits), the number of restricted finfish licenses renewed will be reviewed annually in consideration of exit-entry ratios needed to maintain desired levels of effort.

One of the primary outcomes of the plan and management tools implemented to manage the fisheries is that of exit/entry ratios, or the number of new entrants allowed into the fishery when an existing license is not renewed. Any recommended exit/entry ratios are also provided in proposed accompanying Licensing regulations, which provides for public comment at a required public hearing. Proposed regulations and exit/entry ratios then go before the RI Marine Fisheries Council, a body of eight (8) members appointed by the governor to provide recommendations on marine fisheries regulations, before the DEM Director renders her final decision.

This management plan is developed in support of commercial licensing pursuant to RIGL 20-2.1-9(5) and will be updated annually.

RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT

The primary goals for quota-managed fisheries are to maintain open seasons while maintaining possession limits that are economically viable for the industry, and results in fewer regulatory discards. Due to the multi-species nature of the fishing industry however, increased effort may result in shorter seasons and an increase in such discards, as many quota-managed species are captured during closed seasons or those species when targeting species that are open for harvest.

Several questions need to be answered prior to increasing effort in these fisheries. First, have management goals been realized with current management? With current levels of effort there is a minimum quota amount needed to attain these goals, which raises a second question. Have any of the quotas in recent years been adequate to meet these goals, and what will future quotas be? Finally, would increasing effort negatively impact current license holders through shorter seasons and lower possession limits?

At this time, five (5) finfish species are included in the restricted category: striped bass, scup, summer flounder, black sea bass, and tautog. Two other species (menhaden and monkfish) have been considered for inclusion in this category, however restrictions were achieved through other methods including gear endorsements (menhaden) and management plan changes (monkfish). All species for which the state is allocated a quota are categorized as restricted, with the exception of bluefish, since the quota has been greater than harvest levels since the quota was established.

Summarized below are the stock status reports, management programs, and performance reports of species currently included in the restricted finfish category.

SUMMER FLOUNDER

Stock Status: In 2015, the stock assessment and biological reference points for the summer flounder stock were updated and reviewed through an update assessment process. The update assessment results, using a statistical catch-at-age modeling approach, indicated that the summer flounder resource is not experiencing overfishing but is overfished relative to the established biological reference points in 2014. The summer flounder stock is defined as overfished if the stock's SSB falls below the biomass (SSB) threshold, currently defined as $\frac{1}{2}SSB_{MSY} = 68.78$ million lbs. The SSB for 2014 was estimated to be 88.90 million lbs. This is 35% below the SSBtarget = 137.55 million lbs. The overfishing definition for the summer flounder stock is defined as $F_{msy} = 0.31$. The 2014 fishing mortality rate estimate ($F_{2014} = 0.359$) is above the fishing mortality reference point. Fishing mortality in 2014 may have been higher, as a retrospective analysis indicated that the current assessment method tends to underestimate F in recent years.

Management Program: In state waters, DEM manages summer flounder in consultation with the RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC). Regional management of summer flounder is the shared responsibility of Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management

Council (MAFMC) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Existing DEM regulations provide a framework to manage the annual summer flounder quota allocated to RI through possession limits and seasons. The total commercial quota was allocated into three sub-periods based on the proportion of catches during the years 1980 through 1989. The original management plan in state waters had four sub periods. These percentages and sub-periods were altered in 2007 by combining the two summer sub-periods and combining the historical summer allocation, giving this period (May–October) a 35% allocation, leaving the winter 1 period allocation at 54% (January – April) and the winter 2 period allocation at 11% (November – December). Another management change in 2007 was the inclusion of an aggregate landings program in the summer sub-period. The 2007 management plan as described above was maintained during 2008 through 2014 when a further modification was put in place, which shortened the summer sub period (now ends on September 15) to better align with the residence time of summer flounder in state waters as well as providing a better opportunity to remain open at 100 pounds per day during this sub period.

In RI, management of the fishery for summer flounder has been difficult and the subject of frequent allocation disputes. Larger trawl vessels prosecute the winter commercial fishery offshore. During the summer, smaller trawl vessels, floating trap, gill net, and rod and reel fishermen direct their efforts on this species inshore, along with a substantial recreational fishery. Frequent possession limit reductions and closures are enacted by the RIDFW during each sub-period to keep RI landings within the quota allocated by MAFMC and ASMFC (Table 2a, b).

DEM implemented a Summer Flounder Exemption Program in 1995 to limit the number of vessels that could participate in the directed fishery, based upon their historical participation. At that time, a 200-pound limit was established for anyone who did not qualify for participation in the Exemption Program. Due to the stock biomass in the near shore waters and the number of license holders eligible to direct on the summer flounder fishery, the spring and summer sub-periods have been fully exhausted, even with low trip limits of 100 to 50 pounds.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: Under current levels of effort, the summer flounder fishery has been frequently closed or dropped to low possession limits in recent history. The season most affected has been the summer because of the allocation available coupled with many participants. The proportion of summer flounder taken by different gear types during the summer months has changed over the past few years. The percentage harvested by otter trawl has declined each year during the period 1996 to 2000 while the proportion taken by all other gear types has increased with the greatest increase occurring for the rod and reel sector. As a result, the performance of the fishery has also changed over the years. In 2004, the RIMFC shifted the allocation by adding the additional quota of 469,653 pounds to summer I sub-period in order to maintain the fishery year around. This allocation succeeded in keeping the fishery open for the entire year. In 2005, rather than adding extra pounds to the first summer sub-period, an equal split of the summer allocation was implemented. It was thought that with the increase in quota in 2005, the fishery could remain open under this

regime. The summer flounder quota remained open for the entire 2005 season. Due to several factors in 2006, including the complete utilization of the winter I quota and a decreased state quota allocation, the summer flounder summer fishery saw both a possession limit decrease and a fishery closure. This was also the case in 2007 and 2008 due to a large decrease in quota for these years, while effort remained high on this species. The moderate increase in quota for 2009 was not enough to prevent premature closures in the late summer and early fall time period. The 2010 fishing year remained open with a possession limit decrease. The 2011 fishing season remained open all year with no possession limit decreases (and in fact there were several possession limit increases through the summer and fall). During 2012 there also was no closure but a shorter possession limit decrease was enacted during the summer sub period. The 2013 and 2014 fishing years remained open with one downward modification to the possession limits to prevent an early closure. Finally, in 2015 the summer sub period has remained open to date, and is projected to be fully harvested without a closure, though a drop to 50 lbs was needed to maintain an open fishery.

