

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES



**2018 Finfish Sector Management Plan**

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## INTRODUCTION

This plan is developed and updated annually pursuant to RI Gen. Law 20-2.1-9(5), which states that the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) develop conservation and management plans in support of regulations that may restrict the issuance of commercial fishing licenses. Such restrictions were clearly contemplated by the Rhode Island General Assembly as a means to limit fishing effort and to rebuild depleted fishery resources. As articulated in statute, these plans shall focus on fishery resources with the greatest value to the state.

The primary goal for quota-managed fisheries is to maintain open seasons with economically viable possession limits while minimizing regulatory discards, avoiding harvest overages, maximizing harvest opportunities, and assuring equitable access to the fishery. However, due to the multi-species nature of the commercial fishing industry, increased effort can result in shorter seasons and higher discards for many species. Information contained in this plan seeks to aid in understanding if management goals are being realized under existing management.

To meet the purposes of the act, the commercial licensing program created two licensing endorsement categories for the commercial finfish fishery: *Restricted Finfish* and *Non-Restricted Finfish*.

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. At this time, five (5) finfish species are included in the restricted category: striped bass, scup (for part of the year), summer flounder, black sea bass, and tautog. Two other species, menhaden and monkfish, have been considered for inclusion in this category, however restrictions on effort were achieved through other methods including gear endorsements (menhaden) and management plan changes (monkfish). Species included in the *non-restricted* category include all species of regulated finfish not included in the restricted category. Entry into this endorsement category is currently open to all RI residents.

Within each endorsement category is an *exit/entry ratio*, or the number of new individual license opportunities provided for each license not renewed. Exit/entry ratios are reviewed annually by the Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) and Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC), and presented for public comment at a public hearing in accordance with the requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act (RIGL Chapter 42-35). Determining the level of fishing effort, the impacts to the resource that a particular license type collectively represents, and thus determining the number of licenses desired in a given fishery as a means to limit such effort, is a primary goal of the licensing program.

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## **RESTRICTED FINFISH**

### **BLACK SEA BASS**

**Stock Status:** The black sea bass stock is no longer considered overfished and overfishing is not occurring based upon the 2016 benchmark stock assessment that uses a forward projection statistical catch-at-age model called ASAP. In 2015, the terminal year of the assessment, Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) was estimated to be 48.9 million pounds, a value above the target of 21.3 million pounds. Fishing mortality (F) was estimated to be 0.27, well below the target of 0.36.

**Management Program:** The black sea bass stock is managed jointly by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). Rhode Island's share of the commercial coastwide quota is 11%. Through advice from the RIMFC and industry, DEM adopted regulations to allocate the RI quota into five seasonal sub-periods. The regulations also specified possession limits within each season. Current commercial regulations are as follows:

Min. Size	Target Allocation	Season	Target Allocation (lbs)	Possession Limit (lbs/vsl)	Days Closed
11"	25%	Jan. 1 – April 30	113,867	750/week	Open 7 Days
	25%	May 1 – June 30	115,506	50/day	Friday
	19.5%	July 1 – July 31	90,286	50/day	Friday
	0%	Aug. 1 – Sept. 14	0	CLOSED	Closed 7 Days
	19.5%	Sept. 15 – Oct. 31	81,946	50/day	Friday
	11%	Nov. 1 – Dec. 31	51,277	100/day	Open 7 Days

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** The coastwide quota for 2018 has been reviewed by the MAFMC's SSC and is anticipated to be 8.94 million pounds, a reduction of 15% from 2017. The first sub-period which opened on January 1 experienced both decreases and increases in the weekly possession limit in order to fully harvest the quota, with no early closures. The sub-period opening on May 1 closed early on June 9, however the sub-period beginning on July 1 opened 2 days early due to a quota underage of ~12,000 pounds in the previous sub-period. The sub-period beginning on July 1 closed early on July 20.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Maintain effort at or below current levels in 2018 and maintain as a restricted species.

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## **SCUP**

**Stock Status:** The scup stock is not considered overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The scup stock is assessed using a statistical catch-at-age model. An update

assessment was undertaken in 2017 and this model indicated that the 2016 SSB level for the scup stock is 397 million pounds, well above the SSB target of 192 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  $F40\% = F_{msy} = 0.220$ . The most recent terminal year reference point from the stock assessment update for scup concluded that overfishing was not occurring with  $F2016 = 0.139$ .

