

**RI Marine Fisheries Council  
Scup/Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel  
Meeting Minutes  
September 14, 2011, 6:00 PM  
URI Bay Campus, Coastal Institute**

W. Macintosh, Chairman	G. Tremblay*
M. Bucko*	S. Parente
R. Stuart	S. Moreschi
	J. McNamee, DFW staff

(\*primary advisory panel member; <sup>A</sup> alternate member)

W. Macintosh began the meeting. He stated that J. McNamee of the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW or Division) had a presentation which covered the first 7 agenda topics and was broken in to a scup section followed by a black sea bass section (see attached). He stated that after each section of the presentation the panel would discuss any proposals they may have for commercial management for scup or black sea bass in 2012. He noted that there was not a quorum present therefore no votes would be taken, but it still would be useful to get some advice from the panel out to the RI Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) and the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

J. McNamee started with scup. He discussed stock status, the main point of which was that the stock was no longer overfished and overfishing was not occurring. As a result of the improvement in stock status, the quota for scup was increasing in 2012. He stated that the commercial fishery performed fairly well in 2011 with regard to not having any closures, however due to the large increase in quota seen in 2011 the quota was in danger of being under-harvested. It was almost assured that the entire period would remain open. A number of adjustments were needed to fully utilize the states allocation and the current weekly limit was at a very high possession limit.

The DFW recommended a few changes in scup management for 2012. Prior to beginning this discussion, **the panel voiced its ongoing support for going to a swipe card system to monitor quotas as this would prevent some of the cheating that was occurring in the scup aggregate programs.** J. McNamee indicated that due to a projected high quota, the DFW recommended setting the starting possession limit at 20,000 lbs/week in each of the three sub periods. The possession limits were modeled and the model indicated an even higher amount was possible, but the DFW recommends starting at the 20,000 pound possession limit, which seemed reasonable in case adjustments were needed. A second idea the DFW wanted the group to discuss, not officially a proposal at this point, was to get the groups thoughts on moving scup in to a non-restricted licensing category. Finally, J. McNamee stated that the DFW recommended mirroring the approved winter 1 (federal period) possession limits of 50,000 lbs per trip, stating that the federal period quota was being under-utilized with the current possession limits.

W. Macintosh opened the discussion up to the group. M. Bucko stated that he didn't disagree with moving scup in to an unrestricted category, however he cautioned that it may be problematic if stock status declines, which could lead to a desire to move scup back in to a restricted category. Once a fisherman configured his/her business in a particular way due to their ability to catch scup, it would be detrimental to them if this opportunity were taken away. S. Parente stated that the move will make it easier for a CFL license holder to get activity on his/her license therefore allowing that CFL an easier ability to upgrade to a full license. He was not indicating that this was good or bad, he just thought it was an important thought to consider. W. Macintosh commented that he did not think it would do much of anything as the price for scup would be poor due to the high quota and the lack of a market to handle the product. There would be no price incentive for a fisherman to begin harvesting scup. He went on to state that the increased possession limits may allow fishermen some flexibility to use more progressive gear configurations that would allow them to harvest exclusively jumbos, which would conceivably fetch a higher price.

The group had some discussion on their experience in the scup fishery in 2011. They felt that the harvest of scup was lower than in previous years due to the fish not being in the inshore areas. One thought was that the fish were migrating differently in recent years.

M. Bucko wanted to comment on a broader topic. He felt the large increases in scup quota were being driven by the needs of the recreational fishery. He felt that a better approach than driving the entire coastwide quota up would be to re-address the recreational/commercial split of the quota and provide a higher allocation to the recreational sector. The group discussed this a bit, but the main consensus from the group was that there should be some mechanism to allow the recreational fishery to take advantage of a commercial underage (i.e. not close prematurely), which appeared to be looming for 2011.

