

# **New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council Recreational Summer Flounder Committee Report**

March 30, 2022

A meeting of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council's Recreational Summer Flounder Advisory Committee was held via webinar on March 30, 2022, to discuss management options for the New Jersey recreational summer flounder fishery for the 2022 fishing year.

## **2022 Season**

At their March 2022 meeting, the ASMFC approved the State of New Jersey's conservation equivalency proposal methodology for the 2022 summer flounder season. Under this proposal, New Jersey has been provided the opportunity to liberalize or increase their recreational summer flounder harvest by 16.5 percent. The current 2022 New Jersey recreational summer flounder regulations are an open season from May 22 – September 19 with a 3-fish possession limit and an 18 inch size limit resulting in a 121 day long open season. Through a series of Advisory Committee scoping meetings in 2021 where advisors and Council members provided staff with ideas and future management concepts, Bureau of Marine Fisheries staff developed options for the 2022 fishing year that include example options with increased seasons, lower minimum sizes, higher possession limits, and slot and trophy fish concepts. The Committee reviewed 19 options that included some or all of the aforementioned approaches, ultimately deciding to move 5 options forward for consideration with one as a preferred option as follows.

1. Preferred Option- Open Season from May 21 – September 23 with a 3-fish possession limit and a 17.5 inch minimum size limit.
2. Open Season from May 2 – September 27 with a 2-fish slot possession limit from 17 – 17.99 inches and 1-fish 18 inches or greater.
3. Open Season from May 27 – October 2 with a 2-fish slot possession limit from 16.5 – 17.99 inches and 1-fish 18 inches or greater.

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4. Open Season from May 1 – September 30 with a 3-fish possession limit and an 18 inch minimum size limit.
5. Open Season from May 24 – September 10 with a 1-fish slot possession limit from 16.5 – 17.99 inches and 2-fish 18 inches or greater.

The committee's preferred option was number 1. Advisors and Council recognized the many variations in preferences the anglers of New Jersey given a 16.5 percent liberalization or increase in harvest offered to them. The options considered represent the overall spirit of each concept with the preferred option balancing the success of harvesting more fish than previous recent years, the ability to fish a longer season, and the most responsible option to preserve the health of the resource. By decreasing the minimum size limit, Council feels that pressure currently exhibited on breeding females will be reduced. The slot limit options have several advantages including increased open days as well as a focused harvest on abundant size classes of fish resulting again in conservation of breeding size classes of fish. A concern with using the slot limit options from both the ASMFC Technical Committee, ASMFC Management Board, and NJ Fish and Wildlife Bureau of Law Enforcement surrounds a narrow slot increasing the likelihood of non-compliance and the added burden on enforcement officers requiring the need to measure all fish in possession and attribute that catch to individuals. If a slot limit option is considered, the recommendation is to establish the largest slot gap possible. The committee recommends adopting the measures proposed in Option 1 for New Jersey's 2022 recreational summer flounder fishery.

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<b>Preferred</b>	1		wave3	wave4	wave5	Days Open	
		Minimum Size 17.5 with 3 fish bag	41	62	23	126	Percent of 2021 Target RHL
		2022 Harvest Per Wave	902,298	3,119,507	496,056	4,517,860	16.5%
		Season	5/21-6/30	7/1-8/31	9/1-9/23		

<b>Non-Preferred</b>	2		wave3	wave4	wave5	Days Open	
		2 fish 17 to 17.99 and 1 fish 18 or greater	60	62	27	149	Percent of 2021 Target RHL
		2022 Harvest Per Wave	1,183,969	2,797,107	522,143	4,503,220	16.2%
		Season	5/2-6/30	7/1-8/31	9/1-9/27		

<b>Non-Preferred</b>	3		wave3	wave4	wave5	Days Open	
		2 fish 16.5 to 17.99 and 1 fish 18 or greater	35	62	32	129	Percent of 2021 Target RHL
		2022 Harvest Per Wave	759,720	3,076,844	680,726	4,517,290	16.5%
		Season	5/27-6/30	7/1-8/31	9/1-10/2		

<b>Non-Preferred</b>	4		wave3	wave4	wave5	Days Open	
		Minimum Size 18 with 3 fish bag	61	62	30	153	Percent of 2021 Target RHL
		2022 Harvest Per Wave	1,180,357	2,742,860	568,907	4,492,125	15.9%
		Season	5/1-6/30	7/1-8/31	9/1-9/30		

<b>Non-Preferred</b>	5		wave3	wave4	wave5	Days Open	
		1 fish 16.5 to 17.99 and 2 fish 18 or greater	38	62	10	110	Percent of 2021 Target RHL
		2022 Harvest Per Wave	905,936	3,379,354	233,642	4,518,931	15.95%
		Season	5/24-6/30	7/1-8/31	9/1-9/10		