**Management Program:** Regional management of scup is the shared responsibility of the MAFMC and ASMFC. The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for scup sets annual coast-wide quota specifications, of which RI receives 56.19% divided into three sub-periods. During the two winter sub-periods (January – April; November – December), the quota is available coast-wide and is managed through daily possession limits. The federal period structure will change in 2018, and Winter 2 will begin in October. The period allocations do not change even though the period length has changed. In RI, scup is classified as a non-restricted species during the two federal winter sub-periods, whereas in the summer it is classified as a restricted species. 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 (i.e., gear types other than floating fish traps) allocation (40%) and a floating fish trap allocation (60%), with allocations based on historical landings. To maintain an open season throughout the summer, floating fish trap allocation is routinely transferred to the general category fishery dependent upon available remaining quota. Current commercial regulations are as follows:

Min. size	Seasons	Sub-periods	Quota		Starting Poss. limit
9"	Winter I: (1/1 – 4/30)		Coastwide		50,000 lbs/vsl/day
	Summer: (5/1 – 10/31)	Gen. Cat. Summer: (5/1 – 9/17)	40% of sub-period quota	2/3 of Gen. Cat. quota	10,000 lbs/vsl/wk
		Gen. Cat. Fall: (9/18 – 10/31)		1/3 of Gen. Cat. quota	10,000 lbs/vsl/wk
		FFT: (5/1 – 10/31)	60% of sub-period quota		Unlimited
	Winter II: (11/1 – 12/31)		Coastwide		2,000/18,000 lbs/vsl/day*

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** The floating fish trap sector has harvested 9% of its quota so far in 2017. To date, 62% of the floating fish trap quota has been transferred in to the general category fishery.

The coastwide quota for 2018 has been reviewed by the MAFMC’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and is anticipated to be 27 million pounds, an increase of 22.5% from 2017. To date, no early closures or possession limit changes have been implemented indicating current management measures are effective (Table 2).

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Recommend maintaining effort in 2018 at current levels or allowing for small increases in effort given good stock status and increasing quotas during the summer state quota period. This species should be maintained at its current restricted category in the state allocated summer period and non-restricted category during the winter federal sub periods.

## STRIPED BASS

**Stock Status:** The most recent Atlantic striped bass stock assessment update conducted in 2016 showed that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (ASMFC 2016). The assessment update estimated SSB in 2015 to be 129 million pounds, above the threshold and below the target, 127 million pounds and 159 million pounds respectively. Total F was estimated to be  $F=0.16$ , between the threshold and target levels,  $F=0.22$  and  $F=0.18$  respectively. The next benchmark stock assessment is scheduled to be peer reviewed at the end of 2018.

**Management Program:** Striped bass are managed by ASMFC through Amendment 6 to the interstate FMP, which requires possession limits for the recreational fishery, state quotas for the commercial fishery, and minimum sizes for both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

In Rhode Island state waters, regulations include minimum sizes, possession limits, gear and area restrictions, seasons, and quotas. The commercial quota is divided between two sectors, floating traps (39%) and a general category (61%). The general category quota is then divided into two sub-periods, where the first sub-period is allocated 70% and the second sub-period is allocated the remaining 30% of the general category quota. Current commercial regulations are as follows:

Commercial General Category	Min. Size	Season	Allocation	Sub-allocation	Possession Limit
Commercial General Category	34"	May 28 – Aug. 31	61%	70%	5 fish/day
		Sept. 10 – Dec. 31		30%	5 fish/day
Commercial Floating Fish Traps	26"	April 1 – Dec. 31	39%	N/A	Unlimited

Other key aspects of the current regulations include Friday and Saturday closures for the general category fishery, and the ability for DEM to transfer unused floating fish trap quota into the general category beginning on October 15 of each year. This transfer provision has allowed for the full harvest of the RI striped bass quota each year.

**Performance of Fishery and Quota:** The RI commercial striped bass quota for the general category in 2018 is 111,459 pounds, which is split between two sub-periods with 70% allocated to the first sub-period and 30% to the second. As of the writing of this plan, the first sub-period quota was fully harvested in 29 days with an average of 9,087 pounds. The first sub-period was originally closed after 25 fishing days as it was projected that the quota would be reached. Due to lower than average daily landings, the last few days the fishery was open, there was an underage of ~12,000 pounds. As a result, the fishery was re-opened for four additional days. During these four days, daily landing rates were more than double what was anticipated resulting in the aforementioned overage. The second sub-period has ~24,000 pounds available for harvest.

The floating fish trap quota is 70,113 pounds in 2018, minus any overages that may occur in 2017. As of the writing of this report, 43% of the floating fish trap quota has been harvested with ~40,000 pounds remaining.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Maintain 2018 effort at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

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## SUMMER FLOUNDER

**Stock Status:** In 2016, 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 (ASAP), indicated that the summer flounder resource is not overfished but is experiencing overfishing relative to the established biological reference points in 2015. 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 2015 was estimated to be 79.90 million lbs. This is 42% below the SSBtarget = 137.55 million lbs. The overfishing definition for the summer flounder stock is defined as  $F_{msy} = 0.31$ . The 2015 fishing mortality rate estimate ( $F_{2015} = 0.39$ ) is above the fishing mortality reference point. Fishing mortality in 2015 may have been higher, as a retrospective analysis indicated that the current assessment method tends to underestimate F in recent years. A data update done in 2017 did not indicate any improvement in stock status.