J. McNamee went on to discuss black sea bass. He began with a discussion about stock status. The stock status for black sea bass was that overfishing was no longer occurring and the stock was no longer overfished. Despite this improvement in stock status, the management board did not vote to increase the quota in 2012, citing major uncertainty in the assessment. In fact the Board did not have a choice due to the categorizing of the black sea bass assessment in to a low level by the SSC, thereby requiring a finding of status quo until the uncertainty in the assessment improves. The board approved remaining at a status quo quota in 2012. J. McNamee indicated that the process was finally in place to at least attempt to address this situation. A benchmark assessment was scheduled to occur in late 2011, and the process would allow for a reconfiguration of the black sea bass quota in early 2012 if in fact the assessment were approved and put in to a higher tier by the SSC. Due to the extremely low commercial quota in 2011, the fishery did not perform very well and had frequent and long closures. The sub period allocations were met relatively closely. J. McNamee stated that the DFW did not have any specific recommendations, but thought the group should reconsider how the black sea bass fishery is treated in the fall, suggesting developing a September-October sub period with its own allocation. The DFW also indicated that if possible, the group should provide some

advice as to what to do if the quota does indeed increase due to the new benchmark assessment.

G. Tremblay and S. Parente submitted a proposal on black sea bass (see attached) on behalf of the RI Commercial Rod and Reel Anglers Association. They began the discussion with a comment on process. They felt it was difficult to configure a proposal given that they are not receiving any information until the night of the meeting. There was further discussion on this topic and some ideas were developed including holding two meetings (understanding that there was already a very high meeting burden due to multiple meetings) or perhaps have the DFW send out there presentation a day or two prior to the meeting. G. Tremblay began discussing the written proposal. He stated that the fishery was completely a bycatch fishery at this point due to the lack of quota and the low possession limits. **Therefore their proposal was to decrease the possession limit to 25 pounds per day during the spring through fall sub periods in an effort to keep the bycatch fishery open for a longer period, thus decreasing discards.**

W. Macintosh commented that he agreed with the idea of reducing discards, though he felt a 25 pound possession limit was too low. He instead thought an aggregate limit would be a better way to help reduce discards. S. Parente felt that an aggregate program would allow for cheating which would decrease the quota even quicker than under current management. S. Moreschi stated that he did not agree with a 25 pound possession limit as it would make the fishery unviable for a pot fishermen after the overhead (bait, fuel, etc) were accounted for. **He also stated that if the quota does increase, he would like to see the possession limit increase, preferably up to 100 pounds per day if possible. Finally he felt that the September October period was critical for the pot fishery, therefore he felt that some allocation should be moved to that time period in an effort to keep that period open.** He concluded by voicing support for a potential aggregate plan for the black sea bass fishery. W. Macintosh commented that if the quota increase were more modest, that quota should be moved in to the fall period in an effort to redevelop the fall fishery. R. Stuart asked about an aggregate program and wondered if this would be a viable approach. J. McNamee stated that it was and the DFW had proposed one in the past, to no avail. **R. Stuart stated that he would support an aggregate program for this fishery. M. Bucko supported the idea of adding a modest quota increase in to the fall sub period, and suggested that a hybrid plan including both aggregate and daily possession limits.** S. Parente stated that if there was an aggregate program there should be a conservation equivalency associated with it.

W. Macintosh adjourned the meeting.

**Summary of Rhode Island Scup  
and Black Sea Bass Stock  
Status, 2011 Commercial Scup  
and Black Sea Bass Fishery  
Performance, and Division of  
Fish and Wildlife  
Recommendations for 2012**



# Scup Stock Status

## •Stock Status:

•According to the latest stock assessment update projection and relative to the DPSWG biological reference points, the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

