



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update Finds Resource Remains Overfished With A Less Than 50% Chance of Rebuilding by 2029 *Board to Meet in December to Consider Changing Measures for 2025 to Increase Probability of Rebuilding the Stock*

Annapolis, MD – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board reviewed the results of the 2024 Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, which indicates the resource is not experiencing overfishing but remains overfished relative to the updated biological reference points. Female spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2023 was estimated at 191 million pounds, which is below the SSB threshold of 197 million pounds and below the SSB target of 247 million pounds. Total fishing mortality in 2023 was estimated at 0.18, which is below the fishing mortality threshold of 0.21 and above the fishing mortality target of 0.17. The 2024 Assessment Update included data through 2023 and used the same model from the approved peer-reviewed 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment. The model structure was the same as the 2022 Stock Assessment Update, which accounted for the period of low recruitment the stock is experiencing and for new management changes starting in 2020.

The Board continued to express concerns about low recruitment and the lack of strong year-classes to support the stock and the fishery. Six of the last seven year-classes since 2015 have been below average, with only the 2018 year-class being above average. The 2018 year-class is starting to grow into the slot limit for the ocean recreational fishery and will become more available to ocean harvest in 2025.

The 2024 Assessment Update also included short-term projections to determine the probability of SSB being at or above the SSB target by 2029, which is the stock rebuilding deadline. The model structure for projections from 2024-forward was modified to explicitly account for the narrower slot limits implemented in 2023 and 2024. A range of projection scenarios were considered to explore two primary sources of uncertainty for the rebuilding trajectory through 2029: the level of fishery removals for the current, in-progress 2024 fishing year and the fishing mortality rate from 2025 through 2029.

The Board agreed with the Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee that the most likely projection scenario is lower removals in 2024 compared to 2022 and 2023, followed by an increase in

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

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fishing mortality in 2025, and a subsequent decrease and stabilization of fishing mortality from 2026 through 2029. A decrease in removals for 2024 is projected based on preliminary low 2024 catch data, likely due to the strong 2015 year-class growing out of the current recreational ocean slot limit and the implementation of Addendum II measures to reduce fishing mortality in 2024. An increase in 2025 fishing mortality would correspond to the 2018 year-class entering the current recreational ocean slot limit, and the subsequent decrease and stabilization from 2026 through 2029 would align with the 2018 year-class growing out of the slot limit and the lack of strong year-classes behind it. In this scenario, the probability of rebuilding by 2029 is less than 50%.

Based on these projections, the Board will hold a special Board meeting in December 2024 to consider Board action to change 2025 management measures to reduce fishing mortality and increase the probability of rebuilding to at least 50%. Under Addendum II to Amendment 7, the Board can change management measures through Board action, instead of developing an addendum, if the stock assessment indicates a less than 50% probability of the stock rebuilding by 2029. Ahead of the December meeting, the Board tasked the Technical Committee with updating the projections based on additional 2024 catch data and developing recreational size limit and seasonal closure management options for consideration.

A subsequent press release will provide details on the meeting date and format (in-person or virtual), and the anticipated timeline for the availability of meeting materials and the public input process (which may differ from the standard public comment timelines to allow for the compilation and summary of public comment in advance of the meeting).

The 2024 Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update will be available at <https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-striped-bass> under stock assessment reports early next week. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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