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NOAA Proposes Limits for Three Fisheries to End Overfishing

NOAA Fisheries Service today proposed limits on fishing three key species in order to end overfishing and promote rebuilding of the stocks. The proposal is based on scientific analysis and recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The proposed 2008 total allowable landing limits are:

- Summer Flounder – 15.77 million pounds, 8 percent less than the 2007 limit of 17.11 million pounds;
- Scup – 7.34 million pounds, 39 percent less than the 2007 limit of 12 million pounds; and
- Black Sea Bass – 4.22 million pounds, 16 percent less than the 2007 limit of 5 million pounds.

While all three species support commercial and recreational fisheries, summer flounder is the most prevalent of the three throughout the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions. The summer flounder stock has increased since 2000, when the rebuilding effort started. However, it is still subject to overfishing and still remains short of being rebuilt. Federal law requires that overfishing end and the stock stay on track with its new rebuilding schedule.

“We are committed to ending overfishing, and the Council and Commission’s recommendations lead us there while striking an appropriate balance with economic activity,” said William Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries. “Summer flounder is a particularly important stock and we will continue to monitor all aspects of the fishery closely and take action as appropriate.”

Since 2000, recreational fishery harvests have exceeded their annual limit in most years. NOAA recently urged the Council and the Commission to look for more effective approaches for constraining recreational harvests in 2008. Currently, each state implements its own recreational measures: usually a combination of seasons, minimum fish size and bag limits. The proposed limits are based on calculations that assume the states will no longer exceed their recreational harvests.

“If recreational harvests appear likely to exceed the annual limit before the end of the 2008 fishing year, NOAA will look at options to ensure the rebuilding effort is not jeopardized, including closing the recreational fishery in federal waters,” added Hogarth.

The proposed rule, which includes recreational and commercial fishery and state allocations, may be viewed online at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/regs/com.htm>.

Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted through December 3, 2007. NOAA will implement the 2008 annual landing limits in December.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's

scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>