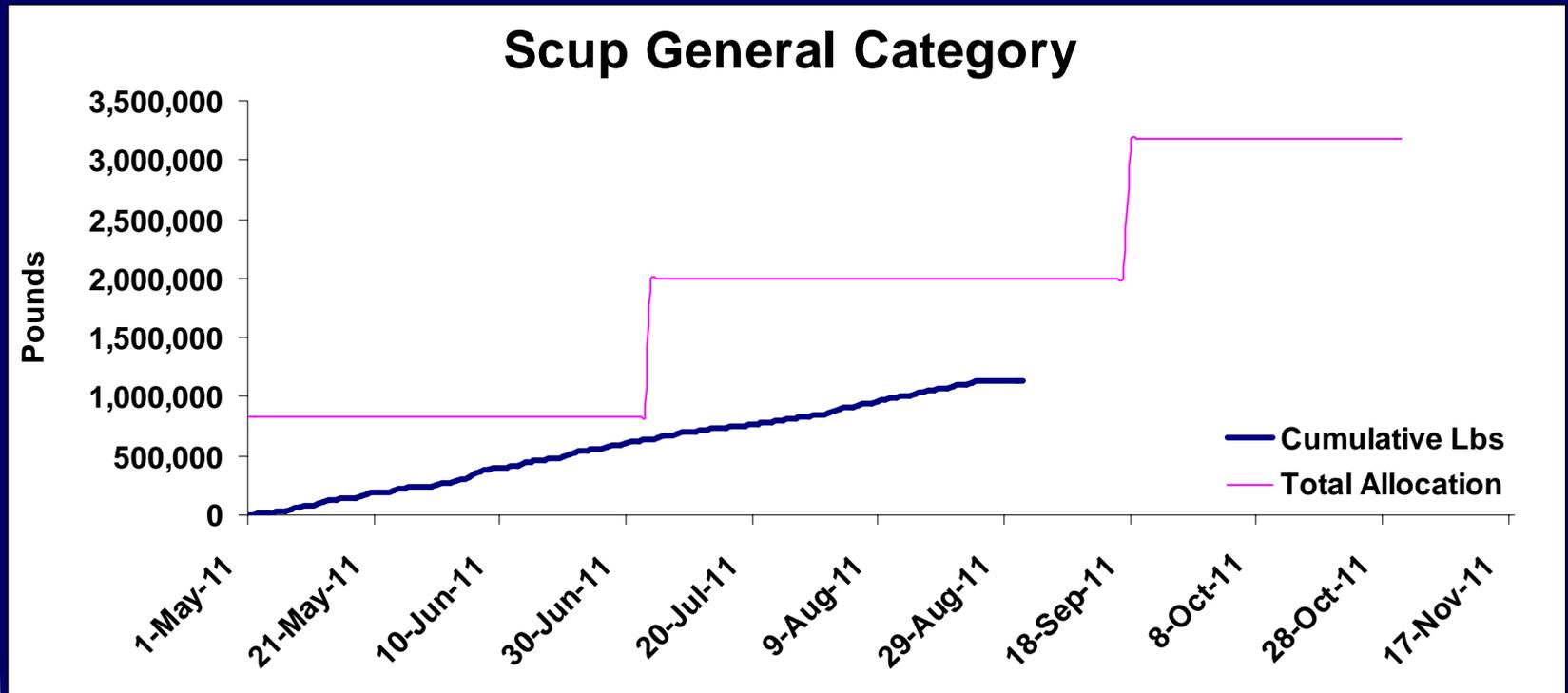
•Fishing mortality varied between  $F = 0.1$  and  $F = 0.3$  during the 1960s and 1970s. Fishing mortality increased steadily during the 1980s and early 1990s, peaking at  $F = 1.0$  in 1994. Fishing mortality decreased after 1994, falling to less than  $F = 0.1$  since 2003, with  $F$  in 2010 projected at  $F=0.053$ . The fishing mortality threshold is  $FMSY = 0.177$ .

•Spawning stock biomass (SSB) decreased from about 220 m lbs in 1963 to about 110 m lbs in 1969, then increased to about 165 m lbs during the mid 1970s. SSB declined through the 1980s and early 1990s to less than 11 m lbs in the mid-1990s. With greatly improved recruitment and low fishing mortality rates since 1998, SSB has steadily increased to about 394.6 m lbs in 2010 (up from 2009) . The SSB reference point is  $SSBMSY = 202.9$  m lbs. The minimum stock size threshold, one-half  $SSBMSY$ , is estimated to be 101.5 m lbs.