**Management Program:** Regional management of summer flounder is the shared responsibility of the MAFMC and ASMFC. In state waters, DEM regulations provide a framework to manage the annual summer flounder quota allocated to RI through possession limits and seasons. Current commercial regulations are as follows:

Min. size	Target Allocation	Sub-period	Starting Poss. Limit (lbs/vsl/day)	Starting Aggregate Poss. Limit (lbs/vsl)	Days Closed
14"	54%	Winter (1/1 – 4/30)	200	1,300/bi-week	Open 7 days
	35%	Summer (5/1 – 9/15)	50	200/week	Fri./Sat./Sun.
	11%	Fall (9/16 – 12/31)	100	No agg. program	Open 7 days

**Performance of Fishery and Quota:** The coastwide quota for 2018 has been reviewed by the MAFMC’s SSC and is anticipated to be 11.05 million pounds, an increase of 17% from 2017. To date, no early closures or possession limit changes have been implemented indicating current management measures are effective (Table 2).

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Due to the continued low quota, it is recommended that effort remain at or below current levels. This species should be maintained as a restricted category species.

## 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. The benchmark assessment was then updated in 2016 (approved for management use in February 2017). Rhode Island (RI) is in a northern region with Massachusetts (MARI). The assessment results indicate in the MARI region the stock is not overfished as spawning stock biomass is at 2,196 metric tons (mt), which is above the threshold of 2,004 mt, but under the target of 2,684 mt. Additionally, overfishing is not occurring; currently the fishing mortality 3 year average is 0.23, below both the target (0.28) and the threshold (0.49).

RI has been proactive in its management of tautog, making management adjustments through the 2000s even with no mandate to do so. Despite these reduction measures, the tautog stock continues to be subject of high recreational landings in the fall months, and is not showing much in the way of rebuilding. Commercial landings have not risen appreciably since plan implementation in RI due to the constraint of a quota.

**Management Program:** 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. Although not specifically required by the FMP, RI established a commercial quota, which in part achieves the fishing mortality targets required by the FMP. The state commercial quota has not increased in several years, and is managed through a combination of seasons, quotas, and possession limits. In 2016, the commercial quota of 51,348 pounds was divided equally into three seasons with a daily possession limit of 10 fish. In 2017, the distribution of the quota was changed, increasing the spring and fall seasons while reducing the summer, current commercial regulations are as follows:

Min. Size	Target Allocation	Sub-period	Target Allocation (lbs)	Possession Limit
16"	40%	April 15 – May 31	20,539	10 fish/day
	20%	Aug. 1 – Sept. 15	10,270	10 fish/day
	40%	Sept. 16 – Dec. 31	20,539	10 fish/day

**Performance of Fishery and Quota:** The state quota for 2018 is anticipated to be 51,348 pounds (minus any 2017 overages), consistent with 2017. In order to keep the tautog fishery open throughout each of the defined seasons, a substantial increase in the quota would be needed. Such an increase is not realistic due to the stock status. Spring is typically the hardest season to manage with early season closures, and high discard mortality. However, a switch in period allocations for the 2017 fishing year was made (an additional 3,432lbs was added) the spring season gained an additional 10 days before closing in 2017. There was an overage of 1,673lbs in 2017 in this spring sub season.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Maintain effort in 2018 at or below current levels and maintain as a restricted species.

## **LICENSING RECOMMENDATIONS- RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT**

In 2015, due to concerns about the ageing commercial fishing population, a 2:1 exit/entry ratio for the restricted finfish endorsement was changed to 1:1 to provide for a limited increase of new licenses to replace effort from those licenses not renewed. This ratio was adopted to be reflective of both current fishing effort, and assuming that latent effort was accounted for with the activity requirement of the license. Referring to Table 1, the number of licenses eligible to harvest restricted finfish has remained relatively stable in the last three years with 1055 licenses issued in 2015, 1054 in 2016 and 1055 in 2017. This indicates that the recommendation to increase the number of restricted finfish licenses issued annually has achieved the desired effect of maintaining consistent effort in the fishery.

