

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Paul Perra, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 281-9153, e-mail at [Paul.Perra@noaa.gov](mailto:Paul.Perra@noaa.gov), fax at (978) 281-9135.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Regulations implementing the Atlantic Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) prepared by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) appear at 50 CFR part 648, subparts A and J. Regulations requiring annual specifications are found at § 648.160. The FMP requires that the Council recommend, on an annual basis, a TAL, which is comprised of a commercial quota and a recreational harvest limit.

The FMP also requires that: (1) The TAL for any given year be set based on the fishing mortality rate (F) resulting from the stock rebuilding schedule contained in the FMP, or the estimated F in the most recent fishing year, whichever is lower; and (2) a total of 17 percent of the TAL be allocated to the commercial fishery, as a quota, with the remaining 83 percent allocated as a recreational harvest limit, with the stipulation that, if 17 percent of the TAL is less than 10.50 million lb (4.8 million kg) and the recreational fishery is not projected to land its harvest limit for the upcoming year, the commercial fishery may be allocated up to 10.50 million lb (4.8 million kg) as its quota, provided that the combination of the projected recreational landings and the commercial quota does not exceed TAL.

The Council's recommendations must include supporting documentation, as appropriate, concerning the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the recommendations. NMFS is responsible for reviewing these recommendations to assure they achieve the FMP objectives, and may modify them if they do not. NMFS then publishes proposed specifications in the **Federal Register**. After considering public comment, NMFS will publish final specifications in the **Federal Register**.

#### Proposed 2003 Specifications

##### Proposed TAL

On August 9, 2002, the Council adopted specifications for the 2003 Atlantic bluefish fishery. NMFS has reviewed the Council's recommendation and has found it complies with the FMP objectives. Therefore, NMFS is proposing to implement the Council's recommended specifications.

For the 2003 fishery, the stock rebuilding program in the FMP would restrict F to 0.41. However, the 2001 fishery (the most recent fishing year for which F can be calculated) produced an F of only 0.246. So, in accordance with the FMP, the TAL proposed for 2003 was set to achieve  $F=0.246$ . The resulting TAC recommended by the Council and proposed by NMFS is 39.5 million lb (17.9 million kg). The TAL is calculated by deducting discards, estimated at 2.2 million lb (0.99 million kg) for 2003, from the TAC. Therefore, the proposed TAL for 2003 is 37.293 million lb (16.916 million kg).

##### Proposed Commercial Quota and Recreational Harvest Limit

If the TAL for the 2003 fishery were allocated based on the percentages specified in the FMP, the commercial quota would be 6.339 million lb (2.875 million kg), with a recreational harvest limit of 30.953 million lb (10.500 million kg). However, recreational landings from the last several years were much lower than the recreational allocation for 2003, ranging between 8.30 and 15.5 million lb (3.74 and 7.05 million kg). Since the recreational fishery is not projected to land its 30.953 million-lb (12.153 million-kg) harvest limit in 2003, this allows the specification of a commercial quota of up to 10.5 million lb (4.76 million kg). NMFS proposes to transfer 4.161 million lb (1.887 million kg) from the initial 2003 recreational allocation of 30.953 million lb (12.153 million kg), resulting in 26.793 million lb (12.153 million kg) for the 2003 recommended recreational harvest limit and a

proposed commercial quota of 10.5 million lb (4.744 million kg). The proposed 2003 commercial quota would be the same amount as was allocated in 2002 and implemented by NMFS and the states under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Bluefish. A recreational possession limit of 15 fish/person (same as in 2002) is proposed, and also, 141,900-lb (64,365-kg) research set-aside (RSA) is proposed. Some or all of the RSA amount will be allocated if research proposals to utilize it are approved for award. A Request for Proposals was published to solicit proposals for 2003, based on research priorities identified by the Council (67 FR 13602, March 25, 2002). The deadline for submission was May 13, 2002. One research project that would utilize bluefish RSA has been conditionally approved by NMFS, and is under final review by the NOAA Grants Office. The Council and NMFS have recommended an RSA allocation of 141,900 lb (64,365 kg), for that project.

If all of the bluefish RSA is allocated, the commercial quota would be 10.460 million lb (4.745 million kg) and the recreational harvest limit would be 26.691 million lb (12.107 million kg). The RSA, the commercial quota, and the recreational harvest limit will be adjusted in the final rule establishing the annual specifications for the bluefish fishery, if necessary, to reflect RSA allocations to projects forwarded to the NOAA Grants Office for award. If the awards are not made for any reason, NMFS will publish notification in the **Federal Register** to restore the unused set-aside amount to the annual commercial and recreational allocations.

##### Proposed State Commercial Allocations

Proposed state commercial allocations for the recommended 2003 commercial quotas are shown in the table below, based on the percentages specified in the FMP less the proposed RSA allocation.

State	% of quota	2003 Commercial Quota (lb)	2003 Commercial Quota (kg)	2003 Commercial Quota (lb)	2003 Commercial Quota (kg)
				With Research Set-Aside	With Research Set-Aside
ME	0.6685	70,193	31,839	6,992	31,718
NH	0.4145	43,523	19,741	43,357	19,667
MA	6.7167	705,254	319,898	702,570	318,684
RI	6.8081	714,851	324,251	712,131	323,021
CT	1.2663	132,962	60,310	132,456	60,082
NY	10.3851	1,090,436	494,613	1,086,286	492,736
NJ	14.8162	1,555,701	705,654	1,549,782	702,977
DE	1.8782	197,211	89,453	196,461	89,114
MD	3.0018	315,189	142,967	313,990	142,425