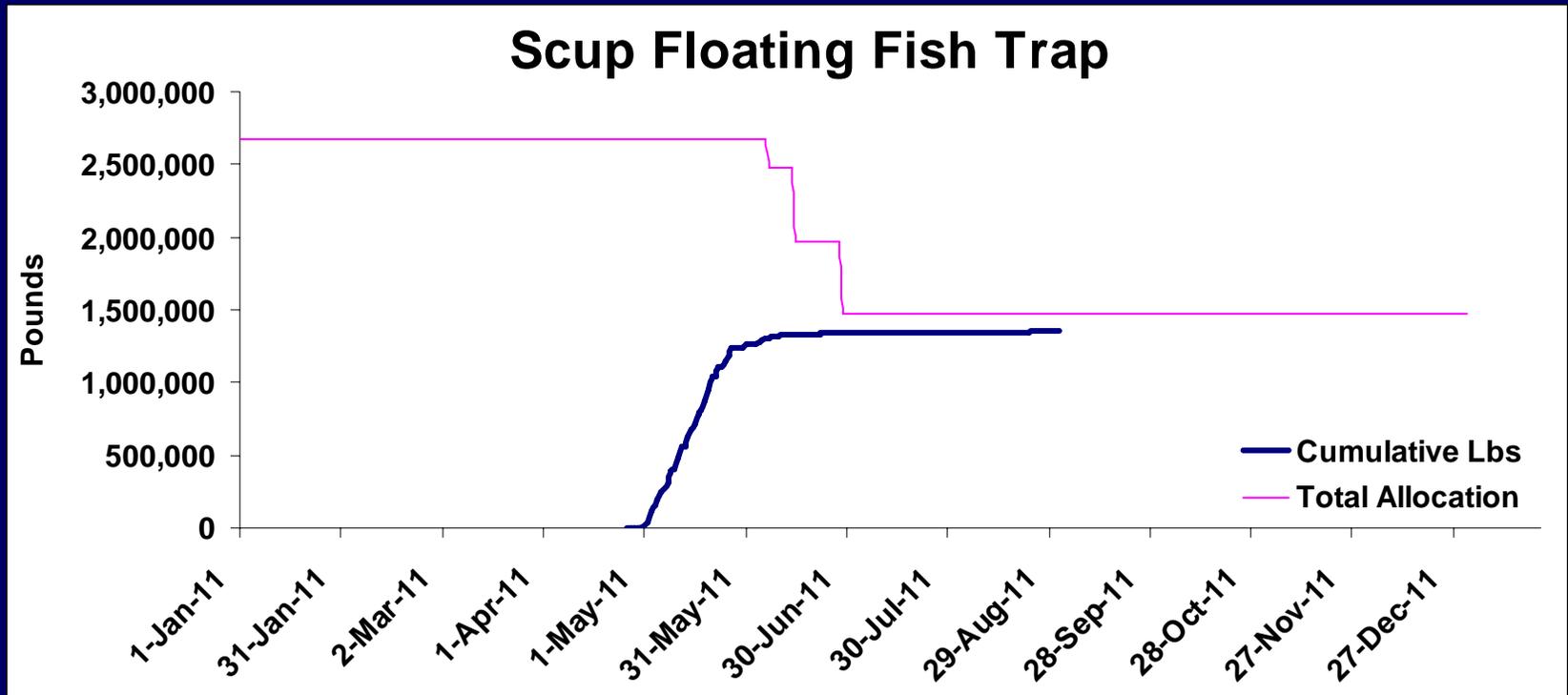
•Recruitment has exceeded the 1984-2009 average of 104 million in 2001, 2004-2009.



# Commercial Landings – Scup General Category



# Commercial Landings – Scup Floating Fish Traps



- To date a total of 1,200,000 pounds has been rolled over in to the General Category fishery

# Scup Management Measure Recommendations 2012

- **MAFMC and ASMFC Management Board Recommendations for 2012:**
  - A TAL of 45.28 m lbs (equivalent to ABC)
  - A commercial quota of 34.43 m lbs.
  - A recreational harvest limit of 10.85 m lbs.
  - These are increases of approximately 66% commercial and 86% recreational
  - Increase current possession limits. Winter I: 50,000 lbs per day (changed from 30,000 lbs/week)/1,000 lbs at 80% quota; Winter II: 2,000 lbs/1,000 lbs at 80% quota (unless trip limits increased by Winter I rollovers)
  - Maintain current minimum fish size and net mesh requirements. (9 inch-TL; 5 inch mesh at trigger)
  - Maintain current GRAs.
  - Maintain current escape vent requirements in scup pots.
- The Board has abandoned their previous precautionary approach and are now allowing harvest up to the levels indicated by the SSC and MC



# Preliminary 2012 Commercial Allocations

- Coastwide Commercial TAL = 34,430,000 lbs
- CW Summer Allocation (38.95% of TAL, RSA not removed) = 13,410,485 lbs
- RSA assumed to be roughly 3% of quota
- CW Summer Allocation (assumed RSA removed) = 13,008,171 lbs
- RI 2012 Commercial Quota (56.19%, estimated RSA removed) = 7,309,291 lbs (64% incr from 2011 quota)
- 2012 Floating Fish Trap allocation = 4,385,575 lbs
- 2012 General Category = 2,923,716 lbs
  - May 1 – June 30 = 974,572 lbs
  - July 1 – Sept 15 = 974,572 lbs
  - Sept 16 – Oct 31 = 974,572 lbs



# Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

•The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes increasing the starting aggregate limits in an effort to keep up with the increasing quota. The Division recommends the following:

- May – June 30 = 20,000/wk
- July 1 – Sept 15 = 20,000/wk
- Sept 16 – Oct 31 = 20,000/wk

•The above possession limits are based on a modeling approach which predicts allowing a virtually unlimited possession limit in 2012. The DFW has decided to propose a possession limit in an effort to maintain some measure of control on harvest while still allowing a very high possession limit

•The advisory panel may wish to comment on moving scup in to an unrestricted species category. If scup were to be moved in to an unrestricted category, the DFW would recommend the following weekly possession limits:

- May – June 30 = **20,000/wk**
- July 1 – Sept 15 = **20,000/wk**
- Sept 16 – Oct 31 = **20,000/wk**

•The DFW also recommends removing the winter 1 scup aggregate program and allowing the full harvest limit of 50,000 lbs/day.

•Finally the DFW recommends repealing or modifying the current logbook requirement in the scup aggregate plans as an effort to allow fishermen to avail themselves of electronic logbook reporting.



# Black Sea Bass Stock Status

## •Stock Status:

•Relative to the DPSWG biological reference points, the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

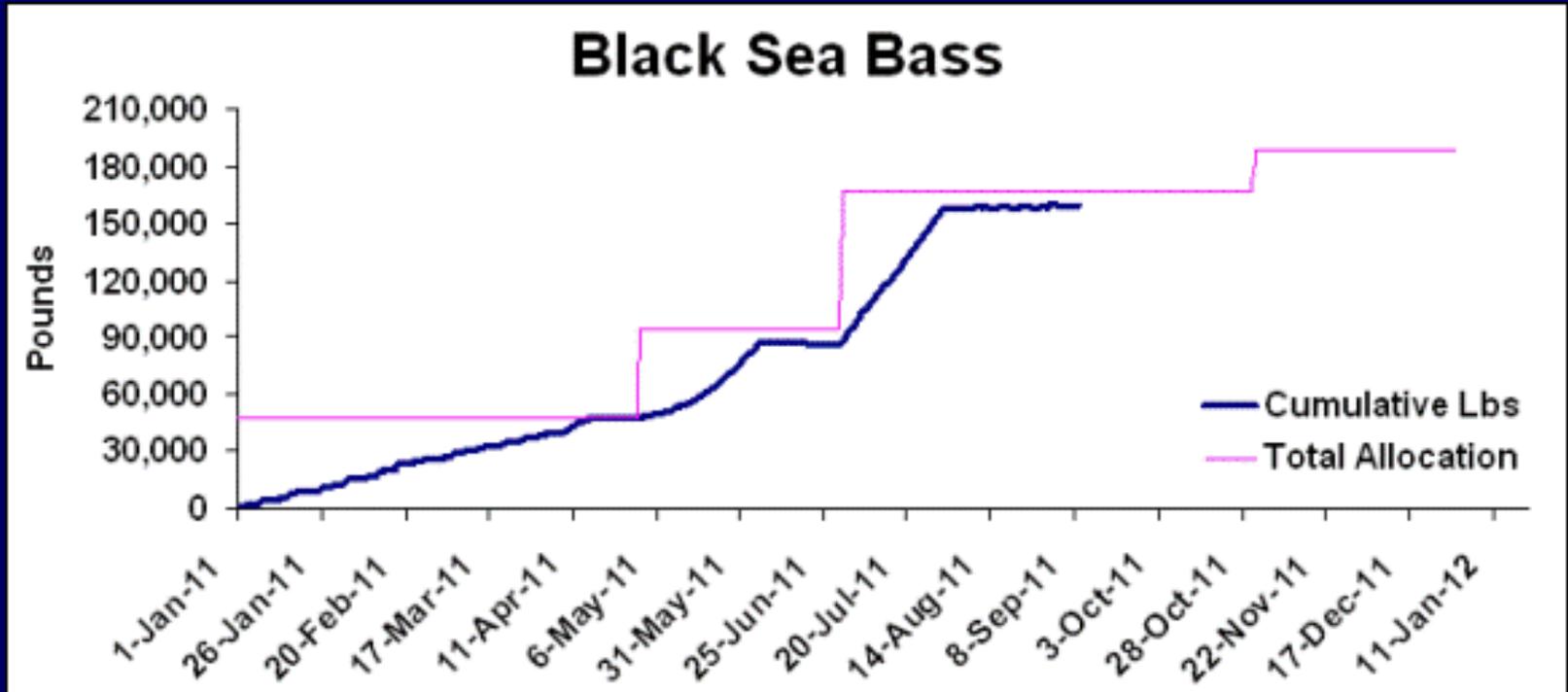
•Fishing mortality varied between  $F = 0.20$  and  $F = 0.74$  during the 1960s and 1970s. Fishing mortality increased steadily during the 1980s and early 1990s, peaking at  $F = 1.26$  in 1986. Fishing mortality remained high until after 2001 ( $F=1.17$ ), falling steadily to  $F = 0.41$  in 2010, less than the threshold  $F = 0.42$ , but close and higher than in 2009.

