



Proposed Federal Waters Recreational Scup Closure

NOAA Fisheries is proposing a closure of recreational fishing for scup in federal waters in 2022. In December 2021, in response to a determination that prevailing recreational regulations would not be sufficient to constrain 2022 coastwide scup recreational harvest to the 2022 scup Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL), the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), which jointly manage scup, voted to adopt a 1-inch increase in recreational scup minimum size in coastwide state and federal waters for 2022 (generally an increase from 9-inch to 10-inch minimum size). The increased minimum length was projected to reduce scup recreational harvest by 33% in 2022, relative to 2021. ASMFC and MAFMC did not choose to adopt a more substantial regulatory change, despite projections indicating that a 56% recreational harvest reduction would be required to ensure the 2022 RHL would not be exceeded, due to a) concerns over the socio-economic impact of imposing such a substantial harvest reduction in one year, b) recognition of the negligible probability of the scup stock becoming overfished in the near-term given the robust state of the stock (over 200% of target biomass according to 2021 stock assessment), and c) the high likelihood that, as in most recent years, commercial scup harvest in 2022 will be substantially lower than the 2022 coastwide commercial quota, further reducing the likelihood of overfishing.

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has subsequently determined that the 2022 scup recreational regulations proposed by MAFMC and ASMFC are not conservative enough to ensure the 2022 scup RHL will not be exceeded, and in adherence to federal regulations, has proposed to close federal waters to scup recreational harvest in 2022 to further reduce scup recreational harvest (on average, 5% of annual coastwide scup harvest comes from federal waters). This closure would apply to all recreational vessels fishing in federal waters (outside of Long Island Sound and greater than three nautical miles from shore) and all federally permitted for-hire vessels fishing in either state or federal waters. Given the anticipated social and economic impacts of this closure, NOAA Fisheries is seeking comments on alternative approaches that would achieve the objective of reducing scup catch and preventing overfishing while also minimizing, to the extent possible, social and economic impacts.

You can submit comments to NOAA Fisheries through the [e-rulemaking portal](#).

NOAA Fisheries is not proposing to change 2022 summer flounder or black sea bass recreational regulations from those regulations already selected by states.

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