**Marine Fisheries Licensing Recommendation:** In 2017, 1,055 licenses were issued with the ability to harvest restricted finfish in state waters (Table 1). Between 2016 and 2017, 16 restricted finfish licenses were not renewed (12 Multipurpose, 4 Principal Effort Licenses). Only 2 of these retired licenses had landings of restricted finfish in the prior year. Under the current exit/entry ratio regulations 18 PEL restricted finfish endorsements would be issued for 2018. It is anticipated that the 2018 fishery specifications for quota managed species (restricted finfish) will increase slightly or remain level. Marine Fisheries recommends maintaining effort at current levels by maintaining the 1:1 exit/entry ratio for the Principal Effort License (PEL) restricted finfish endorsement.

**RI Marine Fisheries Council:** The IAC met on August 10, and the Council met on October 2. No recommendations were offered for 2018 for any changes with the *Restricted Finfish endorsement* for 2018.

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## **NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH**

### **BLUEFISH**

**Stock Status:** A benchmark stock assessment for bluefish completed in 2015 indicates that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2015). The assessment adopted new spawning potential ratio-based (SPR-based) reference points instead of using maximum sustainable yield-based (MSY-based) reference points as was used in previous assessments. This was due to the fact that there is a lack of information available regarding recruitment at smaller stock sizes, thus the stock-recruitment relationship is poorly defined. The assessment estimated spawning stock biomass in 2014, the terminal year of the assessment, to be 191 million pounds, a level above the SSB threshold but below the SSB target, 191 million and 223 million pounds respectively. The assessment also estimated fishing mortality in 2014 to be 0.157, well below the fishing mortality threshold ( $F_{MSY\ PROXY} = F_{35\%SPR} = 0.19$ ).

**Management Program:** Regional management of bluefish is the shared responsibility of the ASMFC and MAFMC through Amendment 1 to the Bluefish FMP. Amendment 1 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. RI receives 6.8% of the coastwide bluefish commercial allocation and uses a minimum size limit, seasons, and possession limits to control harvest levels throughout the year. Current commercial regulations are as follows:

Min. Size	Sub-period	2018 Projected Allocation (lbs)	Possession Limit (lbs/vsl/wk)
12"	Jan. 1 – April 30	17,154	500
	May 1 – Nov. 11	529,585	6000
	Nov. 12 – Dec. 31	34,824	500

**Performance of Fishery and Quota:** In 2017 RI's commercial bluefish quota is 581,563 pounds. During the first sub-period in 2017, Marine Fisheries made several possession limit adjustments to maximize harvest and avoid going over the projected allocation. An underage of 5,839 pounds for the first sub-period was carried over into the second sub-period which is still in progress as of this report writing. The second sub-period currently has ~470,000 pounds remaining and due to lower than expected catch rates, Marine Fisheries was able to raise the weekly possession limit at the end of May to 10,000 pounds/vessel/week and again at the end of July to 15,000 pounds/vessel/week. The most recent ASMFC FMP review, detailing the 2014 and 2015 fishing years for the Atlantic coast, can be found on the ASMFC website (<http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/57b231d72016BluefishFMPReview.pdf>).

RI's initial commercial bluefish quota for 2018 is 493,160 pounds, a 19% increase from the initial 2017 quota and a 15% decrease from the final 2017 quota. The initial quota allocation for 2018 is subject to change depending on the performance of the recreational fishery in 2017 and any potential transfers that may occur from the recreational sector to the commercial sector.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Hold a public workshop and public hearing to discuss the efficacy of the 2017 management of bluefish and seek additional input on bluefish management for 2018 that would continue to control harvest through size limits, possession limits, and/or seasons. In the future, if effort increases and/or the commercial quota decreases, Marine Fisheries will re-assess whether bluefish needs to be placed in to the restricted species category.

## COD

**Stock Status:** The 2015 George's Bank (GB) Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) operational assessment was not accepted by the peer review panel. Therefore, the most recent biological reference points (BRPs) are from the SAW 55 benchmark assessment which shows historically low biomass (NEFSC 2013). SAW 55 estimated total biomass (SSB2011) at 13,216 mt; fishing mortality (F2011) at 0.43; the biomass threshold of  $\frac{1}{2}$  Bmsy at 93,268 mt; and the fishing mortality target Fmsy proxy (F40%) at 0.18. The 2015 peer review concluded that the stock remains overfished based on the benchmark formulation used in SAW 55 (SSB2011 = 13,216 mt <  $\frac{1}{2}$  SSBmsy = 93,268); however, overfishing status is considered unknown.