•Spawning stock biomass (SSB) decreased from about 27.0 million lbs in 1975 to about 18.1 million lbs in 1979, then increased to about 25.4 million lbs during the mid 1980s. SSB declined through the 1980s and early 1990s to only 13.6 million lbs in 1996. With improved recruitment and low fishing mortality rates since 2001, SSB has steadily increased to about 30.7 million lbs in 2010. The SSB reference point is  $SSB_{MSY} = 27.6$  million lbs. The minimum stock size threshold, one-half  $SSB_{MSY}$ , is estimated to be 13.8 million lbs.

•Recruitment estimated by the model was relatively constant through the time series with the exception of the 1999 and 2001 year classes. These cohorts appeared to be the driving force behind the increase in biomass and SSB.



# Commercial Landings – Black Sea Bass



# Black Sea Bass Management Measure Recommendations 2012

## Monitoring and SSC Recommendations for 2012:

- The SSC recommended remaining at status quo for 2012, citing significant uncertainty in the stock assessment.

- The monitoring committee did not withhold support as they did previously, but rather made sure that a process would develop where the benchmark assessment could take place and be reviewed by early 2012. This will be the situation.

## Management Board made the following decisions:

- TAL = 3.12 m lbs (slightly less than in 2011)

- Commercial quota of 1.76 m lbs

- Maintain all other specifications status quo

- The Boards were bound by the SSC recommendations, which were made due to:

- sensitivity and reliability of the new model,

- the uncertainty inherent in assessing a species with an unusual life history,

- the presence of a retrospective pattern (overestimates stock size), and

- the adequacy of fishery-independent surveys in sampling this species.

- The benchmark assessment will take place in late 2011. The SSC will reconvene in January 2012 and can reconfigure black sea bass specs based on the finding of the peer reviewed assessment.



# Preliminary 2012 Commercial Allocations

- Coastwide TAL = 3,120,000 lbs
- Coastwide Commercial Quota = 1,760,000 lbs
- Estimated RSA in 2012 = 93,600 lbs
- Coastwide Commercial Quota (assumed RSA removed) = 1,666,400 lbs
- RI 2012 Commercial Quota (11%, estimated RSA removed) = 183,304 lbs
- 2012 Sub Period Allocations:
  - Jan 1 – April 30 (25%) = 45,826 lbs
  - May 1 – June 30 (25%) = 45,826 lbs
  - July 1 – Oct 31 (39%) = 71,489 lbs
  - Nov 1 – Dec 31 (11%) = 20,163 lbs



# Division of Fish and Wildlife Proposed Changes

- The RI Division of Fish and Wildlife proposes no changes to the black sea bass commercial fishery in 2012 with the following recommendation caveats:
  - The DFW suggests that the AP reconsider their advice for the summer 2 sub period. Due to the low quota amounts, the DFW does not believe the quota will last beyond the August closure, therefore if the AP wishes to have quota during September, an allocation of fish should be moved there.
  - The above recommendation is based on the current state of things. The DFW hopes that the benchmark assessment will answer some of the uncertainties currently inherent in the assessment, but recognizes there are still a number of uncertainties that will not be answered.
  - If the benchmark assessment is peer reviewed and approved, and moves the black sea bass assessment in to a higher assessment tier, the DFW will reconvene the AP early in 2012 to readdress the commercial management plan.

