

Bluefish Get Decisive Action vs Striped Bass, Dumpster Fire

Expect sure, swift rebuilding of bluefish, but it won't happen with striped bass

Report compiled from American Saltwater Guides Association and other sources

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) moved swiftly to address the overfished status of bluefish. At its October meeting, the MAFMC set the recreational harvest limit for 2020 at 9.48 million pounds, a 28.78% reduction from the 13.27 million pound harvest in 2018. At that time we expected new regs for the 2020 season that most likely moved from a 15-fish limit to a 3-fish limit.

No one really keeps 15 bluefish, the current bag limit. To achieve an almost 30% reduction, the daily bag limit must be dramatically reduced.

The Council had approved expected recreational landings of 13,270,862 pounds is 28.56% higher than the 2020 recreational harvest limit (RHL) of 9,480,162 pounds. Thus, MAFMC staff recommended a coastwide 3-fish bag limit to constrain harvest by 28.78% (no discards) so that the 2020 recreational harvest does not exceed the RHL.

Why such swift action?

Well, because bluefish are managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) which has requirements for rebuilding overfished stocks and accountability measures when a sector doesn't meet those requirements.

For now, let that sink in. The number two most popular fish on the east coast, bluefish, are overfished and we are seeing swift and decisive action. The number one fish on the east coast, striped bass, are overfished and overfishing is occurring (worse), and we watch a dumpster fire combined with a demolition derby unfold. The curse of ASMFC continues.

Under MSA, the MAFMC must develop a fishery management plan within two years of determining an overfished status and the FMP must rebuild the stock within ten years. The MAFMC also has to immediately restrict the fishery for the 2020 season. The stock also has to be rebuilt to the target and not the threshold. That's a big difference

Since no one keeps 15 bluefish anymore, a 28.56%

reduction requires a significant creel reduction. Once the FMP is developed by 2022, you can expect even more restrictions in harvest because bluefish must return to target.

There are other options on the table like season restrictions and minimum size requirements. However, limiting the season will benefit certain states. Bluefish migrate right? If we limit the summer season, the Northeast will pay. If we limit the winter, the South will bear the brunt of the burden. If we move the minimum size up to, let's say 19", that won't be great either. Most folks like keeping smaller ones. The big ones don't have a high value for the table.



MAFMC (Bluefish) VS ASMFC (Strped Bass)

So, what are the key differences here? First, swift action. We knew striped bass would be overfished and didn't do a

thing about it for years. Second, coastwide limits. That's right folks, the three fish bag, possible season restrictions, and possible new minimum size would all be coastwide. That was the number one comment from our angler workshops. People want standard limits for striped bass. None of the conservation equivalency

nonsense that will most likely damage the striped bass population further.

Finally, we can expect to see a 10 year rebuilding plan. Not 13 years, like in the case of Amendment VI for striped bass, but a hard 10 year timeline will be in place.

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| Bag Limit | Percent Reduction | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
| | 2018 | | 2017 | | 2016 | | Average (2016-2018) | |
| | No Discards | Discards | No Discards | Discards | No Discards | Discards | No Discards | Discards |
| 10 | -2.50% | -2.12% | -2.03% | -1.57% | -2.96% | -2.50% | -2.50% | -2.06% |
| 9 | -4.01% | -3.41% | -3.19% | -3.01% | -4.27% | -4.08% | -3.82% | -3.50% |
| 8 | -5.69% | -4.84% | -4.71% | -4.48% | -5.67% | -5.46% | -5.36% | -4.93% |
| 7 | -8.23% | -6.99% | -6.50% | -6.23% | -7.47% | -7.20% | -7.40% | -6.81% |
| 6 | -11.18% | -9.50% | -9.34% | -8.91% | -10.02% | -9.64% | -10.18% | -9.35% |
| 5 | -15.29% | -13.00% | -13.11% | -12.54% | -14.56% | -13.88% | -14.32% | -13.14% |
| 4 | -20.58% | -17.49% | -18.69% | -17.85% | -21.20% | -20.21% | -20.16% | -18.52% |
| 3 | -29.89% | -25.40% | -26.30% | -25.16% | -30.15% | -28.81% | -28.78% | -26.46% |
| 2 | -43.36% | -36.85% | -38.02% | -36.27% | -43.47% | -41.47% | -41.61% | -38.20% |
| 1 | -62.27% | -52.93% | -56.19% | -53.46% | -61.80% | -59.05% | -60.09% | -55.15% |

Table above shows associated reduction in harvest if the bag limit was reduced to 1-10 fish for 2016-2018 based on revised MRIP estimates using group catch data. This analysis assumed that all non-compliant anglers (landing greating than 15 fish) will continue to be non-compliant and that previous compliant anglers (landing 15 fish or less) will comply with the proposed regulations and land the full bag limit if they were previously landing higher than the proposed bag limits.