

BLACK SEA BASS (North of Cape Hatteras)

Stock Status – Concern –The northern stock of black sea bass was evaluated using a statistical catch at length model (SCALE). The conclusion of the 2009 Northeast Fishery Science Center (NEFSC) stock assessment update is that black sea bass are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. However, underlying these conclusions is the uncertainty associated with an assessment of a data poor stock. The Northeast Data Poor Stocks Working Group report (NEFSC 2009) advised: “These new reference points and stock status determinations should be used with caution due to the uncertainty in the natural mortality estimate, the model input parameters, and significant uncertainty associated with managing a protogynous species (i.e., individuals change sex from female to male)”.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 2000-2009 – 251,145 lbs./\$585,734

2009 Commercial Landings and Value – 176,748 lbs./\$529,587 (quota managed)

Average Recreational Landings 2000-2009* – 172,122 lbs., **2009*** – 145,210 lbs.

Average Number of Award Citations (4 lbs.) 2000-2009* – 124, **2009*** – 67

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) – In North Carolina, the stock north of Cape Hatteras and south of the United States/Canada border is currently included in the Interjurisdictional FMP, which defers to Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission/Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council FMP compliance requirements. Management measures include commercial quotas, minimum mesh sizes for trawls, escape vents for pots, and minimum fish size limits. Amendment 13 to the FMP established the implementation of a state-specific allocation of the coastwide quota. North Carolinas allocation of the commercial quota is 11%.

Research and Data Needs – There continue to be gaps in critical life history information for black sea bass and current sampling gear may not be optimal to assess the population. Continue monitoring of catches, continue federal tagging projects, develop age information, conduct additional fishery independent surveys, utilize alternative survey gear (pots or handlines), and conduct more experimental and field evaluation of spawning behavior.

Current Regulations – Recreational: 12 inches total length (TL) minimum size/25-fish bag limit, Commercial: 11 inches TL

Harvest Season –The commercial season closes after the quota is met.

Size and Age at Maturity – 7.7 inches TL/2 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 20 years/8 years

Juvenile Abundance Index – Not available

Habits and Habitats - Black sea bass change sex from female to male between the ages of 2 years and 4 years. Black sea bass north and south of Cape Hatteras are recognized as different stocks. Black sea bass inhabit irregular hard-bottom areas such as wrecks, artificial reefs, reef and rock outcroppings. Black sea bass north of Cape Hatteras move inshore and north in the summer and offshore and south in the winter.

*Includes black sea bass landed north and south of Cape Hatteras.

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