**Management Program:** Atlantic cod are managed under the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Northeast Multispecies FMP. RI State waters are considered part of the GB cod stock. The 2017 FY Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is unchanged from the 2016 FY at 730 mt (1,609,374 lbs). In an effort to satisfy statutory requirements to complement federal fishery management plans, RI has adopted a minimum size limit, daily possession limit, and state quota set at 1% of the GB ACL (equal to 16,093 lbs for the 2017 FY). Current management is as follows:

Min. Size	Season	Possession Limit (lbs/vsl/day)
22"	May 1 – April 30	1,000

**Performance of Fishery and Quota:** The state quota for cod has not been met since its inception in 2009. Between the 2009 and 2016 FYs total state-water landings have ranged from 5,233 lbs to 31,868 lbs. State-water landings for RI during the 2016 fishing year totaled 13,507 lbs, which is 84% of the RI state-water quota.

Cod abundance in state waters is ephemeral and potential landings for a given year cannot be accurately projected. This fishery still appears to be resource limited; however, given the dramatic reduction in ACL and associated the state water quota (62% reduction from 2015 FY) landings could approach the 2017 FY quota.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Allow effort to increase above current levels and maintain in the non-restricted species category.

## ATLANTIC HERRING

**Stock Status:** The latest stock assessment update, conducted by the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop in 2015, indicates Atlantic herring are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Spawning stock biomass in 2014 is estimated at 623,000 mt, well above the SSB threshold and target of 155,573 mt (342 million pounds) and 311,145 mt (685 million pounds), respectively. Current fishing mortality is estimated at 0.16, below the fishing mortality threshold of 0.24.

**Management Program:** Atlantic Herring is a jointly managed species by both ASMFC and NOAA Fisheries. Annual specifications are calculated and regional ACLs (quotas) are broken out into fishing areas. Area 2 encompasses Southern New England (SNE) waters including RI state waters. The 2017 Atlantic Herring quota for area 2 was 31,227 metric tons. River herring bycatch is a concern within the Atlantic herring fishery and also has regional ACLs (catch caps) that are set by fishing area. When the catch cap for river herring is reached in any given area the Atlantic herring fishery closes until the next fishing year. The 2017 area 2 river herring catch cap was set at 130 metric tons.

At the state level, all vessels participating in the state waters Atlantic herring fishery to acquire a permit from Marine Fisheries. In 2017 there were 20 participating vessels.

Vessels must provide contact information in the form of an email address to receive messages warning of aggregations of river herring that should be avoided. RI participates in a river herring avoidance program administered by MADMF that monitors river herring bycatch by observing catch at shore side facilities. Vessel captains indicate where the catch originated from on a grid of the SNE fishing area and the data is used to create charts indicating areas where river herring has been observed in the catch. If any given area has been observed to have greater than 0.6 % river herring bycatch a warning is issued to the fleet to alert them to move on from that area.

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** A state quota does not exist. In 2016 9,538,587 pounds of Atlantic herring was landed in RI worth \$1,525,423.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Recommend continuing the current permitting program and participation in the MADMF river herring avoidance program.

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## MENHADEN

**Stock Status:** The ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee last assessed the menhaden stock in 2015. The population is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring relative to the new maximum spawning potential (MSP) reference points. Full fishing mortality in 2013 was estimated at  $F_{2013}=0.22$ , a level that is below both the threshold and target levels,  $F_{15\%MSP}=1.26$  and  $F_{30\%MSP}=0.38$  respectively (ASMFC, 2015a).

Two additional items being worked on for Atlantic menhaden include a socioeconomic study on the commercial bait and reduction fisheries as well as the development of ecosystem based reference points. The socioeconomic study was released in the summer of 2017 ([http://www.asmf.org/uploads/file/5952c992ASMFC\\_MenhadenSocioeconomicReport\\_June2017.pdf](http://www.asmf.org/uploads/file/5952c992ASMFC_MenhadenSocioeconomicReport_June2017.pdf)). The Biological Ecological Reference Point (BERP) working group has been tasked with developing ecosystem based reference points for Atlantic menhaden and anticipates they will be ready in 2019. Although the BERP will not be completed with this task in time for the finalization of Amendment 3, and amendment that is currently in development that will revisit BRPs and quota allocation, the amendment may provide an option for the board to consider these reference points for management use when they do become available.

**Management Program:** Menhaden are managed in state waters by the ASMFC under Amendment 2 to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Menhaden. The Atlantic menhaden management board sets an annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for menhaden which is then allocated to the Atlantic coast jurisdictions based on landings history. The RI menhaden allocation is 0.02% of the overall TAC. Once the RI allocation is met, the landing of menhaden in RI is prohibited, except for non-directed fisheries which have a

bycatch allowance of 6,000 pounds/vessel/day, or 12,000 pounds/vessel/day if two licensed fishermen are on board the vessel. A TAC set-aside of 1% is used each year by states in the New England region for episodic events, or periods of time when large amounts of biomass are present. RI participates in the episodic event set-aside annually which allows RI state waters to re-open to the landing of menhaden until the set-aside is used up or the program ends.