The quota for 2016 has been reviewed by the MAFMC's SSC (Table 3). The quota will see a significant decrease of 28% in 2016. With careful management of the quota during the summer months, the 2015 quota may be able to sustain an open fishery all year with no weekly closed days, but extended possession limit decreases will likely be needed in 2016.

DFW Recommendation: Maintain effort at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

SCUP

Stock Status: The scup stock is not considered overfished and overfishing is not occurring. As for summer flounder, the scup stock is assessed using a statistical catch-at-age model. A benchmark assessment was undertaken in 2015 and this model indicated that the 2014 SSB level for the scup stock is 403.27 million pounds, well above the SSB target of 192.47 million pounds. SSB is projected to remain above the target as indicated in the most recent assessment information. The overfishing definition for the scup resource is defined as the fishing mortality (F) $F_{40\%} = F_{msy} = 0.220$. The most recent terminal year reference point from the stock assessment update for scup concluded that overfishing was not occurring with $F_{2014} = 0.127$ (NEFSC 2015).

Management Program: In state waters, DEM manages scup in consultation with the RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC). Regional management of scup is the shared responsibility of the MAFMC and ASMFC. The scup Fishery Management Plan (FMP) sets annual quota specifications into three sub-periods. During the two winter sub-periods (January – April and November – December), the quota is available coast wide and is restricted through the implementation of trip limits. In 2014, RI moved scup during these winter periods to a non-restricted category. A state-by-state quota system is in place for the summer sub-period (May 1 – October 31), whereby quotas are distributed to the states based upon their percentage share of commercial landings for the period

May through October 1983–1992. RI further divides the state quota into a general category allocation (40%) and a fish trap allocation (60%). Scup remains in the restricted category during the summer months due to the constraint of the state quota.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: Efforts to keep the scup fishery open throughout the summer period in the past had proven to be difficult due to the number of licensees who have open access to the fishery. A weekly limit was instituted in 2003 and beginning in 2004 the fishery remained open for the entire season. The 2015 quota has been sufficient to keep the fishery open throughout all of the sub-periods under the current management plan as of the date of the writing of this document, though a possession limit decrease was needed to keep the fishery open in 2015. This decreased possession limit was needed because the floating fish trap sector harvested much more of their allocation in 2015, thereby minimizing the amount of rollover pounds moved in to the general category fishery. The program for scup in state waters has performed well for the past several years, remaining open for the entire period, though quota transfers were needed from the floating fish trap sector to keep the general category open due to high catch rates.

The floating fish trap sector has harvested 36% of its quota so far in 2015. Through consultation with the floating fish trap operators, portions of the floating fish trap quota has been rolled in to the general category scup fishery throughout the sub periods to provide the opportunity for the entire commercial sector to harvest its scup allocation for 2015. As of the date of this report, 47% of the floating fish trap quota has been rolled in to the general category fishery.

The quota for 2016 has been reviewed by the MAFMC (Table 3). The quota will be less than the quota seen in 2015 by 1%. Catch rates in 2015 were high as of the writing of this document, but the quota so far has been adequate to maintain an open fishery, though a possession limit adjustment was needed to keep the first sub period open.

DFW Recommendation: Maintain effort at the current level during the summer state quota period to account for potential high catch rates in subsequent years that are scheduled to have quota decreases, which will work towards keeping the fishery open all year; and remove scup from the restricted species category during the winter sub-period where the quota is managed by the federal government, which would then allow for scup to be landed during this federal period without adverse impacts to RI's quota.

TAUTOG

Stock Status: The ASMFC Tautog Technical Committee completed the most recent benchmark stock assessment of tautog in 2015 (ASMFC 2015). This assessment was approved for management use, and is the first approved assessment to create regionally discrete assessments for this stock. As of this writing the stock units are still being debated, but RI will end up in a northern region, and the results of each northern region configuration indicate that fishing mortality rates have increased in recent years and is currently above the overfishing threshold. The northern region assessment

indicated low biomass. The current biomass is well below the SSB threshold. Exact numbers for these metrics will be available in 2016, but are not settled as of this writing due to the regional configuration of the northern region not being set at this point (northern region may or may not include CT). The main contributor to the fishing mortality rates appears to be recreational landings, which comprised approximately 75–90% of total landings over the past six years when viewed coastwide. Rhode Island is at the higher end of that range comprising approximately 90% of the landings coming from the recreational sector.

A regional approach to tautog management was approved by the ASMFC in 2008, allowing MA and RI to assess the tautog stock in the two state's waters. Even though this regional assessment allowed for a status quo management scenario, MA and RI decided on a proactive approach and did implement reduction measures in 2008. Despite these reduction measures the tautog stock continues to be subject to high recreational landings specifically in Rhode Island in the fall months.

Commercial landings have not risen appreciably since plan implementation in RI due to the constraint of a quota.

Management Program: The tautog resource is managed within state waters by the DEM with advice from the RIMFC. Regional management of the tautog resource is conducted by ASMFC through Addendum VI to the Tautog FMP, which was adopted in 2011. The FMP in part requires a reduction in fishing mortality in order to achieve an appreciable increase in spawning stock biomass. States were required to implement regulations that meet the required reductions by the start of their respective fisheries in 2012. The state commercial quota has not increased over the past few years. The commercial fishery in Rhode Island is managed through a combination of seasons, quotas, and possession limits. Although it is not specifically required by the FMP, Rhode Island established a commercial quota, which in part achieves the fishing mortality targets required by the FMP. In 2015, the commercial quota of 51,348 pounds was divided equally into three seasons with a daily possession limit of 10 fish.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: A substantial increase in the quota would be needed to keep the commercial tautog fishery open throughout the defined seasons. This does not seem to be a realistic goal as the dynamics and size of this stock may never allow for a long open season with a large quota. Current fishing effort levels are clearly above the fishing power needed to harvest the quota with current possession limits and seasons. The spring quota remains difficult to manage due the imbalance of effort and allowable landings resulting in overages and high discard mortality, though with increased reporting accuracy and timeliness from RI seafood dealers, the spring sub period in recent years had only small overages relative to past years performance.

The commercial quota in 2016 will be the same as in 2015, minus any needed adjustments for overages.

