

Chopping Block Part 2 Flounder and Speckled Trout

Southern Flounder

Next week, at the meeting in Kitty Hawk, the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) will be looking at Amendment 4 to the Southern flounder Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

The only action item in this amendment is moving the 2026 allocation shift of 50/50 up one year instead of following the plan outlined in Amendment 3, which was just finalized in 2022.

Although this amendment was fast tracked with the sole intention of "increasing recreational access", the documents provided by the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) say otherwise. In fact, one document clearly says,

"Even with a shift to 50/50 allocation, a recreational season that maintains the one fish bag limit...would need to be brief (e.g., between two and four weeks) to maintain allowable landings".

In 2022, the recreational season was 4 weeks and the recreational quota was exceeded by 56,340 pounds. In 2023, the recreational season was 2 weeks and the recreational quota was exceeded by 127,294 pounds. So giving the recreational sector 53,235 extra pounds one year early is not going to make any difference for their season length this year.

In fact, the only thing Amendment 4 will accomplish is another unjustified commercial reduction.

The only way to gain more access in the southern flounder fishery is to move away from the 72% target reduction. The reason this draconian reduction continues to be unachievable is because the flounder population is increasing!

The truth is, the decision to reallocate during a rebuilding scenario was foolish to begin

with. This alone has greatly increased the uncertainty surrounding DMF's projections for rebuilding the stock and meeting statutory requirements.

Moving quota from a sector with a higher level of data confidence, to one with a very high degree of uncertainty greatly increases the overall uncertainty in the plan.

Combine this with the known limitations of using MRIP for monitoring removals over a short season and DMF knowingly underestimating recreational dead discards, with an assumed average weight of around one-fifth of a pound (0.21 pounds) for each flounder released, and we have to question how DMF can even claim these measures have at least a 50% chance of success.

Even more concerning is the determination that the latest stock assessment update cannot be used for management. This should make everyone question whether these draconian reductions were even necessary in the first place!

The official NCFA position on this issue is to increase access for both sectors by lowering our target reduction to 52%. Although this issue would take another amendment to implement, it is the only way to truly increase access as the flounder population continues to rebuild.

Flounder Timeline

If the MFC decides to move forward with an early reallocation of the southern flounder quota the next steps would be Advisory Committee (AC) review and public comment before coming back to the MFC again at the May 2025 meeting.

[Southern Flounder Amendment 4](#)
[Southern Flounder Memo](#)

Speckled Trout

Also at the meeting in Kitty Hawk, the MFC will be voting on final adoption of Amendment 1 to the Spotted Seatrout FMP.

NCFA UPDATE:02/12/2025
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At the November meeting last year, the MFC selected their preferred management options of:

-Recreational slot limit of 14"-20" with one fish >26" and a 3-fish bag limit and elimination of for-hire captain/crew limits for a 26.7% reduction

-Commercial slot limit of 14"-22" with a Saturday-Sunday harvest closure January to September and a Saturday-Monday harvest closure October through December for a 38.3% reduction

The Secretary of DEQ and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources (AgNER) were presented with these management options and made no revisions even after much concern was expressed about the commercial sector being asked to take a much higher reduction.

The NCFA still agrees with the spotted seatrout stock assessment peer reviewers;

"Gradual stable management" is what we need for a stock that barely triggered an "overfishing" status in the last year of assessment, not a 38.3% reduction!

Speckled Trout Timeline

If the MFC votes for final adoption of this plan, the next step is the final step, implementation.

[Spotted Seatrout Amendment 1](#)
[Spotted Seatrout Decision Document](#)

Public Comment

Public comment will be accepted on these issues in person at the February MFC meeting, through the online portal, and/or through written comments.

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[Online Comment Portal](#)

Written comments can also be mailed to:
February 2025 Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting Comments
P.O Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557

Or hand delivered to:
Division of Marine Fisheries' Morehead City Headquarters Office
3441 Arendell Street, Morehead City, N.C.

Summary

More information about oysters, clams, false albacore and crabs is coming soon. Please resend, text, forward and spread this information any way possible. Stay tuned for more updates and reach out with any questions or concerns.

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