

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 648****[Docket No. 221223–0282; RTID 0648–XD616]****Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Summer Flounder Fishery; Quota Transfer From NC to NY**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Temporary rule; quota transfer.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces that the State of North Carolina is transferring a portion of its 2023 commercial summer flounder quota to the State of New York. This adjustment to the 2023 fishing year quota is necessary to comply with the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) quota transfer provisions. This announcement informs the public of the revised 2023 commercial quotas for North Carolina and New York.

**DATES:** Effective December 28, 2023, through December 31, 2023.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Laura Deighan, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281–9184.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

Regulations governing the summer flounder fishery are found in 50 CFR 648.100 through 648.111. These regulations require annual specification of a commercial quota that is apportioned among the coastal states from Maine through North Carolina. The process to set the annual commercial quota and the percent allocated to each state is described in § 648.102 and final 2023 allocations were published on January 3, 2023 (88 FR 11).

The final rule implementing Amendment 5 to the Summer Flounder FMP, as published in the **Federal Register** on December 17, 1993 (58 FR 65936), provided a mechanism for transferring summer flounder commercial quota from one state to another. Two or more states, under mutual agreement and with the concurrence of the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator, can transfer or combine summer flounder commercial quota under § 648.102(c)(2). The Regional Administrator is required to consider three criteria in the evaluation of requests for quota transfers or combinations: (1) the transfer or combinations would not preclude the overall annual quota from being fully

harvested; (2) the transfer addresses an unforeseen variation or contingency in the fishery; and (3) the transfer is consistent with the objectives of the FMP and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The Regional Administrator has determined these three criteria have been met for the transfer approved in this notification.

North Carolina is transferring 100,000 pounds (lb; 43,359 kilograms (kg)) to New York through a mutual agreement between the states. This transfer was requested to ensure New York would not exceed its 2023 quota. The revised summer flounder quotas for 2023 are North Carolina, 3,031,074 lb (1,374,872 kg), and New York, 1,537,768 lb (697,520 kg).

**Classification**

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR 648.102(c)(2)(i) through (iv), which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempted from review under Executive Order 12866.

*Authority:* 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 28, 2023.

**Jon William Bell,**

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 648****[Docket No. 231221–0314; RTID 0648–XD357]****Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Atlantic Bluefish Fishery; 2024 and Projected 2025 Bluefish Specifications**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Final action.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS issues final Atlantic bluefish specifications for the 2024 fishing year and projects specifications for fishing year 2025, as recommended by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. This action is necessary to establish allowable harvest levels for the stock to prevent overfishing and promote rebuilding, using the best scientific information available. This action also informs the

public of the expected specifications for fishing year 2025.

**DATES:** Effective January 1 2024.

**ADDRESSES:** The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for these specifications that describes the action, other considered alternatives, and analyses of the impacts of all alternatives. Copies of the specifications document, including the EA, are available on request from Dr. Christopher M. Moore, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Suite 201, 800 North State Street, Dover, DE 19901. These documents are also accessible via the internet at <https://www.mafmc.org/supporting-documents>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Laura Hansen, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281–9225.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Background**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) jointly manage the Atlantic Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The FMP requires the specification of annual regulatory limits for up to 3 years at a time, including: acceptable biological catch (ABC), commercial and recreational annual catch limits (ACL), commercial and recreational annual catch targets (ACT), a commercial quota, a recreational harvest limit (RHL), and other management measures. This action implements bluefish specifications for the 2024 fishing year, and projects specifications for 2025, based on Council and Commission recommendations.

Recent research track (December 2022) and management track (June 2023) assessments for bluefish have determined that the stock is no longer overfished and overfishing is not occurring. However, the spawning stock biomass has not yet reached its target (*i.e.*, the stock has not fully rebuilt), so the fishery remains under its rebuilding plan. These specifications decrease the 2024 ABC by 43 percent from 2023, based on recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), results from these assessments, and the rebuilding plan for the stock. No uncertainty buffers were recommended for either the commercial or recreational sector in 2024 or 2025, but commercial discards are now included in the specifications process and are no longer considered negligible. Although the stock is no longer overfished, and therefore transferring