DFW Recommendation: Maintain effort at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

STRIPED BASS

Stock Status: The 2013 benchmark stock assessment of the Atlantic coast striped bass stock showed that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (ASMFC 2013). The 2013 benchmark stock assessment incorporated changes and additions recommended by the 2007 benchmark review committee and used a statistical catch-at-age (SCA) model with data through 2012. The assessment, approved by the Board in 2013, proposed new fishing mortality (F) reference points to be consistent with the spawning stock biomass reference points. Total F was estimated to be $F=0.20$, between the newly proposed threshold and target levels, $F=0.219$ and $F=0.18$ respectively. Female spawning stock biomass (SSB) was estimated to be at 128 million pounds, above the threshold and below the target, 127 million pounds and 159 million pounds respectively (ASMFC 2013). Overall the assessment concluded that if the current fishing mortality rate is maintained through 2017, there is an increasing probability that the SSB will drop below the threshold (stock overfished) until 2015-2016 where the probability begins to decrease (ASMFC 2013).

In 2015 the Striped Bass technical committee is working to develop fleet-specific fishing mortality reference points for each of the three fleets in the SCA model (Chesapeake Bay, Ocean, and commercial discards). These reference points as well as the 2015 update assessment will be reviewed by the Striped Bass Management board in November of 2015. These fleet specific reference points, if approved for management, will ensure that the impact of the Chesapeake Bay and ocean fleets on the coastwide stock remains sustainable.

Management Program: Striped bass are managed by ASMFC through Amendment 6 to the interstate FMP, which requires minimum sizes for the commercial and recreational fisheries, possession limits for the recreational fishery, and state quotas for the commercial fishery (ASMFC 2003). Addendum 1 to Amendment 6 was approved in November of 2007. In November of 2010 the Striped Bass Management board approved Addendum 2 to Amendment 6 which keeps the coast wide Striped Bass quota at status quo, 70% of historical harvest levels. Addendum 2 redefines the juvenile recruitment data triggers and calculation methods and requires management action if there is recruitment failure for three years in a row. Addendum III to Amendment 6 was approved by the Striped Bass management board in August of 2012 to address the illegal harvest of Striped Bass and makes commercial Striped Bass tagging programs for Atlantic coast states mandatory. Addendum IV to Amendment 6 was approved by the Striped Bass management board in October of 2014. Addendum IV adopted new fishing mortality reference points and adopted new recreational and commercial management measures in order to reduce fishing mortality to at least the target. These management measures were implemented by states in 2015.

Regulations for the commercial striped bass fishery in Rhode Island include minimum sizes, possession limits, gear restrictions, seasons and quotas. The RI commercial quota is divided between two sectors, floating traps (39%) and a general category (61%). The quota for the general category, primarily rod and reel, was made available during two seasons during 2015. The first season was allocated 70% of the quota and the second season was allocated the remaining 30% of the general category quota. The floating fish trap fishery operators worked in a collaborative manner to manage their allocation with just one season in 2015 and no possession limits, but with very stringent reporting requirements.

The management plan for the general category striped bass fishery was modified in 2007. The commercial possession limits changed to a per vessel limit of 5 fish (as opposed to the per person possession limits of the past). A two-day per week (Friday/Saturday) closure was also implemented in 2007. Both of these industry supported changes were an effort to keep the season open longer than what has been the case for the recent past. In 2015, the recreational bag limit for striped bass was reduced to 1 fish per person per day and the commercial quota was reduced by 25% per Addendum IV. The floating fish traps applied for conservation equivalency in 2015 and took an additional 1.61% quota reduction in order to maintain a reduced size limit of 26".

The management plan for the general category striped bass fishery was modified in 2014 to change the start date of the commercial season for the floating fish traps to April 1st and to allow DFW to rollover any unused portion of the floating fish trap quota as they deemed fit beginning October 15. This rollover provision is intended to allow for the full harvest of the RI striped bass quota in the event that the floating fish traps are unable to harvest their entire quota in a given year.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: The striped bass general category quota is split between two seasons with both seasons closing prematurely once the quota has been reached. The RI commercial striped bass quota for the general category in 2015 is 111,459pounds. The quota was split between two seasons with 70% allocate to the first season and 30% for the second season. So far in 2015 the first sub-period quota was fully harvested in 20 days and had an overage of 2,266 pounds. Max landings per day during this sub-period were ~8,000 pounds and therefore there was not sufficient quota remaining to re-open the fishery for another day. At the time of this report writing the second sub-period has ~31,000 pounds to be harvested and will open on September 8th. The floating fish trap quota is 70,113 pounds in 2015, of which 51,923 pounds has been harvested at the time of this report writing.

DFW Recommendation: Maintain effort at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

BLACK SEA BASS

Stock Status: The black sea bass stock is no longer considered overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Previously, the black sea bass resource was defined as overfished when the three-year average of the spawning stock biomass (SSB) index, based on the NEFSC spring survey, was below the threshold biomass index. A new assessment was introduced and peer reviewed in 2008 that uses a forward projection modeling technique called SCALE (Statistical Catch at Length). A new benchmark assessment was initiated in 2011. The new assessment did not pass peer review; therefore the last peer reviewed assessment is the metric by which stock status is measured. Despite the improved stock status, the MAFMC Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) instituted a constant catch management approach given the guidance from their risk policy. They consider the black sea bass stock a level 4 stock, therefore the SSC produces an OFL (overfishing limit) and ABC (allowed biological catch) based on their control rules for their level 4 stocks. The findings were reassessed in 2014. The SSC did not change their opinion of the current stock assessment model and its ability to determine an OFL, therefore a strategy of constant catch was approved for both 2014 and 2015. A new method for assessing the SSC level 4 stocks was introduced in 2015, this method is still under review, but could potentially result in increased quotas for 2016. In parallel with the new data poor approach, a new benchmark assessment has been initiated and should be completed at the end of 2016 for potential use in 2017 management.

Management Program: The black sea bass stock is managed jointly by ASMFC and MAFMC. Amendment 13, which became effective in 2003, established a state quota system. Rhode Island's share of the commercial coastwide quota is 11%. Through advice from the RIFMC and the industry, DEM adopted regulations to allocate a percentage of the commercial quota into five seasonal sub-periods. The regulations also specified possession limits within each season.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: The RI commercial fishery closed prematurely in each sub period to date in 2015 due to the quota remaining at low levels. This trend is expected to continue in to 2016, pending the outcome of the data poor approach noted above. RI's quota in 2015 was 238,783 pounds. The quota for 2016 will remain close to the quota allowed for in 2015 if the new data poor approach is not approved by the SSC. Any expansion of effort at this time would hinder DEM from meeting its objective of keeping the fishery open throughout the year under reasonable possession limits, and in fact until the quota increases for this species, in-season closures will be common.