In addition to the ASMFC management of menhaden, Narragansett Bay in its entirety is designated a Menhaden Management Area through RI statute, which provides DEM the ability to manage menhaden through additional management measures afforded only to those areas with management area status. These measures include areas permanently closed to purse seining (The Providence River and Greenwich Bay), a daily possession limit of 120,000 pounds/vessel, net size certification, vessel capacity restrictions, call-in requirements to both Marine Fisheries and the Division of Law Enforcement (DLE), a threshold amount of fish that needs to be present in Narragansett Bay before the commercial bait fishery can begin (2 million pounds), an overall cap on the amount of fish that could be removed from the Bay (50% of the standing stock in the Bay), and a threshold amount of fish that needs to be present for the commercial bait fishery to remain open (1.5 million pounds). Once the biomass drops below 1.5 million pounds, the commercial bait fishery in the Narragansett Bay Management Area closes. Biomass levels in the menhaden Management Area are monitored on a weekly or bi-weekly basis through a contractor spotter pilot who provides Marine Fisheries with school counts and an estimate of pounds in the management area. A depletion model for open systems (Gibson 2007) uses these spotter pilot estimates, commercial bait landings, and biological information to provide an overall estimate of biomass present in the management area. These model derived estimates are what is used to determine if the fishery can open or must close based on the thresholds above.

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** In 2017, RI’s commercial menhaden quota is 78,195 pounds and has been fully harvested. RI also participated in the Episodic event set-aside in 2017 until the program closed. The table below details the events that have occurred for the commercial menhaden fishery in RI thus far in 2017.

RI’s initial commercial menhaden quota for 2018 is 78,195 pounds, the same as 2017, minus any overages that occur. The initial quota allocation for 2018 is subject to change depending on the timeline and outcome of Draft Amendment 3, expected to go to public comment in the Fall of 2017.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Reason</b>
5/14/17	CLOSED* (Landing & Possession)	All State waters	State quota fully harvested
5/21/16	OPEN (Landing & Possession)	All State waters	Biomass Threshold and RI opted into Episodic Event set aside program

7/3/17	CLOSED* (Landing Only)	All State Waters	Episodic Event set aside program ended
7/13/17	CLOSED (Landing & Possession)	All State Waters	Biomass Threshold

\* Closed to the landing of menhaden except for non-directed gear types who have a bycatch allowance.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Maintain effort at or below current levels in 2018 and maintain as a non-restricted species. In the future, if existing latent effort should become active, consider using the existing purse seine endorsement control date to restrict effort, or move menhaden into the restricted finfish category.

## MONKFISH

**Stock Status:** The federal monkfish (*Lophius americanus*) fishery is jointly managed by the NEFMC and MAFMC, with the NEFMC having the administrative lead. The fishery is managed as two stocks, with RI State waters considered part of the Southern Fishery Management Area (SMA) stock.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted an operational assessment in 2016 (Richards, 2016), but due to uncertainty of growth rates the SCALE model could not be updated in this assessment. An alternative method to advise catch limits was developed, which calculates the proportional rate of change in smoothed survey indices over the most recent 3 years to revise catch limits. Since the SCALE model could not be updated for the 2016 assessment, updated BRPs and stock status could not be updated. Thus, the most recent BRPs are from the 2013 operational assessment, which showed: fishing mortality (F) was 0.11; updated Fthreshold was 0.37; and the corrected total biomass (B) estimate of 88,806 mt was above both Btarget of 71,667 mt (Bmsy proxy) and the 2013 corrected Bthreshold of 23,204mt (1/2\*Btarget). The 2013 BRPs indicated monkfish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring in the SFMA; however, high levels of uncertainty in the BRPs due to gaps in the input data and a persistent retrospective pattern that underestimates F and overestimates B in each area.

**Management Program:** 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 FMP, RI has adopted a minimum size limit, daily possession limit, and state quota on monkfish harvested in state waters.

The RI state-water quota is set at 3% of the SMA Total Allowable Landings (TAL) (595,976 lbs whole weight) with a possession limit reduction to 50 lbs tail weight when state-water landings reach 2% of the SMA TAL (397,317 lbs whole weight). In July

2017, management was amended to update the daily possession limit. Current management is as follows:

Min. Size	Season	Possession Limit (lbs/vsl/day)
17"	May 1 – April 30	700 tail/3,027 whole

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** RI state-water landings for the 2016 FY were 260,316 lbs, representing ~66% of the state possession limit reduction threshold (2% SMA TAL) and 44% of the state quota (3% SMA TAL).

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** 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. Maintain in the non-restricted species category.

