



Greater Atlantic Region Bulletin

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Changes to Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial Accountability Measures

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NOAA Fisheries announces an adjustment to accountability measures required for overages in the commercial summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. Previously, a pound-for-pound payback accountability measure was applied to the commercial annual catch target if the annual catch limit was exceeded, and the overage was not caused by landings, but rather by higher discards than those estimated prior to the fishing year.

This action modifies this non-landings-based accountability measure to account for the variability in commercial discard estimates. Rather than an automatic payback requirement, the new system considers both the level of the overage and health of the stock when determining what accountability measures are appropriate.

- If the annual catch limit is exceeded due to discards higher than those previously estimated, but the stock biomass is above the desired biomass target, no overage payback will be required.
- If both the annual catch limit and acceptable biological catch are exceeded due to discards, overages will be repaid through a scaled adjustment to the catch target based on the current stock status.
- If any overage occurs while the stock is overfished, in a rebuilding plan, or has an unknown status, a pound-for-pound payback will continue to be required.

This action is intended to provide additional flexibility in determining when accountability measures are appropriate, similar to how they are applied for these species' recreational fisheries. Landings-based overages of the commercial quota or annual catch limit remain unchanged by this action and will continue to be repaid pound-for-pound regardless of stock status.

Federal specifications for the 2019 summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries will be developed through a separate action to be implemented in December 2018. We will notify you of those measures in a separate bulletin.

For small entity compliance guides, this bulletin complies with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement and Fairness Act of 1996. This notice is authorized by the Regional Administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Greater Atlantic Region.