DFW Recommendation: Maintain effort at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

LICENSING OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED EXIT/ENTRY RATIOS

DFW Recommendations: To protect against increasing effort on decreasing or stagnant quotas, **DFW recommends to not dramatically increase effort on any of the restricted species, but to allow effort to be maintained at current levels, or, in the case of scup, to continue to allow modest increases in effort.** Since active licenses left the fishery in 2015, DFW feels that replacing these licenses would be warranted, as data indicates introducing a small number of restricted endorsements in a cautious manner does not dramatically impact effort in a given year, thereby meeting the intent and goals of the legislature per RIGL 20-2.1-2. In 2015, there were a total of 1,055 license holders eligible to harvest the restricted finfish species; with 3 new restricted finfish endorsements issued (Table 1). For the 2016 fishing season, DFW recommends allowing restricted endorsements to be issued to current license holders, as the new endorsements issued for 2015 did not negatively impact restricted species quotas and as 19 licenses allowing harvest of restricted finfish were not renewed.

The decision to issue 3 new restricted finfish endorsements was based on DFW's assessment of the restricted finfish species, deliberations with the RIMFC, and requirements set forth in statute. An exit/entry ratio was established at 1:1 (for every 1 active licenses not renewed, 1 new restricted finfish endorsement was issued) in order to allow some new entrance into the restricted finfish category as well as replace some effort that had presumably exited the fishery. The ratio was set up to be reflective of both current fishing effort on the restricted finfish species and assuming that the latent effort was accounted for with the activity requirement of the license. Of these 19 licenses that were not renewed, only 6 had fishing activity. Constraining the new license opportunities to those that were retired and had some activity protects against dramatic increases in effort. **DFW therefore recommends an exit/entry ratio of 1:1 to be maintained for the restricted endorsement category for the 2016 fishing year.**

Of the non-renewals mentioned above, 6 had some level of fishing effort (based on 2014 landings data from SAFIS). The catch rates of the 2015 restricted finfish species were similar to the rates in 2014; therefore the increase in licenses made available in 2015 did not translate into a noticeable increase in effort on these species. The quota allocated to RI in 2016 for a few of the restricted finfish and quota species (i.e., black sea bass, tautog, and scup) are assumed to be equal to or less than in 2015.

RI Marine Fisheries Council: The **Industry Advisory Committee (IAC)** of the RIMFC met on July 21, 2015 and recommended status quo of 1:1 exit/entry ratio for restricted finfish category in 2016, which would result in 6 new PEL licenses with a Restricted Finfish Endorsement to be made available for 2016. **The RIMFC met on October 5, 2015 and recommended.....**

NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT

Species included in the non-restricted category include all species of regulated finfish that are not included in the restricted category. Entry into this endorsement category is currently open to all RI residents. Three additional species; menhaden, cod, and monkfish, have self-imposed quotas applied to them in RI state waters. Summarized below are the stock status reports, management programs, and performance reports of species currently included in the non-restricted finfish category. All of these species are currently managed through a state quota system, with the exception of winter flounder.

WINTER FLOUNDER

Stock Status: In 2011, the NEFSC conducted the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW 52) and updated the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) complex of winter flounder stock assessment. The previous assessment was completed in 2008 at GARM3 (NEFSC 2008). Results from SAW 52 concluded that the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stock complex is overfished but overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2011). An update to winter flounder stocks was carried out in 2014 but not for the SNE/MA stock unit.

The 2011 SAW52 assessment applied a version of an Age Structured Assessment Program (ASAP CAT10), which is an age-structured model that uses forward computations assuming fishing mortality is separated into year and age components to estimate population sizes given observed catches, catch-at-age, and indices of abundance. The workgroup concluded this model was more advanced and flexible than the Virtual Population Analyses (ADAPT VPA vers. 2.8.0) used for the GARM3 2008 assessment. A significant change coming from SAW52 was a change in the value for natural mortality (M) for all three stock groups of winter flounder (including SNE) from 0.2 to 0.3. The change in M is supported by literature values taken from tagging studies and life history equations (NEFSC 2011). Furthermore when the new M value of 0.3 is applied to the ASAP CAT10 model, the retrospective errors that required that the data series be split between 1993 and 1994 were reduced to acceptable levels allowing all data to be considered in one model run. It should be noted that changing the M value from 0.2 to 0.3 results in a downward shift in fishing mortality (F) as well as an upward shift in spawning stock biomass (SSB).

Results from the ASAP CAT10 model estimated fishing mortality (F) in 2010 to be 0.051, well under (17%) the FMSY = 0.310 as well as below (16%) F40% = 0.327. SSB in 2010 was estimated to be 7,076 mt, about 21% of SSBMSY = 33,820 mt and 24% of SSB40% = 29,045 mt. There is an 80% probability that in 2010 F and SSB were between 0.04 and 0.06 and 6,433 mt and 8,590 mt, respectively. Projections at F in 2012-2014 = F = 0.00 indicate a <1% chance that the stock will rebuild to SSBMSY = 38,761 mt by 2014). Nonetheless, substantial increases in SSB can be achieved if F can be kept under 0.248.

Based in part on the high site fidelity of winter flounder and long history of state landings from RI, DFW assessed the local winter flounder stock within state waters in 2011 (M.R. Gibson, DFW Marine Fisheries, unpublished data). A new approach was used for a

local benchmark assessment which examines the impacts of fishing and climate change through the lens of historical stock analysis. DFW determined that the fishing mortality rate in 2010 was below the calculated FMSY = 0.20 and found to be $F = 0.09$, thus overfishing is not occurring. The FMSY calculated in 2011 accounts for rising sea temperatures reducing the sustainable F rate by 50% (M.R. Gibson, DFW Marine Fisheries, unpublished data). Estimates of biomass have fluctuated over the time period 1959–2010, with two peaks occurring in the mid-to late-1960s and early 1980s, but showed a steady decline from 1983-1993, with the estimate for 1993 being the lowest in the time series. Estimates of biomass have remained well below the 2010 calculated BMSY = 5,849 mt since 1988, despite a slight increase between 1994 and 1995. In 2010 the biomass estimate was calculated as 1034 mt indicating that the local stock is still overfished.

Management Program: The NEFMC manages the winter flounder resource through the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan. Under the NEFMC Framework 50 for groundfish for the 2015-2016 fishing year, harvest of winter flounder is allowed in the federal SNE/MA stock management area, and federally permitted vessels who are in a sector are allowed to fish with no limit until they reach their sector allowable catch limit. Federally permitted vessels which are in the “common pool” have a 3,000 lb/vsl/day 6,000 lbs/vsl/trip limit which is adjustable by the NMFS regional administrator. The SNE/MA management area remains open to common pool vessels until the allowable catch limit is reached. Federally permitted vessels may transit RI state waters with a federal possession limit as long as their gear is stowed.

