



JERSEY COAST ANGLERS ASSOCIATION

Working For the Saltwater Resource & Marine Anglers

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JCAA Press Release:

NOAA Unfairly Shuts Down Black Sea Bass

October 1, 2009

NOAA announced on September 30th that they were going to close the black sea bass fishery for 180 days starting October 5th. The stated reason is that preliminary data suggests that the recreational sector will over harvest the 2009 quota. What the NOAA release failed to state is the fact that the quota in 2009 was set too low and they are allowing the same low quota to be in place for 2010. They set the original quota in 2008 believing the stock was being overfished and overfishing was taking place. They raised the recreational size limit to 12 1/2" to implement the smaller quota.

In 2008, after the new stock assessment was published and it stated that the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring, NOAA did not raise the quota in response to this new information. Instead they kept an arbitrarily low quota that guaranteed overharvesting since it did not take into consideration that the stocks were larger than they estimated. They did leave the higher 12 1/2 inch size limit in place.

This year, when it was time to set the quota for 2010, the black sea bass quota was set by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) before the Monitoring Committee of the MAMFC and ASMFC met. The SSC decided to go with status quo even though the latest approved stock assessment showed that the stocks were no longer being over fished. The Monitoring Committee met after the SSC and realized that the quota they set for 2009 was based on the condition that black sea bass was overfished and overfishing was taking place. With this new information, the Monitoring Committee recommended an increase in the quota. At the joint meeting, we questioned the SSC about whether or not they had considered the same new information discussed by the Monitoring Committee when they set the quota at status quo. The response was that they had not. I made a motion asking the Monitoring Committee and SSC to hold a conference call to discuss this issue and see if there was a possibility of increasing the quota based on the available information. After a long discussion, the MAMFC voted a 10/10 tie so the motion did not move forward. The excuse given by the Council Chairman and Vice Chairman was that this would set a bad precedent. What it showed me was the callousness of these individuals relative to the needs of the recreational and commercial fishing industries? This is a new process and mistakes will be made. Until we resolve the procedural matters, there should be no problem revisiting decisions in the best interest of all concerned. For 10 council members, it wasn't important to make sure all information and recommendations were considered before final decisions were made.

After the joint meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC, the ASMFC held the summer meeting in August. At this meeting we saw preliminary data that showed that the black sea bass fishery, summer flounder and scup might be exceeding their recreational targets. It was decided by ASMFC Policy Board to ask the Summer Flounder, Scup and Sea Bass Board to meet via conference call to discuss this issue. There was a conference call on sea bass, summer flounder and scup. The controversy was regarding the Marine Recreational Statistical Survey and how accurately it reflects what is actually happening. Again, this data was preliminary and had not been subject to the in house peer review. The states voted not to shut down the black sea bass fishery based on preliminary and unreviewed MRSS data. We also realized that it would be difficult too for the states to shut down through emergency action since this overage would not hurt the stocks. We realized that in December we would have to review all the data and take actions on the 2010 fishery to guarantee we stayed within quota. What NOAA did through its arrogance is put through an emergency action using preliminary without consulting the public. As the Governor's Appointee to ASMFC, I was not notified prior to the release. The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife were also not consulted or notified in advance. A release from the Mid-Atlantic Council suggests they were not consulted or notified either. This would not have happened during President Bush's administration. Bill Holgarth would have consulted with at least the state directors and council members before implementing an action like this. It seems the new director of NOAA has decided to take unilateral action. This is not how a partnership works to manage fisheries. The JCAA is calling on the recreational community to notify President Obama and our members of Congress that this is unacceptable. We can't have Dr. Jane Lubchenco, NOAA Administrator, taking arbitrary action with no regard for or understanding of recreational fishing and the industry that it supports. This just reinforces our concerns when she replaced the recreational representatives on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Fisheries Council. We also need for each of you to contact your Governors and Legislators, asking them to take whatever action they can. We need for NOAA to rescind this closure immediately. We need NOAA to get the Monitoring Committee and Science and Statistical Committee to establish realistic quotas.

We have all seen the stimulus packages to bail out banks and the auto industry. We have all seen the stimulus packages that are designed to create jobs in both the public and private sectors. These actions by NOAA on black sea bass and red snapper in the Gulf are doing exactly the opposite. If this continues NOAA will have created another economic crisis and increased the unemployment roles. This time we need to avoid the problem and find a common sense solution before we need another bailout. JCAA will keep you posted on our upcoming action on this issue.

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