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## WINTER FLOUNDER

**Stock Status:** The 2015 SNE/MA stock assessment update indicates the stock is overfished, but overfishing is not occurring. Spawning stock biomass in 2014 was estimated to be 13.6 million pounds which is 23% of the biomass target (59.4 million pounds). Fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.16 which is 49% of the overfishing threshold. Since 1981, SNE/MA recruitment has been declining, and 2013 is the lowest in the time series which is approximately 4% of the estimated recruitment in 1981 (the highest in the time series). While the 2014 SNE/MA recruitment estimate increased slightly, overall stock productivity continues to decline. The stock did not meet its rebuilding target in 2014, in part due to low recruitment. In 2014, NOAA Fisheries partially implemented Framework Adjustment 50 to revise the rebuilding end date to 2023. Heavy fishing pressure, habitat degradation, and low genetic variability hinder winter flounder recovery.

**Management Program:** The NEFMC manages the winter flounder resource through the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) FMP. Under the NEFMC Framework 50 for groundfish for the 2018 fishing year, harvest of winter flounder is allowed in the federal SNE/MA stock management area, and federally permitted vessels participating in a sector are allowed to fish with no limit until they reach their sector allowable catch limit. Federally permitted vessels in the “common pool” are currently restricted to a possession limit of 2,000 lb/vsl/day, or 4,000 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.

At the state level, ASMFC manages the inshore winter flounder stocks through Addendum I to Amendment 1 to the interstate FMP, which includes minimum size, daily possession limits, mesh size restrictions, and areas closed to harvest. Current state



regulations including a commercial possession limit of 50 lbs/vsl/day and areas within state waters closed to harvest, including Point Judith Pond, the Harbor of Refuge, Potters Pond, and Narragansett Bay north of the Colregs line, which aim to protect a recovery of the population in these areas due to the SNE closure (Gibson 2010). In order to maintain a stream of commercial landings for biological data collection used in the stock assessment, RI adopted the 50 pound daily possession limit all state waters. Recreational management measures for winter flounder also remain in place in an effort to greatly reduce F, including a minimum size of 12 inches, daily possession limit of 2 fish / person, and season from March 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>

**Performance of Fishery and Quotas:** A state quota has not existed since 2006. In 2016 299,896 pounds of winter flounder was landed in RI worth \$818,165.

**Marine Fisheries Management Recommendation:** Recommend considering changes in management to allow more liberal commercial possession limit in state waters. Any changes in state waters management would need approval of the ASMFC Winter Flounder Management Board.

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## **LICENSING RECOMMENDATIONS -** **NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT**

**Division Recommendations:** In 2017 1,201 licenses were issued with the ability to harvest non-restricted finfish in state waters (Table 1). Between 2016 and 2017 there was a net gain of 1 license issued for non-restricted finfish (+5 Commercial Fishing Licenses, -12 Multipurpose, +7 Principal Effort Licenses). For the 2018 fishing season, Marine Fisheries recommends maintaining open entry into the non-restricted license endorsement category.

**IAC/RI Marine Fisheries Council:** This section to be completed and plan finalized upon inclusion of IAC/Council recommendations: IAC meeting tentative date August 10; Hearing tentative date Sept 18-19; Council meeting date Oct. 2.

**RI Marine Fisheries Council:** The IAC met on August 10, and the Council met on October 2. No recommendations were offered for 2018 for any changes with the *Non-Restricted Finfish endorsement* for 2018.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Historical commercial license counts.

License Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>MULTI-PURPOSE LICENSE</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>789</b>
GILLNET ENDORSEMENT	227	221	218	218	214
DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT	241	236	236	245	242
MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT	132	133	137	139	145
PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT	134	134	129	136	140
FLOATING FISH TRAP ENDORSEMENT	5	3	5	7	7
<b>PRINCIPAL EFFORT LICENSE</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>580</b>	<b>586</b>
LOBSTER ENDORSEMENT	30	27	21	20	19
NON-LOBSTER CRUSTACEAN ENDORSEMENT	35	36	33	33	35
QUAHOG ENDORSEMENT	376	347	340	322	321
RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT	262	258	251	252	266
NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT	135	133	130	152	159
SOFTSHELLED CLAM ENDORSEMENT	235	204	194	183	186
WHELK ENDORSEMENT	118	79	62	53	63
DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT	13	12	11	13	15
MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT	8	9	7	10	9
PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT	7	6	5	9	9
OTHER SHELLFISH ENDORSEMENT (replaces non-quahog endorsement)	211	186	177	177	173
<b>COMMERICAL FISHING LICENSE</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>429</b>
LOBSTER ENDORSEMENT	15	14	14	12	11
NON-LOBSTER CRUSTACEAN ENDORSEMENT	100	101	95	95	104
QUAHOG ENDORSEMENT	165	181	189	197	217
RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT	0	0	0	0	0
NON-RESTRICTED FINFISH ENDORSEMENT	256	240	243	248	253
SOFTSHELLED CLAM ENDORSEMENT	163	155	148	139	129
WHELK ENDORSMENT	92	75	65	58	56
DOCKSIDE SALE ENDORSEMENT	14	16	16	15	18
MIDWATER/PAIR TRAWL ENDORSEMENT	46	39	39	40	37
PURSE SEINE ENDORSEMENT	40	42	43	41	40
OTHER SHELLFISH ENDORSEMENT (replaces non-quahog endorsement)	160	149	152	142	129
<b>OVER 65 SHELLFISH LICENSE</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>STUDENT SHELLFISH LICENSE</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>39</b>