At the state level, ASMFC manages the inshore winter flounder stocks through Addendum 1 to Amendment 1 to the interstate fishery management plan for inshore stocks of winter flounder. The current commercial possession limit for state waters is 50 lbs/vsl/day. There are also minimum fish size limits and mesh size restrictions per the requirements of Addendum 1 to the ASMFC FMP. During 2011 DEM extended the area closed to winter flounder fishing to include Point Judith Pond, the Harbor of Refuge, and Potters Pond. Both young of the year and adult spawning indices are at historic lows, the closure aims to protect a recovery of the population in the pond due to the SNE closure (Gibson 2010). In order to maintain a stream of commercial landings for assessment purposes, RI adopted a 50 pound possession limit in the RI coastal ponds (with the exception of Point Judith Pond, the Harbor of Refuge, and Potters Pond) and all state waters, except in Narragansett Bay north of the Colregs line where harvest or possession of winter flounder is prohibited. It should be noted the recreational management measures for winter flounder also reflect an effort to greatly reduce F. The recreational size and bag limit for winter flounder in 2015 remained 12 inch size and 2 fish / person/day limit. The season was extended in 2014 and now runs from March 1st to December 31st. Management of the commercial sector changed in 2013 resulting in winter flounder being removed from the restricted species list. This change allows winter flounder to be harvested in state waters and landed at state ports by commercial fishing license (CFL) holders. The change also allows transit across state waters to land at state ports by resident and non-resident landing licenses. The rationale for this change was to facilitate federally permitted groundfish vessels to land

all of their catch in Rhode Island. Winter flounder was the only groundfish species on the state restricted list, typically these vessels have a whole suite of other groundfish to land including winter flounder. Winter flounder does not operate under a state quota system so this change should not greatly impact fishing practices.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: A state quota has not existed since 2006.

DFW Recommendation: DFW recommends considering changes in management to allow more liberal commercial possession limit in state waters. Any changes in state waters management would be the result of and in accordance with an increased allowable catch limit allotted to states from the ASMFC Winter Flounder Management Board.

BLUEFISH

Stock Status: The 2014 stock assessment update indicated that the 2013 total biomass estimate for the bluefish stock is 123,716 mt, which is above the biomass threshold ($1/2 \text{ Bmsy}$) = 73,526 mt. The update also estimated that fishing mortality in 2013 was 0.118, well below the fishing mortality target (Fmsy) = 0.19 (NEFSC 2014). A benchmark stock assessment for the bluefish was completed in 2015 and indicated the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Biological reference points will be available in 2016 once the benchmark stock assessment has been approved for management by the MAFMC and ASMFC.

Management Program: Bluefish are managed cooperatively by ASMFC and MAFMC through Amendment 1 to the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (MAFMC and ASMFC 1998). The Bluefish Monitoring Committee meets annually to review the most recent data and to make recommendations regarding the commercial quota, the recreational harvest limit, and other management measures. Amendment I dictates that 17% of the resource shall be allocated to commercial fisheries which are controlled through state-by-state quotas. The remaining 83% of the resource is allocated to recreational fisheries which are controlled through a 15 fish bag limit.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: Since 1994 when states were first allocated a commercial quota for bluefish, Rhode Island has not fully harvested its allocation and the fishery has never been closed while the quota system has been in place, until 2006. In 2006 high catch rates in the fall period used up the quota and a commercial closure was implemented for the first time in RI. Since 2012, annual quota reductions for bluefish have been implemented due to a declining trend in biomass. In 2014 due to a smaller quota and high catch rates in the fall, RI requested and received a commercial transfer of 100,000 lbs to avoid a potential closure.

In 2015 the commercial bluefish quota in RI is 356,826 pounds, a 30% reduction from the 2014 quota. As of this writing ~212,000 pounds of bluefish have been harvested. Due to high catch rates in the month of July, for the first time on July 26, 2015, RI had to implement a possession limit of 1400 pounds/vessel/week to avoid a closure.

Additionally, RI requested a commercial quota transfer from several states and as of this writing has received 180,000 lbs. As a result of the imposed possession limit, catch rates dropped significantly the last week of July and even further the first week of August. This coupled with the commercial quota transfer allowed RI to increase the possession limit to 5,000 pounds/vessel/week on August 9, 2015. Weekly quota projections will continue throughout the year and additional possession limit changes may be made if warranted. The possibility of a potential closure still exists but would most likely occur in the latter part of the year when bluefish landings are minimal.

DFW Recommendation: Hold a public workshop and public hearing to discuss potential options for bluefish management in 2016 that would control harvest through possession limits and/or seasons. In the future, if effort increases and/or the quota continues to decrease, DFW will re-assess whether bluefish needs to be placed in to the restricted species category.

MENHADEN

Stock Status: Atlantic menhaden are a highly migratory species that undergo a large amount of mixing off the coast of North Carolina in the winter months. The ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee last assessed the menhaden stock in 2015. While the assessment considered both the Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM) and Stock Synthesis 3, the BAM model was chosen for providing management advice. The model used fishery fleets broken up into areas to reflect the differences in selectivity along the coast. Starting in 1955, the model estimated population size at age and recruitment and projected forward through the most recent year of data available (2013) to estimate overall trends in recruitment, fecundity, abundance and fishing mortality. The 2015 benchmark stock assessment found the population is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring relative to the new maximum spawning potential (MSP) reference points (ASMFC, 2015). Full fishing mortality in 2013 was estimated at $F_{2013}=0.27$, a level that is below both the threshold and target levels, $F_{15\%MSP}=2.98$ and $F_{30\%MSP}=1.03$ respectively.

A final item being worked on by the Technical Committee is the consideration of ecosystem based reference points. A two day workshop is currently scheduled for 8/31-9/1 to work on developing these reference points. These reference points as well as changes to the current state-by-state quota allocations will be considered in Draft Amendment 3 to the Fishery Management Plan.

