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## **ASMFC Striped Bass Management – Adoption of Addendum IV - October 29, 2014**

### Maryland's Sentiment Towards ASMFC Action:

- This week's decision by ASMFC acknowledges its strong commitment and shared responsibility in managing striped bass, a flagship species along the Atlantic coast.
- A 25% reduction to the coastal fisheries which have been the principal cause for the elevated coastwide fishing mortality levels and primarily catch large, female striped bass is needed.
- Maryland, along with its Bay partners of Virginia, Potomac River Fisheries Commission and District of Columbia, presented a strong case for requiring lower reductions to our Bay fisheries. While the approved reductions are higher than we requested, we appreciate that ASMFC was able to recognize the inequities of the situation and agree upon a reduction that attempts to balance the level of conservation with the socio-economic needs of our local communities. The ASMFC also made a strong commitment to develop Chesapeake Bay reference points which will take into consideration the predominance of male fish in this fishery.
- As a strong partner of ASMFC, Maryland is committed to implementing the required actions. Over the next couple of months, we will be working with our fishermen to develop the final rules that need to be in place prior to the beginning of the 2015 fishing season.

ASMFC Action Taken: On October 29, 2014, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adopted new, more conservative reference points and agreed to reduce fishing mortality to the target level in less than two years. This week's decision requires Atlantic coastal states from Maine to North Carolina to implement measures prior to the 2015 fishing season to achieve a 25% reduction in the coastal fisheries from Maine to Florida and 20.5% in Chesapeake Bay fisheries.

Status of Stock: It should be understood that while the Atlantic coast striped bass population has experienced a recent decline from historically high levels, the population remains healthy – at not risk of biological collapse or at risk of recruitment (reproduction) failure. In fact, the population today is similar to 1995 when the Atlantic coastal states declared striped bass recovered, and well above the level that produced the record young of year in 1993.

So Why is Action Needed?: The 2013 stock assessment indicated that fishing mortality needs to be reduced in order to rebuild abundance to the desired management levels.

Why are Reductions Different between the Coastal and Bay Fisheries?: The ASMFC agreed to lower harvest reductions for Chesapeake Bay fisheries for the following reasons:

- 1) The Bay jurisdictions have responsibly and proactively managed its fisheries for the past 20 years using an annual assessment tool to adjust the annual harvest quota with changes in abundance. As the population has recently declined, the Bay jurisdictions have lowered the harvest quota 15% since 2009 and 18% since 2003 to maintain a stable and decreased level of fishing mortality. Over the same time period, fishing mortality rates on the coastal fishery trended upward and peaked at high levels in the mid-2000s which corresponds with the years of overfishing (Figure 1).
- 2) The Bay's fishery consists predominately of smaller sized male fish (70-90+%), and the coastal fishery is on predominately large spawning aged females. While harvest reductions in the Bay will help protect the strong 2011 year-class, these reductions will not provide significant protection to females as the majority of females migrate out of the Bay before being susceptible to the Bay fisheries.
- 3) Given the points above, a 25% reduction on the Bay fisheries would unfairly impact Bay fishermen.



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What will the Management Changes be 2015:

*Coastal commercial fishery:* 25% reduction from Amendment 6 quotas.

- Since several states have not been achieving their quotas, this action may not result in any harvest reductions from recent levels. The ASMFC needs to revisit this issue for fairness, however, the planned harvest restrictions in the coastal recreational fishery are projected to achieve a reduction greater than the required 25% and, if so, this is expected to make up for the lack of reductions in the coastal commercial fishery.
- Maryland's coastal commercial quota will be similar to 2013 levels.

*Coastal recreational fishery:* Change from 2 fish at 28" to 1 fish at 28", or an alternative plan to achieve a 25% reduction from 2013.

- A 1 fish at 28" is projected to achieve a 31% reduction which as mentioned above will help offset the actions taken for the coastal commercial fishery.
- The ASMFC agreed that the coastal recreational fishery should take the largest reductions because this fishery has been the principal cause of increased fishing mortality, and consists of primarily female fish.

*Chesapeake Bay Spring trophy fishery:* This is a conservation equivalent fishery to the coastal recreational fishery so we need to reduce harvest 25% from the 2013 level. To achieve this reduction, a 1 fish at 36" is expected. Currently, we are at 1 fish at 28". The season will remain the same – 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in April to May 15.

*Bay commercial fishery:* 20.5% reduction from 2012 harvest.

- The ASMFC supported the Bay jurisdictions request to base the reduction off of the 2012 harvest instead of 2013 because the Bay jurisdictions proactively reduced the 2013 harvest quota by 14% in response to decreased abundance. The coastal states did not take any action in 2013.
- Basing the reduction off of 2012 provides MD a Bay commercial quota of 1.471 million pounds. If 2013 was used, our quota would have been 1.321 million pounds.
- Maryland's Bay commercial quota in 2014 is 1.925 million pounds.

*Bay recreational fishery:* 20.5% reduction from 2012 harvest. Given stakeholder preferences to maintain our current 2 fish creel limit and May 15 to December 15 season, we will need to increase the minimum size from 18" to 20".

*Commercial size limits:* No changes are required by ASMFC. There was an option to make the commercial size limits consistent with recreational size limits but the ASMFC rejected this option. We know that the inconsistency of size limits between commercial and recreational fisheries has been an issue of stakeholder concern. While ASMFC does not require them to be consistent we plan to have further discussions with our stakeholders given their interest on this issue. It should be recognized that if the commercial size limit increases the commercial quota could be increased through conservation equivalency. Additionally, stakeholders need to take into consideration the fact that discard mortality would increase under commercial minimum size limit increases.

*Commercial quota transfers:* While the ASMFC decided not to allow commercial quota transfers between states, quota transfers between individual fishermen are still allowed.

Next steps: All the actions above are to be in place prior to the 2015 fishing season. Maryland will proceed accordingly:



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- Conduct public scoping of the above management changes beginning in mid-November.
- Commercial quota changes will be implemented by public notice prior to January 1.
- Recreational rule changes will be pursued by public notice prior to the start of the 2015 season