Table 2. Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2017 (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/wk (1/1) 500/wk (1/22)	50,000/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)
February	500/wk	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	200/day 1,300/bi-wk or 200/day (2/5)	CLOSED
March	500/wk	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	1,300/bi-wk or 200/day	CLOSED
April	500/wk 600/wk (4/2) 700/wk (4/16)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	1,300/bi-wk or 200/day	CLOSED 10 fish (4/15)
May	50/day (5/1) (closed Fridays)	10,000/wk	CLOSED 5 fish/day (5/28) (closed Fri. & Sat.)	50/day (5/1) (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.)	50/day (5/1) (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.)	10 fish CLOSED (5/19)
June	50/day CLOSED (6/10) 50/day (6/28) closed Fridays	10,000/wk	5 fish/day (closed Fri. & Sat.)	50/day (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.)	200/wk or 50/day (6/1) (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.)	CLOSED
July	50/day (7/1) (closed Fridays) CLOSED (7/20)	10,000/wk	5 fish/day (closed Fri. & Sat.) CLOSED (7/3) 5 fish/day (7/10) (closed Fri. & Sat.) CLOSED (7/16)	50/day (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.)	200/wk or 50/day (closed Fri., Sat., Sun.) CLOSED (7/30)	CLOSED
Days in Season	320	365	209	365	365	171
Days Closed	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP	SIP

Table 2 cont'd. Possession limits (pounds), seasons, and quotas established for Rhode Island commercial fisheries in 2016.

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	1,000/wk (1/1) 750/wk (1/24)	50,000/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	200/day (1/1)	CLOSED (1/1)
February	750/wk 500/wk (2/14)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	200/day; 2,500/bi-wk or 200/day (2/7)	CLOSED
March	500/wk	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day	2,500/bi-wk or 200/day; 3,000/bi-wk or 200/day (3/20)	CLOSED
April	500/wk CLOSED (4/3)	50,000/day	CLOSED	200/day 100/day (4/17)	3,000/bi-wk or 200/day; 1,000/wk or 100/day (4/17)	CLOSED 10 fish (4/15)
May	50/day (5/1) (closed fridays)	10,000/wk (5/1)	CLOSED 5 fish (5/29) (closed fri. & sat.)	50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	10 fish CLOSED (5/9)
June	50/day (5/1) (closed fridays) CLOSED (6/5)	10,000/wk	5 fish (closed fri. & sat.) CLOSED (6/23)	50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	250/wk or 50/day (6/1) (closed fri. & sat.)	CLOSED
July	50/day (7/1) (closed fridays) CLOSED (7/13)	10,000/wk	CLOSED	50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	250/wk or 50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	CLOSED
August	CLOSED	10,000/wk	CLOSED	50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	250/wk or 50/day (closed fri. & sat.)	10 fish (8/1)
September	CLOSED 50/day (9/15) (closed fridays) CLOSED (9/29)	10,000/wk	CLOSED 5 fish (9/8) (closed fri. & sat.) CLOSED (9/25) 5 fish (9/29) (closed fri. & sat.)	50/day 200/day (9/11) 100/day (9/16)	250/wk or 50/day (closed fri. & sat.) 200/day (9/11) 100/day (9/16)	10 fish; CLOSED (9/16)
October	CLOSED	10,000/wk	5 fish (closed fri. & sat.) CLOSED (10/10)	100/day	100/day	CLOSED; 10 fish (10/15); CLOSED (10/26); 10 fish (10/31)
November	50/day (11/1) CLOSED (11/10)	18,000/day (11/1)	CLOSED	100/day	100/day	10 fish; CLOSED (11/3)
December	CLOSED	18,000/day	CLOSED	100/day 200/day (12/11)	100/day 200/day (12/11) 300/day (12/18) 400/day (12/26)	CLOSED
Days in Season	307	365	200	365	365	168
Days Closed	158	0	149	0	0	88