Management Program: Narragansett Bay in its entirety is designated a Menhaden Management Area through RI statute, which allows DEM to manage menhaden through the use of seasons and management areas. Purse seine fishing is allowed through the main stems of Narragansett Bay while excluding the Providence River. There are also weekend and holiday closures in the Bay for all directed fisheries. Purse seining for menhaden for use in the reduction fishery has been prohibited in RI state waters since 2003. Similar provisions exist in state waters along the entire Atlantic coast with the exception of North Carolina and Virginia, where the bulk of the reduction fishery takes

place. Purse seining for use in the bait industry is still allowed in RI as set forth above. Emergency regulations were implemented in 2007 that placed a cap on the daily landings that could occur in Narragansett Bay (75,000 pounds). The regulation also placed an overall cap on the amount of fish that could be removed from the Bay, stating that removals could not exceed 50% of the standing stock in the Bay. Once the 50% trigger is hit, the purse seine fishery closes in Narragansett Bay. The trigger is monitored through the use of a depletion model for open systems (Gibson 2007). This same management regime was conducted in 2010 with the exception of the additional gear restrictions on net size certification, vessel capacity restrictions, and a tiered approach to increasing possession limits based on the population level of menhaden in Narragansett Bay. The tiered system also includes a threshold amount of fish that needs to be present in Narragansett Bay before the commercial bait fishery can begin (1.5 million pounds). In 2013 and 2014, all of the elements mentioned above were in place with the exception of the increasing possession limits; the possession limits were kept at a static 120,000 per vessel per day. Amendment 2 required states to implement a state waters quota based on the calculations set forth in the Amendment. The state waters quota was implemented in RI waters via emergency regulation in June of 2013. This item officially went to public hearing in August 2013 and the final regulations were filed in November 2013. The quota monitoring is complex and allows for some landings to occur even after the quota is reached, though at a reduced level. It also allows for the state to opt in to an episodic event quota if certain requirements are met. RI has opted into the episodic event set-aside each year since 2013 as a result of exhausting the state quota early in the year and having a large abundance of fish still residing in state waters.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: Since 2005, large schools of adult menhaden entered Narragansett Bay to varying degrees. As of the writing of this document, RI has fully harvested its state quota for menhaden and opted into the episodic set aside program through the ASMFC. The Menhaden Management Area is currently CLOSED to the commercial harvest of menhaden however the state waters outside of the Management Area remain open to commercial harvest. Table 4 details the events that have occurred for the commercial menhaden fishery in RI thus far in 2015.

DFW Recommendation: Allow effort to remain at or below current levels in the menhaden bait fishery and to maintain it as a non-restricted species. The approach of adding a gear endorsement was hoped to provide some protection against a large influx of effort in to this fishery, however DFW believes that these endorsements should only be made available on a renewal basis (place a moratoria on issuance of new purse seine endorsements). The current level of purse seine endorsements (2015 = 177 purse seine endorsements) has decreased slightly from the 2012 level (189 endorsements), however much of these are in-active. The current level is unsustainable should a large percentage of the existing latent effort become active, and could necessitate a history based restriction in the future.

MONKFISH

Stock Status: The federal monkfish (*Lophius americanus*) fishery is jointly managed by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and Mid Atlantic Management Council (MAFMC), with the NEFMC having the administrative lead. The fishery is managed as two stocks, with the Northern Fishery Management Area (NMA) covering the Gulf of Maine and northern part of Georges Bank, and the Southern Fishery Management Area (SMA) extending from the southern flank of Georges Bank through the Mid-Atlantic Bight to North Carolina (NEFMC 2011). RI State waters are considered part of the SMA stock.

An operational stock assessment was completed in 2013 (NEFSC 2013b) that included two additional years survey data, revised discard estimates for 1980-2011, and overall contained minimal changes to methodological approaches used in the previous per-reviewed SAW 50 benchmark stock assessment (NEFSC 2010e). Based on these results the SMA stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The current 2013 estimate of fishing mortality $F = 0.11$ does not exceed the updated $F_{max} = 0.37$. The 2013 corrected total biomass estimate is 88,806 mt, above both B_{target} (71,667 mt) and the 2013 corrected $B_{threshold}$ (23,204mt). Despite the revised estimates to the OFL, allowable biological catch (ABC) for the SMA remained status quo at 12,316 mt for the 2014-2016 fishing years (FY). A benchmark assessment scheduled for fall 2016.

Management Programs: Fishing mortality for the SMA monkfish stock is regulated by the NEFMC through minimum size limits, gear restrictions, and days at sea (DAS) restrictions. In an effort to meet statutory requirements to complement federal fishery management plans, RI has adopted a minimum size limit, daily possession limit, and state quota on monkfish harvested in state waters.

In December of 2011 RI increased the state quota from 1% to 3% of the SMA Total Allowable Landings (TAL). The current program consists of a state quota set at 3% of the SMA TAL (590,288 lbs) with a daily possession limit of 550 lbs tails or 1,826 lbs whole fish. The possession limit is reduced to 50 lbs tails or 166 lbs whole fish for the remainder of the fishing year when state-water landings reach 2% of the SMA TAL (393,525 lbs). The commercial monkfish fishery operates on a May 1 through April 30 FY, with a minimum size limit of 11" tails or 17" whole fish.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: Over the previous five years total state-water landings were estimated at 99,119 lbs, 106,518 lbs, 182,443 lbs, 144,599 lbs, and 165,820 lbs for the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 FY, respectively. Total state-water landings for the 2014 FY are estimated at 93,657lbs, representing 24% of the state possession limit reduction threshold (2% SMA TAL) and 16% of the state quota (3% SMA TAL). Under the current management program it appears this fishery could withstand a modest increase in effort and still provide for the directed fishery to remain open for the entire fishing year.

DFW Recommendation: Allow effort to increase above current levels and maintain in the non-restricted species category. The rationale for leaving this species in the non-

restricted category is based on the ephemeral nature of monkfish abundance in state waters and increasing state quota that should provide for a directed fishery to operate throughout the fishing year. In the future, if effort increases and/or quota decreases, DFW will re-assess whether monkfish need to be placed in to the restricted species category, or to reduce possession limits and/or seasons to control harvest.

COD

Stock Status: In June of 2013 the NEFSC completed a nearly one and one-half year review of the 2012 stock assessment for Gulf of Maine (GOM) and George's Bank (GB) cod stocks with the publication of the 55th Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW 55) report (NEFSC 2013a). SAW 55 contains the most recent, comprehensive, peer reviewed stock assessment of the George's Bank (GB) cod stock (NEFSC 2008b), which is the stock relative to Rhode Island waters.

In short, the GB Cod stock is at historically low biomass and based on the results of SAW 55 (NEFSC 2013a) the current non-parametric biological reference points (BRP) for GB cod indicate that total biomass (SSB2011) is estimated at 13,216 mt and fishing mortality (F2011) is estimated at $F_{2011} = 0.43$; whereas, the biomass threshold of $\frac{1}{2}$ Bmsy is estimated at 93,268 mt ($B_{msy} = 186,535$ mt) and the fishing mortality target Fmsy proxy (F40%) is estimated at $F_{40\%} = 0.18$. Based on the accepted model results, the stock is overfished ($SSB_{2011} = 13,216$ mt $< \frac{1}{2}$ SSBmsy = 93,268) and overfishing is occurring ($F_{2011} = 0.43 > F_{40\%} = 0.18$).

Management Programs: Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) are managed under the New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Northeast Multispecies FMP contains a complex of 15 groundfish species that have been managed by time/area closures, gear restrictions, minimum size limits, and recently using a Catch Shares approach (i.e. sectors) under Amendment 16 (NEFMC 2009). Framework Adjustment 53 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP (NEFMC 2013) specified the ACL for the 2015 FY at 1,886 mt.

In an effort to satisfy statutory requirements to complement federal fishery management plans, RI has opted to impose a minimum size limit, daily possession limit, and a state quota. Other than technical changes, the current program has not changed since April of 2009 and consists of a state quota set at 1% of the Georges Bank annual catch limit (ACL) and a 1,000 lb possession limit with a possession limit reduction to 75 lbs limit when 90% of the state quota is harvested. A fishery closure is required when the quota is reached. The commercial codfish fishery operates on a May 1 through April 30 fishing year. During the 2013 commercial fishing year the commercial minimum size limit was reduced from 22" to 19" for federal consistency. The 2015 ACL for GB Cod is 1,886 mt, which converts to a 18.9 mt or 41,667 lbs RI state-water quota.

Performance of Fishery and Quotas: The state quota for cod has not been met since it's inception in 2009. Between the 2009 to 2014 FY total state-water landings have ranged from 5,233 lbs during the 2009 FY (6% of that FY state quota) to 31,868 lbs

during the 2012 FY (32% of that FY state quota). The estimated state-water landings for the 2014 FY were 5,698 lbs, representing 14% of the state-water quota. At present it appears this fishery is resource limited and total landings for a given fishing year may stay well below the state quota, despite the reduced minimum size and dramatic decrease in quota.

DFW Recommendation: Allow effort to increase above current levels and maintain in the non-restricted species category. The rationale for leaving cod in the non-restricted category is based on the ephemeral nature, as well as relatively low levels of cod abundance in state waters, relative to the state quota. In the future, if effort increases and/or quota decreases, DFW will re-assess whether cod should be moved to the restricted species category, or to reduce possession limits and/or seasons to control harvest.

LICENSING OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED EXIT/ENTRY RATIOS

Division Recommendations: In 2015 there were 1,177 licensed issued with non-restricted finfish endorsements (Table 1. For the 2016 fishing season, DFW recommends maintaining open entry into this endorsement category, as the existing participation in 2015 did not negatively impact fishery management or quotas. The inclusion of bluefish in the non-restricted category may need to be evaluated in future years if catch rates remain high or if the quota continues to decline.

RI Marine Fisheries Council: The Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) of the RIMFC met on July 21, 2015 and recommended status quo (open access) for 2016. **The RIMFC met on October 5, 2015 and recommended.....**

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TABLES

Table 1. Historical commercial license counts.

License Type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
MULTI-PURPOSE LICENSE	887	867	853	829	816	804
<i>GILLNET ENDORSEMENT</i>	241	236	233	227	221	218
<i>DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT</i>	272	261	251	241	236	236
<i>MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT</i>	123	124	131	132	133	137
<i>PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT</i>	136	137	139	134	134	129
<i>RESEARCH SET ASIDE ENDORSEMENT</i>				22	13	0
PRINCIPAL EFFORT LICENSE	735	713	690	655	615	593
<i>LOBSTER ENDORSEMENT</i>	38	37	36	30	27	21
<i>NON-LOBSTER CRUSTACEAN ENDORSEMENT</i>	22	28	33	35	36	33
<i>QUAHOG ENDORSEMENT</i>	450	422	398	376	347	340
<i>RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT</i>	248	258	266	262	258	251
<i>NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT</i>	127	127	131	135	133	130
<i>SOFTSHELLED CLAM ENDORSEMENT</i>	304	284	256	235	204	194
<i>WHELK ENDORSEMENT</i>	0	0	146	118	79	62
<i>DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT</i>	14	16	13	13	12	11
<i>MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT</i>	5	9	9	8	9	7
<i>PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT</i>	5	7	8	7	6	5
<i>OTHER SHELLFISH ENDORSEMENT (replaces non-quahog endorsement)</i>	265	249	225	211	186	177
<i>RESEARCH SET ASIDE ENDORSEMENT</i>	0	0	0	3	1	0
COMMERICAL FISHING LICENSE	449	394	398	420	404	412
<i>LOBSTER ENDORSEMENT</i>	19	17	16	15	14	14
<i>NON-LOBSTER CRUSTACEAN ENDORSEMENT</i>	119	120	114	100	101	95
<i>QUAHOG ENDORSEMENT</i>	127	141	158	165	181	189
<i>RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT</i>	18	0	0	0	0	0
<i>NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT</i>	273	238	252	256	240	243
<i>SOFTSHELLED CLAM ENDORSEMENT</i>	191	175	174	163	155	148
<i>WHELK ENDORSMENT</i>	0	0	109	92	75	65
<i>DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT</i>	22	20	16	14	16	16
<i>MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT</i>	39	31	40	46	39	39
<i>PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT</i>	28	28	42	40	42	43
<i>OTHER SHELLFISH ENDORSEMENT (replaces non-quahog endorsement)</i>	206	201	171	160	149	152
<i>RESEARCH SET ASIDE ENDORSEMENT</i>	0	0	0	10	6	0
OVER 65 SHELLFISH LICENSE	201	217	240	268	289	309
STUDENT SHELLFISH LICENSE	49	55	49	48	47	37

Table 2a. Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2015 (through July).

Month/Species	Black Sea Bass	Scup General Category	Striped Bass General Category	Summer Flounder w/out Exemption Certificate	Summer Flounder w/ Exemption Certificate	Tautog
January	750/day (1/1) 500/day (1/30)	50,000/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	300/day (1/1) 200/day (1/8)	CLOSED (1/1)
February	500/day 250/day (2/10)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	200/day 2,000/wk or 200/day (2/2)	CLOSED
March	250/day 100/day (3/17)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	2,000/wk or 200/day	CLOSED
April	100/day CLOSED (4/13)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day 100/day (4/20)	2,000/wk or 200/day 1,500/wk or 200/day (4/6) 1,000/wk or 100/day (4/20)	CLOSED 10 fish (4/15)
May	50/day (5/1)	10,000/wk	CLOSED	100/day	100/day	10 fish CLOSED (5/20)
June	50/day CLOSED (6/3)	10,000/wk	CLOSED 5 fish (6/8) CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out CLOSED (6/27)	100/day	700/wk or 100/day	CLOSED
July	50/day (7/1) CLOSED (7/15)	10,000/wk 5,000/wk (7/5) 2,500/wk (7/12)	CLOSED	100/day 50/day (7/27)	700/wk or 100/day 350/wk or 50/day (7/27)	CLOSED
Days in Season	334	365	207	365	365	171
Days Closed	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP

Table 2a. (continued) Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2015.

2015 COMMERCIAL SEASONS				
Black Sea Bass	Scup ⁺ General Category	Striped Bass ⁺ General Category	Summer Flounder	Tautog
Jan. 1 - April 30 May 1 - June 30 July 1 - July 31 Sept. 1 - Oct. 31 Nov. 1 - Dec. 31	Jan. 1 - April 30 ^F May 1 - Sept. 20 Sept. 21 - Oct. 31 Nov. 1 - Dec. 31 ^F	June 8 - Aug. 31* Sept. 8 - Dec. 31*	Jan. 1 - April 30 May 1 - Sept. 15 Sept. 16 - Dec. 31	April 15 - May 31 Aug. 1 - Sept. 15 Oct. 15 - Dec. 31
2015 COMMERCIAL QUOTAS				
Black Sea Bass	Scup General Category	Striped Bass General Category	Summer Flounder	Tautog
238,783	1,858,971	111,459	1,719,629	51,348

+ Floating Fish Trap management had open seasons and no possession limit

^F Federal coastwide quota

* Closed Fridays and Saturdays

Table 2b. Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2014.

Month/Species	Black Sea Bass	Scup General Category	Striped Bass General Category	Summer Flounder w/out Exemption Certificate	Summer Flounder w/ Exemption Certificate	Tautog
January	750/day (1/1) 500/day (1/30)	50,000/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	300/day (1/1) 200/day (1/8)	CLOSED (1/1)
February	500/day 250/day (2/10)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	200/day 2,000/wk or 200/day (2/2)	CLOSED
March	250/day 100/day (3/17)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	200/day 2,000/wk or 200/day	CLOSED
April	100/day CLOSED (4/13)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day 100/day (4/20)	2,000/wk or 200/day 1,500/wk or 200/day (4/6) 1,000/wk or 100/day (4/20)	CLOSED 10 fish (4/15)
May	50/day (5/1)	10,000/wk (5/1)	CLOSED	100/day	100/day	10 fish CLOSED (5/20)
June	50/day CLOSED (6/3)	10,000/wk	CLOSED 5 fish (6/8) CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out CLOSED (6/29)	100/day	700/wk or 100/day (6/1)	CLOSED
July	50/day (7/1) CLOSED (7/15)	10,000/wk	CLOSED	100/day	700/wk or 100/day	CLOSED
August	CLOSED	10,000/wk	CLOSED	100/day 50/day (8/26)	700/wk or 100/day 50/day (8/26)	10 fish (8/1)
September	50/day (9/1) CLOSED (9/11)	10,000/wk	CLOSED 5 fish (9/8) CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out	50/day 200/day (9/16) 150/day (9/28)	50/day 200/day (9/16) 150/day (9/28)	10 fish CLOSED (9/16)
October	CLOSED	10,000/wk	5 fish/day CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out CLOSED (10/7) 5 fish/day (10/19) CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out	150/day 100/day (10/6)	150/day 100/day (10/6)	CLOSED 10 fish (10/15)
November	50/day (11/1) CLOSED (11/13)	18,000/day (11/1)	5 fish/day CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out	100/day 200/day (11/28)	100/day (11/1) 300/day (11/28)	10 fish CLOSED (11/11)
December	CLOSED	18,000/day	5 fish/day CLOSED Fri/Sat thru-out	200/day CLOSED (12/26)	300/day 500/day (12/19) CLOSED (12/26)	CLOSED
Days in Season	334	365	200	365	365	171
Days Closed	163	0	78	6	6	62

Table 2b. (continued) Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2014.

2014 COMMERCIAL SEASONS				
Black Sea Bass	Scup General Category	Striped Bass General Category	Summer Flounder	Tautog
Jan. 1 - April 30	Jan. 1 - April 30 ^F	June 8 - Aug. 31 [*]	Jan. 1 - April 30	April 15 - May 31
May 1 - June 30	May 1 - Sept. 20	Sept. 8 - Dec. 31 [*]	May 1 - Sept. 15	Aug 1 - Sept. 15
July 1 - July 31	Sept. 21 - Oct. 31		Sept. 16 - Dec. 31	Oct. 15- Dec. 31
Sept. 1 - Oct. 31	Nov. 1 - Dec. 31 ^F			
Nov. 1 - Dec. 31				
2014 COMMERCIAL QUOTAS				
Black Sea Bass	Scup General Category	Striped Bass General Category	Summer Flounder	Tautog
238,700	1,921,327	146,377	1,648,193	49,474

+ Floating Fish Trap management had open seasons and no possession limit

^F Federal coastwide quota

* Closed Fridays and Saturdays

Table 3. The 2016 coastwide commercial quotas approved by the ASMFC and MAFMC in comparison to 2015. The limits for 2016 were approved by ASMFC and the MAFMC in August 2015.

Species	2015	2016
Scup	21.23	20.47
Summer Flounder	11.07	8.12
Black Sea Bass	2.24	2.24
Bluefish	5.24	3.51*

*Based on approved ABC of 19.45 million pounds and SSC and MC recommendations as presented at August 2015 MAFMC meeting.

Table 4. Summary of actions to date for the 2015 RI commercial menhaden fishery.

Date	Action	Area	Reason
5/21/15	OPEN	NB Management Area	Biomass threshold
5/28/15	CLOSED	State waters outside NB Management Area	State quota fully harvested
5/29/15	OPEN	State waters outside NB Management Area	RI opted into Episodic Event set aside program
6/28/15	CLOSED	NB Management Area	Biomass threshold
7/27/15	OPEN	NB Management Area	Biomass threshold
8/9/15	CLOSED	NB Management Area	Biomass threshold

Plan approved:

 Jason McNamee, Chief
 Division of Fish and Wildlife
 Office of Marine Resource Management

 Date